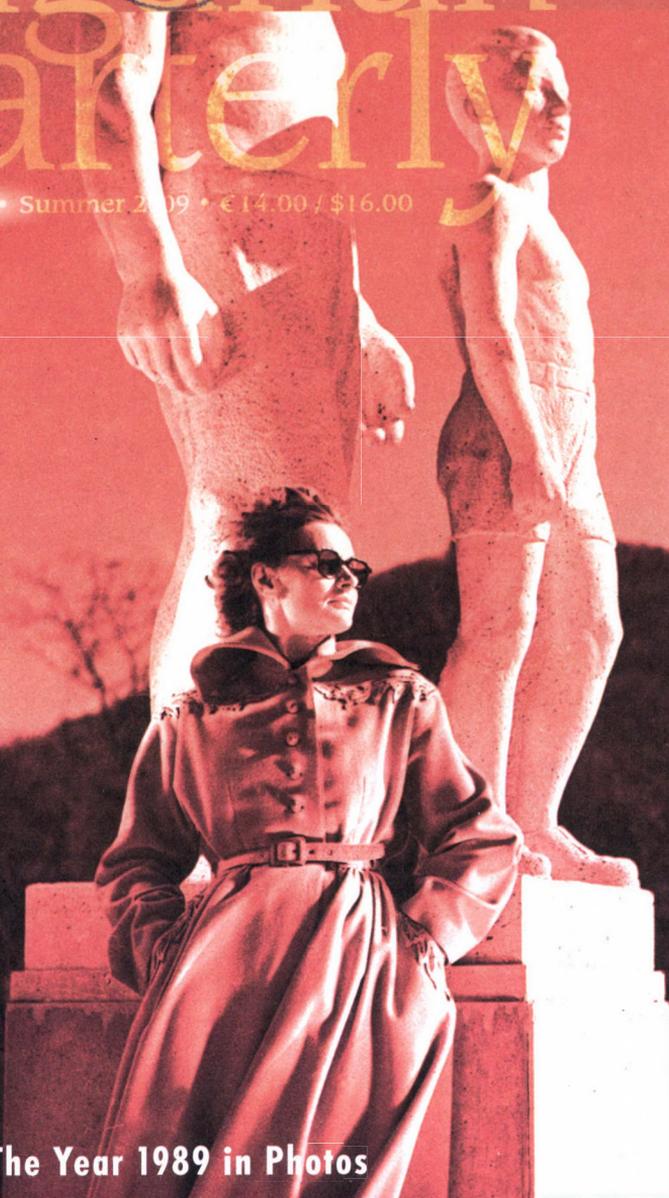


P 22000

2009 JUL 13

# Hungarian Quarterly

Volume 50 • Summer 2009 • €14.00 / \$16.00



■ **Annus Mirabilis: The Year 1989 in Photos**

■ **Trianon Revisited—An Interview with Sir Bryan Cartledge**

■ **Economic Bubbles**

■ **Puskás: The Film**

■ **Dezső Tandori at 70—Fiction and Poems**

■ **The Haydn Year and the Twilight of Quartet Playing**

■ **Lajos Vajda: A Retrospective**

■ **The Sculptures of Katalin Hetey**

# The Hungarian Quarterly

First published 1936

Zsófia Zachár, Editor

Miklós Vajda, Editor Emeritus

Rudolf Fischer & Peter Doherty Language Editors

Ágnes Orzóy, Assistant Editor

Kati Könczöl, Editorial Secretary

## **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](mailto: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

*The Hungarian Quarterly*, © Copyright 2009

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 network  
[www.eurozine.com](http://www.eurozine.com)

**EUROZINE**



**OKTATÁSI ÉS KULTURÁLIS  
MINISZTERIUM**

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

- 3     *Annus Mirabilis*  
      *The Year 1989 in Photos*  
      *Part 2: Two Funerals*  
      Marianna Kiscsatári
- 25     *td at 70*  
      Ferenc Takács
- 29     *A complete tandori—is he completely nutz*  
      *A Delucidate-Eflecter's Novel (Excerpt from the novel)*  
      Dezső Tandori
- 38     *Poems, translated by Christopher Whyte*  
      Dezső Tandori
- 45     *Soldier-With-Flower (Excerpt from the novel)*  
      Nándor Gion

**HAYDN—A BICENTENARY**

- 63     *In Mozart's Shadow*  
      Judit Péteri in *Conversation with Katalin Komlós*
- 70     *The Haydn Year and the Twilight of Quartet Playing*  
      László Somfai
- 79     *Unretouched (Dénes Bartha–Dorrit Révész)*  
      Péter Laki

**THE POLITICAL CLOCK**

- 82     *Hungarian Bubbles*  
      Zoltán Farkas

**TRIANON REVISITED**

- 91     *Hungary? How Boring!*  
      George Gömöri in *Conversation with Sir Bryan Cartledge*
- 95     *The Peace That Failed (Bryan Cartledge)*  
      Tibor Frank
- 99     *No, No, Never (Miklós Zeidler)*  
      Matthew Caples

## ART & ARCHITECTURE

- 105 *In a Dark Age*  
*Lajos Vajda. A Retrospective at the Hungarian National Gallery (Ill.)*  
*Éva Forgács*
- 112 *Changing Structures*  
*The Sculptures of Katalin Hetey (Ill.)*  
*Ildikó Nagy*
- 117 *How the Body at Rest Reclines (Tibor Somlai)*  
*Zsófia Bán*

## BOOKS & AUTHORS

- 122 *Novelising (Nándor Gion, András Cserna-Szabó, Noémi Kiss)*  
*Zsolt Láng*
- 130 *The Legacy of King Matthias Reconsidered (Marcus Tanner, András Kubinyi, Péter Farbaký et al., eds.)*  
*János M. Bak*
- 133 *Fateful Years (Mária Ormos)*  
*Ignác Romsics*
- 136 *The First Long Decade (Ignác Romsics)*  
*Géza Jeszenszky*
- 140 *Coming in from the Cold (Rachel Beckles Willson)*  
*Paul Griffiths*

## PUSKÁS: THE FILM

- 143 *Climbing the Himalayas Twice Over*  
*Klára Muhi in Conversation with Tamás Almási*
- 152 *Puskás Puzzle (Tamás Almási)*  
*Erzsébet Bori*

## THEATRE

- 157 *Cults and Mundanities (Euripides, István Tasnádi, Maxim Gorky, Pintér Béla Company)*  
*Tamás Koltai*

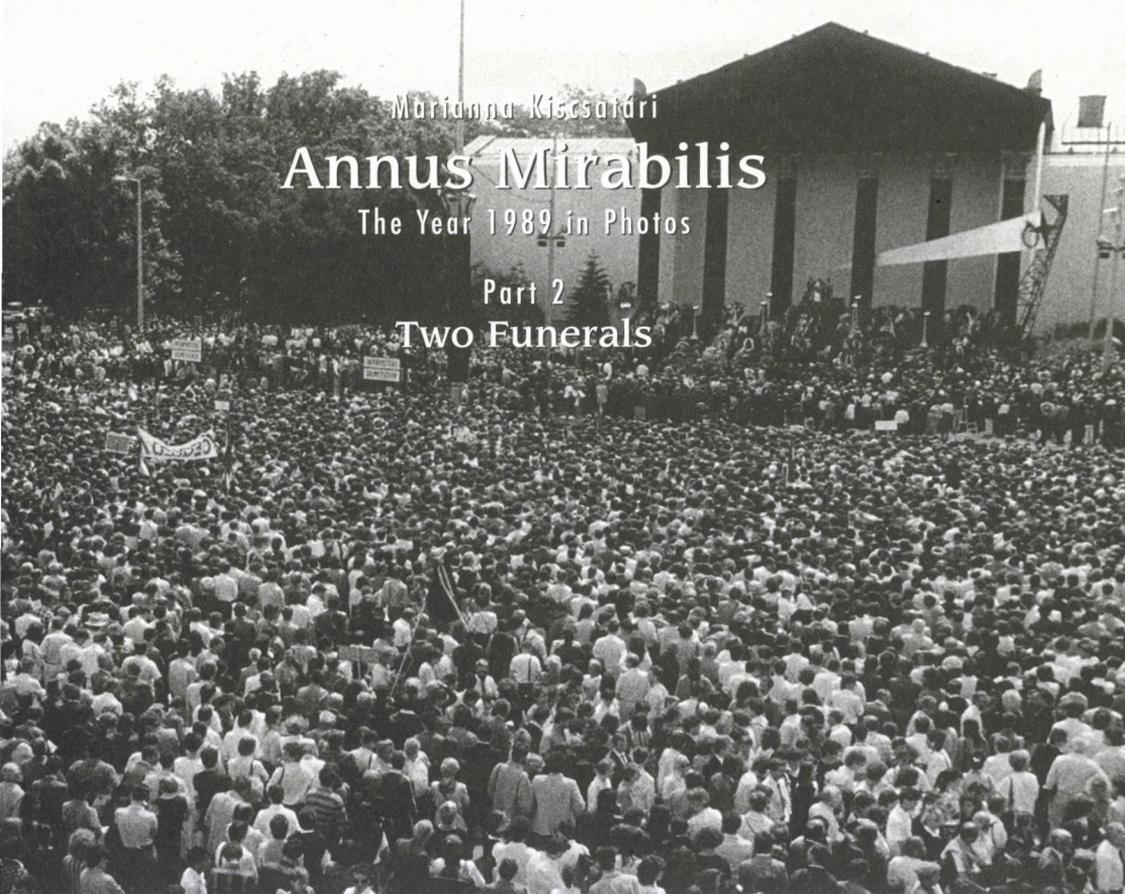
Marianna Kiscsatári

# Annus Mirabilis

The Year 1989 in Photos

Part 2

## Two Funerals



*The last days of the one-party dictatorship and the dawn of democracy in the summer of 1989 were marked by two events charged with symbolic content: the reburial of Imre Nagy and his fellow victims, and the death of János Kádár. The first took place on June 16, the second on July 6: two days which were to ring in the new and ring out the old.*

---

**Marianna Kiscsatári**

*is curator of the contemporary section (1956 up to the present) of the Historical Photographic Collection of the Hungarian National Museum, Budapest, which holds all the photographs in this article.*

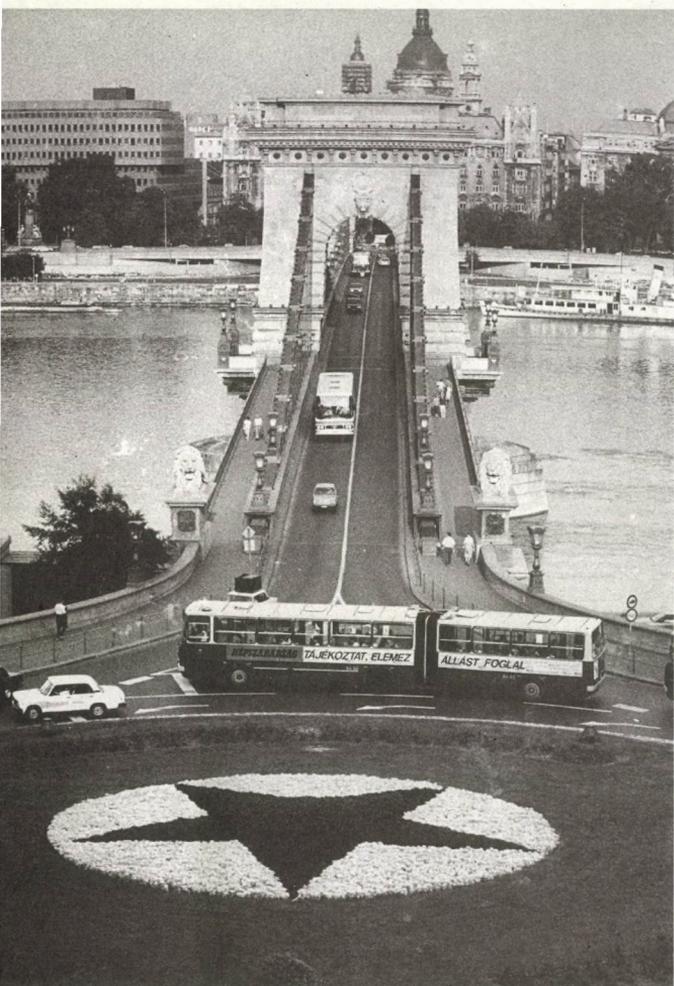
*Much of the text accompanying the photos was based on*

*From Dictatorship to Democracy. The Birth of the Third Hungarian Republic 1988–2001 by Ignác Romsics (East European Monographs, No. DCCXXII. Social Science Monographs, Boulder, Colorado. Atlantic Research and Publications, Inc. Highland Lakes, New Jersey, 2007. Distributed by Columbia University Press, New York, vii + 471 pp.) The book is reviewed on pp. 136–139 by Géza Jeszenszky.*

A red star first appeared on signets and seals of official bodies of the short-lived Hungarian Soviet Republic of 1919, and later, in emulation of the Soviet Union, over a hammer and sickle as part of the arms of the new Hungarian socialist state in 1949. Insurgents removed the hated symbol from public buildings in the very first days of the 1956 revolution. The same happened during the dying days of the Kádár regime in 1989, albeit more peacefully.

The red star in flowers in the middle of the traffic roundabout at the Buda end of the Széchenyi Chain Bridge was a characteristic element of the cityscape, being replanted at least two or three times a year with new flowers in accordance with the season. White flowers and green-leafed plants were set

around the red star to make up the national red-white-and-green and mitigate the socialist symbolism a little. That "little garden" was refreshed for the last time in the summer of 1989, with a start being made on removing the bedded plants on September 22. Before long the red star was also taken down from the Parliament building on the Pest side of the Danube, to be followed by countless other red stars. Within months, statues of Lenin, big and small, were removed from public places, streets reverting back to their earlier, pre-Communist names. Owing to domestic and Soviet protests, the Soviet war memorial stayed put in Budapest's Freedom Square. Some of the outlandish monumental Soviet-era public statues ended up in Statue Park, an outdoor museum opened on the second anniversary of the withdrawal of Soviet troops, and now a prime attraction for visitors to Budapest. 🇮🇪



Lajos Károly

*The red star in flowers at the Buda end of Chain Bridge. Budapest, Summer 1989.*

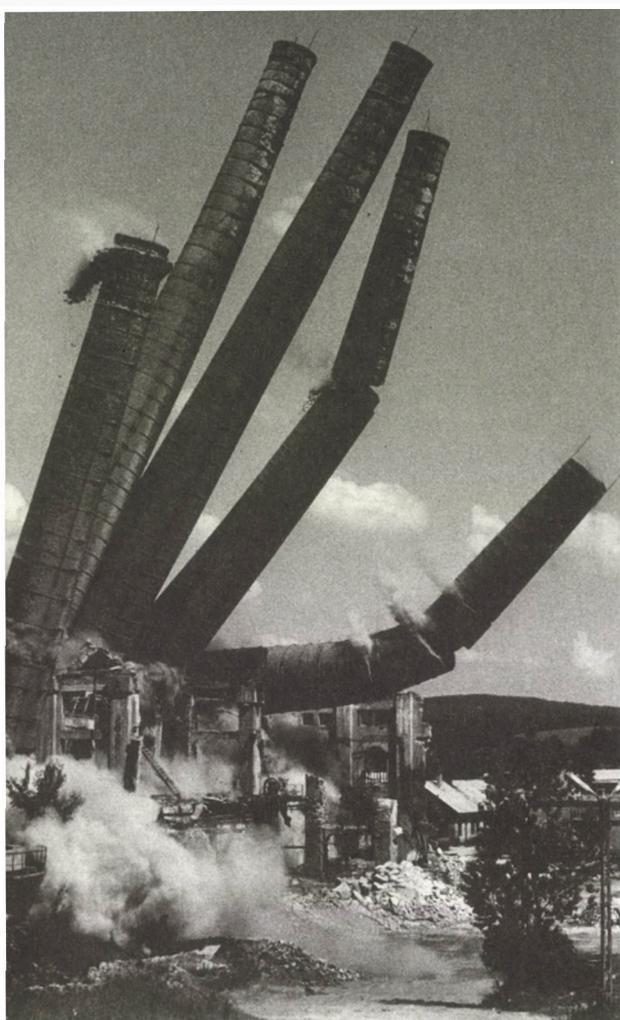
**V**ital measures in the reform of the economy were accompanied by the transformation of an educational system that was based in many respects on the Soviet model. Obligatory Russian language lessons and teaching of ideologically-based subjects were discontinued, while West European languages were taken up by syllabuses. Support was extended to more up-to-date programmes of scientific research, and a start was made on revising the grant system to allow financial assistance for culture (education, films, book publishing, etc.). The state monopoly for setting up and funding of schools was abolished, with freedom for school choice being introduced.

The traditional three-stage—elementary, middle and higher—educational system of the Kádár era was revamped, giving the younger generation a wider set of alternatives after the transition. In vocational education, greater emphasis was placed on training in up-to-date technical, economic, commercial and catering skills, while teaching for apprentices was also overhauled, with the number of company-based workshop schools dropping to one third over the period 1989 to 1995, largely due to the closure of many factory sites. 🐼



IMRE BÉNYÓ

Gábor Áron Industrial Training College. Ózd, 1989. In the background “[the future] that gives rights to millions”—a quote from a poem by Gyula Juhász.



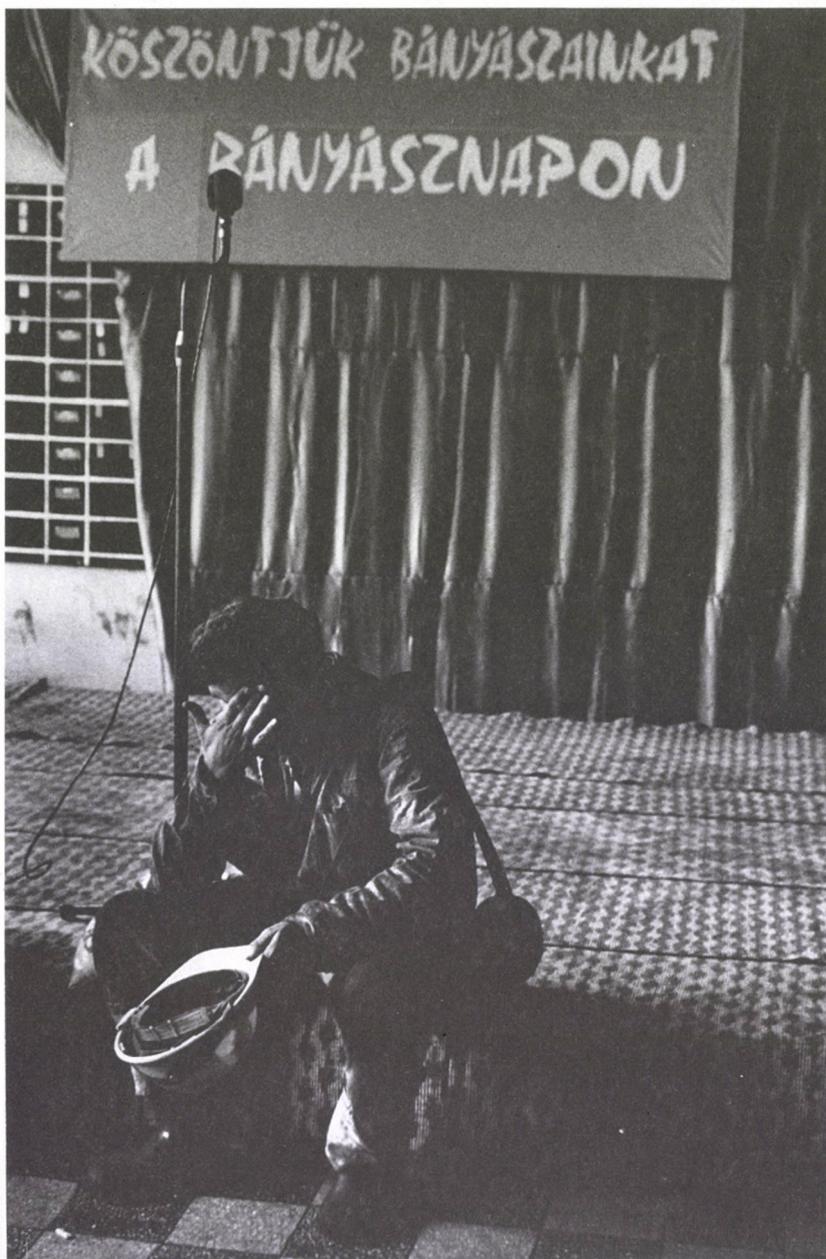
JANOS BANHALMI

*Demolition of chimneys at the Cement and Lime Works. Tatabánya, 1989.*

Following economic reforms introduced between 1986 and 1988 (the bankruptcy law, two-tier banking system, sales tax and income tax), the Law on Companies came into effect on 1 January 1989. It encouraged the transformation of state-owned enterprises into business organisations (syndicates, joint ventures, limited companies, stock companies, etc.), allowing private individuals to form companies as well as attracting foreign investment. This Act, coupled with the 1984 Company Law, which had already stripped ministries of some ownership rights and handed these to enterprise councils, opened the way to privatisation on an unprecedented scale. Heavily-indebted large industrial enterprises transformed themselves into new companies, which were then able to lay off unnecessary staff at minimal cost, while company managers at company headquarters were able to obtain large bonuses.

The 'rationalisation' of an energy-intensive heavy industry that was operating at huge losses accelerated. The mass unemployment that resulted from layoffs, especially in the mining industry, and was accompanied by a drop in living standards provoked a profound moral crisis as social differences between the upper and lower strata continued to widen. In 1989, the annual bonuses of some 200 company managers exceeded HUF 2 million (about 20 times an average Hungarian annual salary), while the average worker's monthly salary before tax, health insurance and other deductions was HUF 13,000. The registered unemployment rate rose in 1989 from 0.35 per cent in late 1988 to 0.7 per cent in late 1989, and 1.2 per cent in 1990, but the actual figures were much higher. Around two thirds of the jobless lived in Budapest or in other urban areas. Half were untrained and unskilled workers (most of them Roma) with little chance to find new employment.

A new generation of photographers and documentary-makers emerged in the press and film world prepared to focus on new problems appearing for workers in heavy industry and mining (see the work of director Tamás Almási discussed on pp. 142–151 of this issue of *HQ*). 🍷



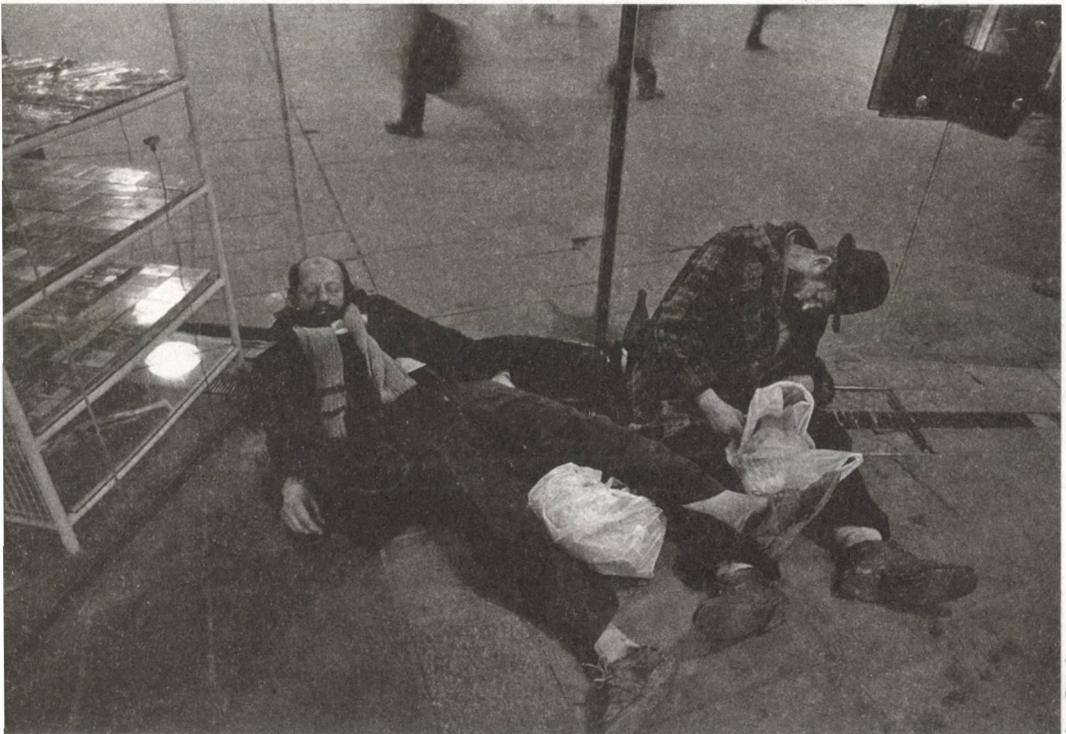
ANDRÁS BAKKUTI

*Before pit closure, with the text "Hail the miners on Miners' Day!" in the background, 1989.*

**H**ungary had homeless people and people without their own homes even in the times of full employment. According to the 1980 census, some 30,000 Hungarians lived in garages, caves or huts, while 90,000 lived in workers' hostels or in temporary quarters. As a result of the downscaling of large firms and the gradual elimination of workers' hostels, more and more of the second group ended up on the streets by 1988 and 1989. No one knew their precise number. A 1987 survey mentioned 30,000–60,000 people, and other estimates for late 1989 put their number at 40,000–45,000. The majority of these were in the capital or in its immediate vicinity. An amnesty granted to some 3,000 convicts on 23 October 1989, on the occasion of the proclamation of the Republic, further increased the number of the homeless and reduced public safety. Although several aid organisations, such as the Maltese Caritas Service and the Salvation Army had arrived in Hungary by this time, running soup kitchens and shelters, the number of those needing assistance far exceeded the available capacity.

To this day, when cold weather arrives, underground passages and train stations fill up with homeless people, most of them in a miserable physical and mental state. With the current economic crisis a further dramatic rise in their numbers is expected. ❧

*Homeless at the Southern Railway Station. Budapest, 1989.*



IMRE BENKŐ

The 'Inconnu' Group of independent and oppositionist artists have already begun their activities during the Kádár era. They are still working today.

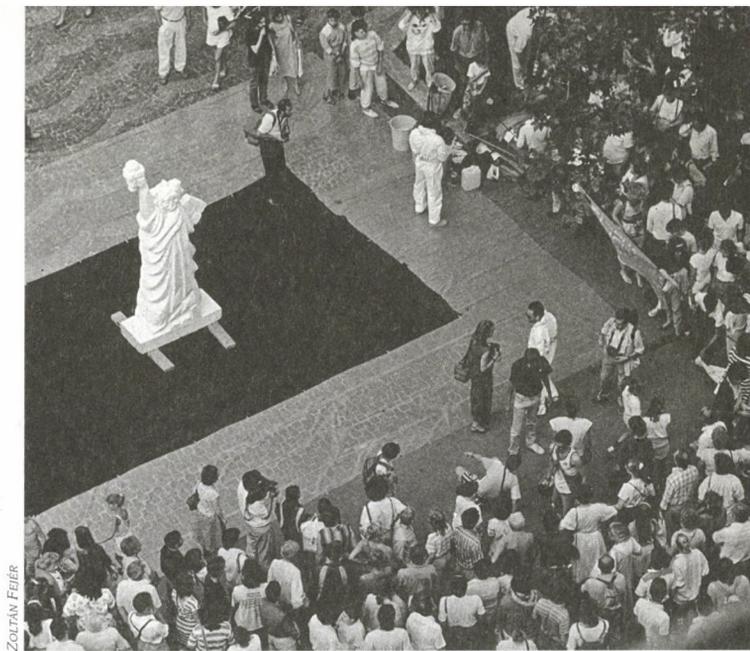
With their 'mail art' letters they made fun of the authorities by using a fictive name for the addressee but designating as "sender" the place they really intended as recipient, so that by the indirect means of using the inscription 'INCONNU' the dispatch

would ultimately reach its goal. Originally based in the town of Szolnok, due to harassment by police and secret-service officials, members of the group (Péter Bokros, Tamás Molnár and others) moved to Budapest, although harassment still continued. They put on performances and happenings on a regular basis, and they took part in many exhibitions, gatherings and samizdat publications eventually launching their own underground periodical *Inconnu Press*.

On 10 July 1989 the group organised a demonstration in Vörösmarty Square in central Budapest to protest against the repression of Chinese dissidents. Just five weeks before, huge processions of students had thronged the streets of Beijing to demand democratic rights and an end to corruption and dictatorship. On 4 June 1989, Chinese communist authorities had attacked a crowd in Tienanmen Square with tanks, leading to the massacre of an estimated 3,600 people.

At the demonstration in Budapest, opposition politicians delivered speeches after which members of the 'Inconnu' Group daubed with red paint an expanded polystyrene copy of the statue of 'The Goddess of Democracy' erected seven weeks before by students in Beijing. The paint caused the statue to shrink, as a result of which a hand dropped off, becoming a potent symbol for the truncation of freedom.

The group had also had a part, some months earlier, in relocating and restoring Plot 301 in the New Public Cemetery of Budapest, where Imre Nagy and his executed associates had been anonymously buried. They set up identical graveposts to mark the graves. ☹️



*Protest action by the 'Inconnu' Group on Vörösmarty Square. Budapest, 10 July 1989.*



In the course of the reprisals that followed the revolution of 1956, the remains of the executed prime minister and his associates were moved at various points in time before ending up in the New Public Cemetery (the biggest in Europe). The plot in which they were buried there was in a distant, tucked-away corner, overgrown with long grass and shrubs, the very borders of the plot being indistinct. The locations of the graves were marked by the way the earth settled rather than regular burial mounds. Relatives had long suspected who was concealed in these unmarked graves, but they were driven away. Some individual members of the opposition movement in Hungary had braved the police harassment already in the early eighties to hold remembrance ceremonies on each anniversary of Nagy's execution.

Since the summer of 1988 the government had been engaged, through a Committee for Historical Justice (TIB = Történelmi Igazságtétel Bizottság), in examining the materials of the post-1945 show trials and other grievances. This was eventually extended to include the cases of those executed after 1956 as well. According to the opposition's view, a reassessment of 1956 was an absolute precondition to any substantive political change. On 24 November 1988, the TIB issued an appeal in which they encouraged the relatives of those executed to request the release of the remains of their family members. After prolonged negotiations in Spring 1989 the government announced that "in order to satisfy the demands of duty and humanity, and with a view at all times to social reconciliation, [it] assents to the reburial of those executed on 16 June 1958."

Identification of the bodies of Plot 301 began on 29 March in the presence of family members and representatives of the TIB. The bodies of Imre Nagy and his associates had been placed face down and wired up. The press releases, radio and television programmes that preceded and accompanied the event stirred public opinion, shaking many. The subsequent 16 June 1989 state reburial of the victims became a milestone in Hungary's transition to a new, more democratic regime. 🌱

*Plot 301 of the New Public Cemetery in Rákoskeresztúr (Seventeenth District). Budapest, 1988.*



*Members of the Government formed a Guard of Honour next to Imre Nagy's coffin. Budapest, 16 June 1989.*

**T**he commemorative funeral service on 16 June 1989 of Imre Nagy and other victims of the post-1956 restoration of Communist rule was the single symbolic event of Hungary's peaceful transition.

Following the disinterments from Plot 301 it soon became obvious that the reburial would not be a simple tribute but a large-scale demonstration. Squabbling between the authorities and the opposition groups as to the venue and the organisation of the event ended with a compromise: permission was granted for representatives of Parliament and the government to participate, but not for the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party to take part as an organisation.

The ceremony at Heroes' Square began at 9 a.m. Of the six coffins placed on the steps of the Art Gallery, five contained the remains of convicted and executed victims of the 1958 trial—Prime Minister Imre Nagy, State Minister Géza Losonczy, Minister of Defense Pál Maléter, journalist Miklós Gimes and József Szilágyi, Imre Nagy's secretary. The sixth remained empty and symbolised the more than 300 others who were executed. The large-scale spectacle, building in contrasts of black and white, was designed by László Rajk, Jr. and Gábor Bachman. Family members and the victims' former co-defendants took turns standing in the guard of honour beside the coffins. People arriving from all over the country and

high ranking personalities from all over the world paid their respects before the bier.

At 12:30 pm, the tolling of bells announced the beginning of the ceremony. At that moment, traffic stopped throughout the country, and factory and car horns sounded for one minute. The nation remembered the martyrs with one minute of silent mourning. During the approximately five-hour funeral service, at least 250,000 people paid their respects.



IMRE PROHÁSZKA

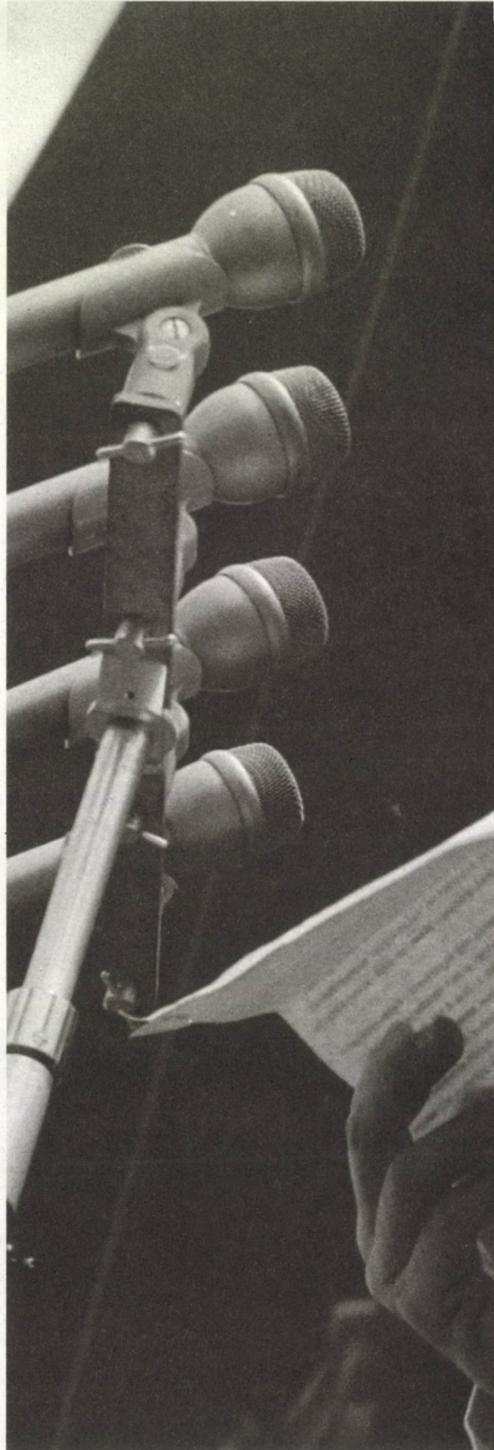
*The bier of Imre Nagy and of those executed with him on the steps of the Art Gallery. Budapest, 16 June 1989.*

Six eulogies were delivered, the harshest comments came from 26-year-old Viktor Orbán, a future prime minister, in the name of Fidesz, the Alliance of Young Democrats:

We stand here unable to comprehend how those who not so long ago slandered the Revolution and its prime minister in unison today suddenly realise that they are the continuers of Imre Nagy's reform policies. Nor do we understand why those party and state leaders, who decreed that we should be taught from textbooks lying about the Revolution, today almost scramble to touch these coffins, as they might a lucky talisman...

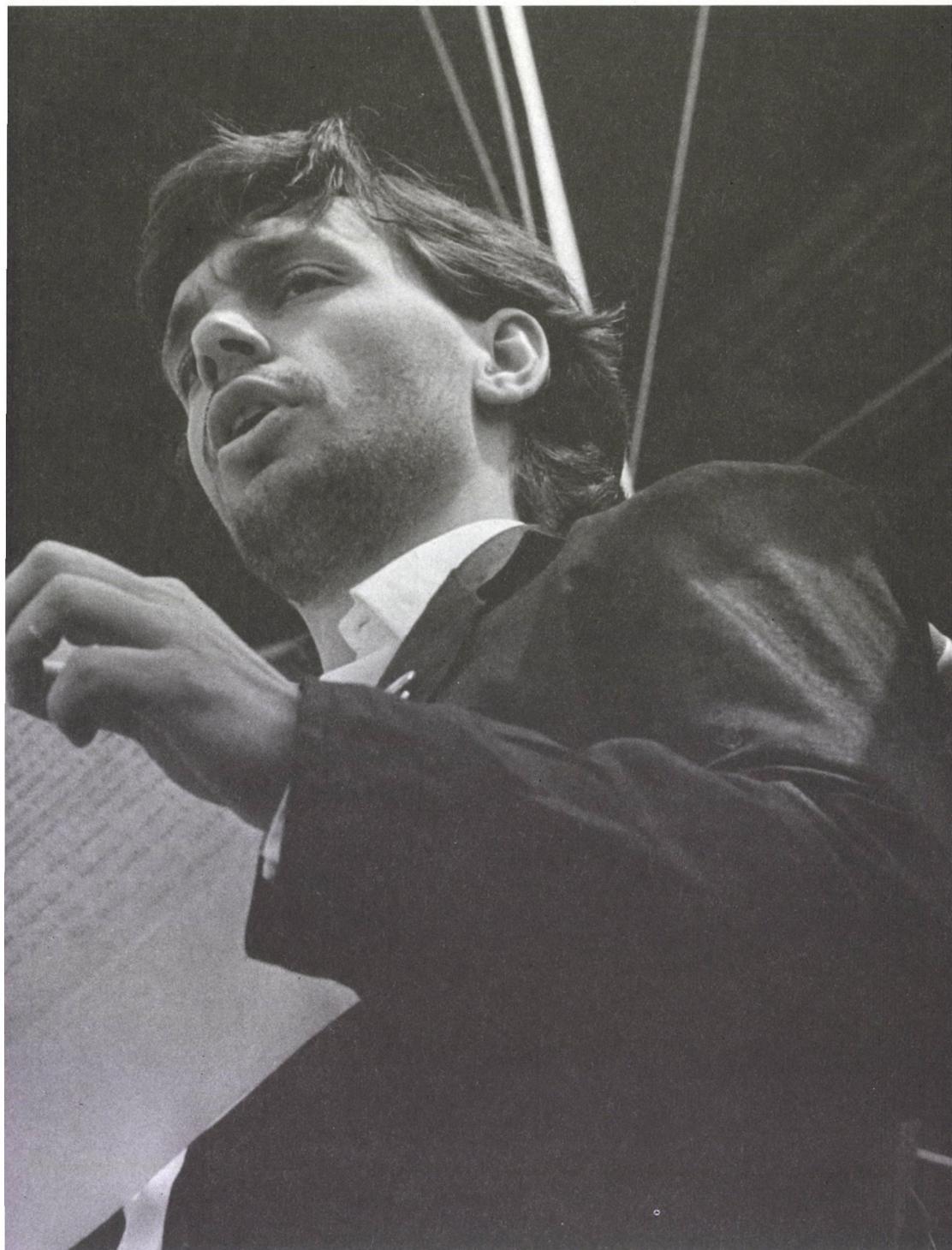
We cannot make do with the promises of Communist politicians that do not commit them to anything: we must see to it that the ruling party, should it wish to, cannot employ violence against us. Only in this way can we avoid coffins and belated funerals like today's.

The divisive effect of the speech highlighted what was to become a central issue in the ideological and political debates of the post-transition years: the assessment of the nearly half-century after 1945, or, in other words, the assessment of Communist rule. ❧



IMRE PROHÁRSZKA

*Viktor Orbán speaking at the reburial of Imre Nagy. Budapest, 16 June 1989.*







IMRE PROHÁSZKA

Two days before the June 16 commemoration, Minister of Justice Kálmán Kulcsár announced that Parliament wished to render justice to the people executed or imprisoned after the collapse of the 1956 Revolution through a separate law. He indicated that in addition to the approximately 300 executed people, nearly 15,000 trials also needed re-examination, and they wished to make amends to approximately 12,000 former political prisoners. Among these, the most important was the trial of Imre Nagy and his associates. The rehearing and the announcement of the Supreme Court's decision took place on 6 July. The 1958 verdicts were overturned and the accused were acquitted in the absence of any crime.

Shortly after the proceedings began someone stepped into the court chamber and sent a piece of paper around to those present. The note read: Kádár is dead. Thus, the rehabilitation of Imre Nagy and his fellow victims and the death of János Kádár took place on the very same day. The coincidence of these two events symbolised the reality of the change of regime.

*János Kádár's bier in the entrance hall of the headquarters of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party (the 'White House'). Budapest, 13 July 1989.*

János Kádár witnessed the momentous changes of 1988–89 in rapidly declining physical and mental state, tortured by his own responsibility in the reprisals. (For a translation of Kádár's last speech delivered on 12 April 1989 at a closed session of the Central Committee of the HSWP, see *HQ* 183). In late May 1989 he sent a letter to Party Secretary General Károly Grósz, in which he pushed for a "judicial examination of the Imre Nagy affair." "Should the court consider me guilty," he wrote, "let it say so. If I am not, I ask the Central Committee to use its influence, and let the insinuations and innuendo against my person cease." He spent the final weeks of his life believing that he would be evicted from his home. He lived to see June 16 and knew of what happened. "Is today the day?" he asked one of his visitors.

Kádár's funeral was arranged and carried out by his party, the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party. His coffin was placed in the entrance hall of the party headquarters building near Margaret Bridge. To the surprise of even the organisers, tens of thousands came to say their farewells. The end of the human wave stretched all the way to the other side of the Parliament building, and it remained that way until late in the evening, recommencing the following morning. (The viewing schedule had to be revised several times.) Some 60,000 people placed a flower or bouquet, or just simply bowed their heads before the bier. When, on the following day, the cars bearing the coffin escorted by police on motorcycles, rolled down the Great Boulevard all the way to Kerepesi Cemetery, on this occasion, too, hundreds of pedestrians formed groups on both sides of the route, and windows overlooking the boulevard were also filled with people.

Data from public-opinion polls conducted in the days preceding and following the funeral suggested that the surprisingly large-scale show of sympathy was not some prearranged demonstration but the spontaneous expression of much of Hungarian society's true feelings. Most people by this time knew the details about the inglorious birth of the Kádár regime, and they suffered at first hand from its economic policies. There were many, however, who believed that the tranquillity and relative well-being characteristic of the 1960s and 1970s outweighed these negatives, and moreover they also found Kádár appealing as a person. Weighing up both positives and negatives, 75 per cent of those polled in 1989 held the opinion that "with his death Hungarian political life lost one of its greatest figures." This favourable view of Kádár has not changed since. According to surveys conducted in the late 1990s, 42 per cent of those questioned considered him to be the most likable Hungarian politician of the 20th century. Only 17 per cent named Imre Nagy. 22

*A man watching the  
procession of mourners.  
Budapest, 13 July 1989.*



ANDRÁS BÁNKUTI



*President Bush addresses the crowd in front of Parliament, Budapest, 11 July 1989.*

JAMBE PROFHISEZI

**O**n 11 July 1989 George Bush had visited Hungary, the first time for an American president to do so. The visit was brief, just 40 hours altogether, although the message was unmistakable: the division of Europe would soon be over, the opportunity for democratic transformation was given, and the United States supported both. This was the essence of his ad lib speech in the pouring rain on Kossuth Square (after ostentatiously tearing up his prepared text), of his toast at the parliamentary dinner given in his honour, and finally of his statements on the following day at the Karl Marx University of Economics as well as during his brief talks with the leading opposition and Party politicians. "Open elections which Hungary had promised will mean a great step forward on the



path to democracy and political freedom and will make it possible for your great nation to enjoy the blessing of pluralism," he declared in his toast.

On the other hand, he did not bring money, or at least brought very little, and no sort of new Marshall Plan would be forthcoming, something that many hoped for then and later. Of the promised \$30 million, he earmarked \$25 million for an American-Hungarian entrepreneurial foundation and offered \$5 million for environmental protection. (Poland was given the same type and amount of support.) Instead of immediate and effective financial assistance, Bush encouraged his Hungarian audience to follow what many felt was a somewhat idealised model of a market economy without state intervention. ❧

JURIE PROHÁSZKA

*The crowd in Kossuth Square.  
Budapest, 11 July 1989.*



In Romania, Ceaușescu had reigned for nearly a quarter of a century. A pampered favourite of the West, his star began to wane in the eighties as his ruthless system of terror revealed itself. The 'systematisation plan', launched in 1988, was especially harsh on Transylvanian Hungarians. Hungarian foreign policy by then was willing to take on their cause, with the Hungarian Socialist

Workers' Party Central Committee declaring: "We have a responsibility for the fate of the more than two million ethnic Hungarians who live in Romania for both domestic and foreign-political reasons. In the interests of the Hungarian people and universal culture, we must do everything in our power to prevent the forcible assimilation of Hungarians."

Amidst tense relations between the two states, growing numbers of ethnic Hungarians from Transylvania attempted to flee to Hungary, often with the intention of making that a permanent move. Others, in seeking

to alleviate the catastrophically low standard of living in Romania merely sought casual work or risked often brutal harassment from Romanian customs inspectors at the border in order to bring out a few goods to sell.

