The Hungarian Quarterly

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