Womenfolk from the village of Szék, who even today wear their traditional costumes, brought to sell in Budapest items of homespun cloth, pottery from Korond (Corund), and intricately embroidered leather waistcoats. Some of them also worked as cleaners in private homes. ♣

The 'Iron Curtain', the term coined by Winston Churchill in a famous speech delivered at Fulton, Missouri, in 1946 for the tightly guarded boundary that separated citizens of the West from the countries of the Soviet bloc, was the symbol of Europe's political division. In order to hinder illegal border crossing, a variety of systems, barbed wire fences and minefields were established after 1949. A start was made in the autumn of 1955 on clearing up the minefields, by the autumn of 1956, it ceased to be effective. After the suppression of the Revolution, the government, in March 1957, decreed its re-establishment. The modernisation of the frontier was completed in 1963. In 1965 it was decided to pick up the mines on the Hungarian–Austrian frontier and to replace them by a 260-km-long electronic signalling system maintained at astronomical costs. Dismantling this was discussed on a number of occasions; after being first



*Transylvanians from Szék (Sic) selling folk handicrafts in downtown Petőfi Sándor Street. Budapest, 1989.*

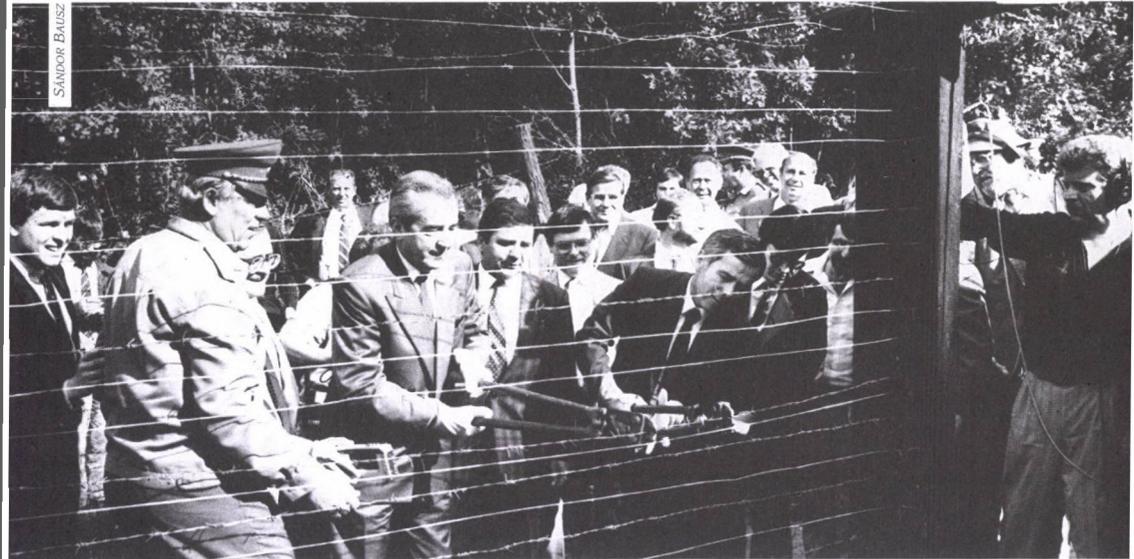
IMRE BERNÓ

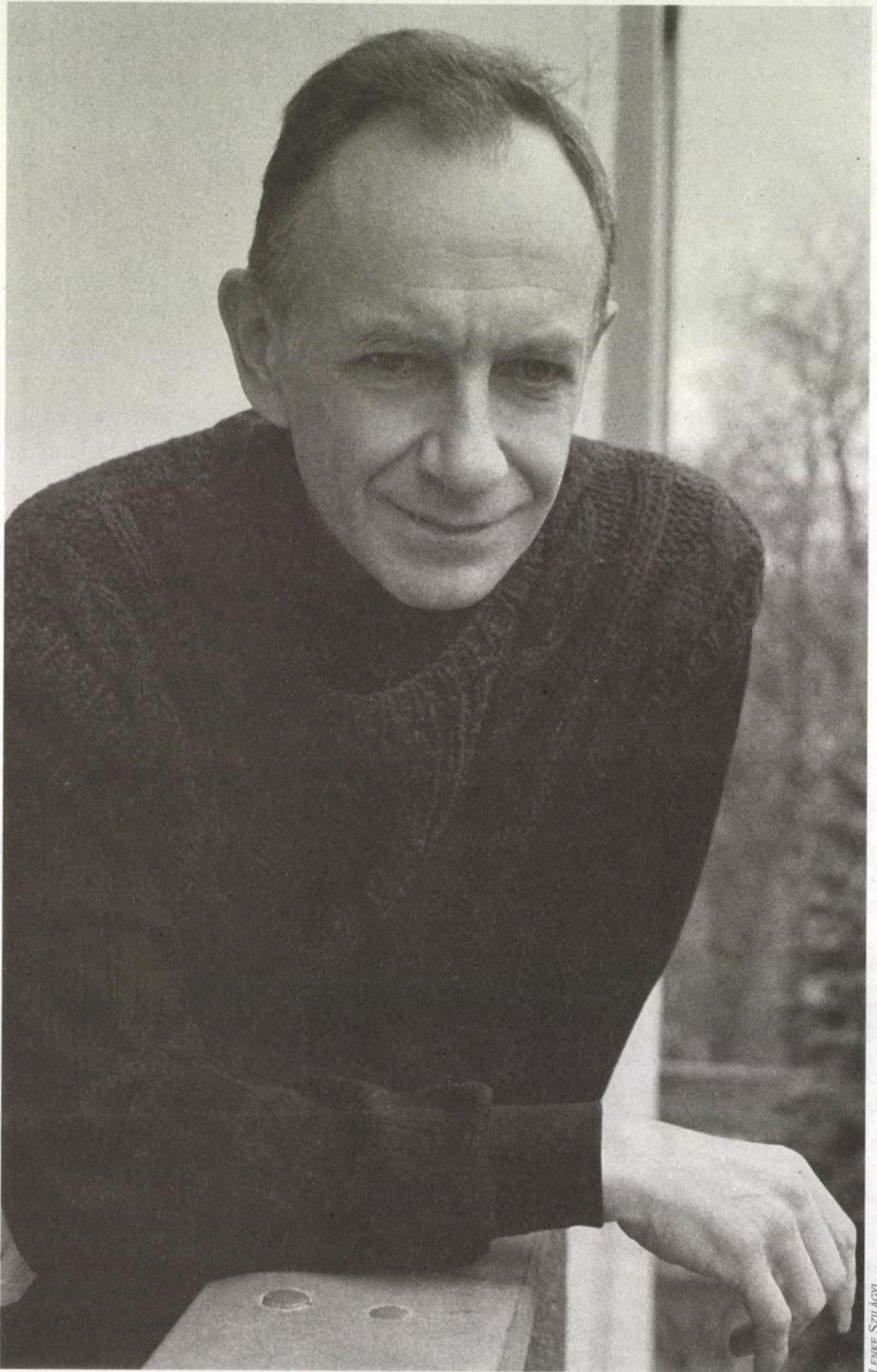


*Hungarian soldiers make a start on dismantling the electronic signalling system on the Austro-Hungarian border. Sopron, 2 May 1989.*

mooted in 1981, a decision to do so was finally taken by the Political Committee on 28 February 1989. Dismantling started on 2 May and was completed on 27 June 1989, when Gyula Horn and Alois Mock, the then foreign ministers of Hungary and Austria, in the presence of nearly one hundred reporters, ceremonially clipped through the barbed wire that separated the two countries on Mount Hubertus, near Sopron. 🇮🇪

*The Austrian and the Hungarian Foreign Ministers Alois Mock and Gyula Horn cut the "Iron Curtain". Sopron, 27 June 1989.*





LENNE SZILAGYI

Ferenc Takács  
*td* at 70

The initials in the title belong to Dezső Tandori, poet, novelist, essayist and multimedia artist, who turned seventy last year. They, the initials, turn up with significant frequency (in lower case, as *td*) in his text-and-figure drawings, in variations making visual and textual puns, and they are accompanied, more often than not, by the sign √, which indicates “void” or “absence” in certain contexts while it can also stand for the instruction “delete” or, alternately, for “fill in”, as in correcting galley proofs.

Minimised, “lower-case” presence and void or absence (and the precariousness of deleting and filling in) have always been concerns central to Tandori’s works, beginning with his first collection of poems, *Töredék Hamletnek* (A Fragment for Hamlet). Published in 1968, this was a selection from Tandori’s poetic output of the years 1958 to 1967. Learning his lessons from neo-Classical modernist poets such as Rilke and Eliot, and, in the Hungarian tradition, Mihály Babits and Ágnes Nemes Nagy, Tandori produced poems that fuse this inspiration with a more contemporary impulse his critics were soon to associate with ideas of the neo-avantgarde, of language poetry and, eventually, of postmodernism. Further ground for these observations and judgments was provided by Tandori’s next volume of poems, the more radically experimental *Egy talált tárgy megtisztítása* (Cleansing an Objet Trouvé, 1973).

Rereading it forty years after its original publication, *Töredék Hamletnek* fully reconfirms later judgment as to what is now seen as its immense, historic significance for contemporary Hungarian poetry. While exhibiting rigorous formal and metrical discipline, the poems in the 1968 collection were quietly

---

*Ferenc Takács,*

*a critic and translator, teaches English Literature at the School of English and American Studies of Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest. He is the author of books on Henry Fielding and T. S. Eliot; his most recent publication is a volume of essays, Mobilis in mobile (Jószöveg Műhely Kiadó, 2008).*

deconstructing some of the traditionally enshrined assumptions and deeply held convictions about what poetry, or at least Hungarian poetry, was supposed to be, and to be about. Mainly by way of offering themselves as alternatives or counter-examples, they put to rest most of the shibboleths of this system of beliefs: they refused to speak in the public, or political voice, and carefully avoided donning the mantle of vatic incantation, still a hallmark of poetic utterance for many Hungarian poets of the 1960s.

Also, these poems did something even more radical than that. As acts of demonstration they destabilised notions of poetic selfhood and undermined ideas of personal presence in poetry—entrenched beliefs long taken for granted in Hungarian poetry whether in the form of a Romantic visionary tradition or in the shape of “objectivist” neo-Classicism. This was done by way of intense self-reflection, by the poem’s involvement in exploring, ultimately with only very tentative gain in certainty, its own (available or unavailable) fundamentals of self, language and communication as well as the conditions of the possibility (or impossibility) of its own inception. They also struck the underlying tone that has remained a constant of this poetry of the “existential” (Tandori’s word): the muted elegiac sadness attendant on the irresolvable paradox of the poem that is written yet cannot be written, or of the existence of the articulate Self that, at the same time, can never be fully articulated into existence.

With all this, Tandori’s early poetry initiated what was later to be seen as a major revolution, or at least a momentous “turn” (to use the more modest term employed by his critics) in recent Hungarian poetry. His example and inspiration encouraged a great number of his contemporaries and, also, a whole array of younger poets in his wake in breaking the outdated moulds and patterns of the Hungarian poetic tradition. What Dostoevsky said about his own generation of Russian writers—“We have all come out from under Gogol’s ‘Overcoat’”—applies, with only a minimum of *mutatis mutandis*, to generations of younger poets in the last forty years: in some way or another, they have all come out from under Tandori’s (metaphorical) overcoat.

Tandori’s contribution to the Hungarian fiction of the last decades has been equally significant. The translator of Samuel Beckett’s *Murphy* and Thomas Bernhard’s *Frost* into Hungarian (in 1971 and 1974, respectively), he made his own prose fictional debut with *Miért élnél örökké?* (Why Would You Live Forever?) in 1977, and has been publishing fiction regularly ever since. In his first novel he firmly committed himself to a distinctly post-Joycean or postmodernist agenda of writing, where authors, narrators and characters lose their distinct outlines in a monologic, confessional-type narration of self-reference, and where experience and the recording of experience, living and writing coalesce in the same process or performance.

His work, while in its core is always about the same basic issues or concerns, is marked by a variety that is truly dazzling. The astounding range and scope of

his poetry was perhaps best exemplified by *A feltételes megálló* (A Conditional Stop, 1983), a monumental, 475-page long collection of nearly three hundred poems including quite a few long, quasi-narrative pieces. Containing Tandori's poetic output in the years 1976 to 1980, its seven sequences of poems constitute the phases of a systematic meditation on themes of art and life. The first sequence is intensely and solipsistically personal; the second contemplates the possibility of some kind of poetic tradition with which Tandori might identify; the third is a more "objectivist" and publicly accessible series of poems on French impressionist paintings; and the fourth sequence presents, in a series of experimental *calligrammes*, typograms, picture puzzles and games of word permutation and combination, a demonstration of certain strictly technical aspects of the way art (as well as poetry) works—or admits that it cannot work. In the remaining sections the poems retrace the same route: there follows a series concerned mainly with contemporary Hungarian painting; then the last two sequences return to the personal, bringing back, in a process of repetition with variation, the "life" of the opening sections.

Tandori's prose writing has shown a similar degree of variety over the decades. Apart from his "existential" fiction, he has published children's books, crime fiction *pastiches* (under the name Nat Roid, an anagram of "Tandori") and science fiction. And if you add to this his radio plays and his non-fiction work: several collections of essays on writing, writers, philosophers and visual artists, and go through the list of Tandori's prose and verse translations ranging from pulp authors like Mickey Spillane or Edgar Rice Burroughs to the *Edda* or Wolfram von Eschenbach's *Parzival*, you find yourself confronted by another mystery, that of the sheer bulk and volume of his output. The size of that output is almost inconceivable. It stretches one's capacity for belief: over forty years, Tandori has published *one hundred* books of poetry, fiction, drama and travelogue, and, in addition, he has *one hundred and seventy* titles on his list of translations. He might have put more words to paper than anybody else in the history of Hungarian literature.

At just over seventy, Tandori is as prolific as ever, even if he has had to face, from the nineties onwards, a paradoxical shift of his position in the contemporary literary scene: a shift to a kind of central marginality where he is now the recipient, unfairly and undeservedly in my view, of a strange mixture of praise and neglect, of, as he puts it, "being ignored while simultaneously put on a pedestal".

**T**he quote is from the back cover of Tandori's 2007 novel *A komplett tandori—komplett eZ?* (A complete tandori—is he completely nutZ). Its author is a certain Nat Roid who, in a parody of the usual blurb clichés, identifies Tandori's (or tandori's, or *td's*) position as one of the central concerns of the text between the covers, the other being the author's "process of learning how to write a novel". The book's scope is ambitious—after all, it celebrates an important anniversary as it appeared exactly thirty years after Tandori's first novel, *Miért*

*élnél örökké?* There is a sense of recapitulation about the book as if Tandori were taking stock of the main concerns of his novelistic oeuvre and summing up his problematics of selfhood, living and writing. The keyword, with its multiple ironies, is “complete”. Completeness of being, full presence: something to be achieved, yet something that cannot be achieved, and if you think otherwise, you are “completely nuts”. Also, it is the completeness of writing, of producing the fully exhaustive account of the subject or of the self, as in old books like Izaak Walton’s *The Compleat Angler* (1653) which tells you everything there is to know about angling and anglers. However fervently wished for, this kind of completeness, the full knowledge of the subject (in both senses of the word) is also impossible. And “learning how to write a novel” is equally so: Tandori, or tandori, or his “soul”, his ghost writer standing in while his useless “writing arm” is healing, will never complete *this* novel. (Even the book seems to refuse to be a completely done and properly made product: Courier, the type used, simulates a typewritten manuscript photographically reproduced, and there are many, obviously intentional, typos as well as confused page numbering.) There is much sadness in the book, generated by the frustration felt at the impossibility of becoming complete, of attaining final being. But there is joy, too—the pleasure of *not* attaining completeness and full being, of remaining in creative virtuality instead of ending up frozen into the deadness of some identity or another.

Ever prolific, Tandori marked 2008, the year of his seventieth birthday by the publication of four books. At least one of these had long been in preparation and then carefully timed to fit the year that was, also, the fortieth anniversary of the appearance of *Töredék Hamletnek*, the poet’s first collection. *2 és fél töredék Hamletnek* (2 and a Half Fragments for Hamlet) is the ultimate in poetic self-reflection: the book reproduces the text of the 1968 collection on its verso pages and supplements, or doubles it, on the *recto*, with recent poetic reflections on the old text, while a fragmentary postscript essay (this is the “half” fragment in the new two-and-a-half assemblage) is supplied in the closing section.

Here, in an act of rereading, both gentle and uncompromising, Tandori executes the paradoxical manoeuvre of delete and reload (*pace* computer lingo): the new context both suppresses and re-establishes the old text, it obliterates as well as it rejuvenates. Tandori seems to assume full authority and presence in dealing, sometimes summarily, with his own beginnings as a poet. But this is, again, qualified by an admission of in-authenticity: “I have no meaningful perspective on my own work now”.

An act of erasure and reclamation, of de-authorising and re-authorising, *2 és fél töredék Hamletnek* is the triumphant non-defeat, Beckett’s “fidelity to failure”, of Tandori’s (or tandori’s, or *td*’s) “to-be-*and*-not-to-be”. This line appears on page 5 as part of a poem entitled, at first surprisingly but, come to think of it, and come to think of *td*, quite appropriately “A happy Hamlet”. ❧

Dezső Tandori

# A complete tandori—is he completely nutz

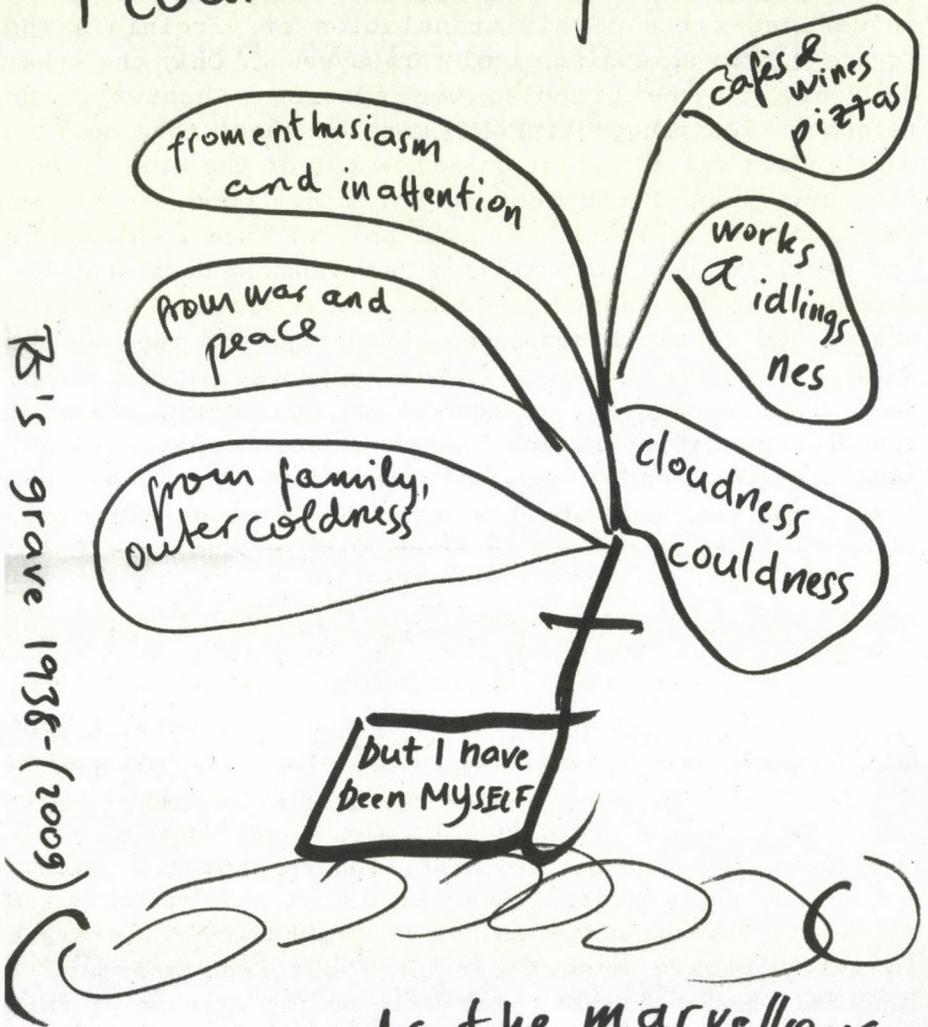
A DELUCIDATE-EFLECTER'S NOVEL

Excerpt from the novel

Nothing +

Look, my soul, or shall I say: evil spirit, I again feel like being a character in a novel, if I may put it that way, says my master, so I shall put it that way. Complaining is hard. To whom. If you complain about Ex that he is not good to you in your business "A", does not bother about it, deep inside, about your business, take good care, it may be the case that Y, to whom you say this, is that way about your business "B", indeed about your business "C" too, and all you are doing is bringing them together, in a front, against yourself, thus my master, and on top of that Zed does not think well, never mind of "A", but of "C". If you talk about your private woes to Em, you trust him, because he has his own private woes as well, similar ones, but it will not be a good move, says my master. Because the one from your own circle about whom you complain, may perchance have been "poisoned" by Em on the part of Cee and Eff and Gee, and anyway Em has no wish to admit that you are right, though he grumbles plenty enough about his own private connections. You would still do better, says my master, to Mrs Overseer, he says, that's also how I told about Em, ha! ha! ha! it wasn't possible to complain about him with/to her because... my ghost, see above. Once someone marries, a Sagittarius, his friends will ask, and unhappy one, who is the partner? She's a Scorpio, for instance, says my master. They kill themselves laughing, that'll be a great marriage, that's a joke, a Sagittarius and a Scorpio! Upon my soul, thus my master, they don't go on about the unbridgeable-distance-between-man-and-man which sometimes, in those still greedy years, possibly decades and a half, of lovemaking, gets pushed to the back, only then, says my master, presents itself daily to the point of boredom, so my master can't believe his ears to hear about just about everybody "not exchanging a word with each other back home", and there are still the kids there, and in addition, no, that was Kafka (A, B, C, etc.), and Thomas Bernhard, so in other words, says my master, it's very much in order, that is to say, would be in order, for one writer to borrow the others, the trouble is that (everyone!) it's not just between lovers that there is an endless distance that presents itself; sets in.

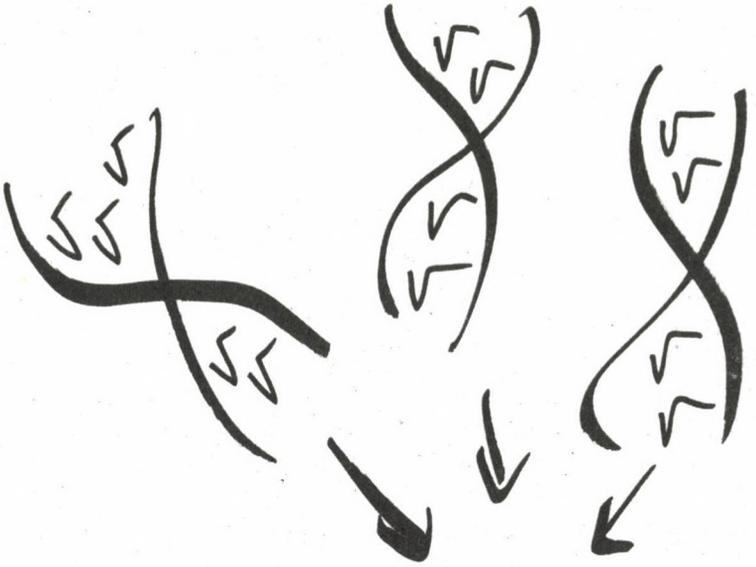
I could have perished



Ah, the clouds, the marvellous  
coulds... the  
coulds, the clouds...  
Baudelaire

My master, out of necessity, had little option but to render the title of his translation of Virginia's The Voyage Out as something like "Farawayness". Only the other day, due to the crippled wee sparrow (Shanty?), the telephone was plugged in. (No more of that! thus he.) An outstanding fellow artist called me out of the blue, a very pleasant chap, I did some work for him once, top-notch relationship. It's just, my evil spirit, that I changed in the meantime. And to what this outstanding does-what-he-pleases (doing what his compulsions dictate?) fellow artist had to say I responded instantly from the gut and sincerely and despondently, thus my master. I didn't say jeez, thus my master, my hand's all fouled up, how am I supposed to write! During the last year alone I wrote 2 novels, translated 4 books (there's plenty who say, and they look like it too, but no, they include Elfriede, Virginia, then this for a book, the Zombie, and now there's the addendum on A. J., not Attila József, and all that takes it out of a chap, says my master), no, I didn't say that, nor even, thus my master, that there's a need for a bit of a breather, that there's a heat-wave, that a wee sparrow is on its way, that Mrs Overseer is very reliant on me with her things, no. From the gut, my master reiterates, I yo-yoed increasingly, this way then that, despondently, that I've reached the stage where I don't much like even leaving the flat, for me there is nothing and no one of interest, I tried to recall what our book had to say on the subject, upon my soul, thus my master, all in all I passed myself off as a deformed monster, I reported, badly at that, what will be the essence of this book, if there is one. Only it was purely because of the wee sparrow that the telephone was switched on, and so on, says my master. Good thing that I was at least able to put up a stout enough resistance that, according to my fellow artist, my situation was, in point of fact, an enviable one, though unquestionably dreadful, thus my master. But nay, my soul, a book's worth of material like this, brr! and ha! ha!, how can it possibly be used in a single answer, to condense it into a telephone, so it's perfectly clear: away, away, farawayness!

Says my master, plus, if it's still necessary to say it at all, he says that he doesn't just imagine a life in which nothing happens differently beyond what has been minimally planned for, thus he, beyond what he is willing to content himself, no, but he himself does not make conversation superfluously, he can't converse well, from his own standpoint, no, because either, so he, he is saying too much, or he would be waiting for something, but it just won't come together, says my master. There's heaps he has given up at some time through this being the way he lives, and not on the Margin, no, but by living precisely the way he lives. Since his fall, he notes, an Arm and a Leg, or to be quite accurate, a shirt and trou, with the connotation of my shirt and trou (onto them, on business, betting etc.), rpt this, better safe than sorry, but if it was only the sleeve of my shirt that had been hammered, says my master, a chilly shirt-sleeve, I would have no trouble, or Shanty's (Seppy? the wee sparrow that's due to arrive) leg-feathers, that's what the trousers on them are called, leg-feathers, aren't they, thus my master. The main thing is for Mrs Overseer, whose leg is playing up something dreadful, and also Lottie the dog to be well, says my master, and Mrs Overseer says the same, good heavens, like so, good heavens, if anything were to happen to me...! Thus my master. But my master too, if he has a wash under the shower, leaning over the bathtub, knowing he wouldn't be able to support himself with either of his wrecked hands, I could fall and hit my head, says my master, it would be too late by the time I had got the better of the protective reflexes, this once I have to be the deflector and not take a shower now that I have elucidated that the bathroom is hazardous, I'll get hurt, the end of this minimalised life, Mrs Overseer can come back home with Lottie from the country, where she is staying, because that is a sensible solution, a little independence, though she tolerates more people, like female acquaintances, workmen, she is even deep-down deeply devoted to her mother, that's why the country, so that she too should enjoy some independence, devoted to nothing, like me, says my master.



TIME FOREVER

22/11/2008/09

Do you imagine, my evil spirit, that I don't know, says my master, what trite tripe I was saying just before? Not so that there should be some sort of illustration, ballsupstration and deluc-effect like failure. But like a train, says my master at crack of dawn today, when, what the hell would I know, a train from Liverpool pulls into London St Pancras, or whatever, my master has a pretty hazy recollection by now, he says, and the clicking as they go over the points. The train, still travelling at a certain speed. Clickety, the sexuality points, clack, the Kafka points, go nowhere, don't drink, you can surrender your liver to the surgeons like Prometheus when, after the discovery of fire, thus my master, he gave himself over to horrendous drinking bouts, his liver that is to say, while I, now that Shanty is coming, the little sparrow with the gammy leg, I can just chuck it, thus my master, the drink, anytime, so says he, kick it. I don't need a reason, then his horrendous period of coldness will come, clickety, the points, says my master, write this down, it's daybreak, independence is one person not disturbing another, and the other does not disturb him, and there's no way of relating that, there are no good points that lead up to that, that's why even Ottlik came a cropper with his novel Buda, thus my master, because he hit the points, what happened to who, who was who, no, the one-track without points is true, my master chuckles, joke, one-track, simile, no! my master exclaims first of all, that one-track is the true good, if there is just the undetailed, completely de-"delucidate-elected", the novel itself, nothing is known about how it was in reality, Arm and a Leg secretly referential, bird follows bird, I wouldn't believe it, no way that this is well made, then, and yet, so my master, anything that it is in any way worth starting with exists this way.

Look, my evil spirit, dislikes of course, thus my master, are hugely varied. Rpts, of course every day and day after day and day, yawns, ear clogging, sigh, all over again, but if I say it's 15 years since Samu died, and Mrs Overseer says the Wee One ought to have been taught as his call "Whoopeee, the woods are my fate!" and I don't grasp it at first but then it dawns on me that it's the woods on the flats on the Danube at Vác where he lives, or we hope he is living. Let Shanty (Seppy) come the same day when, on which, I tell Mrs Overseer, thus my master, Spero came, little Spero, just 29 years ago! Do you remember, says Mrs Overseer when Posey flew through the hole in the back of the chair? And Samu could barely tweet and he was already chasing Spero around, when we still used to write little birthday notes to each other, that, says my master, "because Demeterkin is very impatient, I don't bundle him up nice and neat, I set him down on the table just as he is," says my master, and thousand other things. When we went to collect grass, or a string of things that I'm not at liberty to mention. "I can't say there's been all that much that's been good about my life," my master laughs, but despite all the yawns, sighs and whatever these days, on account of the heat-wave and the thousand times always the same, this something that only Mrs Overseer and I can discuss, and that is exactly as much as it is, so my master, "everything" and "nothing +", like everything, it's ambiguous, that's the curse of the fashion for expressive signs, there no such thing as nothing "plus", though it's also true, says my master, that it's some plus on nothing all the same, or just a reference, a measure. A reference, a measure, that's what I was, says my master, that's what I ought to sigh out, yawn out, ear popping on my death bed, ha! ha! ha! all that will be dangling out of me will be a tube, or on the roadside, anywhere, in the open air, next to a car wreck, I'll be lying there, not even for my heart, or groaning out for gauze bandages, like Dezső Kosztolányi.

It's too good-humoured like this. That leaves the solitude, plus Shanty, the wee sparrow. Of course, nothing is like that, see below, optimal, says my master. "I dropped off to sleep, and I woke up to the idea that the grub had kozma'd off," thus my master, that's what Mrs Overseer had said. "You dropped off to sleep, and you woke up in Kozma Road, because the whole house burnt down through your doing," thus my master. "I dropped off to sleep, and I woke up in the Kozma Road cemetery," thus Mrs Overseer to that, says my master. Tomorrow there will be a proper two-reel black typewriter ribbon, half-inch, says my master, they say. I had a very good outing today, I met several people around Kanizsa Road, three times, all at different places (with a dog in a bar, dogless in villadom). An Arm and a Leg, or however it's written, thus my master, more like an Arm and a Leg-pull! Ha! ha! ha! My master says to Mrs Overseer, so my master: "I have to sleep off the good as well, so that it won't be, that too has to be slept off, for me, thus my master, even the good is an accident, that is what he says to Mrs Overseer, thus my master. Wee Shanty (Chanty, Chantilly—Fr. racetrack) is one of the most enchanting creatures. Even Shakespeare said there's a special providence in the fall of a sparrow. Since I made a promise, thus my master, that I shall not use bad language, I kept that in reserve. And because, thus my master, I have to finish the novel at some point: except for Providence, thus my master, what I have to say is that everyone can go except for Providence, that's how my master puts it, everyone can go to the Petőfi Hall, the P. You will find me too there, next to Jókai and Kosztolányi and Móricz and Ady and Babits (Osiris Student Library, Dezső Beside Nothing Everything's Plenty Tandori, TeeDee). Thus my master. I can pull in that crummy delayed fee at last, I'm up to my eyes with the bank, so he. There you are, my soul and evil spirit, don't pay any attention to me, says my master, I'll take over the reign of terror: tomorrow I'll pay a visit somewhere for the fee, how the hell should I ask, if perchance that one has again published something, so they don't call him over at the same time as me, they used him to bump the critic Ákos T. out of his job, and to what actual benefit? None, thus my master.

Not everything—the reign of terror taken over

(To poet William Carlos Williams and his sparrows)

Since childhood, thus my master, I strove to give away every good so nothing bad should happen to me. And I'm not being pretentious, not trying to dust the dust off my white garment, no, it's a huge indelicacy. I go out early in the morning so as to get the day over with, so that the rest of the day can be mine alone. I might possibly wait for it if the wine pump breaks down, or something else happens, even pleasures and so on. Thus my master. But to get back home "for the postman", which is OK—or would be! But if it's that the post to come out with whatever outfit has again not paid out, and maybe insolently at that, and who has not sent whatever—no thank you! Rather they should give me no pleasure if that is attended by grief, that I should wait for pleasure if it doesn't come. Nothing at all has changed since childhood, when I would hide in the chicken coop instead of going to church or going for a walk, except that then it wasn't me who had to make enough bread for whatever fitted the

—maybe I am allowed to repeat it—

Everything-Is-Shit.

So much for my life. Complete. Mf. (See Ottlik.)

Ferchrissakes, my soul and evil spirit - - -

Dear, oh dear, oh dear, oh dear; to be frank there are just two extremes, so, I thank you very much for everything, baby Jesus, Inquisitor, university professor, cancer-ridden Kosztolányi. For all the chances, thank you very much, thus my master. And he is waiting, him again, for Shanty. He is winding down from the novel, for Shanty, we'll be two cripples in a physically fit world; we too are falling apart, thus my master, into haleness. And the waves subside and back off and, above all, centre. What we have laid down, though after a while all we did was look down. Life's mirror: I am out of silvering. So this can be looked at, then. This was I, a sparrow. Inscription on the paving flag, like this, I did my best; farewell, my master. (After William Carlos Williams.)

*Translated by Tim Wilkinson*

Dezső Tandori

# Poems

Translated by Christopher Whyte

## *So I Can't Talk*

*Hogy nem beszél*

*So I can't talk to anyone about  
what matters to me, is that what you want  
to tell me? That an interlocutor,  
the question of which words to choose, or any*

*consistent objectivity's been left  
so far behind? That what got said till now  
was an exception, that I was more cogent  
when silence was my chosen strategy?*

*And all I'm left with is the plausible  
lowlands of bit-by-bit, a dribbling  
stone tap, that everything that cannot be  
expressed constantly runs the risk of freezing?*

*But even if you were right! Forming a cavern  
drop after drop is still some kind of art,  
and brings a certain status with it, though  
I'd rather be done with it, and "there's the rub".*

*This gives rise to endless difficulties,  
satieties, insatiabilities.  
Associations of what can't be said  
see not themselves, but only their outside.*

2004

# Between the Chairlegs

A széklábak között

*How many different ways of carrying on  
between a chair's legs are imaginable!  
Without even bothering about the whys  
and wherefores of emerging inspiration,  
whether it starts halfway through, and not at  
the place it should, whoever used to sit  
up there has dived down here, into  
his childhood, where a rolling dice dictated  
the ebb and flow of conflict, and he couldn't  
get his fill of it, the button football  
disappeared, had to be hunted for, up there  
the match drew to a halt, and often it  
was left to him to find where it had got to...  
an occasional crack would echo, later,  
above those profound layers of the chair  
world, his movements did not cease, all it  
meant was, the chair was falling apart... And next  
he leant back, put a hand out, absent-minded  
investigator groping through memories:  
in the half shadows at his fingertips  
feast days or midweek days he could return,  
or not return to, for today a different  
repertoire attracted or repelled him,  
not because the chair had castors, no,  
it was that mobile chair with metal feet...  
if he lay down between them, on his tummy,  
how many disappeared infinities  
were manifest as pictures, each of them  
ungraspable, face in a mirror on  
the hunt for itself, he lay there in a calm  
beyond belief, and one after the other,  
mostly in twos, though, between the chairlegs,  
his birds did their level best to reveal  
initially, or finally, what a  
phenomenon existence was, no way  
of understanding it, although he came  
upon the answer once, namely that this*

was not a context a bird could reside in,  
its individuality was too  
strong a magnet... he could let some of them  
perch on the back of his hand, and if he looked  
the answer in the face, it was both with them and  
not with them, his impression was the gaze  
released him from his liability,  
as though he himself had never subsisted  
in excess or in parsimony, as  
though continuing to live could be a promise  
mirroring the chairleg phenomenon:  
an example proving the formula,  
while all his dead stood watching, like a class.

2006

## One-way Dawn Traffic

*A hajnal-egyirány*

*Like being unequivocally caught  
in one-way traffic, packed so tight that it  
resembles a huge earplug, which can stop  
you hearing what is there... Well, what is there  
on dawns of that kind? What speaks out, although  
I cannot hear? Why do I sweep that din  
along with me, the very thing that keeps  
me back, what is it pushing me towards?*

*Times of beginning! Oh, awakenings!  
No way of knowing what it is that reached  
an end, what kind of end, outside the sky's  
still dark, that recent dream is almost  
palpable, on those old dawns someone  
alien even to my imaginings  
managed to get so close, in the half-light  
or in the darkness, and then they submerged.  
And now it's as if the wingbeat of a dream  
hand could flit me off in one direction,  
its head not quite the same, a feather presses*

*on its eye, but we are united somewhere,  
that Other Space incompetently sets  
us thinking of a space that's truly ours,  
resembling the thing that I was always  
certain of, but lacked sufficient shrewdness,*

*it was as if comparison had never  
existed, years pile up, and something wanes.  
This is what I wake up to. There can be  
no question of staying in bed. I get  
cracking in the domain of dawn, and in  
the end I sit here, nothing special happened.  
Such a reality awakened close to mine  
another body, scattering crumbs, so*

*to speak, and flourishing a plastic plate  
among the winter bushes, let the minutes  
of sleep at dawn's verge satisfy a hunger  
I forget at no point throughout the day,  
though all in all I fight against its inroads  
as if I were more than a heap of fragments,  
and thus the one-way street at dawn, fragile  
nor one thing nor the other, beyond thought,*

*constantly ferries its stubborn and yielding  
certitude—that something has got going  
although I have no way of proving so,  
though I don't know where it's all going to lead,  
just waken up with night part of the past,  
exceptions turn humdrum, I wait: Awake?  
All of this gone? But when I fall asleep,  
it does the same, and we fly all night long.*

2006

# To Miklós Radnóti

Radnóti Miklósnak

*After the ultimate word comes the word of survival.  
Night stealing over the heart's put to flight, and the angel  
of fear is transformed into spring with the wingbeat that follows.  
Not that it could restore what has been dispersed, no,  
rather it steps back onto the pavement it left and,  
where the Boulevard St Michel meets the Rue Cujas,  
the worn away kerbstone can never be pristine again.  
But the Meeting is shattered into a thousand fragments,  
this season gapes wide at the line where the snow has sagged,  
at the point to which, over and over, they summon You back.  
Not in the hope you might ever return, but because  
verse's cohesion can never be shattered, although  
it counts back to zero, it won't keep its place in the queue,  
it offers a different angle on what was a changeling  
present's material, grown immaterial now,  
a present that reached its Beginning along with its end.*

*The word of survival comes after the ultimate word.  
Walking up the street named after poetry, you can access  
quite a lot more than a world, if you know what to do with it  
but, walking down, all that seems to have happened is that  
you have died yet again from what was awaiting you there  
with an ersatz of liveliness—glittering spring, or eternity  
here in this world which narrates, because it has recognised  
You turned to verses, how now You are "you", a person  
you cannot tell stories about, only meekly allow us  
to start being alive in your stead, while you continue writing  
poetry in stanzas with us as collaborators,  
as if you had never vanished, as if you became  
Something instead that's as difficult for us to grasp  
as the whole of our lives—we need time to become its nannies;  
no short-term hope is to flood us with its delight,  
it must not be wayward, some specious eternity,  
it must be sufficiently close for us to latch onto,  
and axiomatic, as knowing that peace is a good.*

*You see, that happened only once. And there's a reason for defending, soul. But as the season starts over and over again, whatever the kind of gardens we have, in the dense, green fragrance, where no leaf or blade of grass subsists on its own, where it's so good to wander, Your book in one's hand, open and, as though a swing were to dance up as high as the clouds, up and down with the sun in the sky, and promote rest at night-time, the word of survival walks here, you could be saying: "Look, all of you—once I was, the baker shot past on his brilliant wheel, and seen from above was not merely a map, as We Two and the Others... we came, acted, loved, no, not for forgetfulness' sake, not at all...! It ran in our hearts unwritten, incessantly, like a watermark's letters, announcing arrival, arrival, endlessness of a pure wingbeat from beyond the shadows, celestial soaring, so he can foretell his own country..."*

*The book's two halves fold over across my finger and, at your words, all of it starts to scurry along the rippling hills, with the flames of blueness it flares up as if from the time when time started as only a poem can do, or as the world does: it was a verse, what delirium forgot, but a hand conserved in letters, oh! let it be excavated, be ours once more, let the light in our eyes, reviving, pursue its progress as finger, desire, let it not languish, a desolate wreck, or glimmering ashes, those feathers of ruin after the chisels have ceased—but resonance, peace, much that's Distinct: at One, or many a One coming after the Other, and putting evidence forward, as its own right entitles, authentication for all that is. Oh if only this could be...!*

*As though the eclogues had been struck dumb, the wanderer moved not one step further on from the place where he fell. But in truth he was not there. Like his person, he was concealed: in the letter, the word.*

*That which can never be learned, as the sun rises high in the sky, and we walk, changing shapes, underneath it: the life beyond death with its constant encroaching, life which a man*

*cannot lose should he manage to tread the earth of his home,  
whether the Shepherds within their tent's safety at night  
seeing, even in sleep, existence's Wakeful revolving,  
what kind of strength persists in the chaos that slackens,  
how the Here and the Now can preserve, like a Melody does,  
offering tender expression to law and to teaching,  
as high in the sky the eye follows a fixed path, while you  
show again and again the reason for which we are born,  
the word of survival—is Yours. It is here, with us.*

2006

**www.eurozine.com**

**The most important articles on European culture and politics**

Eurozine is a netmagazine publishing essays, articles, and interviews on the most pressing issues of our time.

**Europe's cultural magazines at your fingertips**

Eurozine is the network of Europe's leading cultural journals. It links up and promotes over 100 partner journals, and associated magazines and institutions from all over Europe.

**A new transnational public space**

By presenting the best articles from the partner magazines in many different languages, Eurozine opens up a new public space for transnational communication and debate.

The best articles from all over Europe at **www.eurozine.com** **EUROZINE**

Nándor Gion  
**Soldier-With-Flower**

Excerpt from the novel

**T**he Calvary is opposite Tuk Hill, on the far bank of the river, a white, terraced chapel that is opened only for the Resurrection but otherwise kept locked the whole year round, and fourteen columns of white stone next to the bridge that leads to the chapel. Into every column is set a large picture depicting the tormenting and crucifixion of Jesus Christ. On the terrace behind the chapel, which can be reached via broad steps, stand three crosses with the Saviour and the two malefactors. The figure of the Saviour is made of bronze, those of the malefactors are of white stone. Over time, the bronze statue had become a deep green, with the Saviour appearing almost black between the two malefactors of white stone.

The Calvary was constructed in 1878, when not so much as a single house stood on the other bank of the river. The village of Srbobran was for a long time trapped between the two waterways, the Krivaja and the Franz Canal, with the Serbs dwelling along the canal, the Hungarians along the River Krivaja. I think it was the Hungarian inhabitants of Tuk of the Catholic faith who got the money together for the Calvary and built it right opposite the hill, along with a narrow plank bridge so that people would always be able to get over to the chapel to pray. After that the first houses also went up on the far bank of the river, and slowly there emerged Calvary Street, the first and, for something like thirty years, the only street on this flat area, which was dwelt in mostly by Tuk's

---

*Nándor Gion (1941–2002),*

*a novelist, was born in the village of Srbobran (Szenttamás, Vojvodina, Serbia), the setting of his novels. He was managing director of the Hungarian theatre in Novi Sad (1983–85) and worked for the Radio there (from 1985). He moved to Hungary in 1994 where he lived until his death. His major work is a tetralogy—a family saga recounting the story of Vojvodina from the end of the 19th century until after the Second World War, reviewed by Zsolt Láng on pp. 121–127 of this issue. The excerpt published here is from the first part of the tetralogy (1973).*

poorer residents; weary, threadbare people who made a desperate effort to claw their way back onto Tuk Hill. Because it was a shameful thing to slip into Calvary Street, and those who lived there perhaps worked all the harder than soil-grubbing, money-gathering Tukers to escape all the sooner from the neighbourhood of the white chapel and those fourteen white-stone columns. The slogging, dog-tired folk did not bother much with the Calvary, and even the more charitable Tukers only came there to pray in the days just before Easter, and naturally also on the eve of Holy Saturday to celebrate the resurrection, but during the working day no one apart from me gave so much as a look that way.

After I finished my schooling, I used to go over to the Calvary every day after school. I did not dig away at the earth like the Toker or Calvary Street mole folk; by the age of fifteen I already earned enough with my zither-playing at family shindigs to have no need to go out to the fields so I was free to roam about the day long, or to sit on the white chapel's terrace at the foot of the blackened bronze Jesus from where I could see the people toiling on Tuk Hill, the neglected back yards of the wretched houses in Calvary Street, including young Gili's, the dreamy village swineherd, who tended pigs over in the meadow by the Szegec road. I was fond of the Calvary because it was always quiet there and cool, and I was able to keep an eye on a lot, but no one could see me. I used to get up early in the morning, just after daybreak, and race across the narrow plank bridge, walk up to the crucified Jesus and watch the people setting out to work. The locals would come out noisily onto the street, raising clouds of dust with their carts, cursing, geeing their horses to get even quicker out to the fields, with the poorer ones padding on foot behind the carts. The Calvary Streeters crept out from their homes without a word, setting off to work with heads bowed. The bustle lasted barely half an hour, then Tuk was deserted, Calvary Street too, only small children and the very old being left at home. That was when the sound of young Gili's horn would swell from behind the Heart, and before long he would heave into sight with the pigs, slowly driving them off towards the Szegec road. This was how it was early in the morning every day, and every day at this hour Godly Mihály Bibic would appear with his wife, on their way back home from the fields. They would meet young Gili the swineherd, and from the Calvary I would be able to see Godly Mihály Bibic raise his hat and, no doubt, greet the little swineherd with hearty Lord-be-praisedes. Godly Mihály Bibic greeted everybody with hearty praises to the Lord. He lived in Calvary Street but was a bit wealthier than the others, who had been reduced to living there, owning a horse and cart, and also owning a small piece of land somewhere over in Devecser. On that small piece of land he grew everything you could imagine, from wheat to hemp, just a tiny bit of everything, but even so he harvested a bountiful plenty. The fact is Godly Mihály Bibic and his wife used to go out to the fields in the evening, the lanes and byways sounding to their loud Lord-be-praisedes into the dark, and if nobody returned the greetings,

they would pull up, load the cart with sheaves of wheat or alfalfa or corn, whatever was within reach and of which, naturally, there was also a handful on their own land. They would bring the first load home by midnight and then go out again to the fields, bringing a second load back by the morning, when Godly Mihály Bibic would also greet young Gili, the swineherd, with a Lord-be-praised. Everybody in Tuk knew about this, but since Godly Mihály Bibic did not purloin too much from one spot, nobody said a word to him.

With Godly Mihály Bibic's return in the morning everything would finally fall silent, and that was when I would go down from the terrace to the stone columns in order to take a look at the Soldier-with-the-Flower. Because in truth that was why I went to the Calvary every day, not to spy on the folk of Tuk and Calvary Street. I'm not saying I wasn't also interested in how the mole folk would race out to the fields, and how they returned home dead-tired, and how they lived their lives in general, and to start with that was indeed the reason I used to go out to the Calvary, but before long I discovered the Soldier-with-the-Flower, and from then on it was he who interested me first and foremost.

In the pictures embedded in the stone columns the Soldier-with-the-Flower is scourging the Saviour with a flail. He is wearing an ash-grey tunic and has an enormous, yellow-petalled flower on his chest. The lurid yellow flower is not at all in keeping with the pictures, nor the soldier either, as no one else has a flower pinned to their clothing; indeed, there is not another flower to be seen, even in the background. It shows on the jostling multitude that where they grew up was from that barren sandy soil, and they belong together somehow or other, but the Soldier-with-the-Flower is striding among them as though he were only there by chance, and that was why he had been branded with a big yellow flower. The first time that I looked for any length of time at the pictures, I constantly had a feeling that the Soldier-with-the-Flower wanted to step out of the picture. I still thought at the time that this was all because of the yellow-petalled flower, but later on I came to realise that it was not just on account of this that he differed from the others; as a matter of fact, the flower wasn't even important. The face of the Soldier-with-the-Flower was different from that of the others. His face was bearded just like theirs, but something was missing. In point of fact, the Soldier-with-the-Flower was not suffering. Everyone else was suffering: the Saviour, whose brow is bleeding under the crown of thorns; the Pharisee who is spitting on the Saviour; Simon the Cyrenian, who has to carry the cross as Jesus sinks to the ground; the executioner and the whole gaping rabble are all, every one, suffering, every single one of them looks unhappy. The only happy person is the Soldier-with-the-Flower. His face is serious, practically stern, but he seems to be continually grinning just a little behind his bushy brown beard, and those wide-set eyes are looking at people as if they did not even exist. And then I discovered something else: the Soldier-with-the-Flower was doing everything wrong. The others understood what

they had to do, including the centurion in command of the soldiers, the carpenters who are setting up the cross, including the executioner too, but the Soldier-with-the-Flower is incredibly clumsy. His helmet is tipped to one side of his head, he is marching in ungainly fashion behind the Saviour, and he is even grasping his flail and lashing with it in such a way that it's virtually guaranteed that the next thing it will be coiling round his neck. In the next picture the flail is cracking on the Saviour's back but in such a way that the ends are flicking back towards the Soldier-with-the-Flower, who is grinning with an earnest expression on his face as if he not only was unaware of the throng of people around him but of the flail that is in his hand. That was very peculiar, and I thought for a moment that the Soldier-with-the-Flower might perhaps be an imbecile. But no, he had a decidedly intelligent face, he was not a dummy, just happy. That was when I decided to work out why the Soldier-with-the-Flower was happy.

That was why I started to go out to the Calvary regularly, and when the Tukers and Calvary Streeters trooped out to the fields and while Godly Mihály Bibic was unloading his cart I would go off to the stone columns to study the pictures. They were in good condition, the pictures, in their blind-window-style openings, set deep into the thick stone columns so that neither sun nor rain could damage them; everything in them looked so neat and tidy, and I scrutinised all of them thoroughly in case there was some tiny detail that would explain why the Soldier-with-the-Flower was happy. I was never able to notice anything new. So I again began to study the face of the Soldier-with-the-Flower and to try to adjust my own face to look like his. I brought a mirror from home and inspected the Soldier-with-the-Flower, then inspected myself and made an effort to look like him, but even so I never got anywhere; I was unable to pull a face like the Soldier-with-the-Flower.

That was when I decided to pay more attention to scrutinising living people, though to be honest I was by now far from sure of ever being able to unravel the secret of the Soldier-with-the-Flower. I had never yet seen anyone who resembled him, but all the same I looked at people from there, the terrace behind the chapel. It was all futile, of course; the Tukers and Calvary Streeters were just like the gaping, spitting rabble on the pictures embedded in the stone columns, all unhappy and in a bad temper even when they laughed.

After a while I no longer made an effort. I was just glad that I had discovered the Soldier-with-the-Flower, in point of fact the important thing was that such a person as the Soldier-with-the-Flower existed, so it was on account of him that I continued to go out to the Calvary, and I was glad that after the mole folk had set off for work I could look at someone who, flail in hand, was unquestionably happy. And maybe a time would come when I would nevertheless come to learn why the Soldier-with-the-Flower was happy. Maybe by complete accident, without my making much of an effort; maybe a time would come when I would

notice something in the pictures that would explain everything, or maybe I would encounter someone who resembled the Soldier-with-the-Flower just a little. Not a Toker or Calvary Streeter, I knew them all too well from the place on the terrace behind the chapel, much better than when I played music for them at their family shindigs. But possibly I might encounter someone somewhere else. Among the shepherds perhaps, let's say. Yes, the shepherds. At the Calvary, among the stone columns, I increasingly thought about the shepherds, and then I started to become proud of my ancestors, who may very well not have borne any resemblance to the Soldier-with-the-Flower, but at least they were not Tokers or Calvary Streeters.

**M**y ancestors, the Tatty Gallais were not earth-grubbing, mole folk but shepherds, and they got their nickname from their 'fancy', or maybe they were tatty, frieze coats. I don't know a lot about them, but they didn't live in Srbobran; they looked after sheep on pastures out towards Subotica, in the North Bácska Hills between Topola, Čantavir and Senta, that was where they wandered with their flocks for a century and a half or so, not settling down anywhere for any length of time, always moving on towards better pastures, at most marrying a girl from one of the villages before moving on with their flocks. Their children were born out on the meadows, to be sure, and that is also where the old folk died, where they were buried too, as it was not worth leaving the pastures on account of a birth or death. Marriage, though, they seem to have taken more seriously, as indeed befits a respectable Roman Catholic; they always exchanged marriage vows in the nearest Catholic church and carefully kept their copy of the certificate. Actually, there is nothing but those marriage documents among our old family papers. With their stamp and the parish priest's signature, they are proper marriage certificates, with dates of birth and all the rest entered on them, just no place of residence anywhere. Or to be absolutely correct I did find the marriage certificate of a certain István Gallai, who in 1931 espoused to a Júlia Ali, a spinster of the Roman Catholic persuasion, for whom "the Senta homesteads" is given as the place of residence, not that it means anything: in all likelihood, the parish priest who joined them in wedlock considered it his bounden duty to write down a place of residence, and since István Gallai happened at that moment to be watching over sheep on the pastures outside Senta, the Senta homesteads is what he wrote down on the marriage certificate. I once enquired with my father about this István Gallai, thinking maybe it was from him that I got my name. He said that that István Gallai was, like all the Tatty Gallais, a bandy-legged, slightly hunchbacked shepherd and never settled down, either in those quarters in Senta or anywhere else. My father did not care to speak about his shepherd ancestors; he was rather ashamed of them, and he was always nettled by the nickname Tatty.

When he was young, even my father, Tatty Pál Gallai, had been a shepherd. He wandered further with his flock than his predecessors, and one summer reached as far south as Srbobran and the Devecser meadow, but then did not go back. By then he hated the nomadic existence and the mockery of that tatty, so he sold the sheep, purchased a chain-length of land and a cottage in Tuk, not far from the Calvary, and that very winter he got married and did not want to hear a word more about looking after sheep. He cultivated that little strip of land, but then, after it proved impossible to make a living from a chain-length of land, he took on all sorts of other work; he was a farm hand, a day-labourer, a carter, just like the other poorer Tukers, but even then he was not able to get rid of that Tatty name, it somehow found its way to him even here in Tuk, and even we, his children, somehow inherited it.

My two elder brothers, Pál and Antal, held our sheep-stinking, vagabond ancestors in, if anything, even greater contempt than our father did; they sometimes got into brawls if they were called Tatty. They too signed on as hands to the farmers of Devecser and tended beasts, but at least they did not watch over them, and they had a roof over their head. I could never understand either my father or my brothers; I was always fond of the Tatty Gallais, and it appealed to me that they just roamed about the big, wide world, driving their sheep, and no doubt they, for their part, did not have much regard for earth-grubbing peasants, and I was even more fond of them when my father related, in almost respectful tones, that the Tatties were a mite better than common, pipe-peeping shepherds; all of them played the zither and had pleasant singing voices. My father had held on to the family's old zither, and of an evening, if he was not too tired, he would play it and sing to us. My brothers were even annoyed by the zither and never picked it up, whereas I quickly learned to play and in time also started playing at shindigs. As a matter of fact I have the family's old zither to thank that when I finished with school I did not have to sign on as a farm hand or day-labourer. I would go to the shindigs that were organised on Saturday or Sunday evenings, usually by young married couples who did not fancy going to János Kiss's tavern and would jig around even to the accompaniment of a single zither; for they found that more agreeable and, above all, cheaper, so everyone would toss a bit of loose change onto the zither—not a lot, because the tight-fisted Tukers always took good care of their money, but even so enough would pile up for me not to have to go looking for work. So for that I was extremely grateful to those shepherds, the Tatty Gallais.

Because I could see how the Tukers and Calvary Streeters had to slog away; I would see them racing out to the fields at dawn and returning in the evening dog-tired and bad-tempered. They were exhausted and ugly then, and I felt much greater contempt for them than my father did for our shepherd ancestors who, I'm quite sure, never felt so bad-tempered and ugly as those mole folk did of coming home from the fields. The Tatty Gallais were merry people, no doubt

about it, and that summer, when I went out to the Calvary every day, I was not just fond but proud of them. There were even times when I thought that maybe one of them had looked a little like the Soldier-with-the-Flower.

One day I went out to the Devecser meadow to hunt down some shepherds. There were no longer any shepherds there, however, only smoking hillocks and sorts of poor devils who baked bricks among the hillocks, and Johann Schank, the lucky Kraut who had the fortune to jump up from the ranks of the poor brick-baking devils and was now building a brickyard of his own. It wasn't worth taking a closer look at them: they were all filthy, reeked of smoke and were ugly, even Johann Schank with his own factory. I was loafing around dejectedly on top of one of the hillocks, the grass on which had been totally shrivelled by the smoke from the brick kilns, thinking I would push off back to the Soldier-with-the-Flower at the Calvary when a long way off on the stubble of the wheat fields, near the Bangó spread, I spotted two flocks of sheep. So I set off in that direction, though I feared that I would not find genuine shepherds there either; maybe the Bangós had turned their sheep out to graze next to the farmstead. And, indeed, that was where the Bangó twins were keeping their sheep, but not far from them, next to another flock, I also noticed a skinny, raven-haired boy of roughly my age. I had no wish to meet the twins, I already knew them well because every winter they would move back from the farm to their house in Tuk, and I knew them to be sneaky, bad-tempered customers, so for preference I headed in the direction of the unfamiliar black-haired boy. The twins saw me from far off and, what's more, they recognised me, so they ran whooping over to me, and when they got close they promptly asked,

"Did you bring your zither?"

"No, I didn't," I said listlessly, then I asked them, "And who's the boy with the black hair?"

"Pity you didn't bring your zither," the twins said. "If you come this way another time, don't forget to bring it."

"Fine, next time I'll bring it," I said, and again I asked, "Who's that boy?"

The Bangó twins looked at each other, curled their lips disdainfully, then one of them said,

"He's one of those raggedy-arsed Green Streeters. He works for the Szegis; it's their sheep he's looking after."

"What's he called?"

"Ádám Török, or Gimpy Ádám Török," they said, now sizing me up suspiciously. "Was it him you wanted to see?"

I assured them that I had not come to see anyone in particular, I just happened to be going that way. On that they took me over to their own sheep, regretting that I had not come the day before, because yesterday they had been extracting honey. Meanwhile they were pointing something out to each other,

but I wasn't watching because I was still keeping an eye on Ádám Török, and I remarked,

"As best I know, all the Gimpy Töröks are redheads."

"He's the only black-haired one," the twins fumed angrily. "That's even worse than red hair. He's always driving the sheep onto our fallow."

"So why don't you chase him off?"

They shuffled their feet in discomfort but did not reply and rather asked:

"Do you like honeycomb?"

I wouldn't let it go at that, and I put the question again,

"Why don't you chase the Green Streeter away?"

"He's got a long spike at the end of his crook," they said grudgingly. "He drove a long nail into the tip of his staff and then sharpened it."

"I get it!" I said. "You mean, you're afraid of him!"

"It's not him we're afraid of," they protested vehemently. "But once he even threatened to skewer our Dad."

"So you're afraid of him, then!"

"What the hell do you want anyway?" they fumed. "We asked you if you like honeycomb."

"I do," I said.

"We'll bring you some straight away," they said with a smirk before racing off to the farmstead.

I was left alone by the sheep, which is when Ádám Török came over, leaned on his crook and stared curiously at me. I took a good look at him too, but he didn't look anything like the Soldier-with-the-Flower; he wasn't even a shepherd, just a hand on the Szegi spread, but I was impressed that he wasn't rattled by the Bangós and was letting the sheep graze so near to their farm. I would have liked to strike up a conversation with him, but before I knew it the twins were back and slapped a big, wrapped-up chunk of honeycomb into the palm of my hand.

"Smash it back in their mug!" Ádám Török said at this.

I was completely dumbstruck, standing there with the sticky honeycomb in my hand. The twins were not smirking any more but darted dirty looks at Ádám Török and said:

"No one asked you for an opinion, Gimpy!"

"I'll give your mother Gimpy!" Ádám Török flung straight back at them, still leaning calmly on his crook, before repeating,

"Smash the honeycomb back in their mug! You can bet they've stuck bees in it."

I carefully pulled back the wrapping. Two small bees were wriggling, stuck to the honey; they were barely alive, but they would still have stung me if I had taken a bite. I didn't smash the honeycomb in their face but threw it down at their feet.

"Feed your own faces."

The Bangó twins were livid that their trick had not worked; it was obvious they would sooner have given me a good hiding, seeing that they were both a bit older and stronger than me, but there was no way of telling what Ádám Török, who had drawn quite close with his spiked crook, might do.

"No one asked you to come over," they finally sputtered out. "Neither you nor the Gimpy."

I edged towards Ádám Török, and then both of us left the furious twins to their own devices. A bit further away from them, we sat down on the meadow. That was when Ádám Török said,

"I hate those Bangós. They try to trick everybody and make fools of them."

"You put the wind up them, though," I said.

"I can well believe that," said Ádám Török, showing me the spiked end of his crook. "They don't have the bottle to start any funny games with me, though it really eats them up to see me driving the sheep over here. Anyone else they will pick a fight with. They even took a pot shot at young Gili once."

"The little swineherd?"

"Yes. Know him?"

"I see him every day from Calvary when he drives the pigs off to the pasture in the morning."

"And what do you do up at the Calvary every morning?" he looked at me in amazement.

I just shrugged my shoulders, having no wish to speak about the Soldier-with-the-Flower, and said only,

"I just watch people. From the Calvary you can even look into the houses."

"Useful to know that," said Ádám Török and stabbed the crook into the ground as he pondered. "So, you can even look into the houses?"

"Yes," I said. "And I also see young Gili every morning, but I never knew that the Bangós had taken a pot shot at him."

"That was a long way back," said Ádám Török, "when young Gili was still working for the Szegis. The twins also got him to eat honeycomb, then they chased him off from anywhere near their spread, but even that was not enough for them. Even back then young Gili didn't have all his marbles; he talked to himself and played with his fingers, and when that had a hold on him he noticed nothing, even bumped into trees. The Bangós have an old musket so the twins charged it with gunpowder and hid with it in the cornfield. When young Gili came near, playing with his fingers, they took a shot. There was no ball in the musket, of course, but it went off as loud as a cannon and young Gili had the fright of his life, his heart may even have stopped beating. Old Szegi found him late that evening and had a hard job bringing him to and had to give up employing him because young Gili was now afraid of the corn field. Old Szegi took it upon himself to arrange for young Gili to be taken.

on as a village swineherd because there are no corn fields out where he watches the pigs.

"I'm really sorry to hear that about young Gili. And I too detest the Bangós."

"Rotten Tukers!" Ádám Török flipped a hand dismissively but then glanced at me. "But you're a Toker too, aren't you? What do they call you?"

"Tatty István Gallai."

"Why Tatty?"

"Because even my granddad was a shepherd," I said with pride, "and he wore a fancy frieze coat. But why the Gimpy?"

"That's because my granddad was crippled," said Ádám Török indignantly. "But I'm not crippled and I'm not Gimpy either."

"I don't mind the Tatty," I said, getting ready to launch into the story of my shepherd ancestors, but Ádám Török was upset by any mention of name-calling so he promptly changed the subject.

"There's lots of rich folk in Tuk, aren't there?" he asked.

"Not that many", I said. "There are a fair few rich peasants, but most of the people are poor, a lot poorer than they show themselves to be. These days, more and more people are moving into Calvary Street."

"But some of them are rich. And you can see into the houses from the Calvary."

"The richest of those whose house I can look into is Godly Mihály Bibic."

"It was a serious question."

"And I've given you a serious answer. I'm quite sure Godly Mihály Bibic is the richest. Every day he brings back two loaded carts, and every Friday he carts to market and sells the produce that he's filched from the fields."

"Mihály Bibic," he muttered incredulously. "The Godly malefactor. Who would have believed it!"

"One of these days the Tukers are going to be gobsmacked," I said. "One fine day, when Godly Mihály Bibic opens his purse. They won't laugh at him then."

Ádám Török looked at me respectfully, patted me on the shoulder and said, "One day I'll have to come with you to the Calvary. I'll see this Godly Mihály Bibic for myself."

We had a good chinwag, sitting there on the meadow, and Ádám Török and I became fast friends, so when it came to midday he invited me to join him for lunch. The sheep by then were huddling together, tucking their heads into one another's shade to escape the blazing sun, so we strode in among them, scrambling them to their feet before setting off for the Szegi spread.

We paid no more attention to the Bangó twins; they may well have gone off to lunch themselves, but we drove the sheep sluggishly on and I was glad that I had come here looking for shepherds, even if I had not found any, and it occurred to me that I would come here to the pasture at other times and help Ádám Török keep an eye on the sheep, who knows, maybe even try to imagine

I was a shepherd like the Tatties had been before, and have a spiked crook with which to keep people like the Bangó twins at a distance. I might even bring my zither along some time. Nothing came of any of that, though.

Ádám Török brought bread and bacon lard from the Szegi farmstead, both of us lunched, and then he said he was going to drive the sheep down to the Krivaja, to Froggy Lea, where the grass was juicy green, the livestock could graze and we could go and tickle for carp in the river. He knew of a place where the water was shallow and clear; there were plenty of carp there and it would be easy to catch enough for dinner, after which we might well take a nap under the willows along the river bank. The idea appealed greatly, so we got up and started enthusiastically to shepherd the flock towards the river, neither of us giving a moment's thought to the fact that Froggy Lea belonged János Váry, the handsomest proprietor in Devecser, and trouble might come from driving the sheep over it.

János Váry was a fine, upstanding fellow who owned five or six hundred chains of land in Devecser, and he had the most graceful horses in Srbobran. I had seen him a few times as he whisked through the streets of Srbobran in his landau, with Váry himself sitting with his head held high, looking fixedly ahead as if he loathed the whole world, but the second anyone hailed him he would raise his hat and return the greeting. And then go back to looking fixedly ahead, and one could see that he was tremendously proud of his graceful horses and of himself as well. The peasants, of course, would greet him loudly because János Váry, however much he might give the impression of paying no attention to anyone, would always notice if someone did not greet him, and that person would then get no more work from him.

Apart from the horses, János Váry did not keep any other livestock, so in point of fact he had no real need for Froggy Lea, and indeed he would permit anyone to graze their animals there, but they had to ask beforehand. If anyone went on it without asking, they were chased off unmercifully. I was not aware of that, but Ádám Török must have known it full well, yet he chose to bother himself with János Váry no more than he did with the Bangós. Without a qualm we drove the sheep onto Froggy Lea, spread ourselves out under one of the willows and waited for the sun to slip lower in the sky so that we could wade into the river to catch carp. A pleasant place was Froggy Lea, a flat, green flood area, and even at this hour in high summer the hint of water could be smelt off the grass, and the sun never burned so fiercely as on the treeless tracts of wheat stubble. We were lying on our backs under the willow-tree and were just debating on which branch to string the carp when János Váry's landau drew up beside the sheep. It was an elegant, yellow landau with a pair of white horses hitched and on the driver's seat was Peter Krasuják, the liveried coachman, who was just as strapping a figure as his master, and held his back just as erect. Váry was not sitting in the landau, and Peter Krasuják was looking us up and down as if Froggy Lea belonged to him.

"Who drove the sheep onto here?" he asked.

Ádám Török got to his feet, grasped his spiked crook and said,

"I did. So what?"

"From who did you ask permission to drive them on here?" Peter Krasuják snarled.

"Nobody," said Ádám Török.

"Then make yourself scarce quick, along with your sheep," said Peter Krasuják.

Ádám Török stretched the pointed end of the crook in front of him, and said with a smile,

"I want to catch carp, and I want to bake myself a bit here, under the willow-trees."

"Watch it, Gimpy!" Peter Krasuják said threateningly. "I'm not a bit scared of your spiked crook."

"I'll give your mother Gimpy!" said Ádám Török.

It sent a chill down my spine. Peter Krasuják was at least three times as big as Ádám Török; I could see he was reddening with anger and expected him to jump down any second from the landau and simply squash Ádám Török, who was no more than a skinny fifteen-year-old, like a bug. But he did not jump down from the landau and did not squash Ádám Török like a bug but again said, his face completely red:

"Watch it, Gimpy!"

Whereupon he clattered off with the landau, his whip cracking wildly over the heads of the horses but not actually lashing them. János Váry would have skinned him alive if the thick strip of rawhide had touched those magnificent white horses.

"Drop dead, you and your master!" Ádám Török snarled irately and again he lay down on his back under the willow-tree.

I could sense even then that trouble was brewing. I lost all desire to go and tickle carp, even for Froggy Lea as a whole, but nervously shuffled my feet under the willow-tree, watching the landau as it hurtled away before turning to ask Ádám Török for his advice, but he had closed his eyes as if he were ready to fall asleep.

"We ought to get the sheep off the property," I said.

"Why's that?" Ádám Török asked, his eyes shut.

"Froggy Lea..."

"This nice green grass on Froggy Lea will go to pot if the sheep don't keep it nicely cropped," he said.

"I don't get it," I said edgily. "The sheep aren't even yours."

"The sheep can get stuffed. I came here for the carp."

"But what about Peter Krasuják?"

Ádám Török finally opened one eye and asked sarcastically,

"Don't tell me you're scared of the likes of Peter Krasuják?"

"He said he's going to fetch János Váry."

"Don't tell me you're scared of the likes of János Váry?"

"This is his land, though."

"When all's said and done, you're just one of those lily-livered Tukers,"  
Ádám Török. "Beat it if you're so scared."

He put his hands beneath his head and again closed his eye. I no longer existed as far as he was concerned. I could sense that trouble was brewing, and I was scared as well, though no longer of Peter Krasuják or János Váry, but Ádám Török. It had tickled my fancy that he had tangled with the Bangós, because they were just ordinary Toker peasants who had managed to feather their nest. János Váry, on the other hand, was a nobleman, and haughty with it; it was madness to pick a quarrel with him. And then along comes this pipsqueak Ádám Török and makes threats with his spiked crook—serious threats at that. Because after what had happened I was now quite sure that he was capable of stabbing a person, and I think Peter Krasuják, the liveried coachman, also suspected as much. I picked up the crook and looked for a long time at the long, pointed nail sticking out from its end, and by now I regretted having come out to Devecser on a hunt for shepherds.

"Still not cleared off?" Ádám Török said a bit later, stretching his limbs and rubbing his eyes.

"No."

"Then we can go and tickle for carp," he said. "I don't think Monsieur Váry is going to come out here and pick a fight."

We selected two strong wands of willow to thread through the fish and then went down to the water. There really were plenty of carp there, clearly visible in the clean and shallow river, hovering with outstretched fins over the cavities washed out by the water in the riverbed as if they were all watching over a nest. We waded carefully into the water, stabbed the willow wands into the riverbed beside us, waited a while for the water surface to settle, then bent forwards, gradually slipped our hands into the water and wiggled our fingers. More often than not, provided this did not scare them away, the carp would angrily attack the wriggling fingers, and that was when, if you were fast enough, you could grab it. I had caught a lot like that in the River Heart, by the Gavanski water mill, so I had quite a lot of practice under my belt, but now I was clumsily snatching after them as if I were doing it for the first time. Ádám Török had already strung up three by the time I managed to catch one, but I grabbed it so awkwardly that I gashed the palm of one hand on a fin. I straightened up to suck the blood from the gash, and that was when I saw the landau. It had pulled up about fifty yards away from us, the pair of white horses with haughtily raised heads and János Váry sitting in the landau, looking fixedly ahead just as he did in the streets of Srbobran as he waited to be greeted. Peter

Krasuják, the liveried coachman, strode over towards the water with a smirk on his face and his fancy rawhide lash.

Ádám Török had not noticed them, having kept his eyes peeled for carp, wiggling his fingers in the water, and he only snatched his head up when Peter Krasuják spoke.

"So where's the spiked crook, Gimpy?" he asked with a smirk.

"Let's swim over to the other bank," I whispered to Ádám Török, but he did not move, he was watching the liveried coachman and János Váry sitting in the landau, looking fixedly ahead, and no doubt he would have amiably raised his hat had we shouted a greeting.

"Have you the guts to come to the bank, Gimpy?" asked Peter Krasuják, and cracked the whip.

"I'll give your mother Gimpy!" and waded towards the liveried coachman.

Peter Krasuják raised his fancy rawhide lash, and when Ádám Török reached the bank slashed at his bare legs. The whip cracked powerfully and a red gash snaked across both of Ádám Török's legs. Even so he did not jump back in the river to swim across to the other side but just hung his head and leaned forward as when he was tickling for carp. Peter Krasuják smirked, cracked the whip and again struck with it. This time, though, Ádám Török was watching out for it: with his head lowered he jumped forward, grabbed the lash and pulled the whip out of the coachman's hands. Burly Krasuják looked in amazement at his hand, and before he could gather his wits Ádám Török struck him on the face with the fancy rawhide lash, dashed past him and raced towards the willow-trees where he had left his spiked crook. He could not find it, though, and I saw him running from one tree to the next, and meanwhile the coachman, whose face had been gashed under one eye, slowly came to his senses and, face bloodied, set off towards the willows.

"Scram into the maize field," I cried out in desperation to Ádám Török, who was still hunting for his crook.

He looked up. He was still holding the whip but he was probably well aware that this was no longer enough, and he at last started to race towards the maize field. Peter Krasuják was wearing shiny boots and on foot he would never have caught Ádám Török, so he ran to the landau, jumped on the box and set the horses off. The pair of white horses started to gallop. And the coachman directed them straight towards Ádám Török, while I cried out in alarm when they got close. Ádám Török jumped out of the hurtling landau's way at the last moment and lashed out between the horses with the fancy whip. János Váry, who all this time had been sitting stiffly in the landau, bellowed in pain as if he had been struck. The handsome pair of white horses, unaccustomed to the whip, reared and then began to career impulsively headlong. That was when Ádám Török vanished into the maize.

I swam across the river, and when I reached the far bank I, too, started to run. I was getting on for three miles from Tuk, and I ran the whole way and went straight to the Calvary. By then it was dusk, and the Tukers and Calvary Streeters were straggling back home from the fields, but I paid them no attention, slumping down in front of the stone columns to stare at the Soldier-with-the-Flower. The columns looked whiter than usual, and there was the Soldier-with-the-Flower, the big, yellow flower gleaming on his tunic as he clumsily scoured with the flail and meanwhile grinned happily with his earnest, bearded face. It was a good thing he was there, and a good thing that he was grinning so oddly, and alongside him I was gradually able to calm down; I stretched out on the ground, and that was the first time I fell asleep at the Calvary.

I was not able to sleep soundly for a long time, though. I had troubled, disagreeable dreams: I was taking refuge from a hurtling landau among the fourteen stone columns, with the Bangó twins seated on the landau's box, offering honeycomb with crafty smirks on their faces, while behind them, leaning on their shoulders Godly Mihály Bibic, repeating continually, over and over again, the Lord be praised, the Lord be praised. I was fleeing and meanwhile I tried to take the flail from the Soldier-with-the-Flower in order to crack in among the horses, and I had the feeling he was trying to pass it to me but did it so clumsily that I was unable to reach. Then all of a sudden Ádám Török popped up with his spiked crook and asked me sarcastically whether I wasn't afraid of the likes of the Bangó twins. At that he stood in front of the hurtling landau, and when the horses reared, he fatally stabbed the two Bangós. Godly Mihály Bibic acted as if nothing had happened and even said a Lord-be-praised to Ádám Török too.

I started up with a shudder, shivering from cold; the Calvary was in darkness; the Soldier-with-the-Flower was no longer visible in the pictures built into the columns, nor was the Saviour, nor the spitting, gawping throng. I felt weak and ill, I could hardly pick myself up off the ground, I rubbed my hands and massaged my legs but felt colder than ever so I left the stone columns and went home by the narrow plank bridge. My parents were asleep in the bedroom by then, so I crashed down on the plank bed in the kitchen, which is where I was in the habit of sleeping if I came back late from a family shindig. Now, though, I didn't dare to shut my eyes, fearing that I would again have all sorts of weird dreams, so I just lay there in the dark kitchen without moving, and I thought about the Soldier-with-the-Flower, not wishing to think of anyone else. Towards dawn, however, I drifted off to sleep anyway.

I woke late in the morning; everyone had gone to work and it was quiet in our house as at everyone's place in Tuk. I found a mug of milk that Mother had poured for me, I drank it, then set off for the Calvary. There was no one out on the dusty streets of Tuk; the only people I met were three children at the plank bridge, who were dangling their feet in the water and angling. I felt much better

than I had the previous evening and was glad to be back at the Calvary, and I resolved that I would not go anywhere in a hurry, and particularly not to Devecsér to hunt for shepherds. I was in high spirits when I greeted the Soldier-with-the-Flower, then I walked up to the terrace behind the chapel. Ádám Török was sitting there, at the foot of the blackened bronze of Jesus.

The first thought that flashed through my mind was that I was still dreaming; I looked back at the stone columns to check that everything was in order: everything was in order, I wasn't dreaming, the sun was shining brightly. Ádám Török said with a grin on his face:

"Godly Bibic just got back. I think he was bringing potatoes."

"How did you get here?" I asked in bewilderment.

"I promised I would one day," he said. "Don't you remember?"

I slowly went over to the crosses, took a seat by the right-hand malefactor and asked Ádám Török.

"What happened yesterday?"

"Mon-sewer Váry set his farm hands on me," he said. "He was mad at me for putting the whip to his fine white horses. They spent the whole night looking for me. I was obliged to make myself scarce, because Peter Krasuják had hidden my spiked staff. Meanwhile old Szegi learned about the whole thing and kicked me out. Those pigs who own everything are great at sticking together."

"I said we should leave Froggy Lea."

"It doesn't bother me," Ádám Török gestured disparagingly. "To tell the truth, I was getting pretty sick of the Szegi spread anyway. I have no wish to wait hand and foot on anyone."

"So what now?"

"The first thing we'll do is keep a good look-out on the Godly thief, then when he leaves home we'll rob him of his money."

"What did you say?"

"We'll rob Godly Mihály Bibic of his money," Ádám Török reiterated patiently. "It was you who said he had pots of money."

I got to my feet from the foot of the right-hand malefactor, stood in front of Ádám Török and said,

"I'm not about to steal from anyone, and you won't either from round here."

"What do you live off, then?" he asked.

"I play the zither."

"Like a Gypsy," said Ádám Török scornfully. "Like Beetle the Gypsy!"

"At least I don't steal."

"But Godly Mihály Bibic steals from everyone."

"That's of no concern to me," I said. "But if you're so set on stealing, why don't you pick on some farmhouse? Why land yourself on me?"

"The farmsteaders have no money," said Ádám Török. "The moment they get a bit of money together they spend it straight off on buying more land."

"Perhaps Godly Mihály Bibic has no money either," I said disconsolately.

"Then we'll see for ourselves," Ádám Török said with a grin. "I'll go down into the house and scout around, and you'll keep a look-out from the Calvary..."

"No way!"

"Screw you, then," said Ádám Török. "I get someone from Green Street who's willing to help me."

I cursed myself for having mentioned the Calvary at all to Ádám Török. But then how was I to know that he would turn up here with the idea of robbing anyone. On top of which he was going to bring in a crowd of Green Streeters. In that case I might as well pack up and go.

"Alright then," I groaned. "I'll keep watch from here by the Calvary, but if you're caught, I know nothing, I don't even know you."

"Now you're talking," Ádám Török jumped up. "There won't be any trouble, and we'll split the money."

"I don't want any of that money."

"Even better," said Ádám chirpily. "You lily-livered Toker! I'd like to know what the hell you come up here every day for."

"Come with me then."

I led him down the steps, then we went over to one of the stone columns and I showed him the Soldier-with-the-Flower and asked him:

"Do you see anything odd about that soldier?"

Ádám Török examined the Soldier-with-the-Flower, shrugged his shoulders and asked,

"Who painted it?"

"I've no idea."

"You can bet he never held a flail in his hands."

"Anything else?"

"No," said Ádám Török and went back to the bronze Jesus. He huddled up on the chapel terrace for a fortnight, keeping his eyes peeled on Godly Mihály Bibic. He was there in the morning even earlier than me, and in the evening too he stayed on longer. We did not talk a lot during those two weeks, and I did not even go up to the crosses but stayed down by the columns, either looking at the Soldier-with-the-Flower or lying on my back gazing at the sky. Once Ádám Török also came down to the columns and asked me if Godly Mihály Bibic had any children.

"As best I know, he has," I said.

"I never see a sign of them."

"Now you mention it," I said, "I've never seen them either, but as best I know he does have children."

Ádám Török muttered something morosely and went back to the terrace.

After a further two weeks he announced that he was going to burgle Godly

Mihály Bibic on Friday morning, because that's when he would be at the market with his wife, whereas the other Calvary Streeters would be digging the soil. It would be dangerous breaking in at night because the dogs might wake the neighbours. I said nothing; it was all the same to me when he was going to do it, the main thing was to get it over with and for me to be rid of Ádám Török.

The Friday morning came round and I took up the look-out point at the foot of the bronze Jesus; we arranged that I should give three whistles if anyone were to go near, after which Ádám Török made his way down to Calvary Street. He went by Godly Mihály Bibic's house, jumped over into the garden, then took a careful look round before stealing up to the house and slipping through the door. Peace reigned on Tuk Hill and in Calvary Street, there was not a soul to be seen; there was nothing to disturb Ádám Török while he hunted for money. The next time I looked, though, Ádám Török was again in the yard, leaning against the wall, white as a sheet and vomiting. I looked all along Calvary Street but there was no one about, so I jumped up and ran across to Ádám Török.

"What's up?" I panted.

"Have a look," he pointed to the door.

I entered the kitchen but saw nothing out of the ordinary there, but a sound of stirring and whimpering could be heard from the inside room. I went over and slowly opened the door, then popped my head round. I was hit by a nauseating stench, my stomach heaved, and that was when I saw the children. Three tiny children crawling about on the floor in indescribable filth, their legs tied to the legs of the bed with thick leather cords just long enough to allow the three children to crawl to the middle of the room where a pile of cooked but cold sweet-corn kernels glistened yellow in a hollow scooped in the ground. The children looked at me curiously, and the oldest, who was maybe four, even said something, speaking with a strong lisp.

I too retched as I raced out to the yard, grabbed Ádám Török by the arm, and we ran together into the garden, climbed over the fence and made our way back to the Calvary. We sat down on the grass by the white columns, turned our backs to each other, and for a long time said not a word. Later on, Ádám Török stood up and took a long look at the Soldier-with-the-Flower. Then he asked:

"Why does he have a flower on his chest?"

*Translated by Tim Wilkinson*

# In Mozart's Shadow

Judit Péteri in Conversation with Katalin Komlós

**Judit Péteri:** *A recording executive told me back in the late 1970s that Haydn records don't sell. Do you think Haydn is a tough-sell?*

**Katalin Komlós:** Haydn has been long overshadowed by Mozart, not just in Hungary but all over the world. This is unfair and hard to fathom. Among the few music books published in Hungary are translations of four or five Mozart biographies, but Haydn: nothing. [Since the time of the interview two Haydn books appeared in Hungary: one is the new edition of *Joseph Haydn élete dokumentumokban*, eds., Dénes Bartha and Dorrit Révész; the other is the Hungarian translation of the New Grove monograph, written by Georg Feder and James Webster.] This may be explained by the fact that it has become fashionable for music historians to psychoanalyse composers and their life-journeys, poring over their diseases, sex lives and psychological complexes. Haydn is a poor subject for them because he was too normal: a healthy peasant who went to London without speaking a word of English. This didn't bother him at all—I can't imagine a healthier temperament. But the picture of Haydn today is far from complete and he is often misunderstood. At first he was jovial "Papa Haydn", and now scholars go to the other extreme, turning him into an intellectual. He was highly cultured, of course, and had a lively intelligence, but he was not an intellectual—he was much more than that. The English

---

**Katalin Komlós,**

*a musicologist and fortepiano recitalist, is Professor of Music Theory at the Liszt Academy of Music in Budapest. She is the author of Fortepianos and Their Music (Oxford University Press, 1995) and a contributor to The Cambridge Companion to Mozart (2003) and The Cambridge Companion to Haydn (2005).*

**Judit Péteri,**

*a musicologist and harpsichord player, is an editor at Editio Musica in Budapest. She is the harpsichordist of the Austro-Hungarian Haydn Orchestra and a member of the governing board of the Hungarian Haydn Society.*

composer Robin Holloway wrote a superb essay for the volume *Haydn Studies* in 1998 called "Haydn: the Musicians' Musician". The title implies that musicians understand Haydn's music best. He expressed himself entirely in music rather than in letters or diary entries.

*Is his music for connoisseurs, then?*

I wouldn't say so. Haydn aimed to please both professionals and amateurs—though there's a side to him that not even musicians know well enough or appreciate sufficiently. Holloway put it like this: "Then there is a deep still contemplation, simultaneously remote and glowing, giving utterance to an extreme inner solitude."\* His late works such as the slow movement of the last piano sonata, the final quartets, the English canzonettas or the German part-songs show this intimate, poetic side. Serious and sublime aspects of his personality rub alongside his witty and sparkling side. Still most people think of him as "Papa Haydn".

*It must be said however that audiences have changed: Haydn's symphonies were hugely successful in England at the time; not only did they get the jokes but they appreciated the works' subtleties too—the slow movements were especially popular.*

Very few people in England knew of Mozart—his music was neither played nor published. Perhaps Haydn was closer to the English mentality and this is why they begged him to travel there and commissioned hundreds of arrangements of Scottish folksongs.

*Is the fact that Haydn is overshadowed by Mozart reflected in the number of performances and recordings?*

In the 1960s, hardly anyone played Haydn's piano sonatas. They played Mozart, but not Haydn. His sonatas weren't really discovered until the late '70s, in great part thanks to the research of Christa Landon and László Somfai, as well as their Wiener Urtext edition. In those days, Hungaroton issued the complete Haydn sonatas, which was an important event. First-rate pianists started to play them, including Alfred Brendel, Rudolf Buchbinder, Malcolm Frager (who unfortunately died very young), Dezső Ránki and András Schiff.

*In the meantime, the historical performance practice evolved.*

Of course, the situation has vastly improved since the 60s, thanks primarily to Malcom Bilson and his students. For some time now, Haydn sonatas are even taught in conservatories—but that's still not enough! It really irks me that if a Haydn piano trio is performed at all, it is almost always the one in G major with the Rondo

\* ■ Robin Holloway, "Haydn: The Musicians' Musician", in *Haydn Studies*, ed. W. Dean Sutcliffe. Cambridge, 1998, pp. 321–334.

all'ongarese. The composer wrote more than thirty trios, each more wonderful than the others! As regards the sonatas, many pianists still don't know how to tackle them, even though their emotional range is much broader than that of Mozart's.

*Is it possible to say how the Haydn and Mozart sonatas differ from one another?*

Haydn had a Baroque musical education. Let's not forget that he was a whole generation older than Mozart. This is a fundamental difference between the two of them. To Haydn, the key of c minor meant something different than for Mozart or Beethoven. He was multifaceted when it came to musical forms and their affects. He never did anything the same way twice. His imagination was boundless. In this respect, Mozart is much more uniform. In order to discover Haydn's diversity, we must know his musical language very thoroughly. If you don't do that, then all you'll see is that Haydn's sonatas, for example, don't have those beautiful tunes you find in Mozart.

*Could this have anything to do with the fact that Mozart was a born opera composer while Haydn was not?*

That's a fundamental difference between their styles and personalities. Even though they spoke the same musical language, their music is completely different. I couldn't name a single stylistic feature they have in common. Charles Rosen is right when he says that Haydn's way of composing is much closer to Stravinsky's than it is to Mozart's. The fact that two composers live in the same period doesn't mean that they necessarily think the same way... (There are other well-known examples for this in the history of music: Palestrina and Lasso, Bach and Handel.) Their careers were also completely different. Haydn was an employee who fulfilled his duties like Bach or other earlier composers. Mozart, on the other hand, became a freelancer after leaving Salzburg. If Haydn's personality resembled another composer, it would be Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach. Aside from the influence Bach's son had on Haydn, there was something similar in their make-up. Both loved surprises, both were highly imaginative, and both composed in a rhetorical way... (A special conference report on the rhetorical interpretation of Haydn's works was published in English last year.) Composers who travelled south of the Alps composed very differently from those who did not. This is true from Dufay to Stravinsky. It is surely no coincidence that Haydn never went to Italy while Mozart was really an Italian at heart.

*Mozart was influenced by another Bach son, Johann Christian, who also cut his teeth in Italy and of whom Mozart always spoke with the greatest admiration; could Haydn's and Mozart's different relationship to Italian music have affected the way each approached the genre of opera?*

Opera was not Haydn's world. I think he only wrote operas because it was in his job description. And his hands were often tied because he didn't have enough

singers, or some of the singers had limited ranges; then there was his lover, Luigia Polzelli, who had a tiny voice, and he had to write arias that she could handle. Haydn was in a straitjacket. Moreover, he never heard as many live opera performances as did composers who had been to Italy, who were completely saturated with the genre. True, Haydn wrote some brilliant vocal parts in his sacred works, his oratorios or in his later songs, but opera is different. Opera and theatre in general has a certain frivolity that was foreign to Haydn. It was once again Rosen who said that Haydn's music lacks the sensuality that plays such an important role in Mozart. Haydn had a certain masculine reticence and detachment—which is not to say that Haydn's operas don't possess beautiful passages.

*Could this have anything to do with the fact that Haydn was deeply religious?*

I don't think so: it is more of a personality trait. His contemporaries reproached him because they felt his sacred music to be too secular in tone; yet he wrote in what passed for church music style at the time. I don't think Monteverdi's Vespers and Verdi's Requiem are any less "secular." Haydn's great Masses, his *Stabat Mater*, or the late part-songs written on religious texts possess great depth and purity.

*Is it possible to sum up Haydn's personality in a few words?*

He was a good-natured man, always at peace with his fate; although I'm sure he had his share of difficult days and sleepless nights. It must have been hard getting up at the crack of dawn and writing baryton trios by the hundreds, because that's what he had been told to do. Yet he never complained and was always able to see the positive side of things. He didn't mind his isolation at Eszterháza; he was happy to have a first-rate instrumental ensemble with which he could experiment. He was kind and loveable; he stood godfather to all the children of the Esterházy musicians: that's how he got his nickname "Papa Haydn". And he was very popular with the fair sex. In London, all the aristocratic ladies lay at his feet, even though he was not the most attractive man, physically speaking.

*We know that Haydn and Mozart met frequently in Vienna; they made music together and spoke of one another with the greatest admiration. Yet we don't know how close they really were.*

It is striking that Mozart refers to Haydn only occasionally in his correspondence. His most important statement concerning Haydn was the often-quoted, truly beautiful inscription of the six quartets he dedicated to his older colleague.

*Haydn didn't write about Mozart in his letters either.*

He hardly ever wrote about other composers; most of his letters were addressed to publishers and business partners. On the whole, he wrote many fewer letters than Mozart. His London notebooks are about current gossip, punch recipes and the like. Yet he probably did tell Leopold Mozart: "Your son

is the greatest living composer." Likewise, Mozart was well aware of Haydn's greatness. He may have been a touch jealous when he tried to talk Haydn out of going to London, arguing that Haydn didn't even speak English. Haydn's often-quoted sentence, "My language is understood by the whole world", was, by the way, a response to Mozart's objection.

*Let's come back to the master's keyboard music. From László Somfai's book on the sonatas, \*\* we learn that there is practically no information available on Haydn's instruments...*

That's right. For some strange reason not a single keyboard instrument owned by Haydn has survived. Yet we do know what instruments he wrote his music for. For instance, he loved Schanz fortepianos, and many such instruments do survive, even if they never belonged to Haydn. Historical performers are beginning to play these instruments whenever they can. We must mention the complete recording of the sonatas by Christine Schornsheim of Germany, which has won several international prizes. Schornsheim plays three different instruments on these recordings: harpsichord, clavichord and fortepiano. (We know that at least half of the sonatas were written for harpsichord or clavichord.) The Belgian Tom Beghin has undertaken a very exciting project. He is in the process of recording the sonatas on seven different instruments: single- and double-manual harpsichord, clavichord, German and English *Tafelklavier* (square piano) as well as German and English grand fortepianos. He is trying to reconstruct the original acoustic conditions as well. Discovering the original sound and understanding the character of the various instruments is an important part of performance. None of these instruments sounds like a modern Steinway piano; this can be extremely informative in itself.

*Another remarkable difference between Haydn and Mozart is that while Mozart switched to the fortepiano early on and wrote most of his keyboard music for that instrument, with Haydn, the different instruments co-existed for a long time. Maybe he decided on one instrument or another based on what type of music he wanted to write.*

Haydn was a pragmatic person. I don't believe he thought this or that sonata could only be played on this or that instrument. Yet there's no doubt that in certain pieces you feel the idiom of the clavichord more, in others you feel the harpsichord. And when he started to notate dynamic nuances in his scores, then you can feel the inspiration of the new instrument, the fortepiano. The music will sometimes reveal the source of inspiration, but not always. Some pieces are more neutral: they work on any instrument. At the time, people played all pieces on all instruments, depending on what they had at home.

\*\* ■ László Somfai, *The Keyboard Sonatas of Joseph Haydn: Instruments and Performance Practice, Genres and Styles*. The University of Chicago Press, 1995.

*How well known and played are Haydn's other instrumental genres today, the string quartets for instance?*

The string quartets have always been in the repertoire. Haydn's quartet oeuvre is so large and rich you just couldn't elude it. It's a great joy that there are now three historical quartet groups in Hungary: the Festetics, the Tomasini and the Authentic Quartets.

*There are not so many early-instrument quartets even abroad (only the Salomon and the Mosaiques Quartets come to mind), so we Hungarians are at the forefront!*

That's right. The Haydn cycle of the Festetics Quartet was very well received internationally. This was due in part to the fact that they had consulted László Somfai, who also wrote the liner notes for the recordings.

*The Tátrai Quartet's accomplishments in Haydn interpretation used to be very highly regarded...*

They worked with Dénes Bartha, who showed them the latest results of Haydn research. We need performers who are receptive to this sort of thing.

*Haydn's symphonies have also long been repertoire staples.*

Yes, but not all, mostly only the later works. Of course, 104 symphonies are a lot, which is probably the reason why we don't have that many complete editions: alongside Antal Doráti's cycle with the Philharmonia Hungarica, we now have the complete performance of the Austro-Hungarian Haydn Orchestra conducted by Ádám Fischer recorded at the Esterházy palace in Eisenstadt. (Other attempts at a complete edition, for instance, those of Christopher Hogwood, remain incomplete.) György Vashegyi and his Orfeo Orchestra have done some fantastic pioneering work here. Over the years, they have performed almost every single symphony at the Eszterháza palace, with the exact original number of players. I have always loved the sound of these performances.

*Yet the piano trios, as you have said, are still performed rather infrequently, even though they represent a very important genre for Haydn. I think trios were to him what piano concertos were to Mozart. What could be the reason for this neglect?*

Haydn has some surprising compositional habits, which come from the fact that he had grown up with Baroque practices. In his trios—even those written in England in the 1790s—the cello plays nothing but the continuo line. This was a conservative approach at the time, but that doesn't take anything away from these pieces. The keyboard accompaniments to some of his part-songs from the 1790s are also written out as continuo basses. Some of them could have been written by Schubert, but they still feature figured bass. That's the span of Haydn's oeuvre: it begins in the era of the figured bass and reaches into the 19th century, the Romantic era. That's

his last, absolutely fantastic creative period. In many of his essays written in the last 10–15 years, James Webster has proposed that the era between Viennese Classicism and Romanticism, that is, the years from the late 1780s through 1815 or 20, should not be considered a transitional epoch but an independent stage in music history. I'm in complete agreement with his view. In Haydn's life, this era produced the two great oratorios, the six late Masses, and smaller but no less significant vocal works like the English canzonettas and part-songs.

These works are filled with astounding harmonies and other innovative features; they are truly in a different style that in many ways anticipates Romanticism but it isn't really Romanticism yet.

These were exciting times. Mozart was no longer alive, but the young Beethoven had already appeared on the scene, and the old Haydn is also still there, not to mention the composers working in England (Clementi, Dussek) and the Frenchmen (Méhul and company)...

*Finally, let me ask you a personal question. Do you remember when you made your strong commitment to Haydn's music? Was your choice prompted by a specific experience?*

Exactly fifty years ago, in 1959, I participated in the performance of *The Seasons*, as a member of the Teacher's Chorus of Sopron on the balcony of the Eszterháza palace. (The palace had just been renovated, more or less; until then it had been in ruins.) It was an outdoor concert led by Miklós Erdélyi, and it was an enormously important experience for me. That's when I fell in love with *The Seasons*, and I still feel that the composer's true personality manifests itself most strongly in this oratorio. Whenever I visit his native village, Rohrau, I hear Simon's aria in my mind. I've always been overwhelmed by the fact that such a great composer should have come from such a small village, from a house with dirt floors, from illiterate parents. Then I got to know and love his entire oeuvre, in part through my fortepiano playing, and I always felt very close to him. By the way, 1959 was a major anniversary year and a fantastic breakthrough: in the darkest Communist days, major musicologists such as H. C. Robbins Landon, Jens Peter Larsen and others came to Hungary—this country on the Eastern periphery—to celebrate Haydn with their Hungarian colleagues, Bence Szabolcsi, Dénes Bartha, and others. In recent years, I've often thought how good it would be to celebrate this year's anniversary as lavishly as we did 50 years ago, but I'm afraid this won't be possible because of financial difficulties. Nevertheless, I'm very much looking forward to the international conference held in Budapest in May, where I will be one of the speakers. James Webster and other major figures of Haydn research will also attend. I am confident that this year will yield important results both in research and in performance. The whole world has been preparing for this bicentennial, and I hope that our understanding of Haydn, which is still far from being complete, will be significantly enriched. 🍷

László Somfai

# The Haydn Year and the Twilight of Quartet Playing

**A**n unusual string-quartet event took place in Budapest this past January. For years, the Manhattan String Quartet has been holding workshops for amateurs on specific repertoires, choosing locations where the appreciation of the music may be helped by the *genius loci* and the advice of local experts. This year, the workshop was brought to Budapest, with Béla Bartók's String Quartet No. 6 as the subject. This is not Bartók's most dissonant work, yet it is certainly modern music and by no means easy to perform. The participants had to be divided into two groups, because as many as 23 amateur quartets, mostly from the East Coast of the United States, had registered for the programme. Each foursome was able to perform this composition, albeit it is challenging from both a musical and a technical point of view. Their playing was real *Hausmusik*, though even if some of the quartets may have included professional musicians, most do not play for a living.

Why do I still speak of the twilight of quartet playing, after witnessing such an event? Sadly, the twilight of quartet playing is imminent, in spite of some heart-warming exceptions. And the decline is most painfully evident in the way Haydn is being played. I truly worry that on the 200th anniversary of his death, Haydn will get the short end of the stick, in spite of many spectacular events. Of course, there is no shortage of sensations. It is likely that no composer has ever been the subject of a spectacle on the scale of the 2009 *World Creation Day*

---

*László Somfai*

*is Professor Emeritus at the Liszt Academy of Music in Budapest; former director (1972–2005) of the Bartók Archives of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences; between 1997–2002 President of the International Musicological Society. He is editor-in-chief of the forthcoming Béla Bartók Complete Critical Edition and is currently at work at the Bartók thematic catalogue. His books include Joseph Haydn's Keyboard Sonatas (University of Chicago Press, 1995) and Béla Bartók: Composition, Concepts, and Autograph Sources (University of California Press, 1996).*

for Haydn. On the actual anniversary of his death, May 31, the oratorio *The Creation* was performed in the musical centres of many countries, staggered in time according to different time zones. My worry is about something long term and probably irreversible, namely that the middle-class audience that considers Haydn's music relevant, a part as it were of its own life, is dwindling everywhere. As a result, professional musicians are also showing less respect for, and interest in, Haydn than before, and this is especially true for string quartets. This state of affairs may have far-reaching side effects, and may have harmful consequences in the training of musicians in general.

I would like to attempt to disentangle the complex problems with the admitted bias of a musicologist who considers Haydn's quartets a basic frame of reference for European art music, one who has been studying them since the beginning of his career.

### Amateur vs. professional quartet playing

Let's start with a little bit of music history, in my own personal interpretation. There is no need for a detailed survey of the genesis of all quartet sets by Haydn and their extremely changeable social contexts, yet a few defining facts do bear mentioning, especially since we often think of a given genre by a great composer as a single book that we open on different pages. Whether we play or listen, we intuitively look for common features: what is Haydn's music like, as opposed to Mozart's or Beethoven's? Or what are Haydn's quartets like, as opposed to his symphonies, sonatas, or piano trios?

The first important piece of information (one we often forget) is this: if we discount the ten early "divertimento" quartets as belonging only to the pre-history of the genre, it appears that Haydn, the "father of the string quartet", was silent during the entire 1760s, waiting out this crucial decade as the genre was being consolidated. In the meantime, the young cello virtuoso Luigi Boccherini started to publish his innovative quartets in Paris, then the capital of music publishing. When, in 1770, Haydn finally decided to write four-movement quartets, he wanted to compose works that were fundamentally different from those of his contemporaries. His primary motive was not simply to delight the audience. He faced players with unusual and highly exciting challenges, and did so not only from a technical point of view but, above all, in matters of interpretation, in the rhetorical progress of a piece, in the creative intellectual work required to perform the music. All this is more than a musicologist's hypothesis. Haydn's way of notation, the information about performance he conveyed in the score by means of special markings, as well as the information he did not *need* to spell out, make it clear that he intended his three sets of six quartets (Opp. 9, 17, 20, 1770–72) for professional musicians.

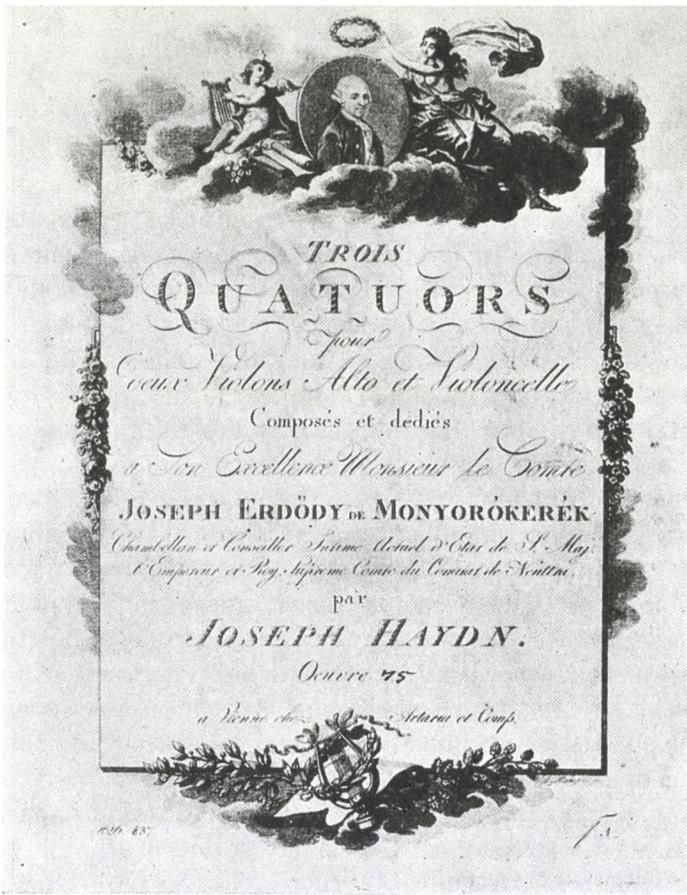
It can be documented unequivocally that it was Haydn's notion of string quartet writing, rather than Boccherini's, that appealed to the young Mozart when he visited Vienna in 1773. It was this line that Beethoven and Schubert followed, as did, inspired mostly by Beethoven, virtually all composers right up to Schoenberg, Bartók, and even the present day. It was in fact Haydn who created the prototype of the string quartet, ranking as an eminently prestigious genre in the hierarchy of instrumental music.

After another nine-year hiatus, another new era began. In 1781, Haydn changed strategies, and, after turning inwards and writing primarily for musicians, he re-oriented himself toward a more outgoing quartet style, creating shorter works geared for the audience, and intending to delight, surprise and move listeners. He published the parts to these new works in Vienna. Haydn was not disappointed with the results: the six new quartets of Op. 33 were an immense success and created a veritable fashion among younger composers. Nonetheless, he once again stopped writing quartets for six years. Then, after 1787, he composed three sets of six in close succession. Each one of these sets had a different purpose, and each one was written to be sent abroad. Moreover, each demonstrates its originality and its high-ranking status among quartets in a different way, depending on what Haydn had heard about the musical tastes prevalent in the target cities or countries. The Op. 50 set was written for London, commissioned by the music publisher Forster. The second set, published in two separate volumes as Opp. 54 and 55, was taken to Paris by Johann Tost, a violinist who used to play under Haydn. Here Haydn positively revelled in spectacular and astonishing musical ideas. The third set, Op. 64, was supposed to have been exported by Tost as well; yet while Haydn was working on it, his employer Nicolaus "the Magnificent" died, the composer was freed from his obligations, and violinist-impresario Johann Peter Salomon turned up in Vienna to take the master with him to London. In other words, the quartets of this set (at least the last ones, including the "Lark") were written with the knowledge that they would have their first performances in London.

The question whether the string quartet was a professional or an amateur genre appeared in a new light to Haydn when he arrived in London in 1791. Some of his quartets were performed in large concert halls alongside symphonies, arias and concertos. In Viennese salons the educated audience sat in rapt attention, waiting for a new Haydn quartet to begin, here it was advisable to start the quartets with a few loud chords demanding silence, and to shape the themes in such a way as to grab the attention of the less sophisticated listener. The six quartets published as Opp. 71/74 are concert pieces written in that spirit.

Further commissions awaited Haydn upon his return to Vienna after the two London trips. His last set of six quartets, Op. 76, was written for the Hungarian Count Joseph Erdődy concurrently with the oratorio *The Creation*. He also

Title-page  
of the first  
edition of  
the 'Erdödy'  
Quartets,  
Op. 76.  
Budapest,  
National  
Széchényi  
Library,  
Music  
Department.



finished two and a half quartets for Prince Lobkowitz (Op. 77 and the incomplete, two-movement Op. 103). These eight completed masterworks represent the peak of Haydn's string quartet output; fortunately for amateurs, they are more or less accessible to the non-professional musician. Haydn took great pains to ensure that the message of his late quartets worked on several different levels. They had to be uplifting and surprising for the first-time listener, but they also had to delight those who could look beyond the façade and were conversant with the traditions, by means of easily discernible musical allusions. And in a few movements, there had to be special messages for Haydn's composer colleagues who approached the scores of his new works as required reading, sensitive to the signs of a style that was part of the musical heritage, as well as to the novelties.

### Can there be too many quartets?

**W**hat Haydn's quartets have to offer is, then, extremely rich and diverse. Fifty years ago, we counted 83 quartets; that was the number found in the Peters edition of the parts, in use since the 19th century, as well as in the

Eulenburg pocket scores. This number included the quartet version of *The Seven Last Words of Christ*; the six quartets of Op. 3, very successful on account of a "Serenade" movement, but written by a German Benedictine named Romanus Hoffstetter who was imitating Haydn; and those pieces published as part of Opp. 1 and 2 that in reality belonged to other genres. The new complete edition, as presented by the Haydn Institute in Cologne, reckons with only 68 quartets as authentic works by Haydn. This output is still enormous, if we consider that Mozart wrote only 23 quartets (plus a few quintets) and Beethoven even fewer, just 16. Still, it is not the largest corpus of quartets in the world: Boccherini wrote 91 string quartets, not to mention his numerous quintets including two cellos.

Unfortunately, there is a "critical mass" when it comes to an overview of a composer's works in a given genre. It is easy enough to remember nine symphonies, but with 104, the task becomes impossible. We can more or less remember the sixteen Beethoven quartets individually, but only a few experts can do that with the 68 Haydn quartets. Of course, from the point of view of *Hausmusik*, the complete works of Haydn are a real goldmine. You can open the volumes at random and discover a piece you don't know; sometimes you recognise a quartet you had once sight-read, or you chance upon one that you've heard in a concert before. Yet the large number of works makes the job of musicians and concert programmers very difficult. Most popular are those quartets that had received nicknames after Haydn's death: the "Lark," the "Sunrise," the "Razor," the "Fifths," the "Emperor," the "Joke," the "Rider," the "Bird" and so on. A dozen or so quartets can be retained more easily than can sixty-eight. In other words, quantity backfires; if Haydn had written fewer quartets, we might find the repertoire easier to access.

It is not amateurs playing in their homes that are given headaches by all this: they, after all, can get through the entire oeuvre even if it takes years. Yet for successful professional quartets making their living largely from touring (and their numbers grew worldwide during the 20th century), Haydn presents a problem. He, the founder and first great master of the form, has played less than second fiddle to Beethoven and Mozart. Professional quartets have long programmed complete Beethoven cycles. Similarly, Schubert cycles have been performed by many famous quartets since the interwar period (starting with the Busch Quartet); they were joined by the ten great Mozart quartets (for instance, in the repertoire of the Kolisch Quartet). When we look at recordings, Haydn's showing is particularly poor, since the recording companies have exhibited only a limited interest in Haydn, for business reasons. As a great exception, His Master's Voice recorded a dozen or so Haydn quartets in America starting in 1936 with the Pro Arte Quartet, which was also highly regarded in Europe. Nor did the situation improve much with the advent of the LP. The Hungarian String Quartet, led by Zoltán Székely, made only seven

Haydn recordings (of four different works) between 1938 and 1972. They recorded the "Lark" three times, the "Fifths" twice, in addition to the D-major work from the Erdődy set and the F-major from Op. 77.

Another danger arose with the arrival of the LP: if the world-famous quartets will only play samples from the Haydn oeuvre, why not record the entire corpus with a specialised ensemble? The complete recordings, of course, have the advantage of presenting all 68 (or even all 83) Haydn quartets in more or less consistent performances, allowing for comparisons. Yet what is the overall quality of these marathons? Players engaged in the superhuman undertaking of recording "all Haydn" often just vegetate at certain points in these multi-year projects, hoping to give at least correct renderings of works whose interpretations they hadn't perfected in the concert hall. For many years, the Schneider Quartet's complete edition served as a model for America and the Aeolian Quartet's for Europe, but these are little known today. The performances of the Tátrai Quartet of Hungary, once renowned for its Haydn interpretations, were also uneven; the artistic standard of their complete edition declined in their later releases.

The CD era produced its own new complete Haydns, but doesn't he once again get the short end of the stick? While there are many recorded Beethoven or Bartók cycles, one better than the next, shouldn't we prefer recordings of a single opus, or some other selection of works, played by the Emerson, Melos, Alban Berg or Hagen Quartets, who polished each work on tour, to complete traversals by the Kodály Quartet, once held up as a model, or the Angeles Quartet from the United States? The recordings of the Lindsay Quartet from Britain, made during the 1990s, may have been the only ones to differ markedly from the other modern-instrument interpretations; yet their performances were controversial and the Lindsays have now retired.

More promising, I believe, are the "historically informed" performances on period instruments. The early ones, dating from the 1970s, could be criticised with good reason, but the Haydn recordings of the Quartetto Esterházy, founded by Jaap Schröder in Holland in 1975, set new standards, and since the recordings of Op. 71/74 by Simon Standage's Salomon Quartet in 1984, real professionalism has been present in this area as well. The Salomon's strongest rivals, in my opinion, are the members of Erich Höbarth's ensemble, the Quatuor Mosaique. They have been followed by numerous younger ensembles in England as well as in Hungary, offering a more exciting Haydn than do the modern-instrument quartets. This orientation is less prevalent in Mozart and barely present in Beethoven, yet in Haydn, that's increasingly the way the wind is blowing.

For professional musicians, the text of the Haydn quartets is the cause of considerable headaches. What edition are we to use, and whom are we to believe? Audiences don't even suspect how thorny these problems are.

## Confusions with scores

**T**he story of the authentic scores is a scandalous one, and it put Haydn at a disadvantage from the start. The editions of Beethoven's quartets were always acceptable. As for Mozart, at least the ten great quartets had been available in an authentic form even before the new critical text came out, thanks to the 1947 Alfred Einstein edition. By contrast, the critical edition of Haydn's quartets, by the Haydn Institute in Cologne and published by Henle, is still incomplete at the time of writing. The latest volumes, with the "Prussian" quartets, Op. 50 and the first "Tost" set, Op. 54/55, were published this year, in time for the Haydn anniversary. The expensive scores, intended for libraries only, have only now been followed by miniature scores and, most importantly, parts.

Amateur quartet players could be happy with the old Peters parts, but professional musicians in search of authentic texts have long been wondering where to turn. They kept patching up the old music based on various sources. They experimented with the Doblinger edition of the complete quartets, by H. C. Robbins Landon and Reginald Barrett-Ayres, that was billed as *Urtext*, but they were suspicious, and with good reason. I have seen ensembles photocopy the new Henle score, cutting it up into parts and pasting it together in four part-books, which is of course illegal. In recent years, the reborn Peters has been trying to fill the gap by a new edition of scores and parts, as yet incomplete—provided you can afford it. The Henle edition of the Erdödy quartets (Op. 76), the most frequently performed set, costs €53, the new Peters is €33. Just imagine how much it would cost a young quartet to purchase all 68 Haydn quartets in reliable editions. In any case, musicians are often reluctant to part with their well-worn, marked-up copies even if the edition is questionable.

Lately I have seen young musicians play, with increasing frequency, from reduced and pasted-up copies of full scores instead of parts. Many call this progress, yet I am not enthusiastic. In the reduced copy, many performance markings, small slurs, staccatos and more, are barely legible; in other words, the musicians play more or less from memory, which is not appropriate for the genre. We should always read and double-check the composer's notation, while watching intently what the other three are playing.

Utmost attention, concentration and constant readiness for the unexpected are of course key requirements in chamber music. They are more important than deciding, fixing and practising each interpretive detail in advance. The following points about quartet playing in Haydn's time indicate the ways in which, in my opinion, we shall never be able to re-create the audience that he had in mind:

■ Eighteenth-century quartet performers mostly sight-read the new pieces which were often excitingly "modern." Therefore, the first reading was not only a challenging experience but was also remembered when a

given section was repeated: it felt good to play certain passages more precisely the second time, to approach others from new angles or to decorate them with tiny embellishments. To their delight, players almost became partners in creation.

■ We may find it hard to believe today that quartet players in Haydn's time never saw a full score, only their own parts. After writing out the full score, Haydn gave it to his copyist who wrote out the parts; only the latter were available, either in print or in manuscript copies. As a result, the four musicians, while reading and playing their own individual parts, had to listen intently to what the others were playing and how their own parts fitted in with the rest of the quartet.

■ Their audience, if they had one, not only welcomed each new piece by the popular composer with respect but looked forward to it as true connoisseurs, remembering the earlier works. They were not tired after a long day's work as today's concertgoers often are. They didn't require their Haydn to be either simplified or exaggerated. Let's not fool ourselves: 18th-century audiences could understand the composer's message on a higher level than listeners of our time are able to.

### How should we perform chamber music and for whom?

Is our age favourable to chamber music, and Haydn's chamber music in particular? In my opinion, the answer is a definite *no*. I consider the following unfavourable conditions to be facts:

■ In the course of the last fifty years, string playing has increasingly evolved in the direction of loud volumes, ample vibrato, fewer kinds of bowstrokes for the sake of a safe and secure performance. This applies not only to soloists but even to orchestral players. Even during the training of musicians, there has been less and less insistence on absolutely pure intonation and dynamic adaptability, both crucial to chamber music playing.

■ If four outstanding young musicians sit down to play quartets in a chamber-music class at a university or conservatory, they often start by playing a difficult repertoire (Beethoven, including the *Grosse Fuge*, Schubert or Bartók) before developing the discipline of maximal attention to one another—a discipline best acquired by playing Bach chorales and extensively practising easier Haydn adagios.

■ Haydn's reputation has been suffering, even at international quartet competitions. For instance, the upcoming Bordeaux competition requires one piece from Op. 50 in the first round; it is enough for young players to know six works out of 68. At the London competition, players must perform one piece from the twelve in Opp. 64 and 76, before graduating to the ten great Mozart quartets. It is the Banff competition in Canada that takes

Haydn most seriously; one can choose from a list of 32 quartets that includes at least one of the early works (Op. 20).

■ As soon as a new quartet faces its audience, it is confronted by a situation much more severe than earlier: the number of high-standard chamber-music concerts and subscriptions is dwindling everywhere at an alarming rate, though the degree to which this is true differs from country to country. The new audience either fills only a small chamber hall, or else is made up of a mostly faceless crowd of, in part, *nouveaux riches* who are flattered by soloists with star attitudes. Such people cannot appreciate the subtleties of chamber music; instead, they are attracted to virtuosity, to extremes in tempo and dynamics. Both lyricism and humour must be spoon-fed to them.

■ It is next to hopeless to make a living from quartet playing nowadays. A first prize at an international competition may help a group take its first steps, but there aren't enough concert opportunities, and it is almost impossible to get a recording contract. And if a young and ambitious quartet really cares about Haydn and has something new to say about this repertoire, they can't hope to present all-Haydn programmes or cycles presenting several kinds of works in a unified concept, except during a Haydn year or at a Haydn festival.

I will conclude with another recent experience. At McGill University in Montreal this past March, all 68 Haydn quartets were performed in one of those Haydn marathons organised all over the world this year. It was a unique occasion for musicians and audiences alike. Eight professional string quartets and more than twenty student groups performed, both in large halls and in a museum environment, from late morning until 11 at night. The good news is that there was a significant turnout, a large paying public for this event in the Canadian metropolis. The bad news, at least in my perception, was that most of the interpretations displayed a distorted musical approach, superficial and shallow. There was barely a trace of a real chamber-music atmosphere of uplift, intimacy and high standards—for, after all, the string quartet is the highest form of classical music both as composition and from the point of view of the interpretation. The performances were dominated by instrumental virtuosity, unnecessarily fast tempi geared to eliciting immediate bravo-calls and standing ovations, and interpretative strategies targeting only the emotions. In nearly every single movement, important artistic values remained hidden; the great loser in all this was Joseph Haydn.

We may resign ourselves, willy-nilly, to the fact that *Hausmusik* of the old days, the happy browsing in the old Peters editions of the Haydn quartets has become the leisure activity of only a tiny minority in the 21st century. What I find harder to come to terms with is that even in professional quartet playing, the predominance of superficiality has become an incontrovertible fact; that I am reduced to reading the scores or get out my old recordings if I want a truly captivating and uplifting encounter with Haydn's string quartets. ♪

Péter Laki  
Unretouched

Dénes Bartha and Dorrit Révész: *Joseph Haydn élete dokumentumokban* (Joseph Haydn: A Life in Documents).

Budapest: Európa, 2008. 355 pp. with CD.

**M**any music lovers have a clear, if superficial, image of Beethoven in their minds: rebellious, irascible and unkempt, just as they have heard of Mozart's occasional silly jokes and complicated relationship with his father. But what about Joseph Haydn, the oldest member of the Viennese classical triumvirate who set the stage for his friend and, later, for his difficult pupil? Only the vaguest notions of a jovial "Papa" Haydn float around in the collective semi-conscious, but the man himself is, in some fundamental ways, still a mystery to many.

Haydn's surviving correspondence is not as extensive or as revealing as those of his two younger colleagues, yet if one reads carefully (both the lines and what's between them), one can reconstruct a fairly accurate portrait of a musician who was a loyal servant of his aristocratic patron for thirty years while always remaining a proud artist conscious of his own worth. Haydn was a shrewd businessman when it came to marketing

his compositions and ended up as a wealthy man. He was also a devoted "Papa" to his Eszterháza musicians whose interests he defended and whose concerns he shared (and who did call him "Papa" sometimes). He was meticulous and explicit regarding minute details in his music; early on in his career, he already stressed the "very great difference between *piano* and *pianissimo*" and harangued his publisher about the proper placement of every single performance marking in the score. Particularly touching are the letters from the last years of his life when he had to turn down invitations because of ill health, while acknowledging the signs of admiration received from all over Europe.

Haydn was never insensitive to the charms of the opposite sex. Unhappily married, he had a long-term relationship with a (not very good) Italian singer named Luigia Polzelli at Eszterháza, and later helped her and her son very generously. In London, he seems to have had a romance with Rebecca Schroeter,

---

Péter Laki

is Visiting Associate Professor at the Oberlin Conservatory of Music. His books include *Bartók and His World* (ed., Princeton University Press, 1995).

the widow of a composer. Unfortunately, only her side of the correspondence has survived, and that only because Haydn took the trouble of recopying, in his own hand, about two dozen of her letters in which she repeatedly expressed concern over whether her "beloved Haydn," for whom she felt "the fondest and tenderest affection the human heart is capable of," had slept well the night before.

During his two extended stays in London (1791–92 and 1794–95), Haydn kept a series of notebooks in which he jotted down anything and everything he had seen and heard in the city. (It is in these notebooks that Haydn's transcriptions of Mrs Schroeter's love letters can be found.) The composer recorded his reactions to concerts he attended, even trying his hand at an English rhyme: "Mad. Banti (She sang very scanty)"\*. He also made drawings of men o'war, noted the price of pencils, scissors and knives, and commented wryly on the amorous escapades and other foibles of noted personalities, providing fascinating and unique insights into London society in the closing years of the 18th century.

**H**aydn's *Collected Correspondence and London Notebooks* were first published, in English, by H. C. Robbins Landon in 1959, on the 150th anniversary of the composer's death. Two years later, Dénes Bartha and Dorrit Révész translated much of this material into Hungarian, producing the first edition of the book under review. Subsequently reissued in 1978, their work has been long out of print, and it is one of the current anniversary year's most welcome gifts to see it return to the bookshops. (In 1965, Bartha also edited the standard

edition of the same documents in the original languages.) Révész oversaw the Hungarian volume's new incarnation as the last project she was able to complete before her death in September 2008.

It is a tribute to the editors' outstanding scholarship that even after nearly half a century, very few changes were necessary. Révész merely wrote a new afterword, updated the bibliography and provided a few other pieces of historical information in an appendix. The latter, concerning currencies, prices and authors' fees in Haydn's time, is a particularly valuable addition. Otherwise, the book did not require more than a handful of stylistic edits and other minor corrections.

It would be a mistake to see this book as a mere collection of documents. Since the letters and documents surviving in Haydn's hand don't tell the entire story of his life, the editors had some major gaps to fill, which they did by supplying what amounts to a full, if succinct, biography of the composer. Their elegant, literary account is at the same time highly accurate and scholarly. The translations are a work of art in their own right: Bartha and Révész had found a "period" tone with expressions a Hungarian contemporary of Haydn's might have used.

The "Bartha-Révész," as we used to call it affectionately, was reborn in a larger format and more handsomely printed than before. No pictures, facsimiles or other illustrations have been added, with the exception of the Ludwig Guttenbrunn portrait of Haydn reproduced on the cover and one by Thomas Hardy (not credited) in the front matter. A full pictorial documentation is, of course, readily available in László Somfai's standard *Joseph Haydn: His Life*

\* ■ Brigitta Banti-Georgi (1756–1806), Italian soprano. Haydn wrote "Scena di Berenice" for her.

in *Contemporary Pictures*, published both in English and in Hungarian.

While we may applaud Európa Press for including an audio CD with the book, the disc, whose material was selected by Mihály Szilágyi, is somewhat of a disappointment. Not that the performances are not of a high quality; the playing by the Weiner-Szász Chamber Orchestra under Imre Rohmann and soloists Kristóf Baráti (violin) and Rohmann (piano) is always excellent. Given the historically-oriented character of this publication, however, it would have been more appropriate to feature performances on period instruments. Rohmann plays the D-major keyboard concerto with the refinement and sophistication (as well as thoughtful and stylish embellishments) that have characterised his playing from the start of his career. Yet his long cadenzas, which exceed the limits of Haydn's style as well as the range of Haydn's piano, seem out of place in a

book that seeks to show the composer in his original context, even if, in and of themselves, they may be justifiable choices on the part of a contemporary artist. The CD also missed a chance to present a selection of little-known works by Haydn. Of the three compositions included, only the Violin Concerto in A major may qualify as a rarity. We may not hear the Symphony No. 60 every day, yet it is not exactly an obscure piece; and the keyboard concerto, with its "Hungarian" Rondo, is definitely a staple of the repertoire. There are more than a few important but neglected works mentioned in the book that we would have enjoyed listening to instead.

This minor quibble, however, in no way diminishes our gratitude for the fact that a beloved classic of the Haydn literature has returned to the bookshelves in Hungary; it will bring this great composer to new life for readers for many years to come. 🎻

#### CORRECTION

The Letter to the Editor on page 175 of *HQ* 192 was written by Thomas Kabdebo, and not by his brother, Lorand Kabdebo. We regret the error.

Zoltán Farkas

# Hungarian Bubbles

In early March, during a visit by Prime Minister Gordon Brown, President Barack Obama made an unguarded remark about “emerging markets like Hungary or the Ukraine”, and how to make sure their problems do not “wash back onto our shores”<sup>1</sup>. Well, it is hardly we who present a danger to America. Hungary, on the other hand, faces a real threat after 2010 thanks to the massive indebtedness of large nation states—and this goes for the whole of Central and Eastern Europe, too.

How did we enter the picture? Mark Hutchinson, the editor of the *New York Times*, scared his readers in February by saying that “the [US] federal government’s ratio of debt to gross domestic product [...] may equal Hungary’s current ratio.” As a result of bank bailouts and fiscal stimulus, the US ratio of debt to GDP will reach 70 per cent in the next three years, the level which has made the financing of Hungary so difficult in the past six months<sup>2</sup>, he added.

The latest European Commission forecast suggests the British figures are no less worrying: its public debt is seen jumping from 44 per cent in 2007 to 71 per cent by 2010. Even the combined budget deficit of the euro zone—the world’s most disciplined region regulated by the Stability and Growth Pact—is expected to more than double this year, and the public debt of 15 member states will swell to 73 per cent of their GDP in 2009 and to 76 per cent next year<sup>3</sup>.

Hungary does not stick out like a sore thumb, but government bonds underpinning its public debt must compete with bonds denominated in euros and dollars, as well as with British or American government securities. It is hard even for Irish, Greek or Spanish bonds to keep pace with such competition. The European Central Bank takes their bonds as collateral in exchange for credit. No such luck for EU members outside the euro zone. No

---

*Zoltán Farkas,*

*a journalist, is section head on the economic weekly HVG.*

wonder both former Prime Minister Ferenc Gyurcsány and the opposition's likely candidate for prime minister Viktor Orbán raised a cry urging a level playing field. This would not go amiss: Hungarian bonds were nigh on impossible to sell for many months since October last year. (It was only in April that Hungary finally braved the market with a sale of medium-term government bonds.) Without its 20 billion euro credit line from the International Monetary Fund and the European Commission available until March 2010, Hungary would have had to shut up shop.

Has Hungary been blackballed by the global financial community? Almost. It is a fact that ever since Iceland's spectacular collapse the forint and Hungary's situation has been steady fodder for the world's press. And this is a problem whether they worry or promise help. Obama did both. It is just that some of his remarks got less coverage than others. In both cases, the forint stands to fall. Neither Hungary's budget deficit at 3 per cent of GDP nor its public debt at just above 70 per cent—high, but not excruciatingly so—fare too badly in a global comparison. So what's our problem?

**H**ungary's road to hell was paved with nothing but good intentions, along with a handsome measure of irresponsibility. The government blew up the largest bubble in the public finances between 2002 and 2006 by misleading people with wage rises well in excess of economic performance—nearly double its growth rate—and making them believe that this would last for ever. Households planned their future based on the promise of higher income, and this is what boosted retail turnover; this gave the hope for young and old alike to borrow. The bubble popped in 2006 and its echoes still reverberate. In the three years since, the government has pared the budget deficit by 7 per cent of GDP, carrying with it a drastic decline in wages and income. As a consequence of austerity measures, economic growth slowed from 4 per cent to 1 per cent. This is when the crisis hit.

Hungary has inflated other bubbles, large and small, within its public finances. The first one is the state pension fund, whose deficit has climbed to 2–3 per cent of GDP, including 13th-month bonus payments and corrections based on the Swiss indexing method, which adjust pension rises to inflation and wage rises in equal measure. Money to finance this had to be rechanneled from tax revenues, which were also used to top up the state health-care coffers. The health-fund deficit was reined in by a drastic law on streamlining hospitals and cutting drug spending in 2006, but this is not likely to produce dividends for long. There is still no harmony between social security contributions and health-care services. No limits have been placed on the use of services, and contributions deducted from pay at source give no incentive to anyone—except for the health-conscious few—to stay in good health via prevention such as screenings. In other words, instead of being used sparingly,

health care is still characterised by souped-up demand. The government has created a social bubble, too: the value of various types of support, come rain or shine, follows the rate of inflation regardless of economic output. This bubble has also burst: the government can't be profuse enough in retracting earlier promises made to pensioners and takes an axe to welfare spending wherever it can (or where it has the courage to do so).

In short, over the past six years the state has redistributed enormous amounts of income between the economically active and inactive population in favour of the latter group. Now it is forced to do the opposite. But what it now takes back from social security funds and welfare spending will scale back consumer demand. And this will deepen the recession. It has no other choice, however.

Hungary's own crisis was not caused by the liberal state—there was no such thing. It was caused by the welfare state, the vastest among the region's new democracies and one which has put a ruthless burden on the economy. No wonder, that it has been hit so seriously by the international credit crunch and the recession.

Another bubble emerged on the housing market. Government interest subsidies and other types of state support enabled the barely creditworthy to buy homes. Banks competed with each other to waive proof-of-income as well as combining two types of state subsidy based on interest and assets. And by this subsidy they lowered mortgage rates to a third of market rates. This was as good as pouring money on the credit market by the bucket load. Just like in America. The middle classes took the most advantage, and when the Socialist-Liberal government realised that this was unjust, it introduced slight cuts in benefits to the more well-to-do, providing more support for poorer families. This however led to serious abuses of the system: some lined their pockets while taking everything away from uneducated indebted families—in some places with the willing assistance of the local housing authority and banks.<sup>4</sup>

Hungary's mortgage bubble would only burst if house prices fell below the value of mortgages. In this case, banks would either need extra collateral or to foreclose on defaulters. To a limited extent, this is the situation today. But if the situation gets out of hand financial institutions will save themselves or their clients—in either case this would be one and the same: the state would have to step in either on their behalf or on behalf of debtors. Provided it has the means.

And the bubble, which in itself would have been trouble enough, is part and parcel of the dizzying spiral of consumer debt. In 2002, fiscal and monetary policy started falling out of sync. The state went on a spending binge and the central bank tightened the monetary belt. Speculators leaped at the contradiction and two attacks on the forint followed in 2003. After this period the central bank kept base rates at a high level. There was not much else it could do, as foreign investors were only willing to purchase any Hungarian government instruments at a considerable interest premium. Forint-denominated

loans were expensive, so commercial banks switched to euro loans, then to Swiss Frank-denominated ones with even lower interest rates, and they encouraged their retail and business customers to become indebted in these currencies. It was easy for them to do: their parent banks provided all the foreign currency they needed. The banks bought forints in return for euros and Swiss francs, and, in the end, it is in forints that they granted the loan which was originally calculated in the foreign currency. Their purchases and constant demand also contributed to the forint's strengthening. This created a fictitious foreign-currency debt bubble as far as households were concerned. On money markets, however, the bubble was very real. The generosity of parent banks suddenly evaporated last October as they seemed to concentrate instead on their own balance sheets. Recovery from this sea change has not been achieved since.

**T**hat being said and done, the Hungarian economy in Spring 2009 was no stronger or weaker than in the months preceding the eruption of the crisis in October. Only, at that time, foreign direct capital was still flowing in, banks were still basing their lending on foreign currencies and foreign investors were still showing interest in Hungarian shares and government bonds. Since October 2008, stock market investors have been leaving in droves, the government bond market has dried up, bank lending has come to a halt and foreign direct investments have run aground. There hasn't been any demand for forints or forint-denominated instruments—either stocks or bonds—for months. Some signs of a thaw were seen in the first few days of May coinciding with some glimmers of global improvement.

When the financial crisis erupted, foreign investors and banks turned their backs on Hungary (and several other states in the region). This was a real problem, because the gross foreign currency debts of the Hungarian state and the private sector combined was almost equivalent to gross domestic product in forint terms in October 2008. This data has done the rounds of the world's press. The amount of foreign currency debt rather than the budget deficit, whose downward trajectory had been securely established, most likely drove speculators preying on the forint. In 2008, the deficit had shrunk to 3.6 per cent of GDP, which put Hungary in the midfield in the EU. Still, the past two years of disciplined budgetary policy has not been sufficient to restore Hungary's credibility.

The central bank and government saw the danger early on and they swiftly turned to the International Monetary Fund and the European Commission, creating a model for other countries seeking global bailouts. (After Ukraine and Latvia turned to the IMF promptly in the first days of the bloodshed, Romania and Poland followed suit.) But this was of little use in fighting the recession, which is bundled up with the financial crisis; it even embroiled stronger new EU countries than Hungary. States who had pegged their national currency to the

euro are spared the speculative attacks against their currency, but, at the same time, they import all the pain and anguish of their export markets: every euro of loss has an immediate and decisive impact on the incomes of businesses and consumers. In the last quarter of 2008, production in Latvia and Estonia fell by a tenth compared to the same period a year earlier, and the Lithuanian economy has stagnated for a year. Members of the euro zone—Slovenia and Slovakia—lose out not only as a result of their atrophied export markets but also due to dwindling competitiveness compared to their regional rivals courtesy of the firming euro. What Slovaks now feel as a blessing—they can shop cheaply in Hungary—may in time become a curse in terms of price competition between the “Visegrád” countries (Hungary, Slovakia, Czech Republic, Poland). The devaluation of the zloty, the Czech crown and the forint, despite its extreme dangers, can act to some extent as an automatic stabiliser: the same amount of income in euros was worth 30 per cent more in forints in January 2009 than six months before. Increased export revenues can somewhat compensate for fallen business income suffered from the loss of some markets.

However, no cure is available for the complete loss of a market. Hungary’s industrial output in the first months of the year was down by a fifth from a year before.

Moreover, the rate the forint was fetching in early March was already doing more harm than good. Hungary’s GDP was worth roughly €109 billion at a forint/euro rate of 250, but only 88 billion at a rate of 310 to the euro. This is not a fictional loss. As the forint weakens, the debts of borrowers in foreign currencies jumps. And by recalculating loans, banks also add risks related to foreign-currency loans to their balance sheets. Imports and foreign travel become dearer, and large swings in the exchange rate make Hungarian export income unpredictable. The devaluation of the local currency evidently increases public debt calculated in forint terms: its level in proportion to GDP was 66 per cent in 2007 and 73 per cent in 2008. Under such circumstances, neither the central bank nor the government can be choosy about its methods: everything must serve the aim of retaining the state’s solvency and protecting the forint—whatever the cost—even if high interest rates and timetabled public spending cuts make economic recession even worse. Elsewhere governments try to pump supplementary demand into the economy; in Hungary, the government sucks money out month by month and from day to day.

This is where the government’s greatest dilemma lies: how to secure solvency and still boost the economy. As prime minister, Ferenc Gyurcsány, battered and brutally attacked by the opposition, settled for the former: he more or less calculated that public spending must be reduced by exactly the amount by which revenues were shrinking so that pledges to the European Union could be kept (the budget deficit should not exceed 3 per cent of GDP). The 2009 budget approved by a majority in parliament last December had estimated a contraction of 1 per cent, but in March, the finance ministry already forecast a

contraction of 3–3.5 per cent. In line with these developments, the government had proposed spending cuts of the same measure, curtailing, among other things, health-care spending and agricultural subsidies. This turned out to be inadequate: it was clear from December and January data that the recession would be even deeper, possibly contracting to 6 per cent.

There was no time for a complete makeover of the budget, and the Socialist prime minister appeared to lack the stomach for it. He resigned instead, making way for a semi-technocratic government. Mr Gyurcsány was replaced by his former Economy Minister Gordon Bajnai, who gathered around him a fairly homogeneous team to tackle the crisis. His finance minister, Péter Oszkó, a first-rate tax expert, was András Simor's deputy at Deloitte's Hungarian unit until the summer of 2006 when Simor went over to head the National Bank of Hungary. Oszkó then took over from Simor at Deloitte and it is from there that he moved to the ministry in April. Bajnai himself had worked with Simor at CA Securities in the 1990s and they still have a sound understanding. The new prime minister had received the backing of two parliamentary parties—a majority—while still a candidate for the job, and presented a strongly pro-cyclical economic policy.

While half of Europe is relaxing, Hungary is eager to keep fiscal rigour in the hope that this policy will sooner or later bear fruit.

**W**ith the aim of bringing public finances closer to balance, Bajnai has taken a radical hand to welfare spending. He has scrapped the 13th-month pension, introduced by the Medgyessy government in 2002 without corresponding revenue from pension contributions. Similarly, he has eliminated the 13th-month bonus for public-sector workers and frozen wages in the public sector for two years. Family benefits will also roughly stay level, while the period of child-care benefits will be shortened and the retirement age raised from 62 to 65. The government topped the clear-cut austerity measures by reconfiguring the tax system: tax and contributions on labour will be gradually reduced; value-added tax and excise duties are to be raised; and a graduated real-estate tax will be introduced from 2010. The former is expected to ease the cost of employment and improve Hungary's economic competitiveness; and the latter can be seen as measures through force of necessity. Without raising taxes on consumption, other cuts in taxes and contributions could not be made. Keeping in mind that the deficit target is sacrosanct.

The Bajnai package was well received by analysts at home and abroad, so the forint could benefit from an easing (temporary or long-term, who knows?) of the global money market: early in May one euro fetched for just under 280 forints, whereas in February–March the rate was 300–310 forints. “An improvement in the international environment undeniably plays a role in the forint's strengthening. I did not expect such improvement in confidence in the

---

## Hungary and the IMF

**H**ungary will have little choice other than to extend its loan with the International Monetary Fund. At the spring financial summit in Washington, 25–26 of April, a correspondent for business weekly *HVG* heard the organisation's leaders say that the Fund would not leave the vulnerable region of Eastern Europe in the lurch.

Here the real catastrophe is only just beginning. Anyone who got a glance at the meeting of the IMF and World Bank last weekend was not left in any doubt about that. This year, the recession will surpass 10 per cent of gross domestic product in the three Baltic States. Because their local currencies are pegged to the euro, wages will slide by a similar ratio. The IMF predicts that the Czech Republic and Slovakia—both more competitive than Hungary—will get through the year with economic slumps of 3.5 per cent and 2 per cent respectively (both countries' leaders had hoped to escape a recession only a few months ago). The IMF in its latest World Economic Outlook cheerfully forecasts a 3.3 per cent contraction of Hungary's economy in 2009. But appearances are deceptive. No one in IMF circles in Washington feigned ignorance of the source of this weird optimism: during the March review of Hungary's bailout programme, the Finance Ministry balked at forecasting a bigger contraction lest the country's budget deficit target for this year of 3 per cent of GDP should be put at risk. (A deeper recession, of course, means less budget revenue and an automatically higher deficit.) The Bajnai government, which came into office in April, plans to reconfigure the public finances accordingly. At the meeting, Finance Minister Péter Oszkó and Central Bank Governor András Simor personally briefed IMF and World Bank leaders of the latest corrections, which include welfare and pension changes as well as modifications to tax policy.

It was a little over a month ago that the IMF's delegation reviewed the government's November programme and approved the second tranche of the loan, worth €2.4 billion, after disbursing the first tranche of 4.9 billion. Three parts of €1.5 billion each are still available for refinancing foreign-currency debts and strengthening the banking sector until the programme's expiry in March 2010. The latter guarantees the Hungarian state the ability to get through this period without a penny of new financing. The question is what will happen later. An increasing number of experts think that if the financial crisis fails to ease, the loan's deadline should be extended or a new pact agreed with the IMF, since it would be too early to allow the market alone to shape Hungary's state financing. This is something that the IMF leadership probably anticipates as well, knowing that the crisis has hit the Eastern European region especially hard. To make matters worse, the world's largest countries are only now beginning to pile up their own enormous public debts, arising from a combination of dwindling revenues, bank bailouts and economy-boosting spending. These require financing too. So the states of Eastern Europe too are likely to face a disturbing lack of financing after 2010. "The global economy will begin to recover in 2010 and the credit squeeze will ease, provided that governments' economic stimulus programmes work," Jörg Decressin, Chief of the IMF's World Economic Studies

---

---

Division, told *HVG*. So far the IMF has granted some \$78 billion worth of loans to this troubled region, almost the same amount as they granted to all needy countries combined during the 1998 Asian crisis.

Lately, the IMF has become more and more lenient with its debtors. During the review in March of Hungary's programme, its experts were not insistent about it sticking to the 3 per cent budget deficit goal at all costs. But the government did not want to risk any slackening, keen as it is to avoid European Union procedures for excess deficits and to concentrate in earnest on adopting the euro. "The costs of a higher-than-anticipated recession must be weighed against the risks of stimulus," IMF chief executive Dominique Strauss-Kahn told *HVG* on the press conference. "It was a very challenging moment (when Hungary turned to the IMF), but in a difficult time, you may be aware that we recently had our first review of that arrangement, and were able to move forward with some additional funding for the Hungarian economy. We're hopeful in a difficult time that we can provide adequate support", IMF's first deputy CEO John Lipsky added. And indeed. Some weeks later, at the second review of the Hungarian programme in May, both the IMF and the European Commission accepted some fiscal easing: the new deficit target for 2009 is 3,9 per cent of GDP and 3,8 per cent for 2010, not to freeze the economy completely.

The IMF, which in 2008 had been suffering from budget and staff cuts, managed to renew its entire arsenal in six months so that it could engage new sources and loan constructions. Based on a decision made at the G20 summit in London, the IMF will grant \$250 billion worth of Special Drawing Rights (SDR), its own "currency". Of this, Hungary will receive some \$1.2 billion worth of funds which can be drawn on unconditionally and can be used towards boosting foreign currency reserves. A further 221 million SDR (\$332 million at current rates) is also available if member states finally approve a policy mooted many years ago to grant members reserve currency who had never received SDR, among them Hungary, which joined the Fund in 1982. On top of this, the IMF may draw in new sources of up to \$500 billion, although it is not very clear at this point who might donate this sum. "We'll manage it by the end of the year," Strauss-Kahn said with confidence, who described the new policy, using IT terminology, as IMF 2.0.

Among its latest innovations proudly cited, IMF has already launched its so-called flexible credit line, more of a kind of insurance than a loan and can only be granted to states that run a rigorous fiscal policy. But they can get it fast and almost without conditions in order to contain troubles due to market disturbances beyond their control. First Mexico, then Poland appealed for these funds, though Polish Deputy Finance Minister Ludwik Kotecki hastened to state that it is not likely that the money would actually be used. Hungary is not yet eligible for the loan the Poles have earned, and is receiving a "traditional" stand-by credit line instead. In response to *HVG*'s question whether this could be converted into a flexible credit line if needed beyond the expiry date of March next year, European Director at IMF Marek Belka said "the latter requires demonstrating outstanding fiscal progress". In other words no—or at least not as things stand today.

Z. F.

short term, and there could certainly still be volatility, as markets are very uncertain. If we are consistent in doing what we must, the forint can stabilise in about six months, while foreign-currency loans and jobs can also stabilise. But this requires many months of work and several tough decisions, as the initial decisions have only brought us conditional confidence," the prime minister said in a radio programme.<sup>5</sup>

Let's add: confidence will return only if the bubble in default-prone Hungary, blown up partly by the international financial world, is popped once and for all. ■

## NOTES

1 ■ "One of the things that Prime Minister Brown and I talked about is, how can we coordinate so that all the G-20 countries, all the major countries around the world, in a coordinated fashion, are stimulating their economies? How can we make sure that there are a common set of principles, in terms how we're approaching banking, so that problems that exist in emerging markets like Hungary or the Ukraine don't have these enormous ripple effects that wash back onto our shores? And we're providing them with some help in a coordinated international fashion, as well." (Jeff Zeleny-David E. Sanger, "Obama and Brown Pledge Cooperation". *The New York Times*, March 4, 2009)

2 ■ "Based on the costs of fiscal stimulus and the bank bailout, the federal government's ratio of debt to gross domestic product is heading much higher. By 2011, it may equal Hungary's current ratio—which skyrocketed due to profligate spending and remnants of centrally planned waste. While other factors are important, that suggests the credit quality of currently top-rated Treasury debt may trend down more toward the quality of Hungary's government debt, which is nearer the bottom of the investment grade pecking order. That's not a complete disaster, but it means Treasuries won't really be a safe investment, either. Assuming deficit projections by the Congressional Budget Office for the 2009 and 2010 fiscal years are right, and adding the cost of the stimulus plan, the bank rescue plan and borrowing costs, public debt would rise from 41 per cent of G.D.P. in September 2008 to about 70 per cent of G.D.P. three years later. That is roughly in line with Hungary's December 2008 ratio. After 2011, America's debt-to-G.D.P. ratio is expected to decline again. The budget office projects deficits of less than 2 per cent of G.D.P. after 2012, and the capital injected into the banking system under the government's bailout plans should start to produce some returns for taxpayers around that time. There are considerable downside risks. The budget office's projections are based on optimistic assumptions: that growth averages 4 per cent annually from 2011 through 2014, that the Bush tax cuts and alternative minimum tax relief all expire in December 2010, and that discretionary spending increases only in line with inflation after 2010. The falling debt projection also assumes that none of the costs under the stimulus plan migrate into annual spending after 2010. Should the recession deepen, or persist beyond 2010, higher budget deficits could become entrenched. Finally, the projection assumes interest rates in the United States remain low. With Treasury bond maturities now averaging only 48 months, higher interest rates would rapidly feed into higher borrowing costs and budget deficits. 'No European government has done anything as boneheaded as we have,' Ferenc Gyurcsany, Hungary's prime minister, said of his country's fiscal policy in May 2006. By 2012, United States policy makers may be echoing his words." ("U. S. Debt Gains on Hungary's". *The New York Times*. February 19, 2009.)

3 ■ European Commission, Interim Forecast, January 2009. The projection was based on economic stimulus measures announced thus far.

4 ■ For a period of time, a certain type of subsidy called the "semi-social support" could be used as collateral for a mortgage when buying resale homes and there were no criteria as to the comfort level of the home purchased. See Sággy, Erna, "Árnyékvilág" [Shadowland]. In: *HVG*, June 28, 2008.

5 ■ Info Radio, May 7, 2009.

# Hungary? How *Boring!*

George Gömöri in Conversation with Sir Bryan Cartledge

**George Gömöri:** *We have known each other for over fifty years—it's quite a long time. When we first met in the 1950s in St. Antony's, Oxford, was there any indication that one day you might write a best-selling history of Hungary?*

**Sir Bryan Cartledge:** No. I was studying in California at the time of the 1956 Revolution and followed events on the radio as best I could; this naturally aroused my interest in Hungary, a country of which I knew very little. But all my interest at that time, and the focus of my academic research, was in Russia and the Soviet Union—I was preparing a thesis on the 'Kornilov Affair' during the 1917 Revolution. I subsequently decided to enter the British diplomatic service instead.

*When did you first visit Hungary and why were you given the post of Ambassador there?*

My first visit to Hungary was in 1975 when, as Head of the Department concerned in the Foreign Office, I accompanied the then Foreign Secretary,

### **Sir Bryan Cartledge**

*is a distinguished British diplomat and academic. After studies in Cambridge, Oxford and the United States he entered the diplomatic service. He was British Ambassador, first in Hungary (1980–1983), then in the Soviet Union (1985–1988). For eight years he was Principal of Linacre College, Oxford. He now lives in London.*

*His publications include a history of Hungary (The Will to Survive, 2005) and Mihály Károlyi and István Bethlen: Hungary (2009), both translated into Hungarian; he has edited six books on environmental issues.*

### **George Gömöri**

*is a Hungarian poet, translator and essayist who left Hungary in 1956. For over thirty years he taught Polish and Hungarian at the University of Cambridge. He is Emeritus Fellow of Darwin College.*

James Callaghan, on an official visit to Budapest. I was immediately attracted both by the city and by the Hungarians whom I met there. I made up my mind to return as soon as I could and to see more of the country. My next job was that of Private Secretary for overseas affairs to the Prime Minister, James Callaghan again and then, in 1979, Margaret Thatcher. It was a tradition at that time that when the time came for the Private Secretary for overseas affairs to leave his post, the Prime Minister asked him or her what they would like to do next—it was one of the rewards for two or three years of exceptionally hard work. When Margaret Thatcher put that question to me, I told her that I would like to go to Hungary as Ambassador. "Hungary? Hungary?" she exclaimed in amazement: "How boring!" Of course I knew that Hungary was far from boring; and I also knew that Mrs. Thatcher had never been there. So I maintained my request and she duly arranged the appointment a few months later. When she herself visited Budapest in 1983, she changed her mind about Hungary.

*When did you start your research on The Will to Survive?*

When I took up my appointment as Principal of Linacre College, Oxford, in 1988, I cherished the illusion that it would be possible to combine the job of running the College with some academic research—I had already decided that I would like to write a history of Hungary. I soon discovered that my work as Principal required all my time and more; research had to await my retirement in 1996. So I began my research for *The Will to Survive* in January, 1997 and completed the book seven years later.

*What sorts of problems did you encounter while doing research and did you have access to all necessary sources?*

My main problem concerned the medieval period. I am not a medievalist and consequently I had to study the characteristics of medieval society—the feudal system, for example—more or less from scratch. Another problem was that although I read Hungarian I do so very slowly—that was one of the reasons why the book took seven years to write! As for sources, I found that almost everything I needed was available in the Cambridge University Library, which allows graduates to borrow books; when necessary—for example to look up old newspapers—I was able to use the Széchényi Library in Budapest.

*History books on small countries are not very popular with publishers. How did you find your publisher and are you happy with the results?*

You are quite right; it was very difficult to find a publisher, particularly since *The Will to Survive* is quite a long book. Several publishers told me that they might consider taking the book if I could reduce its length by at least half; others asked me to begin the book in the 19th century, eliminating the medieval and early modern periods. Eventually I decided to enlist the help of an agent,

Andrew Lownie, who specialises in history and biography. He worked very energetically on my behalf and eventually found a small publisher, Timewell Press, which was willing to publish the book as it stood, without cuts. I think they made a good job of it; I was particularly happy with the design of the dust jacket. The design of the Hungarian edition, *Megmaradni*, is even better.

*How was The Will to Survive received in England and Hungary?*

I think it has been quite well received in both countries. It has been given very few reviews—perhaps because of its length!—but those which have appeared have been favourable. The most valuable was a review article by John Lukacs in *Harper's Magazine*. However, both editions of the book sold out and second-hand copies are commanding a substantial premium, which is encouraging. I am hopeful that a third edition may be published this year, by a different publisher.

*Did you have any problems with the Hungarian translation of the book?*

I was extremely fortunate in my translator, Veronika Bánki. To be a good translator it is not enough to be an excellent linguist, which Veronika is: as I am sure you, as an eminent translator of Hungarian poetry, would agree, it is also necessary to have a flair for capturing the author's meaning and for conveying it vividly, not necessarily in precisely the same words. Veronika does this brilliantly. I am also most fortunate in my Hungarian publisher, Officina 96 Kft; Katalin Balogh sets a very high standard in the design and production of her books, from which both *Megmaradni* and my new book on Trianon have greatly benefited.

*Your new book is much smaller and different from the previous one. Why did you choose such an unusual title as Mihály Károlyi and István Bethlen: Hungary?*

The English edition is part of a series, *Makers of the Modern World: the Peace Conferences of 1919–23 and their Aftermath*. The series will eventually comprise thirty-two books, one for each of the countries which took part in the Conferences. The publisher, Dr. Barbara Schwepke of Haus Publishing, decided that the books would gain in interest and appeal if they were given a strong biographical emphasis, focussing on the personality or personalities most closely associated with their country's involvement in the conference. The books already published in the series include, for example, *Georges Clemenceau: France* and *David Lloyd George: Great Britain*. It was difficult to decide on the most appropriate personality to associate with Hungary's brief involvement with the Paris Conference. I eventually decided on Mihály Károlyi, who never attended the Conference but conducted a fruitless dialogue with it; and István Bethlen, who was a leading member of the Hungarian Delegation to the Con-

ference and had to cope, as prime minister, with its disastrous consequences for Hungary. The Hungarian edition will have a more straightforward title: *Trianon—egy angol szemével* (Trianon, Through English Eyes). It will also have an introduction by John Lukacs.

*What changes (both positive and negative) can you see in present-day Hungary when compared with the situation 20, or even 10 years ago, when you completed your Hungarian history?*

The most positive change from 20 years ago is, I think, the guarantee of complete freedom of expression and academic freedom. I have been amazed by the avalanche of historical writing which has resulted from the removal of the restrictions and self-censorship of the Kádár years—it is like the bursting of a dam; and of course the same applies to other fields of creative and academic writing as well. I think that this is even more important than the obvious improvements in the material conditions of life; there is so much creative talent in Hungary which was muzzled for so long. On the negative side, I am increasingly concerned by the bitterness and confrontational style of politics in Hungary; and in particular by the advent of the party 'Jobbik' and its anti-Roma agitation. As we all know from bitter experience in the '30s and '40s, periods of economic difficulty can all too easily give rise to political extremism. Perhaps this is one development in opposing which the mainstream parties can find common ground.

*What are your plans for the future? Will you perhaps write an autobiography?*

No, I have no plans to write an autobiography; there is no market for ambassadorial memoirs these days. I may, however, attempt to write a biography of another British diplomat, Sir Owen O'Malley, who served as British Minister in Budapest from 1939 until Hungary's entry into the war in 1941 resulted in the closure of the British Legation and the termination of his mission. Later, as British Ambassador to the Polish Government-in-Exile, he produced the first official account of the infamous massacre of Polish officers at Katyn. My decision on whether or not to go ahead with a biography of O'Malley will depend on the availability of adequate sources, especially concerning his personal life; but I am quite hopeful. 🍀

Tibor Frank  
**The Peace That Failed**

Bryan Cartledge: *Mihály Károlyi & István Bethlen: Hungary.*  
"Makers of the Modern World" series. London: Haus Publishing Ltd,  
2009, 176 pp.

Shortly after publishing his magisterial history of Hungary, *The Will to Survive*, both in English and Hungarian, Sir Bryan Cartledge, former British Ambassador to Budapest and Moscow, former Principal of Linacre College, Oxford, and an eminent historian undertook to participate in the new series issued by Haus Publishing Ltd of London, entitled "Makers of the Modern World—The peace conferences of 1919–23 and their aftermath." "This new initiative provides the framework for a comprehensive re-evaluation of the Paris Peace Conference of 1919–20, organized round a series of biographies of the peacemakers ... the scope of the project is as global as the events that it addresses, many of whose consequences are still with us", says Professor David Stevenson of the London School of Economics (see blurb) of the

new publishing venture which is especially useful for more recent generations interested in, but rarely knowledgeable about, the aftermath of the First World War and the consequences of this tragedy for the rest of the 20th century.

Every volume focuses especially on one or two major characters of the countries that were covered by the Peace Conference. Well-known statesmen such as David Lloyd George, Georges Clemenceau and Tomáš Masaryk are addressed along with long forgotten international politicians including Wellington Koo, Paul Hymans and Zigfrids Meierovics. The book devoted to Hungary takes the somewhat unusual couple of Counts Mihály Károlyi and István Bethlen as its heroes, though one could possibly think of others whose role was more relevant to the conference

---

**Tibor Frank**

*is professor of history at the Department of American Studies and director of the School of English and American Studies at Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest.*

*His most recent books include Double Exile: Migrations of Jewish-Hungarian Professionals through Germany to the United States, 1919–1945 (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2009), Zwischen Roosevelt und Hitler. Die Geheimgespräche eines amerikanischen Diplomaten in Budapest 1934–1941 (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 2009) and Hangarii Seiou-Gensou no Wana—Senkanki no Kaneibeihia to Ryoudomondai (Tokyo: Sairyu Sha, 2008).*

itself, such as Counts Pál Teleki and Albert Apponyi. Other figures involved in this sad story included internationally well-known leaders such as Admiral Miklós Horthy who became Regent of Hungary in the very months the Treaty of Trianon was finalised. But knowing Hungarian history as he does, Sir Bryan chose his heroes well as they proved to be leading representatives of conflicting ways of thinking and differing policies that shaped the fate of modern Hungary.

The book gives a brief but useful introduction to Hungarian history and discusses his key heroes in a contrastive way. We learn that Károlyi was born "a sickly child, [...] with a cleft palate, a hare lip and nearly blind in one eye" (p. 17)—but one of the wealthiest landowners in the country. His physical handicaps made him eager to act wildly and show he had overcome them. His marriage with Countess Katinka Andrásy, granddaughter of Gyula Andrásy, Sr., the joint foreign minister of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy and of a great reputation, was a success that brought the couple into the centre of Hungarian and international politics, increasingly progressive.

Count István Bethlen was a landowner himself, a descendant of illustrious Transylvanian-Hungarian aristocrats, coming from a troubled family background comparable to that of Károlyi. Sir Bryan seems to know the psychological motivations of his heroes well and describes the troubles of Bethlen's parents as well as Bethlen's problems with his wife and his appetite for women. He also reminds his readers that the young count thought highly of the mission of the Hungarian landowning class which, he thought, should hold on to its hegemony as it "always favoured progress because of its cultural superiority, its economic

power, its political sophistication." (p. 22)

As is natural, the author has a special ear for contemporary British observers who, like R. W. Seton-Watson, warned already in 1915 that Magyar hegemony, along with Prussian militarism, are the "principle obstacles to European progress", and spoke in Bucharest about "the brutal and artificial domination of the Magyar race over all its neighbours." (p. 48) After discussing Hungary's tortuous ways towards the Peace Conference, the two revolutions and the counter-revolution within the brief period between late 1918 and early 1920, Sir Bryan goes on to survey contemporary British reactions to the case of Hungary at the Peace Conference itself.

In what is the gist of his book, he discusses Hungary's fate at the Peace Conference in detail in his Chapters 6 ("Dismemberment," pp. 67–80) and 8 ("Paris," pp. 91–106), which are obviously the most exciting parts. He surveys in great detail the views and activities of, as is naturally expected, mainly the British experts who adversely and even inimically informed and influenced the position of the Foreign Office on Hungary, influencing members of the British Peace delegation such as Harold Nicolson and Allen Leeper. They were both under the influence of Robert William Seton-Watson and the Vienna correspondent of *The Times*, Henry Wickham Steed. "Infected by Seton-Watson's enthusiasm for nation-building, [the British] attached prime importance to the economic and strategic viability of the new states to whose birth they were committed—Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia and 'Greater Romania'", Sir Bryan Cartledge concludes (p. 70).

**T**his became the dominant view, indeed, though several important members of the British peace delegation such as Sir

Eyre Crowe realised that it was their "ultimate duty [...] to produce a condition of things likely to lead to permanent peace." (p. 71) Sir Bryan prominently quotes Viscount Bryce, the grand old man of British law and politics (and one who travelled in Hungary in his younger days), declaring in the House of Lords on 30 March 1920 that "A settlement that is made in contradiction of the principles of justice will not be a permanent settlement." (p. 100) Apart from Bryce, Lord Newton, Lord Curzon and Lloyd George himself supported a careful reconsideration of the Hungarian case. Sir Donald McLean spoke in the House of Commons and argued that an impartial commission be set up to investigate the case of Hungary. However, the ultimate reaction of the British Foreign Office was worded by "Allen Leeper, the Magyarphobic official" (p. 101) whose "memorandum argued strongly, even passionately, against any suggestion of amendment to the territorial clauses of the peace treaty" (p. 101). Even Lord Curzon left Leeper's statement without comment.

While he addresses the British attitude to Hungary in some detail, Bryan Cartledge gives less attention to a major event that was co-timed with the Paris Peace Conference and had a lasting influence on the Hungarian mind. Led by Béla Kun, a former POW returning from Russia, the Hungarian Republic of Councils (*Tanácsköztársaság*, 'tanács' meaning Soviet in Hungarian), the Hungarian equivalent of the Bolshevik revolution, was an ill-fated political attempt to build Communism in Hungary in 1919. Though it lasted only for 133 days, its significance was huge. It offered a vision of Utopian messianism to the lower classes and tried to disown the rich in the name of the poor. Not rooted in

Hungarian tradition, the result was a political disaster and a social upheaval which made the great powers in Paris most uneasy. Sir Bryan is more than right to state that

the Kun regime left a profound impression on the Hungarian national psyche. It instilled a hatred of Communism and, by association, a deep hostility to the Soviet Union which, 20 years later, helped to account for Hungary's tolerance of right-wing extremism, apparent indifference to the horrors of Nazism and passive acquiescence in the occupation of Hungary by Nazi Germany. Since the leading figures in the Revolutionary Council had been Jewish, the Kun experience also revived anti-Semitic sentiment in Hungary, which had never been far from the surface. (pp. 79–80)

The chapter on "Paris" gives a proper image of the aged Count Albert Apponyi, head of the Hungarian peace delegation, who tried his best to defend the interests of his nation, also in a major speech in three languages on 16 January 1920, only to fail. *Nem, nem, soha!* ('No, no, never!'), the famed slogan of Hungarian revisionism was to be born. The sober Apponyi, however, was brave enough to convince his own nation later in May to sign the treaty, much to everybody's hatred and to his own pain.

The third major chapter discusses the outcome of the Peace Treaty of Trianon for Hungary—and indeed for Europe. In what is a naturally concise but most informative summary of Hungary's history until well after the Second World War, we learn how Trianon led to Hungary's pro-Italian and pro-German inter-war foreign policy only to propel the country right into Hitler's arms in the hope of getting back the lost territories,

courtesy of the Führer and the Duce. Hungary fought a dreadful war under the banner of revisionism only to receive pieces of its former territories in the two Vienna Awards (1938, 1940) which it was of course to lose again in another Paris Peace Treaty, in 1947—this time most probably for good.

The author presents the careers of both Károlyi and Bethlen in the inter-war era and after. Károlyi is less visible in this section, partly because there is no available biography in English, partly because his émigré career was less spectacular than Bethlen's pivotal role in Hungarian politics, both as Prime Minister of Hungary (1921–1931) and as an elder statesman and a confidante of Regent Adm. Horthy afterwards.

This little book, and indeed the series of which it is part, is a treasure for readers of all ages. It is a succinctly written essay, well-focused, with a certain distance, both geographically and timewise, from the events it aims to elucidate. Though it is not entirely clear whether the intention of the publisher is to address the Paris Peace Conference itself or to use that event as a pivotal point of world history and consider the broader issues and implications for every nation throughout the whole of the 20th century or, else, we are confronted with a modern rendering of Plutarch's *Vitae Parallelae*. To be sure, in Bryan Cartledge's case this resulted in a masterly combination of all those. Whatever the intention, it will be particularly at home on the reading lists of college classes on world history, the world over. It includes a welcome chronology (pp. 150–163), placing the lives of Károlyi and Bethlen in the context of national and general history as well as culture. It provides a few maps and images, but the publisher should find a better way for the presentation of maps

in future volumes of the series as the way it is done here makes the country that it addresses almost invisible. There is a sound bibliography of books (but not articles) available in English, and English only, on the subject. This is understandable, though it leaves the voluminous non-English, including Hungarian, literature unmentioned—a warning, once again, for Hungarian historians to publish their work in English. The notable exception is Professor Ignác Romsics, several of whose important books are available in English and have served as major sources of Sir Bryan's current work.

Bryan Cartledge has succeeded in doing something which few Hungarians could do with like success. He put the issue of the Peace Treaty of Trianon very visibly on the current international scholarly agenda. He argues for and against it impartially, presents his subject in a truly international context, and draws on his own diplomatic experiences to help us understand what happened in Paris and why. He is high above the traditional pro- and anti-Hungarian views of politically motivated historians, stating in his "Epilogue,"

The terms imposed upon Hungary by the Peace Conference were not, in the main, the product of malice, revenge nor even of any powerful urge to punish. They resulted partly from the faulty structure of the Conference itself and partly from a fatigue-induced disinclination to take a second look at a complex web of demographic and territorial issues; but mainly from the determination of the Allies to satisfy and consecrate the national aspirations of the formerly subject peoples of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. (p. 141)

An important statement from an excellent book by an author of "insight and outlook." ❧

Matthew Caples  
No, No, Never

Miklós Zeidler: *Ideas on Territorial Revision in Hungary 1920–1945*. East European Monographs DCCXVI, Boulder, Colorado & Wayne, New Jersey, 2007. Distributed by Columbia University Press, New York, 300 pp.

**N**o one could be in Hungary very long," recalled the American minister to Budapest in the 1930's, John F. Montgomery, "without knowing that *nem, nem, soha* meant no, no, never, and that it referred to the boundaries fixed by the Treaty of Trianon."<sup>1</sup> As the diplomat's comment suggests, visitors to Hungary in the 1920s and 1930s encountered a nearly universal rejection of the peace settlement and an incessant clamouring for its reversal at almost every turn. Trianon

inflicted a national trauma upon the Hungarians equal in magnitude to any in the nation's history and gave rise to an irredentist cult that occasionally assumed astonishing proportions. As one historian has remarked, "the shock of Trianon was so pervasive and so keenly felt that the syndrome it produced can only be compared to a malignant national disease."<sup>2</sup> Revisionism was "in the air." Yet while the peace treaty in all its aspects has spawned a massive and ever-burgeoning literature,<sup>3</sup>

1 ■ John Flournoy Montgomery, *Hungary: The Unwilling Satellite*. New York: Devin-Adair, 1947, p. 47.

2 ■ Steven B. Vardy, "The Impact of Trianon upon the Hungarian Mind: The Nature of Interwar Hungarian Irredentism," *Hungarian Studies Review* 10:1 (Spring 1983), p. 22.

3 ■ Naturally the present article can provide neither an exhaustive nor even a basic list of works on Trianon; in Hungarian see for example Mária Ormos, *Padovától Trianonig* [From Padua to Trianon] 1918–1920. Budapest: Kossuth, 1983, focusing primarily on the role of France in creating the peace settlement; József Galántai, *A trianoni békekötés 1920: a párizsi meghívástól a ratifikálásig* [The Peace Treaty of Trianon 1920: from the Invitation to Paris to Ratification]. Budapest: Gondolat, 1990; and Ignác Romsics, *A trianoni békeszerződés* [The Peace Treaty of Trianon]. Budapest: Osiris, 2001, a recent and concise summary. In English, valuable despite their venerable age are: Francis Deák, *Hungary at the Paris Peace Conference: The Diplomatic History of the Treaty of Trianon*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1942, a detailed account of the negotiations from the armistice of November 1918 to the ratification of the treaty in November 1920; and C. A. Macartney, *Hungary and Her Successors: The Treaty of Trianon and Its Consequences 1919–1937*. London: Oxford University Press, 1937, a survey of each country impacted by Trianon and a goldmine of information.

---

Matthew Caples

is currently a PhD candidate in Hungarian and Finno-Ugric Studies at Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana. The topic of his research dissertation is the interwar pan-Finno-Ugric (kindred peoples') movement in Hungary, Estonia and Finland. He recently completed a research trip of several months to Budapest and Tartu, Estonia, and he plans to defend his dissertation later this year.

the ensuing revisionist movement and attendant irredentism has generated less analysis.<sup>4</sup>

The author of the work under review, Miklós Zeidler, is abundantly qualified to tackle this subject. The bulk of this work, a revised version of his doctoral dissertation, has already appeared in print in Hungarian in the form of a brief monograph on revisionist thinking in Hungary<sup>5</sup> and an extended essay on the cult of irredentism between the wars.<sup>6</sup> In addition, he has authored numerous shorter studies dealing with various aspects of Hungarian revisionism and has edited and annotated a mammoth compendium of source materials as part of the series *Nemzet és emlékezet* (Nation and Memory).<sup>7</sup>

The book's opening chapters provide the prolegomena to the main narrative. A survey of the events that led to the disintegration of historical Hungary is followed by an account of the Paris Peace Conference and analysis of the factors that influenced the drafting of the Treaty of Trianon itself. Along the way Zeidler addresses and debunks a number of commonly-held notions connected to the treaty. First, the severe terms were dictated much rather by the security interests of the Entente than any anti-

pathy towards Hungary, even if, as the author points out, such anti-Hungarian feeling could be detected among at least certain delegates of the Great Powers (p. 17). He also refutes the notion that more favourable terms might have been obtained had the Hungarian delegation been headed by someone other than Albert Apponyi. In fact, the Count's performance in Paris apparently made an overall positive impression on the peacemakers (pp. 22–24). Nor does the assertion that the treaty was a “ramshackle structure [and] a legal patchwork based on inaccurate information and ill will” hold up to scrutiny. On the contrary, the treaty was a thoroughly circumspect document, “a carefully constructed, detailed legal product,” even if its terms reflected only the interests of the victors (p. 30). Its 364 total articles, distributed over 14 parts, regulated almost every aspect of Hungary's place in the post-war order and left virtually nothing to chance.<sup>8</sup>

Chapter Two details the demographic, territorial and economic consequences of the peace settlement for the country. Stripped of approximately two-thirds of its territory and some 70 per cent of its population, Hungary was transformed from a mid-sized multi-ethnic state to a

4 ■ For instance see Loránt Tilkovszky, *Revízió és nemzetiségpolitika Magyarországon 1938–1941* [Treaty Revision and National Minority Policy in Hungary 1938–1941]. Budapest: Akadémiai, 1967, on the government's nationality policy in the period of territorial reacquisition; and Anikó Kovács-Bertrand, *Der ungarische Revisionismus nach dem Ersten Weltkrieg: der publizistische Kampf gegen den Friedensvertrag von Trianon (1918–1931)*. Munich: R. Oldenbourg, 1997, on Hungarian anti-Trianon propaganda.

5 ■ Miklós Zeidler, *A revíziós gondolat* [The Idea of Treaty Revision]. Budapest: Osiris, 2001.

6 ■ Idem, *A magyar irredenta kultusz a két világháború között* [Hungarian Irredentism between the Two World Wars]. Budapest: Teleki László Alapítvány, 2002.

7 ■ Miklós Zeidler, ed., *Trianon*. Budapest: Osiris, 2003.

8 ■ Several editions of the treaty have been published; in English, see for example *The Treaties of Peace, 1919–1923*, vol. I. New York: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1924, pp. 461–649. A Hungarian version can be found in András Gerő, ed., *Sorsdöntések: A kiegyezés, 1867, A trianoni béke, 1920, A párizsi béke, 1947* [Fateful Decisions: the Compromise, 1867, the Trianon Peace Treaty, 1920, the Paris Peace Treaty, 1947]. Budapest: Göncöl, 1989, pp. 166–253.

small nation-state, thus becoming one of the most ethnically homogenous states in East Central Europe. An influx of refugees from the annexed territories increased the strain on already inadequate resources, and economic woes stemming from the loss of important markets and much of its former natural resources were compounded by onerous reparations payments. Although the story has been told many times before, it is necessary for grasping the magnitude of revisionism in interwar Hungary.

Zeidler next moves on to the "core" chapters of his study, in which he discusses the evolution of the revisionist aims of Hungarian foreign policy in the 1920s and 1930s as well as how that policy was impacted by revisionism and irredentism (Chapters 3–5). The crucial year is 1927, by which time the Bethlen government had largely completed its domestic consolidation and had begun to pursue a more active foreign policy. Parallel to this, it was at this time that the Hungarian revisionist movement intensified its activities. In June Lord Rothermere launched his infamous campaign with his article "Hungary's Place in the Sun" (pp. 103–116), and the Hungarian Frontier Readjustment League was established to coordinate revisionist propaganda abroad (pp. 117–133).

The author draws a clear distinction between the concepts of "revisionism" and "irredentism," terms that are sometimes used interchangeably. Revisionism is a legal notion defined as an attempt to renegotiate and modify the terms of a treaty through diplomacy and international law. By contrast, irredentism aspires to take back or "redeem" putative national territories that are under foreign rule and seeks to achieve these goals either through peaceful means or by

force. In Zeidler's opinion, interwar Hungary's official foreign policy can be classified as revisionist, whereas the propaganda of unofficial or semi-official organisations was consistently irredentist in nature, as was public opinion in general (pp. 69 ff.). Anti-Trianon activity in Hungary essentially proceeded along two parallel and not necessarily complementary tracks: an official governmental effort carried out by the country's political leaders and diplomats, as well as a propaganda campaign conducted by various organisations, first and foremost the Hungarian Frontier Readjustment League, as well as private individuals. While the former sought to redress the wrongs of the peace treaty through peaceful means, the latter was intended to mobilise the masses and frequently assumed a bellicose tone. As Zeidler clearly shows, more often than not the government looked askance at the private initiatives, which it viewed as counter-productive to its own efforts to win allies for Hungary's cause.

The sheer number of proposals for frontier revision that originated in these decades, both inside and outside Hungary, is striking. Zeidler surveys not only plans drafted by famous and infamous Hungarian politicians, such as István Bethlen, Gyula Gömbös and Ferenc Szálasi, but those designed by less well-known civil servants and public figures, such as László Ottlik, Pál Hevesy, Miksa Fenyő and Emil Nagy. Proposals authored by non-Hungarians included those devised by Lord Rothermere, Aldo Dami, Franco Vellani-Dionisi, Ponsonby Moore Crosthwaite and C. A. Macartney. One uncontested fact emerges from Zeidler's account: at no point did any of the non-Hungarian plans, even those devised by persons most favourably disposed

towards Hungary, entertain anything approaching integral revision. Rather, they invariably advocated some form of ethnic or ethnographic revision. Hungarian plans, too, also rarely advocated an absolutely integral revision. In fact, the decision-makers, ever flexible and open to compromise, at various times indicated their willingness to cede not only Fiume, the Burgenland and the small territory attached to Poland but occasionally even Croatia or Transylvania as well (though in the latter case, under the condition that Transylvania was made independent). In light of this, many Hungarian historians in recent decades have employed the term "optimal revisionism" to describe the government's foreign-policy aims.<sup>9</sup>

Because limitations of space do not allow for more than a cursory examination of these various schemes, the discussion will focus primarily on the integralist blueprint put forward by László Ottlik in 1928 in the journal *Magyar Szemle* (pp. 140–142) and will add a few salient points not covered in the book. The choice can be justified by the lively debate it sparked in the press and the influence it exerted on the public. Moreover, such influential figures as Bethlen and Gyula Szekfű often cited it. Based on the so-called "state ideal of Saint Stephen" (*Szent István-i állameszme*), Ottlik's "New Hungaria" outlined an optimistic vision of a reconstituted Greater Hungary that would be held together by what he termed "neo-

patriotism": the idea that "St. Stephen's legacy belongs neither to minority nor majority, neither to lords nor solely to Magyars, but to all those whose ancestors lie in the lap of the Carpathians, who gave their blood or sweat for these lands, and for whom this is their home in the wide world."<sup>10</sup> In subsequent articles Ottlik would elaborate the concept further, incorporating the notion of a *Pax Hungarica*: only the old Hungarian kingdom had been able to provide the stable framework and harmony necessary for the various peoples of the Danubian Basin to thrive and so the period of Hungarian rule should be seen as a golden age for these peoples.<sup>11</sup>

Zeidler is undoubtedly correct to identify Bethlen as the primary catalyst for the article, but as I see it, the article bears the stamp of the minister of culture, Count Kunó Klebelsberg, as well (neonationalism, cultural superiority). In addition, it should also be pointed out that the plan was not purely integralist either, as it discussed only Croatia, Slovakia, Transylvania and Ruthenia. Yet however well-intentioned the plan might have been, it was delusional to believe that the former nationalities of Old Hungary would willingly opt for membership in a Magyar-led state instead of outright independence.

The book then continues with an excursus on the cult of irredentism in public and everyday life (Chapters 6 & 7 respectively). Zeidler identifies three

9 ■ On this, see Ignác Romsics, "A két világháború közötti magyar külpolitika megítélésének változásai" [Changing Opinions about Hungarian Foreign Policy between the Two World Wars], in idem, *Múltról a mának* [On the Past for the Present]. Budapest: Osiris, 2004, p. 367.

10 ■ László Ottlik, "Új Hungária felé" [Towards a New Hungaria]. *Magyar Szemle*, September 1928: 1–9.

11 ■ László Ottlik, "Pax Hungarica," *Magyar Szemle*, November 1934: 297. Ottlik also discussed this idea in other journals; see for instance "A Period of National Peace in Hungary, 1526–1790," *The Hungarian Quarterly* 1:1–3 (1936): 215–226.

major sets of symbols: those which likened Hungary's suffering to Christ's Passion; those drawing parallels to the Revolution and War of Independence in 1848–1849; and those invoking the Conquest of the Carpathian Basin by the Magyars and their heroic defense of that territory over the centuries (p. 187). Of these the first category was the most popular, Anti-Trianon artwork often depicted Greater Hungary wearing a crown of thorns and nailed to a cross, and references to the country's resurrection were common. Irredentist memorials appeared in public spaces in Budapest and throughout the country, while many streets were rechristened with names evoking the lost territories. The most ambitious of these monuments must have been the assemblage of statues unveiled in 1921 on the northern end of Szabadság Square in Budapest, featuring four larger-than-life allegorical sculptures representing North, South, East and West, later to be joined by the so-called reliquary national flag.<sup>12</sup> Other monuments in the capital memorialised such dubious figures as Jenő Rákosi, Nándor Urmánczy and Lord Rothermere.

This irredentist cult was no less pervasive in the everyday life of the population, even if on a less monumental scale. Shop windows were decorated with irredentist displays, flowerbeds were arranged with irredentist slogans, and one could purchase everyday household items bearing anti-Trianon symbols, from pencils to matches, from ashtrays to table lamps. Even an irredentist board game

was produced. The various manifestations of irredentism catalogued by Zeidler lend some credence to a remark allegedly made by Kálmán Kánya, Hungary's foreign minister between 1933 and 1938, according to which where revisionism was concerned, the Hungarians might have suffered from a slight case of insanity.<sup>13</sup>

In the final chapter Zeidler recounts Hungary's revisionist successes between 1938 and 1941, which came at a steep price: participation in a disastrous war. Unfortunately the generous treatment promised to the returning national minorities as outlined by Ottlik and others never materialised (pp. 279–286), but somewhat surprisingly the re-integrated Hungarians did not fare much better (pp. 283–285). As Zeidler shows, by the end of the Thirties many Hungarians from beyond the borders held views about the future of their territories that were quite different from those originating in Budapest. The evidence presented leads one to conclude that revisionist propaganda and agitation had the greatest impact on the Hungarians of Hungary, making but little headway in advancing the cause abroad. Summing up, Zeidler detects at least five miscalculations in Hungarian revisionist policy: its goals were too ambitious; it never lowered those goals after it became clear that there was no support for them abroad; it urged the implementation of revision and also accepted it at a time when it could not be certain of its permanence; in pursuit of revision it served goals many

12 ■ Incidentally, certain images were used by both Hungarian revisionists and the anti-revisionists in the Little Entente, and the Czechs for instance also depicted the Slovaks and/or Ruthenians as defenceless children, as in the statue North on Szabadság Square; see the Czech anti-revisionist propaganda posters reproduced in Lajos Steier, *Ungarns Vergewaltigung. Oberungarn unter tschechischer Herrschaft*. Zurich: Amalthea Verlag, 1929, Table 37.

13 ■ Montgomerly, pp. 54–55.

citizens did not agree with and which put the very fate of the country at risk; and finally, it actively joined a war effort it was unprepared for, at a time when its certain enemies outnumbered its uncertain allies (p. 290).

The book contains a substantial scholarly apparatus. The copious end-notes, running to some 67 pages, testify to the author's familiarity with both archival and secondary sources; however, the book lacks a bibliography. An appendix presents brief biographical notes on nearly 500 persons mentioned in the text. Forty black-and-white plates are included to illustrate the irredentist cult described in Chapters Six and Seven,

along with a dozen clearly drawn maps illustrating various proposals for frontier revision as well as the actual changes to Hungary's borders. Unfortunately, the text would have greatly benefited from more careful editing: misspelled words abound, the syntax occasionally follows the Hungarian original too closely, the punctuation is odd and sometimes confusing, and there are even a few incomplete sentences. However, this detracts little from the value of the scholarship. Miklós Zeidler has produced a thorough and admirable study that should remain the standard account of interwar Hungarian revisionism long into the future. ♣

## New English Titles

from

Corvina  Books

**ENGLISH WORDS** by George Szirtes

Poetry, an English–Hungarian bilingual edition



### **BUDAPEST**

Image – Poem – Film

by Clarissa Upchurch & George Szirtes



### **PICTOESQUE BUDAPEST**

Etchings, Watercolours, Oil Paintings

by Vera Várnai

Mail orders to:

Corvina Books, Postbox 108, Budapest 4. 1364

Fax orders: (36-1) 318 4410

E-mail orders: [corvina@t-online.hu](mailto:corvina@t-online.hu)



Lajos Vajda: *Panther and Lily*, 1930–33, photo montage on paper, 648 x 508 mm.  
Ferenczy Múzeum, Szentendre.



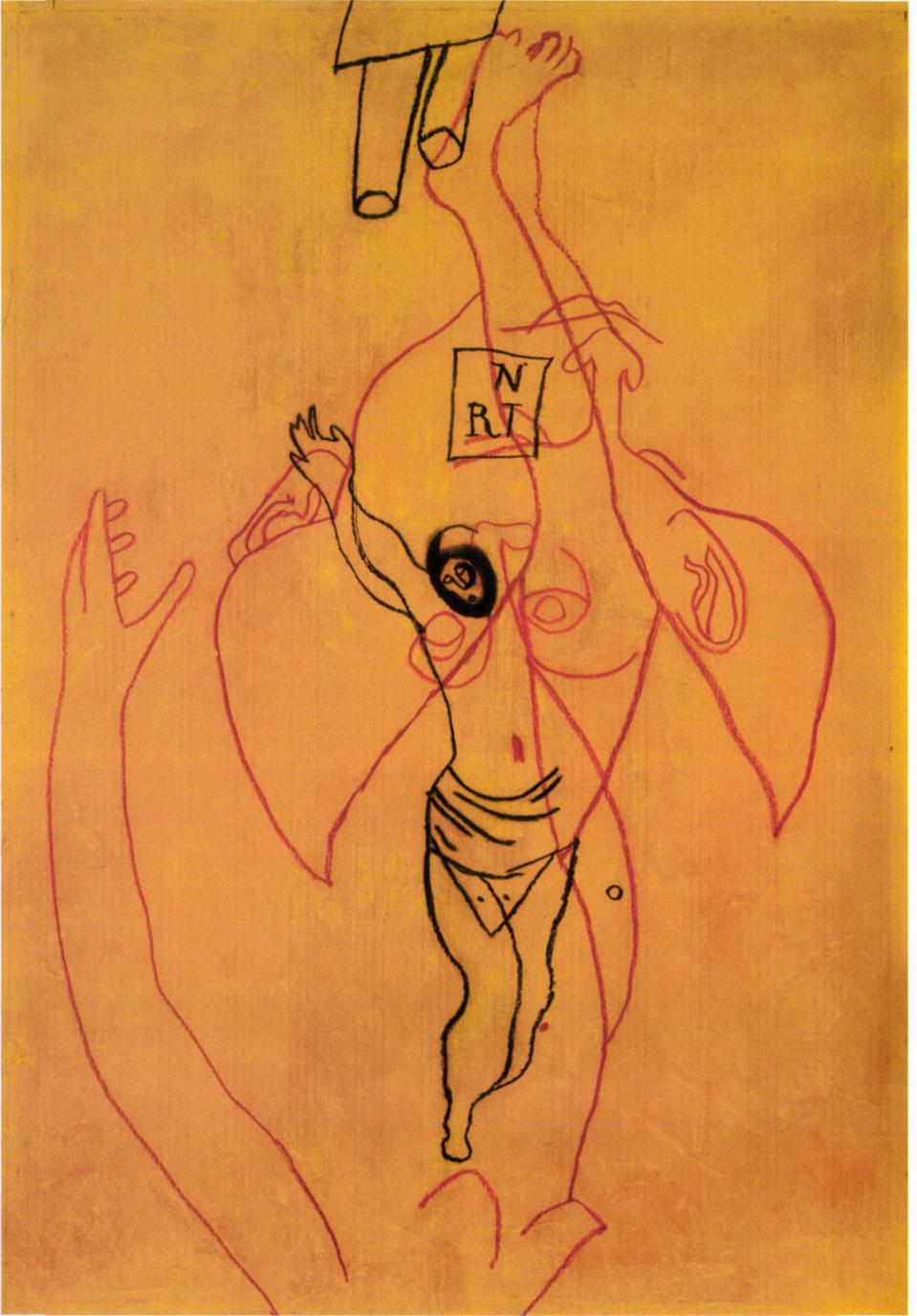
Lajos Vajda:  
*Szentendre Houses with Crucifix*, 1937,  
tempera and collage on paper,  
620 x 460 mm.  
Ferenczy Múzeum, Szentendre.



Lajos Vajda:  
*Tower with Plate Still Life*, 1936,  
tempera on paper, 320 x 230 mm.  
Hungarian National Gallery, Budapest.



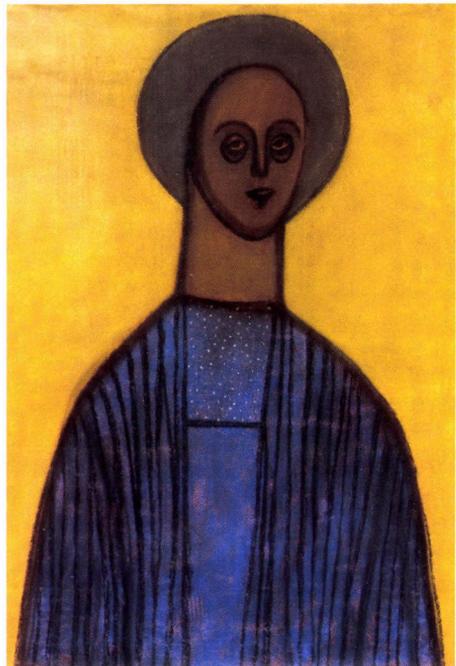
Lajos Vajda: *Floating Houses*, 1937, tempera on paper, 320 x 460 mm. Private collection.



Lajos Vajda: *Montage of Drawings with Black-face Christ Figure*, 1937, charcoal and chalk on paper, 768 x 528 mm. Ferenczy Múzeum, Szentendre.



Lajos Vajda:  
*Self-portrait with Architectural Structure*, 1936,  
pencil and charcoal on paper, 435 x 317 mm.  
The Antal-Lusztig Collection.



Lajos Vajda: *Icon Self-portrait*, 1936,  
pastel on cardboard, 900 x 600 mm.  
Ferenczy Múzeum, Szentendre.



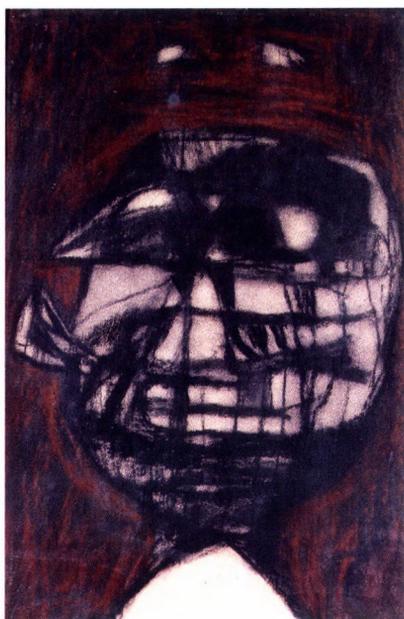
Lajos Vajda:  
*Mask with Moon*, 1938,  
pastel on paper, 860 x 600 mm.  
Art Gallery, Szombathely.



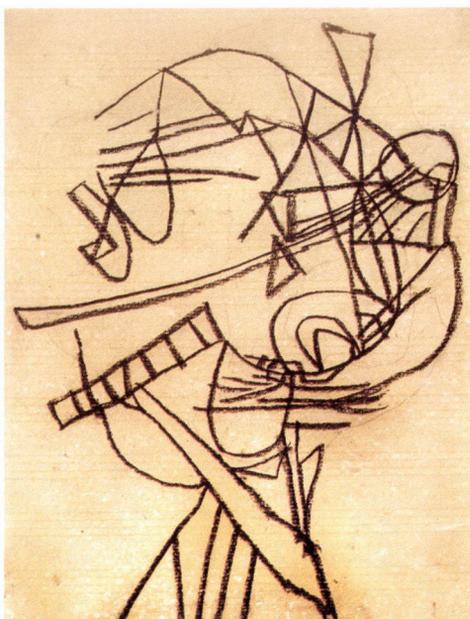
Lajos Vajda: *Silver Gnome*, 1940,  
gouache, indian ink and pastel  
on paper, 629 x 740 mm.  
Hungarian National Gallery,  
Budapest.



Lajos Vajda: *Northern Landscape*, 1938, pastel and charcoal on paper, 290 x 880 mm.  
Private collection.



Lajos Vajda: *Brown Cross-bar Mask*, 1938, pastel on paper, 442 x 300 mm.  
Ferenczy Múzeum, Szentendre.



Lajos Vajda: *Abstract Self-portrait*, 1937, charcoal on paper, 400 x 310 mm.  
Ferenczy Múzeum, Szentendre.



Lajos Vajda: *Prehistoric Vegetation*, 1940, charcoal on paper, 900 x 1260 mm.  
Ferenczy Múzeum, Szentendre.



Lajos Vajda: *Rhizome*, 1940, charcoal on paper, 900 x 1260 mm. Private collection.

Éva Forgács  
 In a Dark Age

Lajos Vajda. A Retrospective at the Hungarian National Gallery.  
 Budapest, 12 December 2008–22 February 2009.  
 Curated by Gábor Pataki and Mariann Gergely.

**T**he centennial retrospective show of Lajos Vajda—like recent retrospectives of István Farkas, László Mednyánszky, Béla Veszelszky, Béla Kondor, Tibor Csernus or János Mattis Teutsch—confirmed that Hungarian art has no coherent narrative. Instead, we have individual artists who don't seem to connect.

The French are clear about how such different artists as Ingres, Matisse or "Le Douanier" Rousseau fit into their culture. French gallery-goers visit newer exhibitions of these artists' works with the curiosity one has to see a new production of a well-known play—to enjoy the subtleties of a new director's interpretation. By contrast, we always have an opening night with a first introduction. The Hungarian art lover is not a gourmand who will discern new insights and intriguing details in each new show: he is rather confronted, time and again, with surprising and completely new material. This is the case even when the exhibited works have often been shown before and had been covered by catalogue essays and monographs. How is it that the works of Hungarian artists fail to come together into a coherent fabric of Hungarian art?

This is an issue that Vajda's earlier critics also addressed. Géza Pernecky saw the 1969 Vajda retrospective at Székesfehérvár's King Stephen Museum. He said: "Missing from the exhibition is a sense of posterity: awareness of the word 'art'... [Vajda] never became a regular artist. There was no regular society around him."<sup>1</sup>

1 ■ Géza Pernecky, "Koponya madárral—Vajda Lajos emlékkiállításán" [Skull with Bird—At a Lajos Vajda Retrospective Exhibition]. *Élet és Irodalom*, October 1969, quoted by Stefánia Mándy, *Vajda Lajos*. Budapest: Corvina, 1983, p. 216.

---

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).

Writing about the same exhibition, Éva Körner found that "An entire era in Hungarian art came and went with hardly anyone noticing." The tragic intonation of Vajda's late work "resonates as foreign and alarming in the much more subdued murmur of Hungarian art."<sup>2</sup> Nearly a decade later Judit Szabadi used the same words to characterise Vajda's paintings at his 1978 retrospective at the National Gallery: "he has remained uncontinuable and inappropriate, locked in the sensual and intellectual uniqueness and alarming foreignness of his self-contained and self-terminating world."<sup>3</sup>

Though, as we'll see, it is not quite true that Vajda's world was closed in upon itself, Körner and Szabadi's calling his art "alarmingly foreign" pins down exactly why Vajda is so received. Many critics have this impression. I would, however, contradict the general view that Vajda's perceived "foreignness" might be due to his personality or his Jewishness, and propose that in fact every significant Hungarian painter, from Csontváry to István Farkas, has seemed "foreign" within Hungarian culture. Besides critics' subjective responses or historians' more deliberate viewpoints we find no consensus about what trends would constitute "mainstream" Hungarian art. In point of fact, Vajda did have followers: those who remember the early work of Albert Kováts or Dezső Váli in the early 1960s may recall their Vajda-inspired paintings and their determination to carry on some elements of Vajda's legacy in the new Hungarian art. Though less directly, Péter Donáth, too, incorporated Vajda's legacy into his own work. Without a sustaining fabric of Hungarian painting, however, these experiments never took root.

**T**he personal and artistic fate of Lajos Vajda (1908–1941) is an example of how circumstances and competing narratives render the integration of an oeuvre into the national culture impossible. In 1928, at the start of Vajda's career, the Hungarian art scene was dominated by two diametrically opposed political and artistic trends: government-sponsored Christian-conservative Neo-Classicism and Lajos Kassák-led socialist, progressive avant-garde, increasingly following a sociological approach and a classicist style. Vajda, unwilling to adopt either of them, developed a third, independent approach.

Both politically and in the modernity of his art Vajda was closest to Kassák. He actively participated in Kassák's *Munka* (Work) Circle not only as a painter, but also as member of the poetry recital group. But he was too open-minded, curious and independent to put up with Kassák's authoritarian style. Kassák himself had invited Vajda to join the *Munka* Circle along with the Group of

2 ■ Éva Körner, "Vajda Lajos művészete. Emlékkiállítás Székesfehérvárott" [The Art of Lajos Vajda. Retrospective Exhibition at Székesfehérvár]. *Valóság*, 1964/9, reprinted in *Képzőművészeti Almanach* 3. Budapest: Corvina, 1972, p. 9.

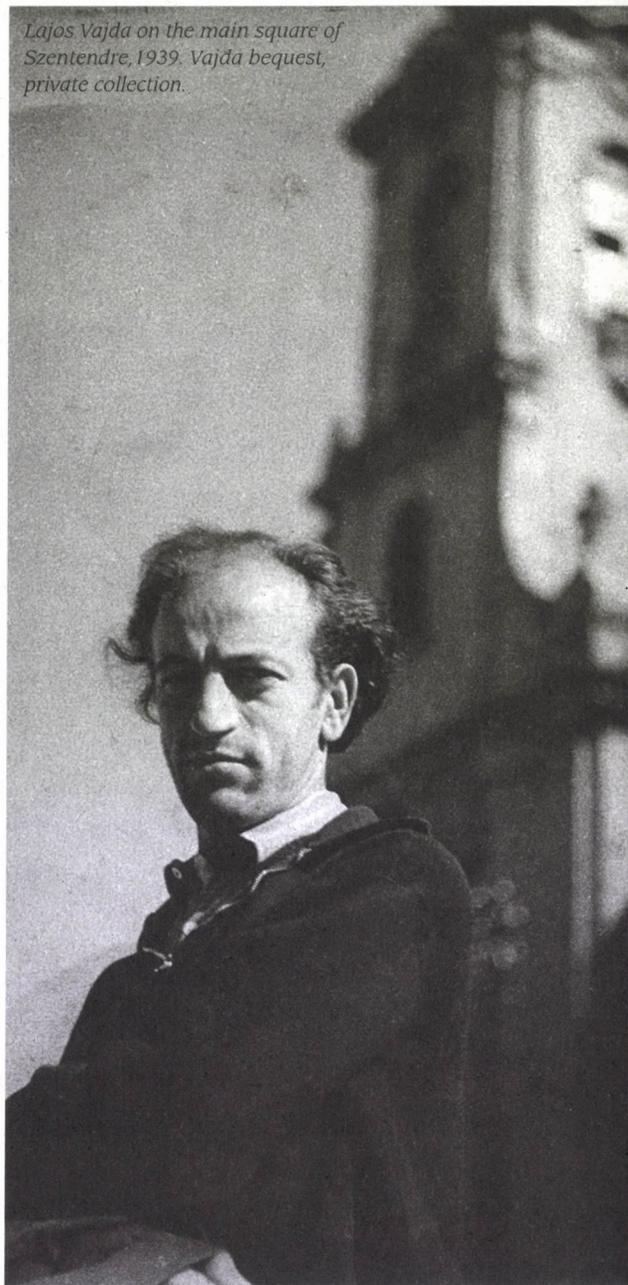
3 ■ Judit Szabadi, "Vajda Lajos gyűjteményes kiállítása a Nemzeti Galériában" [Lajos Vajda Retrospective at the National Gallery]. *Budapest*, 1978/10, p. 25, reprinted in S. Mándy, *ibid.* p. 216.

Progressive Youth that included Dezső Korniss, Béla Veszelszky, György Kepes, Sándor Trauner, Béla Hegedüs and Ernő Schubert while Vajda studied at the Academy of Fine Arts between 1928 and 1930. In 1930, however, Kassák found the young artists' views and artworks incompatible with his own principles and expelled them from the Circle.<sup>4</sup>

The young progressives had attempted to reconcile the dynamics of Russian Constructivism and the visual and thematic freedom of French Surrealism with their own ideas. As we learn from a notebook (here one of the exhibits), Vajda had read and glossed a Malevich article<sup>5</sup>, and had made sketches for Suprematist and Constructivist compositions following Malevich and, presumably, El Lissitzky.

Judging by the reviews of their works in the contemporary press, the fresh outlook of the Progressive Youth Group stirred up the still waters of the Hungarian art scene. The official position, however, was so hostile to their views that all further exhibitions were banned, and even their teachers, István Csók and János Vaszary, were fired from the Academy of Fine Arts.<sup>6</sup>

Every member of the group went abroad. Vajda travelled to



Lajos Vajda on the main square of Szentendre, 1939. Vajda bequest, private collection.

4 ■ For the details of Vajda, Korniss, Kepes, Trauner, Schubert and Hegedüs's conflict with Kassák, and their break with the *Munka Circle*, see Lóránd Hegyi, *Korniss Dezső*. Budapest: Corvina, 1982, pp. 15–16.

5 ■ K. Malevich, "Suprematismus, Aus den Schriften 1915–20". *Europa Almanach*, Potsdam, 1925, pp. 142–144.

6 ■ Hegyi, p. 16.

Paris where he lived between 1930 and 1934, making mostly collages. Back home, he and Dezső Korniss started to collect and draw East-Central European folk motifs. Vajda studied Serbian icons, Jewish motifs, the visual effects of Hebrew texts, and the naïve, folk-art roots of religious art. In the absence of a tradition that he could identify with, he constructed one for himself from deeplying elements that he unearthed, like an archaeologist, from the abandoned and long-forgotten burial grounds of the culture. As he explained in an oft-quoted letter to his wife Julia, he wanted no less than create a new, specifically East-Central European artistic idiom that would revive the region's rich traditions and would be the foundation of a new, modern style in painting. He wrote: "We should also get the Slovaks, the Transylvanians and the Yugoslavs—and not just the painters but the architects, writers and musicians as well, to join together in a little international East-Central European creative community."<sup>7</sup>

The unbridgeable gap between Vajda's plans and the opportunities open to him is one of the most painful aspects of his lifework—and of the Hungarian National Gallery's exhibition. In 1937 he wrote: "I plan to develop paintings of all my drawings, for I find them unsatisfactory as they are". For want of money, time and studio space he never managed this; the visitor has to make do with far more pencil and charcoal drawings and fewer oil paintings than exhibitions of such scope usually feature.

**T**wo things will be immediately obvious to the visitor: Vajda's powerfully expressive drawing skills that he commanded already as a boy, evidenced by the chalk drawing he made of his father at the age of sixteen; and his clearly articulated, astounded curiosity about the forces of history and their impact on man that comes across in his collages. The central themes of the collages made in Paris between 1930 and 1933 are torture and execution: the most unacceptable acts of what Vajda saw as the legalised barbarity of war. The most shocking pictures, like *Chinese Execution*, *War* and *The Whipped One*, are well-defined visual structures where skull, flower, male face and female body, refugees, executors and those about to be executed appear superimposed within strictly controlled and clearly designed compositions. Some collages follow the diagonal or circular arrangements of the Constructivists, while in other photomontages the fragments of photo-journalism are arranged according to a different logic, but still within clean contours.

The drawings he made after his return to Hungary in 1934 seem, precisely by virtue of their clear contours, to be a continuation of his collages. Gone is the busyness of documentary photos from the central space; only the lucid contours remain to define the limits of the composition. Vajda uses clean,

7 ■ Lajos Vajda's letter to Júlia Vajda, Aug. 18, 1936. Quoted in S. Mándy, *op. cit.* p. 184.

steady lines to represent figures and faces, at times experimenting with filling parts of the surfaces with dots or tiny broken lines. Reduction to contours makes the drawings crisp and lucid. The power of the steadily drawn, vigorous line seems a great discovery. Clearly-drawn outlines are a hallmark of Vajda's paintings and so is the superimposition of various motifs to overlay the conceptual and the graphic, Vajda's next breakthrough<sup>8</sup>.

Layering motifs and inscribing them into each other made it possible for him to render not only simultaneity and the dynamics of optical perception, but also the inseparability of the visual and psychological sides of reality. Drawings such as his *Szentendre Yards*<sup>9</sup> (1936) and *Houses with Ship* (1936), or paintings like his *Floating Houses* (1937) and *Tower with Plate Still Life* (1936) bring the visual sight and the associations it generates into one picture space; that is, images of objects that evoke memories depict both the objects and their mental reflections. In this way Vajda could synthesise the internal and the external image, the present time of the perception and the past time of the memories it evokes. The pair of 1937 drawings, both titled *Double Portrait*, and *Two Heads with Nude* (also from 1937) establish this kind of interconnection between visual and psychological reality. This complexity is at its most concentrated and enriched with transcendental overtones in the 1936 *Icon Self-portrait Pointing Upward*. Through a rust-coloured icon silhouette evocative of the Serbian church in Szentendre, the clear contours of Vajda's self-portrait come to sight. It is written into a stylised, bluish-gray, shadowy self-portrait-figure; the two superimposed images result in a doubly-strong colour field. The focal point of the self-portrait is the pair of blue eyes without pupils. The raised hand on the left looks more like the shadow-play of a hand on a wall than a realistic representation. The familiar, if not naturalistic, form and the ambiguity of whether it belongs to the Christ of the icon or to the painter keeps the painting suspended between physical and spiritual reality.

8 ■ Vajda considered this from a practical-technical point of view: "I've been working on something which, till now, has been a preoccupation of Russian film critics: the effect an object generates when placed into another, 'foreign' object. For instance there's a weeping willow motif (which I copied from a cross in the cemetery here), and I've copied it onto 12 different drawings; the result is quite striking, because it expresses something different in every drawing as it is superimposed on a different object. Of course you can do this only with very clear contours; and so it's possible to get an infinite series of drawings from one single motif." Lajos Vajda's letter to Júlia Vajda, 3 September, 1936. Quoted in Mándy, op. cit. p. 186.

9 ■ The titles of the works I've taken from the exhibition catalogue and Stefánia Mándy's book. Many of the titles, however, do not originate with Vajda. I personally would find numbering the works more appropriate, particularly the charcoal drawings of Vajda's last period, which depict unspeakable horrors. As Mándy writes, "The early drawings, including some of the studies, were titled by the artist himself. Many studies and drawings that have a concrete theme have been identified by that theme. The titles of the other works vary in origin. Some of the titles were given by Vajda himself, others were named in the course of a conversation or at various posthumous exhibitions, while the titles of the remainder were affixed to them by Júlia Vajda and the author in the course of cataloguing Vajda's entire oeuvre, so that the works would have a name by which they could be referred to." S. Mándy, op.cit., p. 217.

The downward-flowing stream on the right—perhaps water pouring out of some spout, or, as some critics claim, a Jewish prayer shawl—serves as a counterpoint to the upward-pointing fingers on the left.

Icons preoccupied Vajda not so much for their representation of Christ, but as an almost-two-thousand-year-old, validated, traditional form—circular head in circular halo. His “icon” portraits and self-portraits stylising the human face and shape betray full awareness of the power of form. The pictures Vajda made in 1936 and 1937 testify to his faith in the overarching form as framework—a feature we could see already in his collages. Form is the repository of tradition and culture. It erases the differences between the male and the female face as well as individual features and the irregularities; the hair will take on the shape of the halo. In *Icon Self-portrait*, *Lily Self-portrait*, *Silver Icon*, *Girl Icon* (all from 1936) and *Plastic Head* (1937) strong contours carve out the form from the background. The circle of the head rests on the rectangle of the neck and the torso, thus closing the upward-tending angular form. The correlation of circle and rectangle also appears in his still lifes with plate and his constructivist sketches drawn on squared paper. Attempting to reconcile the drive of upward-tending with the balanced inactivity of the circle, these compositions contain the finite and the infinite on the same picture plane, with the reduction of the motif serving to empower the form. In his icon pictures reduced to the formula of basic forms Vajda aspired at permanence, an indisputable validity. It might not be the religious symbolism of the icon but its form that Vajda considered important. Form, writ large, as painterly work, the synthesis of the cognitive and the experiential, the fruit of culture. Gábor Pataki rightly notes in the booklet accompanying the show (no catalogue was published) that Vajda, in his icon pictures, offers a synthesis of the sacred and the profane—and other authors could be quoted on a similar note. However, it remains clear that in his icon pictures, Vajda empowers form, which absorbs all content so that content becomes inextricable from it. It is particularly *Lily Self-portrait* and *Icon Self-portrait* (which, presumably, was meant to have a golden background) that stand solidly on the picture plane, secured, with strong contours, in their Byzantine permanence, though with figures more fragile than in real icons.

*Icon Self-portrait Pointing Upward* is more layered and complicated than these pictures. Its shadowiness is Platonic rather than Byzantine: it is intuition rather than a statement. Gone are the closed contours of the earlier pictures: instead of Form, we are faced with the possibility of several forms. The irregular picture of the natural face is seen through the shadow of an icon that has been distilled to a basic form. The sensual materiality of the multicoloured texture keeps the viewer's gaze wandering back and forth in the space generated between the icon's shadow, the immaterial self-portrait and the

hand. In this work, forms and background intermesh, the contours are sometimes stronger, sometimes barely visible.

Two early photographs from Vajda's estate in the show shed light on his approach to form. Both show details of Szentendre houses: a vertical pillar between two bow windows. The house itself is seen as a face, the pillar being the nose between the two window-eyes. A sketchy self-portrait placed next to the photos suggests that Vajda was really interested in the dynamics of the vertical line between two cavities on a horizontal plane, regardless of what the line and the cavities actually depicted.

**B**y 1938–39 mask-like formations replace the human face, and the contours of the forms grow ever fainter. Where the contours are still definite enough to provide a framework, it is the space within the masks that disintegrates: we find third eyes, semi-abstract scenery and a world of cosmic dimensions, as in the 1938 pastel *Mask with Moon*. The decisive turn, however, is the disintegration of form, something foreshadowed already in the 1937 *Abstract Self-portrait*. The 1938 *Brown Crossbar Mask* and *Mask with White Contour* anticipate Jean Dubuffet's rebelliously neo-primitive paintings from the 1940s. Vajda's works of 1938–39 exude his horror at the realisation that Form, that hallmark of European culture, and all Europe's great cultural achievements which had not been able to prevent the First World War, would again be swept away by the dark forces of the irrational back in power in Europe.

The forms of expression that Vajda had developed in the course of his career allowed him, at the end of his life, to visualise the tragic dissolution of that culture, and portray the monsters that surface once its fragile veneer is rent by forces hostile to order. The victory of the vulgar, the break with the Ten Commandments (the basis of Judeo-Christian culture), was tantamount to the dissolution of form to Vajda. He, too, experienced Goya's insight: *The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters*.

The charcoal drawings of 1940, his last creative year, show how far his earlier sensitivity, creativity and penchant for learning had been a matter of rational choice. In a world bereft of reason, his raving, unbridled, rhizomatic charcoals mirrored the unfettered darkness of the irrational around him. These horrific visions call for the self-examination of European culture, a harrowing self-critique threatening indigestible answers. To dismiss Vajda's works as "alarmingly foreign" is to refuse to look within. Vajda's work is, much rather, alarmingly familiar, it seems to me. Familiar to everyone harbouring the forces of destruction and darkness as much as the sustaining powers of creativity. And who can claim to lack any of these? 🐼

Ildikó Nagy

## Changing Structures

Katalin Hetey: Steel Sculptures and Graphic Works.  
Exhibition at the Mono Gallery, 7 May–6 June 2009.

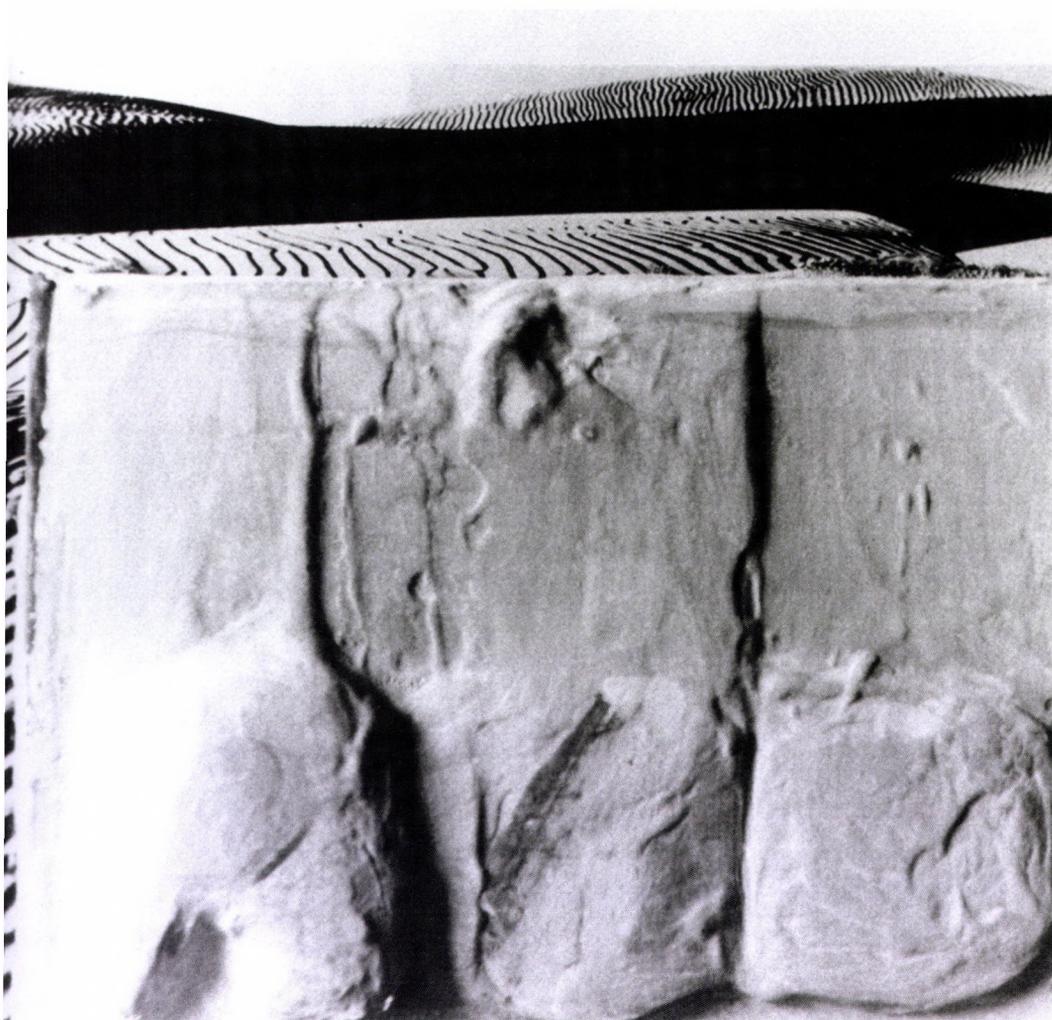
**N**ot long ago a new venue, the Mono Gallery, opened on Ostrom Road, which runs steeply up the north side of Castle Hill in Buda. Its declared intention is to show the work of contemporary artists, including most emphatically sculptors. In May 2009 the work of Katalin Hetey was on view, of a double pleasure for art lovers. Hetey's sculptures are rarely shown in Hungary, and yet she is one of the most important of contemporary Hungarian sculptors of our time. This was a chance to honour one of the country's least known creative artists. Hetey left Hungary in the wake of the 1956 revolution, and for 25 years even fellow-artists heard little about her, though by the eighties she was already being allowed to show her work and, indeed, she even moved back to Hungary. That, though, was only to remain modestly in the background: retrospectives of her work were arranged in provincial cities (Miskolc, Győr), in Budapest, however, she featured mainly in group shows and small solo exhibitions. Those, along with a high-quality album and a catalogue of her work, both published in 2005, were enough to make her name, and even win her a degree of recognition (she was awarded a Kossuth Prize in 2009), but a real breakthrough to a wider public, which she deserved, would have needed a big one-man exhibition in Budapest. The Mono Gallery, restricted to the limitations of what was possible for them, showed only a small and focused segment of the whole oeuvre, with the goal primarily of arousing attention and paying respect to an artist, who will turn 85 this year.

From 1942 to 1947 Katalin Hetey studied painting under István Szőnyi at the Budapest Academy of Fine Arts. For the next ten years she taught drawing and art history at the Fine Arts *Gimnázium*, taking leave of the country at the end of 1956. The first stop on her journey was Italy, where the world began to open

---

*Ildikó Nagy*

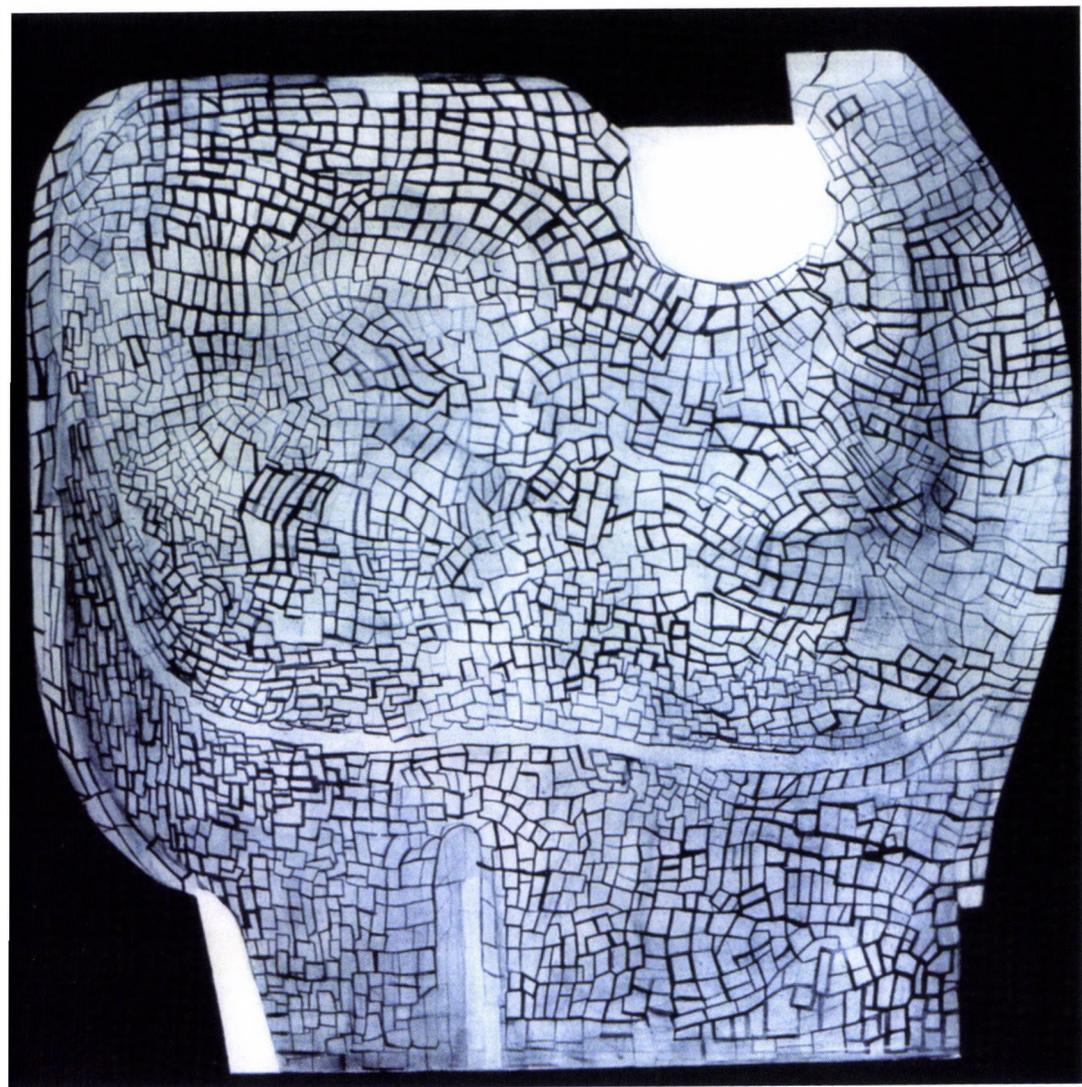
*is an art critic specialising in twentieth-century Hungarian art.*



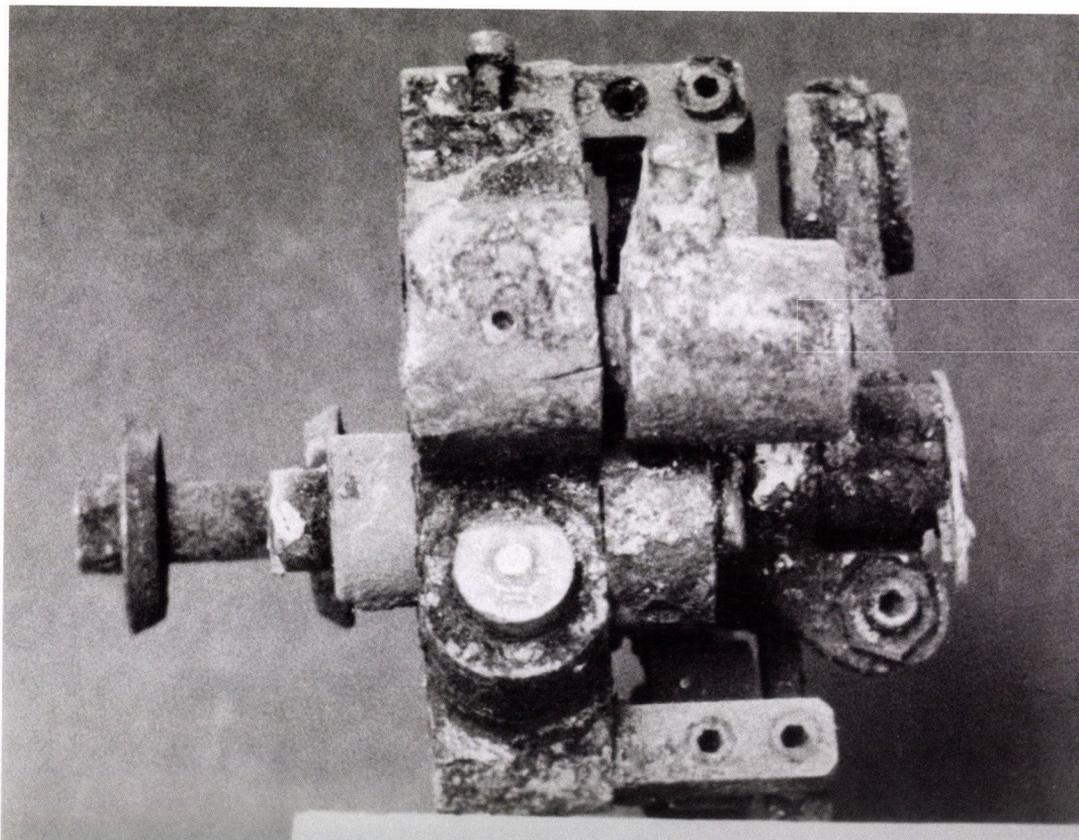
Katalin Hetey: *Wall Formed by Material Running Down in the Wind-Swept Desert*, 1970, photomontage, plaster relief, 22 x 20 x 3 cm.



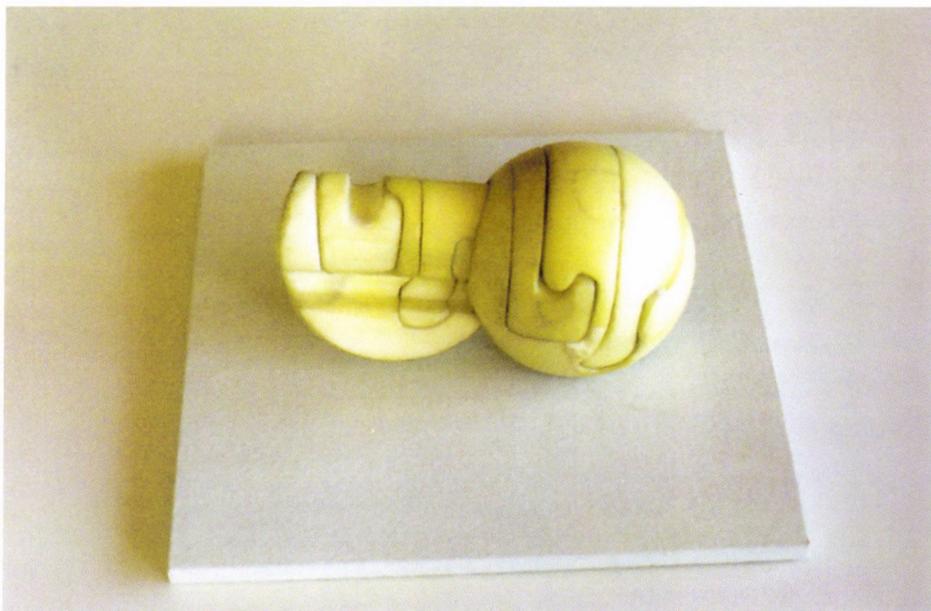
Katalin Hetey: *Dense Structure*, 1969, polyester, cement, wood, 30 x 30 cm.



Katalin Hetey: *The Tiny World of the Subconscious—Diversity of Parts Arranged in a Uniform Whole*, 1972, acrylic on canvas, 150 x 150 cm.



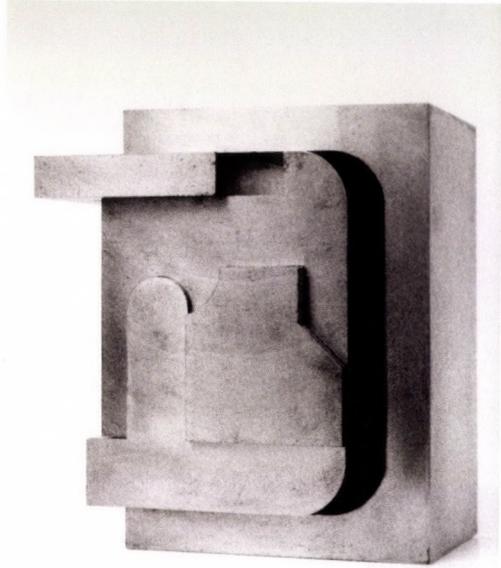
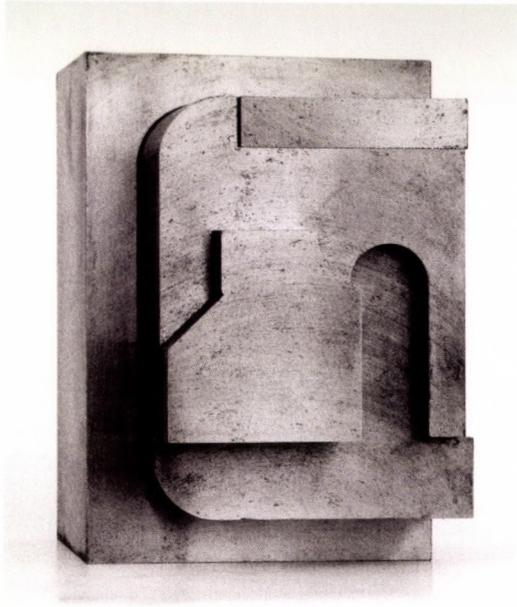
Katalin Hetey: *Objet Trouvé*, 1970s, steel.



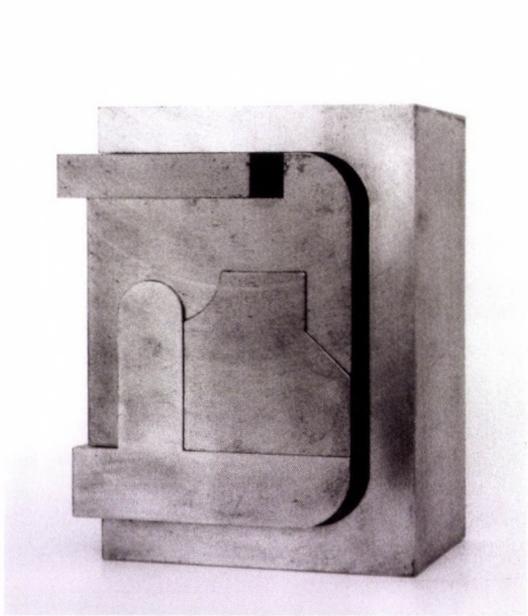
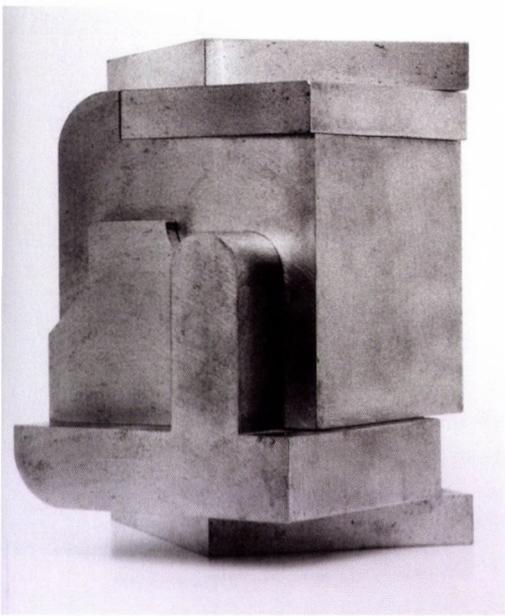
Katalin Hetey: *Part and Whole: Organic Variation*. Wax Model. Private collection, Berne.

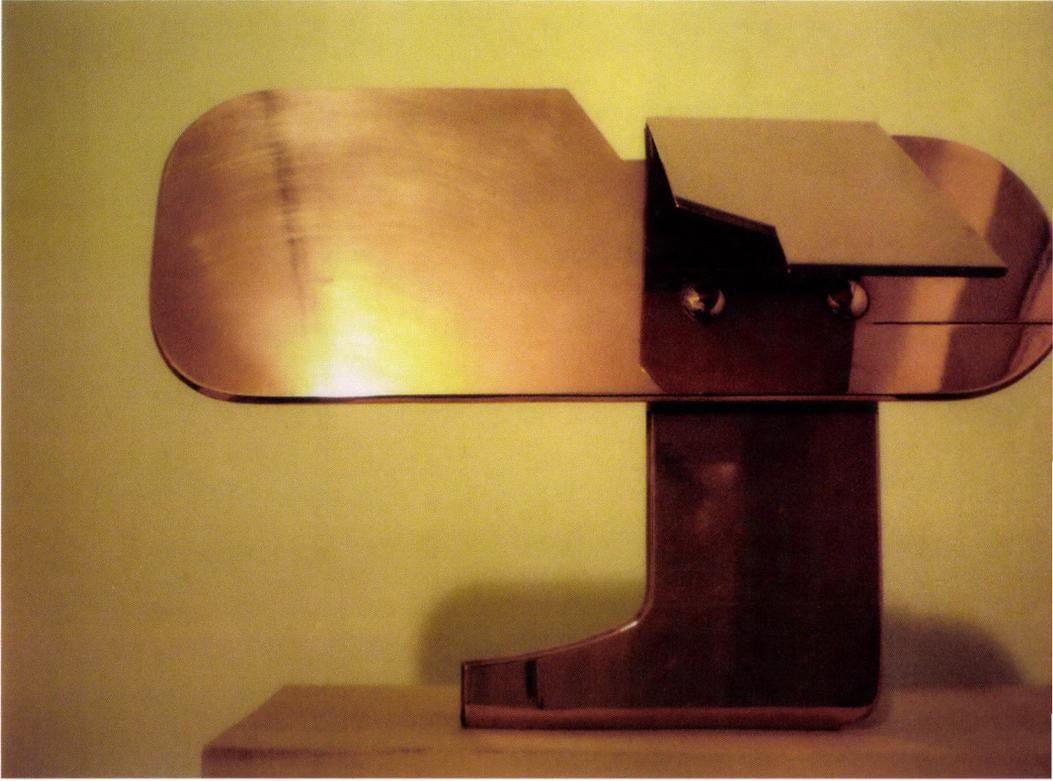


Katalin Hetey: *Part and Whole VII: Organic Variation*, 1978, polished bronze.  
Braunberens Collection, Munich.



Katalin Hetey: *Part and Whole II: Variations*, 1983, steel, 11 x 14 x 20 cm.





Katalin Hetey: *Sign in Double Displacement*, 1982, polished copper, 46 x 32 x 24 cm.

up for her, giving her the chance to meet major figures in the art and literary scene such as the sculptor Marino Marini, the writer Ignazio Silone, and Alberto Burri, a leading painter of the Arte Povera movement of the sixties. She also made friends with the writer François Fejtő and his wife and, with their help, she settled in Paris in 1957. The dynamic artistic environment transformed her art: from a painter, she became a sculptor. Looking back over what is now more than half a century, one has the feeling that it could not have happened otherwise for such a sensitive and open artist.

In order to make a living, she took on work as a graphic artist and illustrator and later again she taught drawing, but all the time she maintained her connections with the art scene, entering competitions and attending conferences on art. She engaged strongly with current issues of the day, above all questions of how art can be integrated with the world around her. She held her first one-man show in 1962 at the Galerie Lambert in Paris, and the next year she won a scholarship offered by the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving, which allowed her to work for a year in California and New York. From then on there was a whole string of shows: Washington D.C., Los Angeles, Hamburg, Schiedam (the Netherlands), Paris—all prestigious venues, and she was also among the participants at the International Biennale for Young Artists at Tokyo.

She became a French citizen in 1970, a year which also marked a turning point in her work. At an exhibition in Lausanne she made the acquaintance of the owner of the Galerie Schlegl in Zurich, who offered to take on not only her but also her husband, the painter Tamás Konok—a co-operation that lasted until Schlegl's death 22 years later. One of the conditions of the deal was that the two artists should spend part of the year in Zurich, and from that point onwards her life was divided between Paris and Zurich. While working in Zurich, she made regular visits to a foundry in the nearby small town of Aarau, which is where the small sculptures that make up the series *Part and Whole* were cast. This could indeed be considered her chef d'oeuvre, as she began the series in 1970, and to this day she is still adding to it. It was in this that she hit upon the kind of sculpture and one formal world that gave her the personal voice with which she could address not just the art of our day but also its philosophy. In order to get at its essence, however, it is necessary to review the path which led her here, namely, the part of her career between 1957 and 1970 taking her from the problems presented by two dimensional painting to sculptural form and the fundamental issues of space.

**T**he two decades of this period were years of major expansion in sculpture, a process reflected in writings on the history of sculpture as something quite independent of that of painting, with more books being published about sculpture than had appeared in the half century before. Quite apart from strictly art-historical surveys, there were also surveys that took a particular line

in grouping and analysing works in relation to the inherent laws of form, such as mass and sculptural volume. This was when critical writings began to record the process through which the art of modern sculpture was born, with the art of forming mass turning into the art of forming space. The change in approach was no doubt assisted by the fact that the big metropolises of Western Europe, in seeking to rebuild after the Second World War, had ever greater aspirations to integrate modern sculpture and offered to artists large-scale commissions like never before. All the arts strove to think in terms of spatiality. With even painters stepping out of planarity to concern themselves with the possibilities of three-dimensional modelling, the moulding of the immediate environment, the aesthetically organised relationship of abstract form and space, of colour and space, became central issues.

The sixties were a time of interaction between art and industry and the growth of industrial production gave design a huge boost. The call for a modern, artistic moulding of functional objects came to be taken for granted, and artists were thrilled to discover industrial rationality, the beauty of mechanical structures. Sculptures emulated the aesthetic of machines, with public arenas sprouting sculptures of highly polished metal, mechanically operated mobiles, and enormous, cheerful works of plastic art composed of brightly coloured tubes.

In complete contrast, the other major movement of the time, Art Brut used ordinary materials without regard for traditional ideas of what was aesthetic, showing the other side of modern industrial society in all its brutal rawness, the singular "aesthetic" of rubbish and scraps of waste. So art, even as it strove to create a clear-cut, lucidly arranged, logical order of structured spaces through a new interpretation of the relationship between space and mass, was turning with avid interest to everything that was its opposite: of the moment, unpredictable and chaotic. The material of such works seems to live a life of its own, with lacerated, crumpled surfaces and compressed masses collecting within themselves and re-radiating the external forces which formed them. There is no regular form or reassuring plane to be seen. Artists discovered the beauty of the world of the *objet trouvé*, scrap metal and rusting engine parts. The fringe of life encountered the peak of art. Katalin Hetey grasped both, resolving the contradiction between them by organising chaos into structures.

**L**ike many other sculptors, she made the rounds of scrap-iron yards, photographing them and collecting interesting objects. She was attracted to chaotic heaps of formless forms, sensing that they contained poetry despite the brutality and aggressiveness of their appearance. She emulated this in her own works, assembling large-scale photomontages and collages of crumpled paper, fashioning sculptures out of press-moulded metal pieces that she came across. She was passionately interested in materials, malleable plaster most especially,

shifting of its own accord (e.g. by dripping) at even the gentlest touch of the hand. She produced a whole series of plaster reliefs under the title *Self-development of the Material*, but she also used plaster fragments combined with other materials. *Wall Formed by Material Running Down in the Wind-swept Desert* of 1970, in which a photograph is combined with plaster relief is a particularly beautiful, almost lyrical landscape from the same period when she started the series of sculpted pieces made of white cement. These are small-scale models that can be enlarged as much as one pleases, offering varied and intriguing spectacles from every angle, including high above, to which traditional sculpture has rarely paid attention. Another group of works is made up of pieces comprising a variety of irregular forms or figures compressed into a definite framing shape: *Dense Structure* and *Collected Power* are both dated 1969. The same is also seen in her large-scale coloured abstract paintings. Some works reveal their intention in the very title they have been given: *The Tiny World of the Subconscious—Diversity of Parts Arranged in a Uniform Whole* (1972).

All these pieces draw attention to the three principal concepts of movement, structure and tension, all three of them forces that form and sustain a work and all three present in Katalin Hetey's pieces. The trinity of movement, structure and tension has offered a virtually endless opportunity for variation leaving the artist to ask herself only what she wants to say; with what idea or personal confession about the world can she find to grasp something essential affecting us all. That is, the relationship of the Part and the Whole.

Hetey has referred in an interview to the major effect on her of German physicist Werner Heisenberg's book, *The Part and the Whole*. I myself would be wary of making any pronouncements about the connections between atomic physics, philosophy and art, but the loss of the Whole, the new relationship between the Part and the Whole, the fragmentariness of existence is an experience of the modern human condition. In Hungary, even social scientists love to wheel out the poet Endre Ady, who with impressive acuity already pinned down that awareness in the early years of the twentieth century: "*Ev'ry whole has shattered / Ev'ry flame flickers just in parts*," he wrote, at a time when such an idea was becoming axiomatic. The torso as raised to a self-sufficient genre within sculpture, exemplifies how the fragment is capable of reflecting the magnificence of what used to be Whole. (Rilke discerned this and captured it in "Archaic Torso of Apollo"). Modern man, and modern art, has accepted such fragmentariness, but Katalin Hetey seems to turn against that trend. The relationship of the Part to the Whole in her work is in constant dialogue rather than expressed as a fixed and accepted reality. Since 1970 she has worked continuously on defining that new kind of relationship through the pieces of that series.

The early parts of the *Part and Whole* series are spherical bodies cast in bronze which are composed of moveable elements of cylinders and arched

forms. By pulling these apart, sculptures of variable form arise from one and the same mass while the space that surrounds the closed form of the sculpture pervades its interior and becomes a part of the sculpture. This world of organic forms was supplemented in the early 1980s by a geometric variant. Lucia Moholy-Nagy (László Moholy-Nagy's first wife) asked Katalin Hetey to produce for her collection a spatial composition which consisted of two industrial forms and two cubes, giving special regard to the variations that resulted from displacements. This was the starting point for the series of geometric works entitled *Part and Whole* in which the framing form is a cylinder or cube whereas the partial forms can not only be pulled out but can also be made to turn around the body's axis. A general feature of the series, then, is that the framing form of the sculpture (sphere, prism, cube, cylinder) is always a circumscribed figure, the inner core of which is made up of parts. Those parts are moveable, so that within any given sculpture lies the potential for various sculptures. Inherent in the body of a permanent sculpture is the potential for unlimited variation, the unlimited possibility of remodelling which, through the independence of the parts, always creates a new Whole. Mass and space, outside and inside, incessantly transform into one another, and out of this delicate interplay emerges the tension of structure and movement. We feel that each and every variant is a self-standing and complete Whole, though knowing that this is merely a momentary state in which the parts find themselves.

The formal inspiration for the series is the world of machines, of industrially created forms and movements. Hetey has spent a great deal of time in factories and workshops, having also worked in the Agricultural Machinery Works and the Carriage & Wagon Works in Győr. She was fascinated by the "world of movement" of factories, with finished products constantly giving her new ideas. After bronze her favourite materials have become iron, aluminium and, above all, steel. The Mono Gallery assembled a small collection of the geometric steel sculptures. Visitors could not move the pieces, but as there are four specimens of each sculpture it was possible to see four versions of the same work next to each other.

"This is the material that provides the cleanest surface, working through its cold beauty, its gentle shine and its strong tension. I sense energies inside it; it compels me to compose the most precisely. Its cleanness is not emotional, not romantic, and it spares me from having to be garrulous," Hetey commented in an interview. 🐼

Zsófia Bán

# How the Body at Rest Reclines

Tibor Somlai: *Tér és idő—Lakásbelső a két világháború között 1925–1942* (Space and Time: Home Interiors Between the Two World Wars 1925–1942). Budapest: Corvina, 2008, 363 pp.

One of the countless parallel strands that runs through *Párhuzamos történetek* (Parallel Stories), Péter Nádas's universal novel, is the attraction that an architect and furniture designer, Alajos Madzar, feels for Mrs. Szemző, a married psychoanalyst. Madzar, a disciple of the Bauhaus school of arts and crafts in Weimar, follows the functionalist approach to design. His attraction, unbridled yet tightly reined-in, leads him to accept a commission from Mrs. Szemző to completely redesign her apartment in the Újlipótváros neighbourhood of Budapest, to create a consulting room as well as design furniture and fittings throughout the home. He accepts this despite having already made up his mind to follow Walter Gropius, László Moholy-Nagy, Marcel Breuer and other luminaries of the Bauhaus school to America, given the gloomy prospects for modernists in Hungary. He intends his acceptance of the

commission as a gesture professing his love. A love, which, because it is concealed, no one else can sense, least of all the woman who is the object of his desires. "Yet he secretly hoped she would anyway" (*Párhuzamos történetek*, vol. 3, p. 67). Madzar followed the trend that saw the primary aim of design as harmonising and linking the triad of humanity, society and nature through man's physical relationship to space. As far as architecture goes, buildings were regarded first and foremost as spaces for the body—spaces that enacted the setting, role and senses of the body. Beyond its obvious functionalism, the approach had a metaphysical charge, as can be easily appreciated following the idea that a building is the body's amphitheatre; the body, the temple of the mind. (The motif is enhanced in this strand of Nádas's novel by Madzar's being commissioned to design and furnish, of all things, a psychoanalyst's office.) The movement's tendency toward inter-

---

Zsófia Bán

was born in Rio de Janeiro and grew up in Brazil and Hungary. She is a writer and critic as well as Associate Professor at the Department of American Studies of Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest. Zsófia Bán is the author of, most recently, *Esti iskola* (Night School, 2007), a collection of loosely interconnected short stories and *Próbacsomagolás* (Test Packing, 2008), a collection of essays.

nationalism, abstraction and reduction was light years removed from the needs of political regimes placing paramount emphasis on national character, and thus many of the movement's members were forced to emigrate—that is, assuming they did not perish during the war. Among the famous émigrés, or those forced into exile, were many Hungarians (Moholy-Nagy and Breuer were just the best known), who in their own way represented both an international and at the same time alternative Hungarian culture (one needs only note the telling name of Nádas's character: Madzar). There were also those who, in the end, plumped for settling down, for staying put. One example would be Farkas Molnár of the 'Red Cube House' project, who met an early demise in the closing stages of the Second World War, when the villa that he had designed suffered a direct hit in a bombing raid during the siege of Budapest.

A major tenet of this functionalist school was the idea that furniture design was not just the province of craftsmen and industrial designers. Indeed, architects undertook interior design,



*An ante-room, also used as a waiting room, as suggested by the semicircular bench. The walls are covered in light-coloured textiles to door-height, the woodboards above are the same colour, very likely bright red, and so is the shelf below the mirror. The whole room must have been exceedingly bright.*

*Designer: György Bonta, 1930–35.*

consummating symbolically as it were the notion that architecture, like furniture design, should be concerned above all with the role of the body, which was a kind of holistic, universal design ideal:

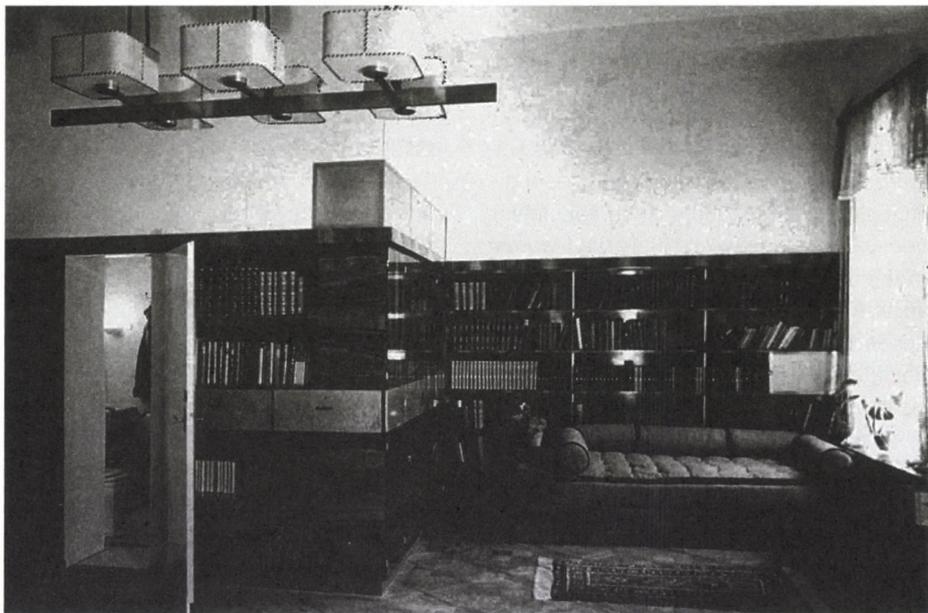
Madzar looked on pieces of furniture, chairs above all, as sculptures. He went along with Gerrit Rietveld, who held that the dramatic connection between what a body sensed and its position in space becomes clear for someone taking a seat... A chair truly had to



*Room with a plant window in a Balatonföldvár summer home. On the right, an opening leading to the kitchen. Architects Gábor Preisich and Mihály Vadász, interior by Zoltán Révész, 1936.*

grasp this dramatic relation in a positive sense. For that reason he felt a repugnance for the calamitous decadence of a Tonio Kröger, although he could well see that Mrs. Szemző got a real kick out of his childish repugnance, which was why she insisted on his reading it... A chair could not surrender either to nostalgia or catastrophe, or to the little tragedies of personal life; it could not

task, Madzar returns to his birthplace of Mohács in order to produce the furniture for Mrs. Szemző from the timber of specially impregnated railway sleepers that had been left in his father's now forlorn workshop. Mrs. Szemző sends him an unexpected telegram that she will visit him in Mohács, as a result of which he sets feverishly to work:



A master bedroom-cum-study, 1935. The bookshelf is combined with a cabinet incorporating a door to the en-suite bathroom (visible through the open door), storing space for clothes and shoes, and a cocktail cabinet at the corner. Note the chandelier, also designed by architect and interior designer Zsuzsa Kovács.

even surrender to sweet melancholy like Tonio Kröger, who could never have been ruffled by frenzies of the body, simply because he could not surrender to them; a chair could not try to please. He knew just about everything about this fastidiousness of the chair, its sensitivity to objectivity. He saw it as being directly necessary, from the standpoint of this utopian knowledge, to feel a repugnance for German decadence. (*ibid.*, pp. 44–45)

In order to accomplish fittingly what is for him such an exceptionally significant

Except for the writing desk, the screen and the secretaire, he managed that night to assemble every piece of furniture at least roughly. Even the delicate matter of the couch, from which so much was expected. Maybe he would manage to interleave several centuries of experience. He had to give a response to the objective question of how the body at rest reclines.

Of course, quite apart from any functional perspective, the couch that receives the reclining and resting body is, at one and

the same time, a physical embodiment of his erotic fantasies about Mrs. Szemző:

The puritanical items of hastily assembled furniture, propped up by other objects and devices, stood solitarily on and in between the machines. He knew that no one in the world had yet been the recipient of such a valuable profession of love, but, fortunately, no one else apart from him could learn that; a stranger was incapable of understanding it. (*ibid.*, p. 67)

If we accept the very plausible idea that, in the ideal case, every book is also (or can also be) a work of art, then Tibor Somlai's book, which in any case genuinely fills a gap in our knowledge, can be regarded as a similar profession of love. His affection though is not so much directed towards the creators of the interior-design and architectural objects that feature in his book as towards the objects themselves and the types of rooms and interior spaces as objectified mementoes of a vanished and in a way yet quite present era. Last but not least they are mementoes of the people who commissioned and used them. The atmosphere of a vanished age in book form. First the Second World War, then nationalisation, resulted in untold and irreparable damage. The book, then, can also be regarded as a sort of memorial, with its focus not only on art historical and interior design considerations but, of no less significance, on wider historical, sociological and anthropological contexts. Whether focusing on astonishingly lavish interiors and layouts of villas from that era, or on economical, functional appointments of the typical middle-class two- and three-room home in Central Pest, the book divulges whole worlds, which moreover enact or stage, as it were, the bodies, the ways of thinking and the lifestyles of those who live in them. The book can thus be

read as a visual novel without having to resort to a genuine novel like Nádas's.

Somlai's book starts off by listing home interiors and their furniture by designer, and the great advantage of this chapter is that apart from including already well-known designers (such as Lajos Kozma, Farkas Molnár and Gyula Kaesz), it familiarises us with a number of other, relatively unfamiliar names. This inevitably means, as András Körner says in an introduction, with a markedly personal tone, that those few well-known designers were neither exceptional geniuses nor isolated cases, but the embodiments of a popular movement, even an ideology, one that made a lasting impression on interwar Hungary, and the relics of which at least are still there for us to enjoy today (as witnessed in the recent revival of the Bauhaus and Art Deco).

The names of many furniture designers are not honoured simply because they were known first and foremost as architects, so this part of their output was fairly obscured. In fact, since mass production of high-quality furniture was in those days still something of a rarity, quite a number of architects undertook commissions for individual items, indeed in some cases for complete interior decors, as they were often unable to make a living purely from architecture. Black-and-white photographs, whether by amateurs or professionals, but especially some marvellous, vividly coloured watercolour plans, provide a useful supplement to the blueprints. The evocation of colour is of uncommon importance, because one of the trademarks of the movement that was of revolutionary significance, over and above clean form and functionality, was precisely its daring application of colour—which of course does not show in the black-and-white photographs of the time.

The next section is organised by type of furniture or fitting, such as beds, cocktail cabinets, dining rooms, cloak-rooms, writing desks, armchairs, lamps, dressing tables, children's rooms, doctor's consulting rooms and terraces. This is where a motif that has already cropped up occasionally in earlier sections comes to the fore, terms which nowadays have a distinctly odd ring to them: the "man's room" and the "lady's room", meaning their bedroom, with the possibility that ingenious partitioning will also allow the spaces to be joined together. In modern homes a less obvious separation of, and respect for, gender is implemented in the form of "spaces" for women and men. It would be wrong to think that this was customary only in the case of multi-roomed suburban villas, because in two-room inner-city apartments it was also the latest thing for the *anima* and *animus* of a home to be asserted both in its spaces and its furnishings. The same concept also demonstrates rather eloquently the gender relations and outlook on life of those days, even in cases where both partners had jobs. Then there is a regular cavalcade of now-forgotten interior-design objects that likewise testify to quite a different age and way of life: the secretaire, dressing table, dressing room, radiogramme, cocktail cabinet—the kind of meaningful and evocative personal belonging like the "overnight case" of twenties' and thirties' America, as featured in Hitchcock's *Rear Window*, which in those days was an indispensable appurtenance of the emancipated new woman: a *nécessaire* or dressing case, fitted with all the toilet articles necessary, should one happen to spend the night somewhere else. One also encounters materials that by now have largely disappeared, such as opalescent milk glass, or frosted glass, or the linoleum

that is so frowned upon today, but was then likewise a colourful complement to interior spaces. All the same, what is most striking is the individuality of the furniture and interior spaces, which above all says a lot about their users and their lifestyle. The bulk of the pieces can be considered "site-specific", insofar as they were made to fit a specific space, and indeed a specific, predetermined place within that space—in many cases they were built-in or fitted items of furniture. Even if one occasionally finds such an item that has survived the ravages of time, these objects now exist outside their original "context". Fine pieces as they are, they have become detached from their history.

One has to be grateful to Tibor Somlai and to Corvina Books for producing such a splendid album, with the preface and list of plates being supplied in English to make them accessible to a wider readership. There is even the added bonus of a DVD giving a virtual tour round Lajos Kozma's Havas villa (see HQ 185). There are a few errors and gaps, such as the lack of a proper index, which would have been particularly useful in view of the large number of cross-references (in not a few instances an individual features both as architect and furniture designer), and there are some cases where, for no obvious reason, basic biographical data are missing. Then too, when it comes to illustrations it would have been handy in the chapter of designers to have been provided with photographs of the individuals in question. All carping aside though, it is a real joy to pick up the book, to read it and become immersed in it—and to let one's imagination wander.

Last but not least, I would like to dedicate this piece to my late paternal uncle, György Fränkel/Almár, who is one of the designers featured in the book. 🐾

## Zsolt Láng

# Novelising

- Nándor Gion: *Latroknak is játszott. 4 regény. Életmű 1* (He Played for Malefactors, Too. Four Novels. Collected Works, Vol. 1). Budapest, Noran Kiadó, 2007, 928 pp. • *Börtönről álmodtam mostanában. 4 regény. Életmű 2* (Nowadays I Dream of Prison. Four Novels. Collected Works, Vol. 2). Budapest, Noran Kiadó, 2008, 622 pp. • András Cserna-Szabó: *Puszibolt* (Snogshop). Budapest, Magvető, 2008, 264 pp. • Noémi Kiss: *Trans.* Budapest, Magvető, 2006, 170 pp.

**W**hat makes a novel? Definitions are hard to find. The term covers too much; the word "novel" means roughly as many things as "celestial body", which can mean a star, a planet, an asteroid or comet, a supernova or a black hole. A novel grows from language, but just as the universe is matter and expanding space, so too a novel needs something more than language. Something happens to language, a copy of what really happens. It's hard to say precisely what scale the copy is on—there are as many scales as there are novels. Just take a look at these three examples of differing approaches, traditions and techniques.

Nándor Gion was born in Vojvodina in 1941. This is a region just beyond Hungary's southern border: When the Austro-Hungarian Empire fell apart this region became part of the Kingdom of Serbia, was briefly again part of Hungary during the Second World War, to belong to the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia after

the War. Then after Yugoslavia crumbled in the 1990s Vojvodina was once again inside a country called Serbia, this time a republic. Vojvodina has been rich in Hungarian contemporary prose writers, apart from Gion, Ottó Tolnai, László Végel, Attila Balázs, Péter Bozsik and Ferenc Kontra should be mentioned. The periodical based in Novi Sad (*Új Symposion*, from its beginnings in the early Sixties, ushered several generations of writers into print. It is important to mention this, because at the time Nándor Gion's early writings were appearing in *Symposion* the Iron Curtain between Hungary and Yugoslavia was a fact of life, and Vojvodina's Hungarian writers were culturally fairly cut off from Hungary. If this big community of writers and readers had not existed, then even writers of Gion's calibre might well not have flourished.

*Kétéltűek a barlagban* (Amphibians in the Cave), Gion's first book, appeared in 1968 to be followed a year later by

---

### Zsolt Láng

*is a native of Transylvania. He is an editor at the Hungarian-language literary journal Látó in Marosvásárhely (Târgu Mureş), Romania. His books include four volumes of fiction and collections of essays and autobiographical pieces.*

*An excerpt from Virágos katona (Soldier-with-Flower) reviewed here is on pp. 43–60 of this issue.*

*Testvérem, Joáb* (My Brother, Joab), which won a Grand Prix given by the locally-based Forum publishing house. Both novels broke with realism, borrowing much from neo-avant-garde prose ("Out with provincialism!" was the group's battle cry). Nevertheless, Gion was apparently reluctant totally to dispense with traditional form, with his structures being held on course by plain love of storytelling, or rather, storytelling as a mode of existence.

The most striking feature of Gion's prose is just how strong is his urge to write fiction. Every sentence is placed in the narrative in such a way as to be the starting-point for a novel. The various strands of the story trace intricate sets of relations which, the same way as the whole image is contained in each fragment of a hologram, show the wider contours of the novel.

During the sixties and early seventies when Gion started writing, Vojvodina was one of the liveliest parts of Hungarian-speaking Europe. Apart from Hungarians, Serbs, Croats, Slovenes, Germans, Slovaks and Ruthenians, at least another twenty ethnic groups were recorded and, most importantly, Tito's regime, unlike the other Socialist countries, allowed its citizens a relatively large degree of freedom and private property. Also Vojvodina, as an autonomous province, had special privileges. In fact, it had been a bustling region since the days of antiquity and subject to many rulers, having at one time or another belonged to the Roman empire, Byzantium, the Avars, the kingdom of Hungary, the Ottoman empire, the Habsburg possessions and the Austro-Hungarian Dual Monarchy, with each power, in order to secure its own interests, seeking new settlers, at times even from hundreds of kilometres away

(e.g. Ruthenians, Ukrainians, Slovaks).

As a result, its inhabitants included hemp-growing Slovaks and road-paving Bunjevci, Turkish confectioners and Macedonian bakers, leather-working Albanians and Gypsy tinkers. A multitude of peoples and cultures. In a novel by Gion one inhabitant of this world, just like a traveller from far-off lands restless to tell his tale, launches into a story which can scarcely stay just a story. Why? Because the narrative is already packed with dense, concentrated exoticism, lists of the oddities of characters; countless other descriptions and moods that cannot fit into any one normal piece of fiction. Novels struggle to be born into the kind of fictional world where every character carries whole novels within him, each one of those stuffed with richness and colour in turn.

The first two volumes of Gion's *Collected Works* that started after his death in 2002 contain a total of eight novels. The four making up the first volume form a regular tetralogy, a socio-historical tableau, with the plot starting at the time of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy and ending in the Tito era, in the mid-twentieth century.

First published in 1973, the first of the quartet, *Virágos katona* (Soldier-with-Flower: see the chapter translated on pp. 43–60 of this issue of *HQ*), is perhaps the best known of Gion's novels. It is a totally unnostalgic portrait of life in the Monarchy (the story opens in 1898). Serbs, Hungarians and ethnic Germans live in separate districts of a large village, not mixing and yet unavoidably belonging together. The two main characters, 'Gimpy' Ádám Török and 'Tatty' István Gallai, the former a stubborn, self-willed, hot-tempered, adroit, selfish, ever-resourceful man, as opposed to the

gentle, music-making (zither-playing) Tatty Gallai. They spend part of their time up on Calvary Hill from which they can gaze down on the village. Fourteen columns of white stone lead up the hill, and into every column is set a large picture depicting the tormenting and crucifixion of Jesus Christ. One curious figure is a smiling Roman soldier wearing a flower. The Great War then breaks out, as if Jesus's scourgers and tormentors had taken over the world and not the smiling Soldier-with-Flower.

The following novel, *Rózsaméz* (Rose Honey), which came out in 1976, describes events during the years between the two world wars. The people of Szenttamás (Srbobran), Gion's native village, at that time under Serb administration, have their different ways of relating to the Great War, the Serbs rejoicing and the ethnic Germans ("Swabians") filled with nostalgia and hope for a future German dominion. The Hungarians on the other hand are desperate, with the nearby frontier making it all the harder as the motherland is within reach but nevertheless unable to be of any assistance. Gallai returns from the war, wounded but still able to play the zither, which he often does, even for free, for those who need cheering up. Ádám Török, however, is quite incapable of adjusting to his fate; he is not one to be satisfied by someone else's pleasure, or by the rose honey that has been raised to a symbol of longing (Tatty Gallai promises this to his children)—he becomes a malcontent and ends up in gaol.

The third part, *Ez a nap a miénk* (Today Will Be Our Day), is set in the Second World War. The village is back now to Hungarian rule; Ádám Török, released from jail, is vengeful and, despite Tatty Gallai's words of caution, pillages

the Serb-owned estates. Consequently, when the Serb state returns, he is one of those executed at the Srbobran town hall. Tatty Gallai, still making music, lives through the war and in the concluding part of the tetralogy, *Aranyat talált* (He Struck Gold), he is seen as a Serb in Budapest and a Hungarian spy in Belgrade, but he manages to survive that period too and finally returns to Srbobran. He is happy as long as he can play on his zither. Even though some of those he played for were thugs, he always saw their best side and never fomented revenge against anybody.

Close to a thousand pages in length, the tetralogy is not told in parallel, linear lines but ever-changing, spiral whirls. The narrative seeks to leave nothing out, to account for everything, and with this approach even the moment of death is nothing more than an item in a list, having almost no resonance or ambit. Death, continually recurring death, in the form of murders and genocides, is the fundamental experience of a world in which "something is always happening." It is nothing more than a punch on the jaw, a house lost in a card game, a kiss, a character waited for in vain. It is a world where it is hard to tell the difference between something that is experienced and imagined; a world where reality is swifter than imagination. No, this is not the Central European absurd where the writer stands on his head; here it is the world that turns upside down.

The second volume of the *Collected Works* also contains four novels: alongside *Amphibians in the Cave* and *My Brother Joab*, mentioned earlier, are *Börtönről álmodtam mostanában* (Nowadays I Dream of Prison, 1990) and *Izsakhár* (Issachar, 1994), the most philosophical of Gion's novels. They are not

interconnected works, but it is plain that they belong to the same world. *Nowadays I Dream of Prison* might just as well have been part of the tetralogy. The Lyricists are a group who declaim verses by classic Hungarian poets in the House of Culture, but at night double as bootleggers. The fence for this happy band is a Turkish confectioner by the name of Kuçuk, whose large extended family act as his bodyguards. Among those who feature is God-fearing Dániel, the foundling. He grew up on goat's milk when he was an orphan and now writes poetry, but he is also handy with his fists if need be. Another character is Simon Leviathan-Lukić, a Jewish dealer in jewellery born in Uzbekistan, who at the age of one hundred visits Bokhara, the scene of his childhood, and constantly tells people about the journey. His travelling companion is Mr Šimković, a crippled painter, who only ever paints street scenes with walnut trees in leaf. The principal character and narrator is a night porter and university correspondence course student. He dreams of prison, and the dream comes true: he is put behind bars first for being a bicycle thief, later for causing a fatal traffic accident. He is in love with Ilona, a village girl for whom a poetry evening is arranged. It is whilst driving home from this that the accident happens, with the girl being thrown out of the sidecar of a motorcycle borrowed from Kuçuk the confectioner.

Gion's novels put Srbobran before our eyes. One scene from *Soldier-with-Flower*:

Really it was a pointless scuffle—János Kiss's tavern on the road to Becse, which is where the Green Streeters and Tukers would usually brawl, saw heavier scraps than that every week—but even that upset him beyond belief. It happened one cold winter afternoon. Stefan was clearing the

snow in front of the mill; there was no one passing by on the street, and there were only two customers drinking in the 'New Town' tavern, János Csorba and big, pasty-faced Joey Ubonyi. Stefan could pick them out clearly, because in the dark public house in winter they already had the lights on by then. He noticed later on that he was not on his own after all, because somebody was standing opposite the pub, back to the wall, on the other side of the road and watching every move. He was still shovelling snow when Joey Ubonyi came out onto the street and set off homewards. He wanted to cut across the snow-filled street, but that was when the hitherto motionless observer stepped towards him. Stefan recognised him now: it was Dušan Mandić, and he also knew now that this would turn into a scrap. The Mandićes lived in the Serb area, over in Kać, there were a lot of brothers, all incorrigible fighters. No doubt they had some accounts to settle with Joey Ubonyi, because Dušan Mandić placed himself in front of him and without so much as a word socked him on the jaw. Big, pasty-faced Joey Ubonyi just blinked; as yet he didn't so much as lift a finger. Dušan Mandić punched him twice more in the face, and by now Joey Ubonyi's face was streaming in blood, but he still got back on his feet. It seemed it would never end, and Stefan's stomach was starting to turn; he couldn't bear to watch any more, so he moved to separate the two. In front of the tavern, though, he bumped into Márton Gion, the fisherman, who was drunk, having no doubt drunk away the price of the day's catch. Márton Gion was the meekest of the Gions: a quiet, dark little chap who did not even swear, and whenever he became tipsy he would lurch unsteadily while singing hymns. There were still plenty of meek characters like him on Green Street, and also clumsy

lumps like Joey Ubonyi. Types like him had probably been pasted flat as kids by elder brothers or the neighbourhood kids. Márton Gion was lurching and singing hymns, the frost-covered clothes simply creaking on him; he couldn't have noticed what was happening, only taking a look around when he bumped into Stefan.

Compare that to this scene from *Nowadays I Dream of Prison*:

That night the Lyricists crew celebrated the funeral in the Avala tavern a wee bit raucously, and some time round about midnight they got into a brawl with the Magnates crew. Out came the bicycle chains, a few heads got opened up, and they only managed to get away at the last minute as the police were turning up. As for me, I dreamed of prison that night too, and it was then that it started to dawn on me that dreams like this were a bad sign.

The story unexpectedly terminates—in the same way as Ilona's life unexpectedly ends. Abrupt changes like this are typical of Gion's novels: a meticulously assembled plot is suddenly broken apart by something that no one counted on. Through these moments of unexpectedness the story becomes even more wrenchingly realistic. A deviation is made from the normal order of a narrative in order to demonstrate a stronger order—that of the raw, unpredictable reality of life.

**A**ndrás Cserna-Szabó was born in 1974 and has now published his sixth book a collection of loosely connected short stories. He is a witty, light-hearted, coolly ironic and highly imaginative storyteller. In places that lightness of touch verges on the downright crude, at times on the morbidly grotesque. In the opening story, Auntie Klotild, who runs the

tobacconist's, is so plump that it is impossible to squeeze into the shop beside her, though admittedly there would be no point in doing so as she has nothing to sell. Cserna-Szabó makes good use of his rich imagination just as in his previous books where, for instance, he dreamt up a fictional village, with all its streets, its houses and inhabitants, and presented it as a boisterous pseudo-travel guide. He proceeds in similar vein in this new volume, inventing an out-of-the-way town, about whose location we are told no more than that it is situated "on volcanic soil." In one of the town's stores, in fact the tobacconist's where Virgin Street crosses Heart Street, the business is run by a gross woman whom everyone, except her husband, calls Auntie Klotild.

But Auntie Klotild aka Mrs Morafcsik is not the only strange figure in the town. József Fikár, for example, the town clerk, is responsible for dressing the town's twenty-three statues in winter clothing—moreover, a day before the frosts arrive. It is also where Móric Móricz, an alcoholic writer lives. One night he is visited by the Saviour, with whom he has a convivial natter over a glass or two of tippie. At other times he pulls a nylon stocking over his head and sets off, not to rob banks, but to steal secrets. To his great surprise, it turns out that the pharmacist Vilmos Holsten's biggest secret is that he keeps a harem. But, taking a step ahead in the story, we learn that this is no ordinary harem—but let's not reveal the author's secret... There are stuntmen, knife-throwers, would-be suicides who are unable to die, virgins who have long been touting their maidenhood. They all crop up at some point only to disappear and pop up again in another chapter. And just as the place is the same, so too are they, with their life unchanged, their character

not a whit different. They live through near-unimaginable escapades, yet they all lug their own strange, grotesque fates further, resignedly, stoically, unchanged.

The stories contain a series of well-observed characters, amusing creations, a veritable caravan of freaks. A meteorologist predicts showers of blood in his weather forecast, so the inhabitants spread tarpaulins over their cars, but the showers of blood fail to materialise. The shower of blood is the menstruation of the Creator, someone explains, allowing prophetic consequences to be drawn from that failure, not that this changes anything. It is no coincidence that people are still going round on Csepel bicycles or Zhiguli station wagons. The department store is called 'Faith, Hope & Charity,' its owner Bezdán V, which is a reference to an annual hot-air balloon race that is the biggest event bar none in the town's life ('V' indicates that he has won the race five times). One off-licence is known as 'The Menstruating Snail' and one of the statues as 'The Unfaithful Steward', while the town also has an Empress Theodora Arch of Triumph, and a Sermon-on-the-Mount Road and Hippolytus Irigoyen Road. As for the personal names, here are just a few: Wavy Rodrigo, Alfred the Blade, Titus Petrak—not so much cases of *nomen est omen* as *homo in nomen*, or the person writ large in the name. Even the names are evocative with the 'Bundles Bank' or 'Faith, Hope & Charity' Department Store indirectly figuring as portrayals of reality, just as the way that characters on different rungs of the social hierarchy interact with each other (above all the considerable role of curses as portrayals of character) is a form of portrayal of reality, or the way that priests and senators take their seats in the umpiring

hot-air balloon. Everything takes on a metaphorical tinge.

Everything is grotesque (the unhappy knife-thrower is the one called Alfred the Blade, while a magic spell for healing runs: "A shark which feeds from the palm of your hand will do so from the sole of your foot; a shark which feeds from the palm of your hand will do so from the sole of your foot..."). This is no philosophic grotesque, one inclined to be satirical—more something flippant, almost frivolous. Nor is it, however, the frivolity Aladár Schöpflin, literary critic of the prewar periodical *Nyugat* wished for

If only we had a truly good frivolous writer, but the frivolous ones are all rotten, the truly good ones, all serious—deadly serious. A touch pompously virtuous at heart, just like you. It seems a little country can only have weak or, at most, mediocre frivolous writers, but perish the thought that anyone should ever be a true, dauntlessly, utterly frivolous writer. A pity.

No, not that kind of flippancy; a cooler, less serious, more alcohol-fuelled type. Not that it leaves a hangover. If you read a story in the evening, you'll find it easier, come morning, to look out of the window onto whatever town you happen to live in. That's because all our towns resemble Cserna-Szabó's town of Snogshop. Or perhaps they don't at all.

**M**ore than one reviewer of the book by Noémi Kiss (also b. 1974) has made reference to E. T. A. Hoffmann's Nathaniel in "The Sandman", who is drawn towards the unknown by an irresistible force. The parallel is suggested by the quote used as the book's epigraph:

Perhaps there does exist a dark power which fastens on to us and leads us off

along a dangerous and ruinous path which we would otherwise not have trodden; but if so, this power must have assumed within us the form of ourselves, indeed have become ourselves...\*

The resemblance between the Hoffmannesque character and Noémi Kiss's protagonist would still hold even without that epigraph, though. Noémi Kiss herself is fond of launching into unknown territory, not only in her stories, adventurous and strange in scale, or even stranger in perspective as they are, but also frequently setting off in her articles and essays, with landscape breaking into the writing without fail, even in the doctoral dissertation that she wrote on Paul Celan or the journals that she has kept on the cultural anthropology of Central and Eastern Europe.

The tale that provides the title for the most recent collection of short stories bears the subtitle "Passage to Roundabout Ways" and is set in a notorious bar in Berlin visited by the narrator and H. (a friend of a friend) late one night. Everyone in the bar is friendless and sits alone at a table. The new arrivals speak to nobody, and most likely do not want to remember anything either, trying to drink themselves into unconsciousness as speedily as they can. Sex is only important inasmuch as it numbs the senses and clears the mind. The girl's corpse is then discovered in the toilet, and an investigation is set in motion, which is nothing other than a voyage from one role into the other, or none other than the writing itself, the tale of what happened on that peculiarly long night from July 7th to the 8th.

"H as a Silent Frontier" is set in Frankfurt an der Oder, the Polish/German

border town, with the narrator telling the story of her love for a Turkish lad. The text is divided into subchapters in much the same way as a piece of music is into movements: 'Turkish Delight' is about the blossoming of love; 'Talk Turkey' maps the emergence of turmoil; 'Cold Turkey' is about splitting up. Between these are monologues and confessions of the Self, the ever-recurrent Self: the voyages to the Ultimate Self. It is a harrowing story: an East European chorus girl falls in love with a young Turk who returns her love, but before long he starts to dominate her and eventually leaves her at the very point that she finds out that she is pregnant. All this eventually leads the narrator off into her Self: "I wanted to be a mother. Well, that is my story."

"B., B. and B." consists of the pooled notes that two girls make about a long journey and the passionate relationship that they develop en route in a string of towns beginning with the letter B. A tangled swirl of dreams, memories and reality. But then what is reality? Nothing more than the unsettling sketches of our relationships and entanglements, our suspicions and our deadly certainties: that is every person's own reality. To be more precise, this is a tale of uncertainty and of its formation into a story. Because only reality that has been related has reality; the unrelated hangs in a vacuum, indeed cannot even be said to hang, because it doesn't exist.

"Wig" probes the question: why does a woman write and, above all, what is needed for a person to be able to write? "It then slowly dawned on me how paltry all this was; the characters hackneyed, my sentences repetitive, nothing changing. I needed to suffer too in order to learn how

\* ■ *Tales of Hoffmann*, transl. R. J. Hollingdale. Penguin Classics.

to write. But then I had nothing to suffer for." The few lines of the conclusion reverse the question. To be more accurate: they switch writing for reading as a sign that writing also functions as reading: writing is self-reading, or in other words a part of self-discovery. This is the Wittgensteinian assertion to which the previous stories also point: the limits of my world are the limits of my tale.

The closing tale of this collection, "Swapped Heads, Olympia," is a paraphrase or re-telling of the piece by E. T. A. Hoffmann mentioned above. Constructed from letters, the tale is an investigation, binding the different strands together with a sensually delicate rationality, probing what happened between N. and her lover Tamás. What happened to Tamás? Why does he fall in love with Olympia? How could a photograph come between them (between N. and Tamás, that is)? Where is that other story that in wedging itself between them came true even as it parasitically sucked the juices out of the comfortably evolving surface story?

In "Wig" Noémi Kiss writes: "Women write in various positions. Just as they make love in a thousand different ways. As many times as they made love in their lives, that was how many texts they produced." Six texts are in this volume, or the fruits of six sexual acts if this confession is to be believed. Yet more important than this number is the creative act. The thousand different ways of lovemaking and writing. This is not an

unbroken series of movements so much as a swirl of glittering wing-beats moving around a single goal. The wing-beats are unified by the ecstasy and joy, the many moods, of sex.

This is a durable book, a book of abiding wisdom without even seeking to be wise. "Getting to know someone requires excitement, divorce—patience". That is a wise and graceful sentence in its unpretentious way.

As for "novelising", the way these many different types of tales assemble into a novel is a function of the Self. The Self is able to relate its story because it has endured everything. Enduring is primary, recording comes second. And how does it endure? Noémi Kiss's novel is that of a sufferer. A novel narrated by the sufferer. A sufferer observant like a child. Who becomes conscious that she is crossing the customary limits time and again, and all at once finds she has to confess how much more freely she goes about her business in the world. She has a suspicion of how the human condition, which until then she only heard about second-hand, is composed, and as a result what it is like to be something else—an animal, say, or an object. Viewed from that position, the question "why does a writer write?" can be rephrased, even answered in part.

What makes somebody seem mysterious or loveable, and another of no interest? How does dislike turn into friendship or love? Why do we seek to understand the stranger? 🐼

János M. Bak

# The Legacy of King Matthias Reconsidered

Marcus Tanner: *The Raven King: Matthias Corvinus and the Fate of his Lost Library*. New Haven & London, Yale University Press, 2008, 264 pp.

András Kubinyi: *Matthias Rex*. Translated by Andrew T. Gane.

Budapest: Balassi Kiadó, 2008, 209 pp. • Péter Farbaky et al., eds.: *Matthias Corvinus, the King. Tradition and Revival in the Hungarian Royal Court 1458–1490. Exhibition catalogue*. Budapest: Budapest History Museum, 2008, 608 pp.

The year 2008 was declared Renaissance Year in Hungary, marking, as it did, the 650th anniversary of the election of Mátyás Hunyadi as king of Hungary. His humanist courtiers named him Corvinus from the raven (Latin: *corvus*) in his family coat of arms. The festivities included art exhibitions, festivals of art, fashion, gastronomy and much else. The purpose seems to have been what the principal organiser, Minister of Culture István Hiller put in these words:

"Let us leave the twenty-first century behind, and immerse ourselves in the hilarities of a medieval court!" (from the Preface to the catalogue of the "Matthias the King" exhibition). There are surely good reasons to want to forget about many things in this twenty-first century, and the hilarities of the year may have offered the chance to some or even many to do so. What will certainly remain after the year will have passed are the three books published more or less in connection with it.

The books to be briefly presented here differ considerably from each other. The catalogue, an impressive quarto of 608 pages and at least as many illustrations weighs 3.5 kg; *The Raven King* is 264 pages in length, while *Matthias Rex* is a modest, small-octavo of 200 odd pages. *The Raven King* was written by an interested and devoted English journalist, with many personal reflections from the twenty-first century we were exhorted to leave behind. The monograph is the last completed work of a great Hungarian historian, who, alas, did not live to see it leave the press. The catalogue, in turn, is a collective effort of historians, art historians and archaeologists, most of them belonging to the younger generation of Central European scholars. Marcus Tanner became interested in Matthias when he saw examples of manuscripts from his famous library, the Bibliotheca Corviniana. András Kubinyi spent a lifetime of study on late medieval

---

János M. Bak

is a medieval historian and professor emeritus of the University of British Columbia and the Central European University in Budapest. His main interests are the legal, institutional and social history of the late Middle Ages.

Hungary during the reigns of Matthias and his immediate successors. The round one hundred authors of the catalogue are students of the period or of some aspect of it.

Tanner faced quite a challenge. He wanted to embed the history of the precious manuscripts, about which he knows a lot, into the history of their sponsor's reign, using the books as a thread to the latter. He has ended up with an eminently readable book, covering much more than the bibliophile activities of the king, for he uses every occasion to wander off into related subjects of contemporary art, literature and book production. He may have fared better had he left the history of the reign to others. Much of what he establishes about the reign rests on rather out-of-date secondary literature (though no major mistakes have crept in). His narrative is, however, as good as it is exciting when he turns to his main interest, the fate of the manuscripts, including the highly celebrated "return" of some of them in the nineteenth century, closely connected with the foreign-policy manoeuvrings of the late Ottoman Empire. And, as I mentioned before, his asides, such as anecdotic details on the fate of the Matthias monument in Cluj/Kolozsvár in our century, are most entertaining.

**E**ntertaining is surely not the word to be used for most of what Kubinyi has written on King Matthias. His meticulous reconstruction of the workings of the government in late fifteenth-century Hungary is a historian's masterpiece, but often makes for difficult reading. Kubinyi correctly focused on the persons surrounding the king, those obtaining positions and those losing them, for medieval politics were very much a

personal affair. He is in no ways writing hagiography: the mistakes and misjudgments in domestic and foreign affairs of the king are just as clearly demonstrated as his achievements. It makes good sense to start with the background of both the Hunyadi and the maternal, Szilágyi, sides of his family, for extended kinship explains quite a few of the choices of personnel. There is even a bit of a mystery: the rise of the Szapolyai brothers—whose family was to give Hungary its second elected "national king", John (1526–41)—has sometimes been explained by some unknown close relationship to the king, but Kubinyi dismisses the speculation. They, as quite a few others, played important roles in the Corvinian government because of their talent. On the other hand, the dependence of the king on the barons and prelates, mostly from the old aristocratic families, is emphasised, and the older view of Matthias having promoted many *homines novi* is placed in a more realistic context. Kubinyi, very properly, refrains from using the problematic notion of a "Renaissance state" under Matthias. In Chapter 3, Kubinyi offers a succinct but very informative "snapshot" of Hungary in the second part of the fifteenth century, admitting the impressive results of Matthias's financial reforms, but placing them in a comparative context: even in the best years, the income of the treasury was less than half that of the Sultan's, the country's principal enemy. No one else could have presented a more precise and, in the best meaning of the word, "objective" history of the Corvinian: the author has seen virtually every single document of the age (for which there is no published catalogue!) and followed the fate of the major actors step by step. While the "shot by shot" history may demand

careful reading and, as I said, is hardly entertaining, the closing chapters, in which Kubinyi draws up the balance for the thirty-odd years under review and the last one on "The Matthias Legend and Reality" are splendid essays. Kubinyi does not decide the centuries-old debate whether the king's "western" policies were mere illusions chasing the *fata morgana* of imperial greatness or a realistic assessment of the country's inability to resist the Ottomans alone, but points out that even if the Corvinian's "empire" collapsed at his death, "[f]or more than three decades, Matthias upheld the reputation of the country, while establishing a name for himself as a patron of the arts, literature and science. It is thanks to him that Hungary remained a major European power until 1526 [the defeat at Mohács]." It is a pity that the translator (or publisher) did not bother to consult with historians: many a technical term is poorly rendered or misleading, names are inconsistently translated and so on. For example, to call the Master of the Doorkeepers (in fact the *Hofmeister*) a "master of the janitors" sounds a bit strange for the reader of today. And there are many more.

Finally, the catalogue. The exhibition was presented on these pages\* in detail. In this case, the catalogue contains more than what the exhibition was able to show. In fact—as is often the case of such books nowadays—it is and will remain for some time the best handbook on the age. It is hardly possible to summarise all the new findings and assessments presented in the introductory eleven major articles and the many, many shorter ones on the Hunyadi family, the Corvinian court, the reconstructions of the king's itinerary and the residences, the relationships between late-Gothic and Renaissance elements in art and architecture, and much more. Special emphasis has been given to the Central European context of the king and his country, the Romanian family background, Matthias's connections to Moravia, Silesia and, of course, Italy, and so on. That this catalogue was published (also in English) in time for the exhibition and the international conferences is an extra bonus; catalogues often come out too late for consulting together with the exhibits. The generous support from the sponsors of the "Renaissance Year 2008" was in this case well spent. ♣

\* ■ Terézia Kerny: "The Renaissance—Four Times Over. Exhibitions Commemorating Matthias's Accession to the Throne". *The Hungarian Quarterly* 190 (Volume 49, Summer 2008), pp. 79–90.

Ignác Romsics  
Fateful Years

Mária Ormos: *Hungary in the Age of the Two World Wars 1914–1945*. Social Science Monographs, Boulder, Colorado. Atlantic Research and Publications, Inc. Highland Lakes, New Jersey, 2007, Distributed by Columbia University Press, New York, 567 pp.

**M**ária Ormos, one of the most prolific of the Hungarian historians writing today, is familiar to readers both at home and abroad for her books on the history of Europe in the first half of the twentieth century. Her first major work, published in 1969, was a detailed study of French foreign policy as it concerned Eastern Europe between 1931 and 1936; the most recent, which came out last year, deals with German history from 1871 to 1990. The best-known and most significant of the numerous other works she has published in the intervening years are her analyses of the political regimes and international relations of the interwar years, and her biographies of Hitler and Mussolini, which have run to several editions.

Another recurrent focus of her attention has been the Horthy era. Her very first book, which came out in 1964, tells the full story of how the Hungarian state obtained a substantial loan from the League of Nations in 1924. One of her

latest, published in 2004, discussed the Hungarian repercussions of the great depression of 1929–1933. Interwar Hungary is the setting of her *Padovától Trianonig* (From Padua to Trianon, 1983), an illuminating study—based principally on French archival material—of the diplomatic background of the negotiations that led to the signing of the Treaty of Trianon by Hungary and the Allies on 4 June 1920, as well as of her two-volume biography of Miklós Kozma, a key figure of this period (2000).

In the book under review Mária Ormos sums up much of her previous findings on Hungarian history from 1914 to 1945. Her focus is on politics and ideology: in other words, she shows how Hungarian foreign and domestic policy developed over the period, along with the doctrinal issues behind some of the major steps. She also discusses the most important economic, social and intellectual developments of these years, though admittedly in less detail.

---

Ignác Romsics

is Professor of Modern History at Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest. His books in English include *Hungary in the Twentieth Century* (Budapest: Corvina, 1999), *Dismantling of Historic Hungary* (Boulder, Co: Columbia University Press, 2002) and *From Dictatorship to Democracy* (Boulder, Co.: Columbia University Press, 2008), reviewed by Géza Jeszenszky on pp. 136–139 of this issue.

The story is told in strict chronological order. Thus, her presentation of Hungary's role in the First World War is followed by the two revolutions of 1918–19, and those in turn by the 1919 counter-revolution. The next chapter is devoted to István Bethlen, prime minister from 1921 to 1931, ten years which Ormos, like many other historians, considers to be a period of stabilisation and consolidation. That spell of relative tranquillity came to an end with the Great Depression of 1929–1933. There followed a period, stretching over roughly the whole of the 1930s, to which Ormos gives the chapter heading "Perilous Experiments". Next comes the part that Hungary played in the Second World War: three chapters, indicating both the importance of the subject matter and the focus of Ormos's own interest.

Twenty-one contemporary sources—documents and texts—are appended to the narrative: notably party manifestos and diplomatic treaties, laws and government decrees. Several of these texts appear here for the first time in English translation. There is also a detailed bibliography. The publication of the essential sources and listing of the literature consulted are all the more welcome as Ormos gives no footnotes identifying her sources. The notes at the ends of the individual chapters merely gloss the text.

Mária Ormos does not take sides in the old dispute about whether the dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy was inevitable or not, and to what extent internal and external factors played a part in it. She does suggest that "Empires [...] are bound after a longer or shorter phase of splendor to vanish without trace" (p. 4), but she chooses not to be more specific,

merely noting that she considers defeat in war to be one fundamental reason for such demise. She also considers this to be a major factor in the break-up of historical Hungary:

All things considered, the Hungarians had a role in producing what has come to be known as the Peace Treaty of Trianon mainly through their past and their distant past. The events of 1914–1919 influenced their destiny only by presenting them with a challenge. Hungary was tried and condemned for geopolitical reasons to do with national communities and power politics. The military defeat provided the chance to impose the sentence. (p. 58)

Another classical point of dispute is how to characterize Hungary's interwar political system. Hungarian historians writing in the fifties, sixties and indeed, most of the seventies—for reasons not unrelated to the political expectations of the times—labelled the Horthy regime as fascist, or at least fascistoid, and almost invariably juxtaposed the adjectives "counter-revolutionary" and "dictatorial". Ormos takes strong exception to this old practice. As she points out, in a country where Parliament was sitting without interruption, where regular elections were held, and in which all political groupings, the Communist Party excepted, were allowed to run for office, none of these terms are justified. She is more lenient when it comes to the term "authoritarian", which certain Hungarian historians started using in the 1980s:

...if it is taken to be a system that seeks to have its subjects behave with respect for their superiors and the state, and consistently restricts the opposition's conduct, the concept appears useful in every regard in social terms, and well worth considering in terms of the state as well. (pp. 111–112)

In connection with Hungary's 1941 entry as an active combatant into the Second World War, Mária Ormos sticks to the "traditional" position. The aircraft which, on 26 June of that year, carried out an aerial bombardment of the town of Kassa (Košice, Slovakia), which had been re-annexed to Hungary under the First Vienna Award in late 1938, were never, either at that time or subsequently, convincingly identified; but, proceeding on the principle of *cui bono*, the attack is generally put down to a provocation by the Hungarian and German military rather than to a decision on Moscow's part, as was claimed at the time. As Romsics sees it, "The likeliest explanation is that certain local and German personages were involved" (p. 383). As for the subsequent fateful decision to enter the war, she concurs, in line with what is known about the facts, in attributing a key role to General Henrik Werth, Chief of the General Staff, in persuading Prime Minister László Bárdossy and the Regent, Miklós Horthy, to declare war on the Soviet Union. By the terms of the Constitution, Horthy had the last word, but his decision was confirmed by the cabinet and also by Parliament. There was no infraction of the law by any member of Hungary's political élite in June 1941, but unquestionably, several individuals played a part in making this flawed decision.

The situation was much the same after the German occupation of Hungary on 19 March 1944. Although an SS Sonder-

kommando led by Adolf Eichmann was responsible, at the highest level, for starting the deportation of Hungary's Jews, it was Hungary's administrative machinery, under the command of Hungarian government authorities, that carried it out. The non-Jewish population was generally passive in its attitude, and the Regent himself viewed the unfolding tragedy for very nearly three months without lifting a finger. Only at the end of June did he stir from his passivity and take steps to order a halt to the deportations. When he did, his intervention had a decisive role in saving a large proportion of the Jewry of Budapest from being sent to the Nazi death camps.

The title of the book's final chapter, "Two Occupiers, Two Governments", shows that Mária Ormos sees no substantial difference, from the point of view of Hungarian sovereignty, between the German occupation that began in March 1944 and the Soviet "liberation" that occurred over the late autumn of 1944 and the winter and early spring of 1945. In both cases, it was a question of military action by a foreign power that restricted the country's freedom of action to the minimum, the only difference being that whereas the German occupation lasted no more than a year, the Soviet one persisted for very nearly half a century.

All things considered, the book offers a good picture of where Hungarian thinking on the history of the interwar years stands today. 🍷

Géza Jeszenszky

# The First Long Decade

Ignác Romsics: *From Dictatorship to Democracy. The Birth of the Third Hungarian Republic 1988–2001*. East European Monographs, No. DCCXXII. Social Science Monographs, Boulder, Colorado. Atlantic Research and Publications, Inc. Highland Lakes, New Jersey, 2007. Distributed by Columbia University Press, New York. vii + 471 pp.

**W**hy is it proper to have many writings, talks, events on the 20th anniversary of the collapse of Communism in Central Europe? The answer can be brief: it ended the postwar period known as the Cold War.

The sudden collapse of Communism in 1989 was the third major turning point in the 20th century after 1919 and 1945. Both world wars started, at least concretely, in Central Europe, in the zone between Western Europe and the Russian heartland. After Sarajevo and Danzig/Gdańsk it was again what happened in the fault line between Eastern and Western Europe that had worldwide repercussions. Two nations, the Poles and the Hungarians were the pioneers in overturning the Communist dominoes; their peaceful dismantling of the one-party dictatorship, and Hungary facilitating the escape of so many East Germans prompted first the so-called German Democratic Republic, then the

Czechs to follow the example, while the year ended in the dramatic and violent overthrow of that most distasteful tyrannous boss, Ceaușescu of Romania. The process continued in the more gradual political transformation of Bulgaria and Albania, and was crowned in the voluntary dissolution of the Soviet State (that involuntary union) at the end of 1991. Contrary to Marx's predictions it was not the state that withered away, but Marxist communism.

While the march to victory of Solidarity in Poland is well documented, very little is available in English on the peaceful regime change, the negotiated revolution in Hungary. *The Lawful Revolution in Hungary, 1989–94*, edited by Béla K. Király and András Bozóki (Boulder, Colorado, 1995), also in the present series, was a collection of essays by many authors, most of whom stood close to the then governing coalition, and the result was a rather one-sided picture.

---

*Géza Jeszenszky,*

*a historian, who teaches at the Corvinus University of Budapest, was Foreign Minister of Hungary in the first non-communist government (1990–94) and Ambassador to the United States of America in 1998–2002. He is the author of numerous books on history and foreign policy, most recently Post-Communist Europe and Its National/Ethnic Problems (Budapest: Kairosz, 2009).*

Ignác Romsics, one of the leading Hungarian historians, and a prolific one, was the first to produce a comprehensive account in Hungarian: *Volt egyszer egy rendszerváltás* (Once Upon a Time There Was a Regime Change, Budapest, 2003). Originally it was meant as an explanatory text to 200 photos taken by Imre Prohászka illustrating those crucial years (not reproduced in the English version), but Romsics took his task very seriously and wrote a full, researched history. The book reviewed here is its practically unrevised English version, with the addition of eleven important, well-selected documents.

The English title is somewhat misleading concerning the period covered: Romsics gives a succinct and balanced account of the external and internal antecedents going back to the 1960s, then in three chapters he covers the three crucial years of the transition (1988–1991), stopping there. Even after twenty years the process, however, is not completely over. The eight-page long Epilogue, which summarises the following ten years, provides little more than a Wikipedia entry, so the time-frame indicated in the title should have been 1988–1990.

Admittedly it is difficult for a historian to write on the times he lived through; but to try to present a detached assessment of such a radical transformation as the Hungarian one, in the course of which not only the body politic, but the whole of society became deeply polarised, required much circumspection. Romsics deserves credit for the attempt; it was inevitable

that every side, every participant, including this reviewer, saw some of the events differently. For the sake of objectivity the book had to be descriptive rather than analytical. Its foremost merit is the detailed, factual account of the political, social and economic events of three crucial years, 1988 to 1990.

The road to 1989 is not only recorded but also explained. Still, Romsics has not done much to provide a resolution to the recent heated debates concerning Hungary's regime change. Starting from the fact that in the last seven years Hungary has been run (many would say mismanaged) by former, relatively high-ranking Communists, a section of the population thinks that the changes were only superficial, not genuine, but premeditated by the old guard, or misdirected by the first government led by József Antall. (A rather ridiculous charge is that Prime Minister Antall was "sent," or invented by the old *nomenclatura*.)<sup>1</sup> Though only indirectly, Romsics shows how misplaced such accusations are. A more valid question is how and why many former Communists (both prominent and ordinary ones) became very rich during the transition years. But the answer should not be sought in the present work, as the enbourgeoisement took place later, mainly after the 1994 change of government, when Gyula Horn, the last Communist foreign minister was prime minister. Anyhow the book describes only the beginnings of the process of privatisation, showing that the government tried hard to prevent fraud,

1 ■ If anybody thinks that the charge may contain at least an element of truth, he or she should urgently read János M. Rainer's book on how Antall and his family were an object of extensive surveillance, employing agents and informers from the Communist takeover until the collapse of the regime in 1989: *Jelentések hálójában. Antall József és az állambiztonság emberei 1957–1989* [In a Web of Reports. József Antall and the Shattered Mirrors of State Security Men]. Budapest: 1956-os Intézet, 2008. (A review of the book is forthcoming in the Autumn 2009 issue of this journal. Ed.'s note.)

corruption and manoeuvres that would help only the members of the former political class; the aim was to further the creation of a strong middle class, based on small and medium-sized enterprises. The role played in the privatisation process by foreign capital was largely outside the scope of the present work. The aim of Romsics was not to explain the consequences, the results of the great transformation, he simply wanted to tell how an apparently strong and relatively popular one-party authoritarian state with an increasingly inefficient command economy transformed itself into a well-functioning multi-party democracy together with the appurtenances of a market economy—without violence, bloodshed, indeed without even a punch on the nose.

The best part of the book shows how two opposition movements emerged in the 1980s, first coming closer to each other, but splitting on the eve of victory, to become bitter rivals up to the present. (Their differing social and political background should have been given more emphasis.) I find the term applied to the non-socialist camp somewhat unfortunate. It is certainly difficult to translate the term "*népi-nemzeti*," (literally meaning "attached to the people and the nation"), but calling a major Hungarian intellectual-political tradition "populist-nationalist" is in the opinion of this reviewer unfair and misleading. Towards the end of the 1980s, mainly but not exclusively under the influence of Gorbachev's policies, the two wings opposed to "the system" were joined by "the reform-Communists." (Some of them, like Pozsgay, must have been

genuine converts, but the vast majority of party members were merely pragmatists seeking an easier life, who now jumped on the bandwagon of democracy.) The meeting of the three groups, encouraged by the international environment, led to an almost uniquely peaceful and lawful transformation.

Many of the important details related by Romsics are little known even to well-informed Hungarians (e.g. that the last Communist boss, Károly Grósz, was really planning a *coup* in late 1988, or that in October 1989 the newly formed Socialist Party was more popular than the combined opposition), and it is enlightening to learn that with the radically transformed Constitution and fundamental laws passed in late 1989 Hungary returned to the parliamentary system founded in 1848–1849 and modified in 1946 (p. 214).

The reviewer, who was the foreign minister of the Antall government, understandably differs from the author's presentation in a number of cases. The most important: the account of the so-called "Pan-European Picnic" of August 19, 1989 states that the Hungarian authorities deliberately prepared the escape of 6–800 East Germans. András Oplatka's researches<sup>2</sup>, however, do not confirm that. It was the common sense of the local border guards which prevented the stampede of the escapees ending in bloodshed. What is certain, however, that the Picnic and its huge publicity prompted tens of thousands of East German citizens to rush to Hungary, and that led to the decision of the Hungarian government to open the border for them on September

2 ■ András Oplatka, *Egy döntés története* [The Story of a Decision]. Budapest: Helikon, 2008. 166–182. The title of the German original: *Die Öffnung des Eisernen Vorhangs in Ungarn Anfang September*. Wien: Paul Zsolnay Verlag, 2008.

11. That made the existence of the Berlin Wall superfluous, and its opening on November 9 brought about the collapse of the East German State and indeed the collapse of communism in Europe. Romsics falls short of stating that, but his account, too, suggests it.

The conduct of Hungary during the growing tension within Yugoslavia in 1990–91 was more of regional importance. Romsics discusses Prime Minister Antall's statement, namely that "the right of nations to self-determination cannot be treated and interpreted selectively," and the reactions to Hungary's selling of a small consignment of assault rifles for the Zagreb police in September 1990 more in line with the interpretation of the Hungarian opposition of the time than with the government's actual conduct. I am convinced that the Belgrade authorities exploited or

even provoked the whole incident. My forthcoming book will have much to say on that. What I really cannot understand, however, is how Romsics could credit Havel and his foreign minister with taking the initiative over the regional cooperation including Poland, Czechoslovakia and Hungary, later named "Visegrád" (after the location of the first, 1991 summit) when it was definitely Antall who was the author of the scheme. Of course, solidarity between Central European anti-Communists was an important feature of the 1980s, and the very concept had many antecedents from Kossuth's proposal for a "Danubian Confederation" in 1862 to Oszkár Jászi's "United States of the Danube" in 1918. It is fortunate that by the twentieth anniversary of *annus mirabilis* a major English-language book on Hungary's transition should be available. ♪

## New English Titles

from

Corvina  Books

CORVINA

### ZSOLNAI CERAMICS

A Guide for Collectors by Éva Csenkey, Éva Hárs, Árpád Weiler  
translated by Michael Kando with 218 reproductions in colour



### MARKÓ

The Life and Work of the Artist Károly Markó (1791–1860)  
by Gabriella Szvoboda Dománszky



### IVÁNYI-GRÜNWARD

The Life and Work of the Artist Béla Iványi-Grünwald (1867–1940)  
by László Szabó

Mail orders to:

Corvina Books, Postbox 108, Budapest 4. 1364

Fax orders: (36-1) 318 4410

E-mail orders: [corvina@t-online.hu](mailto:corvina@t-online.hu)

Paul Griffiths

## Coming in from the Cold

Rachel Beckles Willson: *Ligeti, Kurtág, and Hungarian Music during the Cold War* (Cambridge University Press, 2007), 300 pp.

The title alone says something of why this book is important, both composers having been generally regarded hitherto as isolated individuals, expressing themselves despite the very context here invoked. Kurtág's reputation outside Hungary, not made until the Cold War was almost over, located him, if retrospectively, as a dissident. As for Ligeti, even though he eventually published many works from his decade as a professional composer in Budapest, and even though he continued to set Hungarian texts in pieces as late as *Síppal, dobbal, nádihegedűvel* (With Pipes, Drums, Fiddles, 2000), his background has most often been ignored, or else viewed negatively. Hungary was somewhere to leave. Beckles Willson contrariwise invites us to wonder how much he really did so—how much he remained a Hungarian in spirit, shaped not only by the influence of Bartók but also by having been part of Hungarian music during the Cold War. She also shows how Kurtág's

independence was established not by the latterday western mind but within Hungary, within a culture that had a place ready for the resistant genius—a culture, too, not always in opposition to the Soviet aesthetics foisted on it.

To take an example from early in the book, it is illuminating to discover how the elevation of Bartók's most straightforwardly diatonic works, such as the Concerto for Orchestra, was promoted by Bence Szabolcsi, Antal Molnár and other opinion formers in the immediate post-war years, before the local institution of socialist realism. We even have a note from Kodály saying he agreed with Andrey Zhdanov's attack on 'formalism' in music. It was easy to simplify Bartók's history as one of contradicting an Austro-German hegemony being continued in Schoenberg and his politics as robustly socialist. A strong strain in Hungary's recent past, and not only in its increasingly Soviet-dominated present, encouraged composers to seek their models in folksong,

---

**Paul Griffiths**

is the author of books on Stravinsky, Bartók, Ligeti and the string quartet as well as *The Penguin Companion to Classical Music* (2004), *A Concise History of Western Music* (Cambridge University Press, 2006) and *The New Penguin Dictionary of Music* (2007).

their ideals in classical simplicity and their aims in engaging with the whole musical nation. One begins to understand why not just cynicism or constraint might have urged the infant Hungarian Musicians' Union to hold a mourning ceremony in response to Stalin's death—or Kurtág to write Soviet-style mass choruses including "Üdvözlő ének Sztálinhoz" (Greeting Song to Stalin).

No doubt in response to widespread conceptions of Kurtág as an outsider, Beckles Willson stresses his distinctly insider status during this pre-1956 period, in explicit contrast with Ligeti's position. The younger composer's *Korean Cantata*, expressing Hungarian partisanship in one of the Cold War's test conflicts, "was far more in tune with concerns of the time" than the *Cantata for a Youth Festival* that Ligeti had written at roughly the same age, and two instrumental works of 1953–4 reveal another disparity, Kurtág's Viola Concerto being praised by senior colleagues and in the press while Ligeti's First String Quartet remained unheard. Without quite saying so, Beckles Willson suggests that Sándor Veress's emigration in 1949 may have given Ligeti, who had studied with Veress, the idea his future would lie abroad. Her illuminating reading of "Éjszaka" (Night) and "Reggel" (Morning), two choral settings of Sándor Weöres poems he made in 1955, finds him packing his creative bags.

After 1956, of course, everything was different. According to Beckles Willson: "Kurtág became strongly critical of the Soviet regime only at the time of the 1956 revolution, and became deeply self-critical thereafter in consequence"—though this remark, curiously relegated to a footnote, is somewhat countered by evidence that Kurtág's sense of his inferiority to Ligeti went back to the beginning of their friend-

ship. In any event, after visiting Ligeti in Cologne in 1958, Kurtág felt himself almost hopelessly behind. Beckles Willson quotes a touching letter to Ligeti in which Kurtág says he wants to show his friend his new quartet pieces (to be published as his Op.1) even though "[y]ou certainly won't like them" and even though "I think it will be a long time before I am capable of writing an acceptable piece of music", whereas "I am not anxious about your future".

In this book, however, we find the two composers moving in tandem, though so widely separated. (There seems to have been no meeting between 1958 and 1970, when Ligeti made his first return visit to Budapest, and no correspondence survives other than the single letter just quoted.) Beckles Willson comments on their shared sense of music as speech and their common recourse, though both Jewish, to Christian texts for their first post-1956 essays in word-setting: Ligeti's Requiem and Kurtág's *Bornemisza Péter mondásai* (The Sayings of Péter Bornemisza), two works on which she has revealing things to say—not least in placing Ligeti's Requiem against (or within) the hellfire of Mann's *Doktor Faustus*, which, as she demonstrates, gave Hungarians a paradigm of asocial composition. Her thorough acquaintance with Hungarian cultural and political life also allows her to make fascinating connections between Kurtág's art and that of his poet friends, notably János Pilinszky and Dezső Tandori. She also points out that his weightier works (*Microludes* is the example addressed), as much as his *Játékok*, have the practice of teaching written into them.

When she reaches the 1970s and 1980s, she finds the two composers almost crossing over, Kurtág becoming an international figure (both in setting

Russian and German texts and in gaining a commission from Pierre Boulez) just as Ligeti was finding a place for himself in the new Hungary, even if he went back rarely (the author refers to a "third official visit" in 1983 but not to later invitations or to any informal stays). At the same time, Ligeti was admitting his musical Hungarianness, not just in releasing more and more of his early compositions but also in introducing, or reintroducing, "Bulgarian" metres and fully characterised modal melodies, and in once again setting Hungarian texts (first in the *Magyar etűdök* of 1983, which, in drawing on poems by Weöres to be sung by a multi-part choir, seem to answer the leavetaking gesture of the 1955 pieces). As this book amply indicates, however, he

had been there all along. Beckles Willson finds ways in which even so ostensibly radical a work as *Atmosphères* has trails, poetic and technical, leading back into Bartók and Hungary. And movingly, towards the end of her book, she intimates connections between the piano concertos both Ligeti and Kurtág completed in 1988.

The ending, though, is not with them but with Peter Eötvös's opera *Three Sisters*, which Beckles Willson reconsiders in the light of *Bluebeard's Castle*, reminding us of the persistence of national narratives and of the presence of others—Járdányi and Szervánszky, Durkó and Szöllősy, Vidovszky and Jeney, and many more who appear in these pages—behind the commanding dioscuri. ❧

## New English Titles

from

Corvina



Books

### **TIRESIAS'S CONFESSION** by András Gerevich

Poetry translated by Thomas Cooper, David Hill, George Szirtes, Christopher Whyte and Peter Zollman

### **LADIES DAY** by Gyula Krúdy

A novel translated by John Batki

### **MORE ONE MINUTE STORIES** by István Örkény

Selected and translated by Judith Sollosy

Introduced by Péter Esterházy

### **COLOURS AND YEARS** by Margit Kaffka

A novel translated by George F. Cushing

Mail orders to:

Corvina Books, Postbox 108, Budapest 4. 1364

Fax orders: (36-1) 318 4410

E-mail orders: [corvina@t-online.hu](mailto:corvina@t-online.hu)

# Climbing the Himalayas Twice Over

Klára Muhi in Conversation with Tamás Almási

PUSKÁS: THE FILM

**D**uring the Cold War, Western and Eastern Europe carried hostilities over to the arena of sport. Perhaps its most potent symbol was Ferenc Puskás, a legendary footballer of the 1950s and 1960s, captain of the Golden Team as it is called in Hungary, or 'Mighty Magyars' as they were dubbed by the English newspapers after their famous 6:3 victory over the English national eleven in 1953. The goalscorer of the century was stranded abroad amid the turmoil of the 1956 revolution, but he soon picked up a new career by signing for Real Madrid. Many Hungarians never truly forgave him. Tamás Almási recently brought out a 117-minute documentary about the man known affectionately as 'Öcsi' or 'Kiddo'.

**Klára Muhi:** *You made Puskás in response to a commission, but your personal passion for its subject is palpable—and the film has had a good run at the box office, too.*

**Tamás Almási:** Sometimes I'll be driving back home and find someone sounding their horn, and there are three people I've never seen before hanging out of a car yelling "Your Puskás is great!" No award can beat that. It is rare for me to get asked to do something by a producer. I'm almost ashamed that I didn't get the idea first: I adore football and have played since boyhood. For me, Puskás has been 'Öcsi' ever since.

*Puskás was still alive when you started on the film; your job can hardly have been easy.*

This did complicate things. The invitation came in January 2006, by which time it was impossible to interview him as he was no longer able to speak. Clearly,

---

## Klára Muhi

*is a film critic and member of a research team for media and film pedagogy. She is a part-owner of and co-creator at Inforg Studio, an experimental and avant-garde workshop.*

had I been able to talk to him a very different film would have emerged. Most likely I would never have taken on the job since I'd have had to confront many ethical issues and problems of authenticity. Puskás had been suffering from Alzheimer's, and, although his family and doctors have a different view, the fact is he had already started to show the first signs of it—or at least a severe memory disorder—in the 1970s. It would have been difficult to reconstruct this fantastic career if Puskás had been able to contribute, since he would have barely been able to relate the basic facts.

*The film is very discreet about Puskás's illness.*

We did not include a single shot or archive material that was humiliating or even slightly dubious—and we have plenty such footage. Such as "Öcsi" going with his male nurse to a football stadium named after him. By this time the illness was advanced, and he just dribbles a ball when all of a sudden it bounces away. This helpless man stretches out a foot for it as if he were thirty or forty years younger. As an active football player, it broke my heart. For a long time we kept that clip as a rough cut, but then I dropped it, even though it looked like a possible ending. But then there was another picture which sprang to mind the moment I was asked to do the film. I had heard that Öcsi's hospital room overlooked a football pitch, and my thought was that I could use that as an opening for the film: an elderly man, someone we could not see too clearly but can sense it is him, looking down over some boys playing on the pitch and seeing them as himself when he was a boy. I have around 6,500 digital photographs, and I found a superb one from the 1930s which admittedly doesn't show Puskás himself but, with a bit of careful support from the soundtrack, nevertheless conveys what I would like to get across. I decided to bring back that sequence to close the film as well.

*I didn't get the feeling that the film needed a live interview.*

Extracts from his letters and diaries were a major resource in building up a picture of Puskás's personality. It was no easy matter getting hold of them. Apart from the family, there are three collectors of the correspondence. It was typical of him that he wrote regularly for years on end to people that he did not know; who had nothing to do with money or politics, and, in many cases, not even with sport.

*They are simple, artless, honest letters with a sprinkling of spelling mistakes...*

You must remember that Puskás only finished six years of primary school and most of his adult life was spent abroad where he had no need to write in Hungarian. His writing was copperplate and his thoughts were lucid. He was well aware of his own position.

*Comments in letters to his friends about Hungary's political transition in 1989–90 are thought-provoking.*

"It's good that this change of regime is with us; but why the tearing hurry? Things that we couldn't sort out in 40 years, we now want to in a year of two!"

*But the old regime—which here he seems almost to defend—did him a lot of harm. In 1956, at the end of a successful tour in South America, he was placed in a position where he did not dare return to Hungary. He was banned from playing at the very height of his career.*

Puskás never played politics. The film includes a Party assessment dating from the 1950s which is quoted as saying: "He is unwilling to recognise the leading role of the Soviet Union." But whoever we spoke to—fellow footballers, family members, foreigners or Hungarians—said that it was impossible to talk politics with Öcsi. He just was not responsive. He never beat his breast, claiming that he had been driven away from his homeland. The film includes an interview that he gave to the Italian RAI TV channel in which he was explicitly provoked to say something bad about Hungary. All Öcsi said was that life had changed a lot since he left, and as he was living abroad he was unable to make a judgement about what was happening.

*Maybe he didn't play politics, but he was a beneficiary of politics on many occasions. After all, any career as a sportsman in the Stalinist climate of Rákosi's Hungary in the early fifties was part and parcel of being in the Party's good books. Where did he get that instinctive talent, or indeed the sheer guts, to be able to chat to politicians, who in other contexts were figures of terror, as if he were speaking with his pals?*

Puskás soon became a star among those he associated with. He grew up in Kispest close to the local team's football ground. His father was a football coach, and Puskás's talent already stuck out a mile when he was a boy of six or seven. On top of that, Öcsi was big-hearted by nature. I chose not to put this in the film, but he was prepared to take a sweet from his mouth and offer it to someone else, and he would also divide up a slice of bread and dripping. As a kid he got used to being waited on hand and foot. When he was just 10 or 12, the local tradesmen paid to have a pair of football boots made for him, because just before and after the war, in the 1930s and 1940s, it was the local butcher, shopkeeper and baker who provided the financial backing for many teams. Öcsi would get regular pocket money, and all the while the other lads adored him. A kid like that can have a heart of gold, but he also gets used to being entitled to all that because of his talent. In some way this explains why he was able to deal just as naturally with a figure like Mihály Farkas, the feared Hungarian Minister of Defence, as he did with a Spanish minister or a chimney sweep who lived next door. Puskás simply had no interest in differences of rank.

*It's very odd that he almost unfailingly landed in some dictatorship or other; or is this just the result of some editorial slant that runs through the film?*

There's no denying that when I read through the story of his life this was the first thing that struck me. Puskás was a coach in a huge number of countries; the Arctic and Antarctic must have been just about the only parts of the earth where he had not been employed. After the Rákosi regime in Hungary, his first new home was Franco's Spain, then in the Seventies he moved to Greece when the colonels were in power. Then in Egypt, for instance, Puskás could only



come third with his team because matches were fixed in favour of the teams of the police and the military. And he worked in Pinochet's Chile and Paraguay, which were also dictatorships at the time.

*The most dramatic point in the film, as far as I'm concerned, is in 1956, when Puskás has to kill time in no man's land, in Vienna. He was banned by UEFA from playing competitive football for two years following pressure by the Hungarian authorities. Puskás did not collapse under the strain. On the contrary, he used the time to lose weight and become fully fit, miraculously regaining top form.*

After he emigrated, he told a journalist: "In Hungary I was a celebrated, well-known, pampered star; here I am an anonymous nobody." At 31 years of age,

already overweight and in a foreign country he had to start everything afresh—past his zenith. There really is hardly any parallel for that in the whole of football history.

*Your film doesn't go much into the relationship between Puskás and Hungary after 1956.*

After Puskás left in 1956, they kept quiet about him in Hungary. They virtually air-bushed him out of the national consciousness; they simply ignored his



existence when he was at his peak. Then they very deliberately distorted news about him. One of the bases for that manipulation was an interview in the seventies by András Sugár in which Puskás, who by then had been living outside the country for around 20 years, was undoubtedly speaking Hungarian with a slight accent. On top of which the reporter questioned him about the legendary Hungarian victory at Wembley, and Puskás is heard saying: "That six-... , six-... , anyway, when we beat the English..." The 6-3 score just did not come to mind. It was entirely typical of the situation at the time that before it was broadcast the interview was shown to a member of the Politburo responsible for information. It was given the nod; obviously they knew that it was the best possible counter-propaganda against a former hero who was detested by the Kádár regime. The interview was broadcast and the whole

country loathed Puskás. There was purportedly a commentary that was prepared which claimed that Puskás no longer liked his homeland, had forgotten how to speak Hungarian and so on. So a whole generation grew up only knowing him in that light. For people now in their thirties and forties, who were not alive during the fifties and have no knowledge of the circumstances in which Puskás left the country, the image of Puskás has been subject to major manipulation. "We stayed here, at home, out of a 'thirst for adventure', while he lined his pockets and forgot Hungarian on top of everything." It is a

monstrous lie, but that was what Puskás got from his first appearance on Hungarian TV.

*Puskás and the powers-that-be—it's a big subject that your film has no wish to dwell on.*

In the 1950s, the leadership was very keen to collaborate with Puskás, but he only did so as far as was absolutely necessary. He never kow-towed. Then a period of hushing-up, fabrication and dirt-throwing followed. In the 1980s and 1990s all those who had betrayed him and hated him began licking his

boots. They started using him in really cheap marketing for just about anything. It's a wonder he wasn't asked to do bras as well. Öcsi, of course, was the sort who would go anywhere he was invited—he was 'crazy' like that; straightforward and honest. I have shots that if I had put them in the film would have made the whole country curl up in shame. By the 1990s millionaires would invite the by then very sick Puskás to their places, seat him at the head of the table and carry on with their business as usual around him. I used none of that footage because I had come to understand in the meantime that this would make it a film about Hungary rather than about Puskás. After the film's first screening, some people asked why there was nothing in the film about the time when he worked for the Hungarian Football Association including two years as Manager of the Hungarian Eleven, and I told them that it was because it would have shown us all in a poor light.



*He was buried here in Hungary, but the burial has also been left out of the film.*

And three of our cameras were there to record it. With huge ceremony, he was given a state funeral in St Stephen's Basilica in Budapest on 9 December 2006. The government ordered a national day of mourning, and the funeral was covered live by several TV channels and radio stations. But again, to have used any of that would only have served the cause of mundane politics, and in any case would have turned it into a grim farce.

*Why?*

Well, wasn't it? I try to imagine Puskás himself watching his own funeral, holding a glass of spritzer and just laughing out loud. The name Puskás is the most widely known Hungarian word in the whole world: like it or not, it is a Hungarian hallmark. I was well aware that whatever I might do, it was in some way going to be a film about public perceptions, simply because it was about Puskás. My ambition was to present a fantastic career, which was also a hopeful one; a kind of symbol that this too was possible. The plot of Öcsi Puskás's life could hardly have thickened better if it were a Hollywood script: the hero faced up to the demons of his fate and he won. Many of my films have their heroes facing up to their demons and dying. This in itself might be the subject of a film; after all, this is Hungary's history: the recent past. What is more, where there are no winners to show, or if there are, it turns out within two minutes that the winner is really a loser, or a traitor.

*One thing the film makes clear is that Puskás truly had no wish to leave Hungary, but in the confusion after the 1956 revolution he was essentially stranded outside the country.*

That was how it was. Around 200,000 people left Hungary in 1956—some because they had taken part in the revolution or had worked for the secret police, but some simply because they were fed up with leading a life like that. Öcsi Puskás, on the other hand, had a passport and was abroad with official permission, as a sportsman. For a year and a half he killed time in Vienna, with a two-year ban hanging round his neck. He had serious thoughts of going back to Hungary, but he had been downright humiliated personally, with all sorts of malicious lies spread about him. Newspapers wrote that, as team captain, he had not divided up the money they had been given fairly. His basic sense of honour would never have allowed anything of the sort. Anyway, the other members of the Golden Team had been banned, too, but any who returned home were allowed to play six weeks later. Even so Öcsi, by then a striker for Real Madrid, gave serious thought to taking part in the 1958 World Cup as a player in the Hungarian national team.

*Not all the things you have just said are apparent from the film.*

There were a lot of details that I decided not to include because I wanted to do a portrait of a man of very special qualities, with a god-given talent for sport, rather than to make a simple soccer film centred on him. What I was investigating is what it is that turns an individual into a topos, a byword. There have not been all that many who grew up on Hungarian soil and had qualities that could vie with Puskás; maybe the middleweight boxer Laci Papp, another man with a big heart, who never played politics but who was nevertheless treated very shoddily by politics. Unlike Puskás, Papp was not able to reach the very top—or, to be more precise, he was not allowed to do so even though in 1956, when the rest of the Olympic boxing team stayed outside the country in Melbourne, he was the first to return to the Western Train Terminal in Budapest. It could be that he was not quite as open to all-comers the way Öcsi was; but then, by choosing to live abroad, Puskás was able to learn to accept other cultures and customs. He learned the language of all the teams he was associated with. Once, as they were preparing for their eighty-second trip to Chile or Paraguay or Saudi Arabia or Egypt, his wife Bözsi would ask: "But Öcsi, why there?" He would always say: "Bözsi, there are people there too." And because he was liked everywhere he went, Puskás was perfectly well able to be the most Greek of Hungarians, and also the most Spanish of Hungarians. What is worth keeping in mind is his positive approach. One of the biggest curses of public life in this part of Europe is an unwillingness to believe in ourselves and our successes. There is a general failure to believe we can do anything, but nothing will work without that. Öcsi, by contrast, firmly believed in winning, and he was able to pass on that conviction to the whole team. His openness, his faith in victory, and just the way he was able to sustain his god-given gift and still remain human, because there are many who trip up on that—those are the three things that governed the style, the material and structure of my film.

*Why do we feel Puskás to be so totally Hungarian, despite everything that was done against him in Hungary? He hardly lived in Hungary; was of ethnic German parentage; and, as far as I learnt from the film, his grandchildren don't even speak a word of Hungarian.*

What we really ought to ask ourselves is who can truly call themselves a Hungarian in this once multinational country, where the ethnic ties are so mixed in every family. Not long ago I was abroad watching Hungary play Malta, and the supporters in one section of the ground put up a huge banner which read '100 per cent Hungarian.' I just chuckled to myself: that's exactly why I think Puskás, who was a German, a Spaniard and a Greek as well as being a Hungarian at heart, sets an important example.

*One of the Greeks you interviewed had half-seriously traced Puskás's ancestry to being a cross between Zorba and Odysseus.*

Yes, indeed. Marvellous! That is why those words were put at the end of the film, because it is so typical of how Puskás was seen around the world.

*I haven't got a clue about football, but another thing that struck me was just how magical football was in times gone by. Péter Esterházy has written that an era vanished along with Puskás, because he was not a star in the sense that we now understand it but more of an extraordinary character.*

That sort of football really has had its day. What we have these days is more in the nature of entertainment. Footballers nowadays are more a sort of gladiator. Football has changed a lot since Puskás's time, but, in my view, it is still able to mimic the world and the society around it. I would like to make a documentary specifically about this, using people who have something to say about the relation of football to society and of football to history. The heyday of football really began in the 1930s. Then radio, film and the press all lent a hand to boosting its popularity, which is part of the reason why it had such a powerful impact in Hungary in the 1950s. And don't forget, in the Socialist states it had a big role in building up a country's image.

*Puskás would have provided good material for a feature film. Did you ever consider that? A pure genius gets stuck abroad, outside his own country, at what is truly a historic moment, and the thing that is tragic for him is at one and the same time a stroke of luck.*

I doubt I could make a good feature film from that; I am still too close to the figure to be able to conceptualise him in those terms. I can almost hear him talking. The way I'm sure others do. Anyway, something that would be very close to my heart would be a very Hungarian feature film, with lots of sociology and history, but that would simply be over people's heads elsewhere.

*Are you quite sure that Puskás was the world's greatest footballer of the fifties and sixties, or is that just something Hungarians like to believe?*

I think it would be more accurate to say he was the greatest football personality. After all, there were a number of other real geniuses with a ball: Pelé, di Stefano, Maradona... But as a person and footballer combined Puskás was the greatest, I'm quite sure of that.

*You also have Pelé, the greatest living footballer, saying some words.*

Yes, he contracted to give us twenty minutes, but as it turned out it was difficult to get him to stop after 40 minutes. In fact, Puskás apart, I think he is pretty well the only one who is able to carry off his legendary status with real grace. But Puskás was even greater than Pelé precisely for the reason you have already alluded to: he was able to reach the peak twice over. Climb the Himalayas a second time. To reach the summit twice over, that's almost incredible. 🙏

Erzsébet Bori  
**Puskás Puzzle**

Tamás Almási: *Puskás Hungary*

**I**n *Search of a Legend, The Puskás Secret...* I was trying out (in Hungarian) other possible titles for this film, but they sounded more pompous than the original. And that was before I had even started on English, which gives real scope for over-the-top bombast: Puskas—the Film, The Ultimate Biography, and so on, all promising something definitive, unrivalled, unbeatable.

But then again, why not? After all, it's hardly exaggerating to call Ferenc Puskás the most famous of all Hungarians. I and many other Hungarians have frequently found his is the name that travelled furthest. I had to hear it with my own ears before I believed it. If anyone had asked me to name the "most famous Hungarian", I would have answered Bartók, Kodály, Franz Liszt or, if pushed, John von Neumann, Ferenczi or Georg Lukács. Perhaps Houdini or Béla Lugosi, to include mass culture. But there is nowhere, from Salonika to the Outer Hebrides, from Campobasso to Warsaw, where Puskás's name does not come up once someone asks "And where are you from?" Older people can even rattle off the

name of the entire Golden Team. One has to bow before the weight of the evidence.

Understatement is typical not only of the title but the film as a whole. The definition that the film gives—"Puskás is the most widely recognised Hungarian word"—is even better than calling him the most famous Hungarian. In one interview he has given, the director related that one possible title that was considered was "The Real Puskás", but he rejected that. He felt he had no right to assert that what he was showing was the "real" Puskás.

The restrained, unassuming director in question is Tamás Almási. Unassuming or not, you might think he has something to be immodest about. The most highly regarded Hungarian non-fiction director, he has a background working as a cinematographer in feature films. Born in 1948, it was not until the Nineties that his career really took off, but since then he has established himself as one of Hungary's best-known documentary makers, shooting close to 30 feature-length films since the early Eighties. He has won many awards, and his films are

---

*Erzsébet Bori*

is The Hungarian Quarterly's regular film critic.

seen by hundreds of thousands of viewers. This is despite the paucity of venues and audiences for documentary films in Hungary. A television screening in itself is a huge stroke of luck, and documentaries on DVD are as rare as hen's teeth, but screenings in actual cinemas are nowadays the stuff of dreams. Since the few years that followed Hungary's transition to democracy, when documentary films exploring previously taboo subjects and history's blank spots drew big audiences (see my review in *HQ* 169), Almási's achievement has been unparalleled. *Sejtjeink* (Our Cells, 2002), the film in which he tracked the fates of couples participating in test-tube baby treatments played for weeks in cinemas and has been shown on TV several times, but the more word spread about it, the more people wanted it repeated... *Szívügyem* (A Matter of the Heart) is about the twists in the fate of a man waiting for heart-transplant surgery, while *Szerelem első hallásra* (Love at First Hearing) is an unconventional love story about a totally blind, severely diabetic man, kept alive by an artificial kidney, who had previously wanted to kill himself, because he found his life intolerable and his future absolutely hopeless. He meets a healthy, attractive woman with a successful career and, as the film's title suggests, they fall in love with each other at their first meeting. Three days later, he asks her to marry him, she says 'Yes', gives up her work, the whole life that she has led up till then, and when the man's artificial kidney fails, she donates one of her own. It is a heart-rending story, which leaves hardly a dry eye in the house. A commercial TV channel might devote as much as three whole minutes to it, but Almási made a one-hour film about László and Katalin. The bare facts are told (otherwise it would be impossible to

follow the story), but a true film-maker will not parade his subjects as a curiosity, like a two-headed sheep, to make audiences ask "What comes next?" Almási's aim is precisely the opposite: to acquaint us with the participants' lives, their day-to-day activities, what motivates them, their feelings about the tribulations or successes that they encounter. When you get to your feet at the end, despite any initial misgivings you might have had about sensationalism, you simply feel that they are people like us; there is nothing in the least odd about them. The only thing that is strange, astounding or incredible here is life itself. Almási unfolds the story before our eyes using all the craft, tact and authenticity that are typical of him. It is the two main figures, first and foremost, who speak for themselves, but at times doctors and friends also chime in, because there are some things that Kati and Laci cannot or will not say about themselves. The main location is their village house, but the most dramatic scene is in the Budapest teaching hospital where the life-saving kidney transplant surgery was performed. The operation was a success, but the expected happy ending fails to arrive: the couple's life together underwent its biggest crisis because he, who was in any case completely dependent on his wife, initially couldn't cope with the fact that now he had her to thank for his life as well. Almási builds the film up from what they relate about the fateful moments and apparently insignificant, mundane episodes in such a way that this one hour conjures up whole lives.

If only because large numbers of people were affected, *Valahol otthon lenni* (To Be at Home Somewhere) had a similarly large audience. In this people who were once Hungarians in Transylvania, the

Carpatho-Ukraine or the Vojvodina are now Hungarians in Hungary. They talk about themselves and tell the story of their resettlement, which was in some cases drama-filled and adventurous but in every case a major turning point. No lessons or recipes are drawn, no ready made formulas are provided. The film is about people who were compelled by circumstances to think through and reassess repeatedly something that those born in this country take for granted often not even giving a thought to what it means to be Hungarian. It is the curse of Trianon that many Hungarians simply reject the very idea of a dual identity, be it that of ethnic minorities in Hungary or of ethnic Hungarians left outside the country's borders, who feel committed both to their nation and the region of their birth.

*Az út vége* (At the End of the Road) tells the parallel stories of two young couples, both with two children, who now live in eastern Hungary. The opportunities on offer to them here are at best slim pickings: choices made under force of necessity. One couple considers keeping the family together the top priority; they stay, trying whatever they can, and even after many years can still muster a patient and cheerful smile, though where they get the inner strength is hard to understand. The other couple, Ilona and Tibor, have a bold plan. Leaving the children with the grandparents, they take themselves off to the IBM factory in Székesfehérvár in Central Hungary. It may be accepted in America, but in Hungary it is still uncommon for an entire family to pack their bags and move in search of work. Hungarians are not keen to move, there's no denying it, but my view is that this is due not so much to a lack of enterprise as to the superhumanly daunting prospects

of obtaining new housing. In the Kádár era, a veritable army of people commuted a long distance to make a living, and a family could indeed do well as a result. But they had no chance to build a new life in the city. An average pay packet nowadays is simply not enough to set up a new home or pay for long-distance commuting. So what Ilona and Tibor took on was not really typical of the new times. The young woman moved to a farmstead with no running water or electricity, peeling onions for local entrepreneurs, whereas at the multinational firm she donned spotless white overcoats and in a sterile environment that looked like a set from a sci-fi film set she made computer subassemblies under a microscope. The only shadow is her pining for her children. The couple manage to get income support to rent a flat where the family can be reunited, but they are uncomfortable with life in the high-rise apartment block, they miss pottering about in the garden. What emerges in the end, yet again, is that there is no path between the two worlds: an income that is good by Hungarian standards, much more than incomes in Szabolcs County in the north-eastern tip of the country, is not enough to pay to live in the west of the country. When IBM starts to lay off, well before closing down completely, the family is back to square one, working for a poultry processing plant, though they do move into a smart new house. "It looks like this is the end of the road," says Ilona wryly.

Made not unlike a feature film, the 58-minute documentary threw sharp light on many of the problems that Hungary, then on the point of entering the European Union, was grappling with, not least the yawning gap between East and West. Hungary's transition to democracy and

freer markets may have created “unlimited opportunities” for some, but for most that was more a narrowing of opportunities.

It may not be able to vie with the foregoing films in either the number of viewers or in popularity, but the *Ózd* series (from 1992 onwards) is still a crucial historical document. It is an authentic, human-centred chronicle of the radical economic transformation and paradigm change that Hungary underwent in the early nineties. It was only in the second half of the eighties that the process of moving into a post-industrial age, which the West had already gone through years, if not decades, before, got under way in Hungary. A process that was accompanied by the running down of heavy industry, the closure of factories and mines that had guaranteed employment to the masses. It also meant the relocation of production to the Third World, where raw materials and manpower were cheaper, the decline of entire regions and flourishing cities and their disintegration into heaps of rusting metal, and with it a multitude of individual human tragedies. The Communist system was only able to delay this inevitable global process, which was already under way long before the end of the system and was over by the mid-nineties. Ózd had once been a mere village in north-eastern Hungary, where prosperity was based on nearby coal mines. Iron-smelting, with its critical dependence on readily accessible coal, multiplied the population by ten, the small village grew into a municipality and one of the citadels of socialist heavy industry in Hungary. Almási began shooting in Ózd in 1987, when the iron works there employed over ten thousand men and no one had an inkling of the dimensions of the

shock that would hit the area a few years later. However, management were aware by then that the plant was operating at a loss and thus re-organisation and slimming were on the cards. Unrest was also rife among the workers themselves, as fears grew about future prospects. Almási documented the successive stages in the inevitable course of events at a site he has returned to regularly ever since, recording the hopes and the crushing disappointments, both the acts of wanton criminality and the totally legal acts of shameless adventurers and politicians who sealed the fates of thousands; the heroic efforts that were made to keep the industry alive, and eventually the growing sense of doom and devastation. The titles given to the individual films—*Szorításban* (In a Vice), *Lassítás* (Slowdown), *Acélkapocs* (Steel Clamp), *Meddő* (Barren), *Tehetetlenül* (Helplessly)—are eloquent in themselves. The ten parts of *Ózd* that have been released to date make up an unrivalled historical document whose importance will grow as time passes.

It was with this background, then, that Tamás Almási found himself being invited to make a film about Puskás. Ferenc Puskás himself was still alive when work got under way, though by then he was seriously ill and unable to communicate, and his closest relatives, too, refused to be filmed (he died on 17th November 2006). The 100-minute film draws on a large archive of material that is available, both on film and in the form of documents, in every part of the world, as Puskás appeared as a player or manager in scores of countries around the globe, on every continent. This made the greatest challenge: how to order and balance all material without squeezing out Puskás himself. Another difficulty was that the film was meant for an international audience

from the start. Puskás may be a recognised figure all over the globe, but different countries and different age-groups have rather divergent views about, for instance, conditions in Hungary during the forties and fifties, the particular place that sport occupied and its role in the Communist system, whereas the (incomplete) picture that Hungarian viewers have of Puskás's activities, of his life outside the country is necessarily distorted by the political propaganda of the time. Putting together the portrait of Ferenc Puskás must have been like assembling a jigsaw puzzle from

thousands of pieces scattered around the world. These were not just in different sports clubs, archives and the stories of relatives, fellow players and friends, but also in the collective memories of millions.

Yet this film managed it. It managed to respect what a varied set of people knew, and it adds fresh facts until recently unknown. Like the youngest son of so many folk tales, who started life in poverty, Puskás through his own efforts and skill rose to the very top. Yet even as a famous star, he stayed to the end an eternal boy with a big heart. ♣

## New English Titles

from

Corvina  Books

### **ARTBORÉTUM**

by Mihály Borsos and Gábor Ébli

Art and Nature in a Private Sculpture Garden in Budapest

### **ZICHY**

The Life and Work of the Artist Mihály Zichy (1827–1906)

by Katalin Gellér

### **MARGIT KOVÁCS**

by József Vadas

A Life in Ceramics

### **THE WINES OF HUNGARY**

A Short Insider's Guide

by István Bárány

Mail orders to:

Corvina Books, Postbox 108, Budapest 4. 1364

Fax orders: (36-1) 318 4410

E-mail orders: [corvina@t-online.hu](mailto:corvina@t-online.hu)

Tamás Koltai

## Cults and Mundanities

Euripides: *Orestes* • István Tasnádi: *Fédra Fitness* • Maxim Gorky: *Barbarians* • Pintér Béla Company: *The One Never Returning*

If politics means the business of the city (*polis*), then political theatre is the theatre of public business. But what is public business?

For instance, it is public business if there is a hatred or feud that persists in a community across several generations. *That's why murder moves on to murder / through blood and does not leave alone / the double line of Atreus*—in Euripides' tragedy *Orestes*. The most recent murder was committed by Orestes and Electra, who killed their mother and her lover because they in turn had murdered their father.

In the performance by the National Theatre, we see the siblings, fugitives from justice, cast out in the street. To quote the new translation's contemporary idiom, the police (revenge goddesses called Erynnis) are in "hot pursuit" of them and the jury will vote over their fate. Orestes had been assigned the task of revenge earlier by Apollo. The task: to kill a mother for him. Therefore he has the right to expect the protection of the god. The other arm of justice is the assembly, which guards law and order as well as the

rules of living in a community, and which decides who is guilty. At this assembly it is people like Menelaos who are voting—who dragged the country into war because of his unfaithful wife Helen and who is therefore responsible for the dead.

Who has the right to pass judgment? Who has the right to talk about moral deficit? The gods are untouchable, the politicians are corrupt; out of fear, the "horrible children" are acting like terrorists. (They reminded one critic of the German terrorists of the 1970s: Andreas Baader and Ulrike Meinhof.) The game works out at the expense of the people (the *plebs*), whom—the Argos women's choir—Euripides depicts as deeply indecisive.

As managing director of the National Theatre, this production is also Róbert Alföldi's first as director of a play. The theatre building, criticised ever since its 2002 opening and rightfully so, is a monument to empty self-representation and in this sense suits the drama and performance and its critical depiction of celebrity status. The performance begins with a prelude. The actors deconstruct the play's classical mythology with impro-

---

Tamás Koltai,

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

visations set in some of the theatre's strikingly tasteless lobby areas. Those playing the parts of Orestes and Electra come from the alternative theatre; in their characters they represent opposition to the world of privilege. The siblings, who use contemporary language rather than ancient rhetoric, are rebelling against the fake morals of the state's apparatchiks as well as their identity and upbringing. This hatred of theirs is mixed with passionate self-loathing. In their intense bitterness, the siblings gradually work themselves up into mindless, vengeful hysteria. In the midst of the burnings, their outrage against the city, Apollo appears and, like some popstar, with an entourage from a TV show, raises Helen to divine celebrity status—as she is Zeus' daughter—and marries the hostages to the terrorists. The women's chorus—which at the beginning went up on stage from among us, the audience, and was present throughout the entire play—is, by the end of the performance, finished plucking the bird and cooking the soup. We can go home and have dinner as well.

**T**he National Theatre's performance translates the antique political drama into today's language. Hungarian tailoring of Greek mythology—sewing new garments out of old clothes—is common in theatre. István Tasnádi's play *Fédra Fitness* does not change the story of Phaidra, who is in love with her stepson Hippolytos. (Tasnádi intentionally writes the heroine's name phonetically, according to the rules of Hungarian spelling.) This is the third written version of the play. The first one premiered at the Berlin Schaubühne Contemporary Theatre Festival with a German and Hungarian cast in 2001; the second was a co-production of Krétakör Theatre and the

Stuttgart National Theatre at the Salzburg Festival in 2005 (that was a performance I wrote about in *HQ* 180). The third version of the text was directed by the author himself, who chose for its staging the fitness room of a shopping centre.

Unlike the earlier versions, this performance is a myth-parody. The actors—even the mythical heroes not connected with the literally interpreted plot—talk while working out on exercise benches and machines.

The reason for the setting is that there is no other place for them: no mythology exists that would otherwise convince a contemporary audience. For the ancients, mythology was reality; for us, it is virtuality: cyberspace. Theseus's idiot son—appropriately his name is Minitaur, not Minotaur—walks around in cyber goggles, playing video games, “been circling around the labyrinth for half a year”. If he passes to the second level, a game entitled “Fight with the Amazon” is next, a story which took place “in reality”; or, as one of the actors interprets for Hippolytos: “Your daddy drops your mama.” Hence the mythical story becomes a parody, and the mythical space becomes today's popular setting: the fitness room designed for body building. Cult, as such, is presented as mere body cult: body culture as cultural substitute. Exercise so you can assert yourself! Physical condition and emotional wellness are priorities! Theseus, waking from a coma, immediately starts exercising; for Fédra, they assemble a personalised training plan so she can stay in shape.

The myth parody is also a parody of a way of life, a caricature of cultural and mental degeneration. Here also, celebrities are the unworthy main characters. The world-hero Theseus brags and grumbles just as before falling into a

coma. The dirt-conscious, ultrasensitive, precocious teenager Hippolytos' image of sexuality is that of a teenager who's just reached puberty; his political programme is infantile and stupid, and does not promise much good for the day he steps into his father's place. We also have a cunningly servile yet also macho brigand who supports those in power and a "personal trainer of mental hygiene": that is, a cynical intellectual. It is only the idiotic Minitaur who is acquitted by the author: his reward is a closing monologue resulting from a cleared-up mind. The rhetoric of this speech resembles the visionary accounts of messengers in ancient drama as they relate divine judgments—an apocalyptic vision with the implacability of a tsunami.

**M**axim Gorky's play of a hundred years ago, *Barbarians* depicts the mundane everyday "as it is". This play is not about celebrities, the mentality of the "power elite", but about the life of average people. Engineers arrive in a distant town to build a railroad, but there is little talk about work—although one of them does seem to be fiddling around with some plan for a few minutes—more talk about honey beer, fishing and love. The two men, housed at the finest house in town—one of them young and married, the older a bachelor—do not so much upset their musty surroundings as shed light on it. Their presence works as a catalyst. Their simply being there throws a sharp light on all that is otherwise more or less apparent to everyone living there: domestic violence and desperate love, petty intrigues, lust for power, selfishness, and above all the arsenal of immeasurable emptiness and uselessness. In *Barbarians*, there are no secret relations, everyone knows who com-

mitted suicide because of whom, who reports about whom, which individuals are in love with the beauty trapped in the bad marriage; even the estrangement between the newly arrived engineer and his wife takes place before the public eye.

This is a drama of undisguised emptiness. Although gossip as a way of life is responsible for some conflicts—a young woman even dies when she realises the worthlessness of her love—still nothing really happens. There is no moral to the story, no self-examination, and definitely no catharsis. Here, demythifying does not work, as there is no working myth according to which the level of emptiness might be measured. There is nothing other than the bleak, trapped existence of a life lacking any sense of values.

In the Katona József Theatre's production, director Tamás Ascher lays open the intricacies of how people live together. Within this he uses his multifaceted approach to expose a huge range of emotions and raw nerves. There might be sharper surgeons than him (in fact, there are not many), but he is the most able stage director at dissecting the complexities of living as a social animal. In the way the two engineers on stage serve each other their short pieces of offhand dialogue like two practised table tennis players, there is a sense of the "superiority" of these intellectual outsiders. One of them remains a cynical, drunken bachelor, and is—implausibly—fired up by a romantic young woman. The other—a peasant turned intellectual—makes believe for some time that his blunt manners and honesty are gestures of solidarity, but it turns out this is not so. The seeming manliness and solidarity with which he tries to shield the weak are a façade, mere routine. The hidden bomb

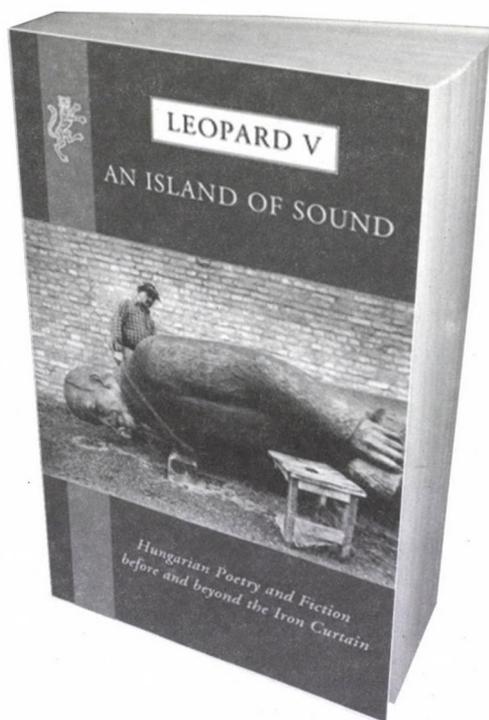
in all this uneventfulness is the young woman who reads romantic novels and desires a love like the ones she reads about. She is vain, provincial, a husband-hater and a man-teasing vamp headed unstoppably towards her fate. Her demise will go unnoticed: everything goes on as if nothing had happened.

**T**he Pintér Béla Company's performance of their play *The One Never Returning* rhymes with this old story almost word for word. The plot takes place today. Here, a four-member team of engineers is off to start working abroad, on a building construction in the imaginary West-Fatalistan (ironic name, its root is in the latin *fatum* meaning fate), which should be set somewhere in the Middle East. They have won a tender and can go and build *something* (exactly what, the play never tells us). Except, according to their contract, only three of the four can travel—Mr. Goodman and Mr. Freeman (speaking names, of course) tell them this in the name of the American customer who ordered the job. Therefore one of them has to stay behind: has to be dropped. It is difficult, however, to inform the one selected for the part of the *loser*; the three start a game of devious manipulation and weave a thread of lies to make him lose heart so they can finally liquidate him. They morally blacken him, smearing his private life, while they themselves are morally much darker than their victim. Finally they succeed and lose their partner without whom they set off to West-Fatalistan to meet their own fate.

Writer and director Béla Pintér's usual, mundanely ironic and slightly surreal style works to the benefit of this production. As always with this company, we see a musical performance. The play begins with the actors singing new lyrics to old tunes—the Russian-Soviet anthem, the International and the working-class marches from the Communist era. The metaphor is clear: we have denied the past but are singing the same song—maybe a little differently, suited to the new needs of the times. The characters are stepping around in their company uniforms like they would during the May Day marches of Communist times; behind them stand the Americans in cowboy hats and boots smoking paper cigars, amazed at the over-zealous enthusiasm of capitalist youth.

The tangled strands of private life remind one of a soap opera. The redness of a suddenly falling red drapery rhymes with the atmosphere of Communist rallies. A father figure is wearing Lenin's mask. It gradually becomes apparent that the title of the play can be interpreted in several ways. At the outset, everyone thinks they have found a never-to-return chance of a great business deal. One of the characters never returns from West-Fatalistan. Finally, many agree with Pintér and company that the never-to-return opportunity of the system change was misused. The once-in-a-lifetime chance to bury a past of political oppression and darkness and finally make the best of freedom and independence was wasted. ❧

An extraordinary literary journey through  
the second half of the twentieth century



AN ISLAND OF SOUND  
*Hungarian Poetry and Fiction  
before and beyond the Iron Curtain*

*Edited by George Szirtes & Miklós Vajda*



THE HARVILL PRESS  
[www.randomhouse.co.uk/harvill](http://www.randomhouse.co.uk/harvill)

*Puskás apart, I think Pelé is pretty well the only one who is able to carry his legendary status with real grace. But Puskás was even greater than Pelé precisely for the reason you have already alluded to: he was able to reach the peak twice over. Climb the Himalayas a second time. Whatever for? To reach the summit twice over, that's almost incredible.*

*From an interview with Tamás Almási, director of the film*

**Puskás Hungary**

*pp. 143–150.*



CURRENT AFFAIRS • HISTORY • DOCUMENTS • FICTION • POETRY • ESSAYS • REPORTAGE • BOOKS & AUTHORS • THEATRE & FILM • MUSIC • PERSONAL



HU ISSN 1217-2545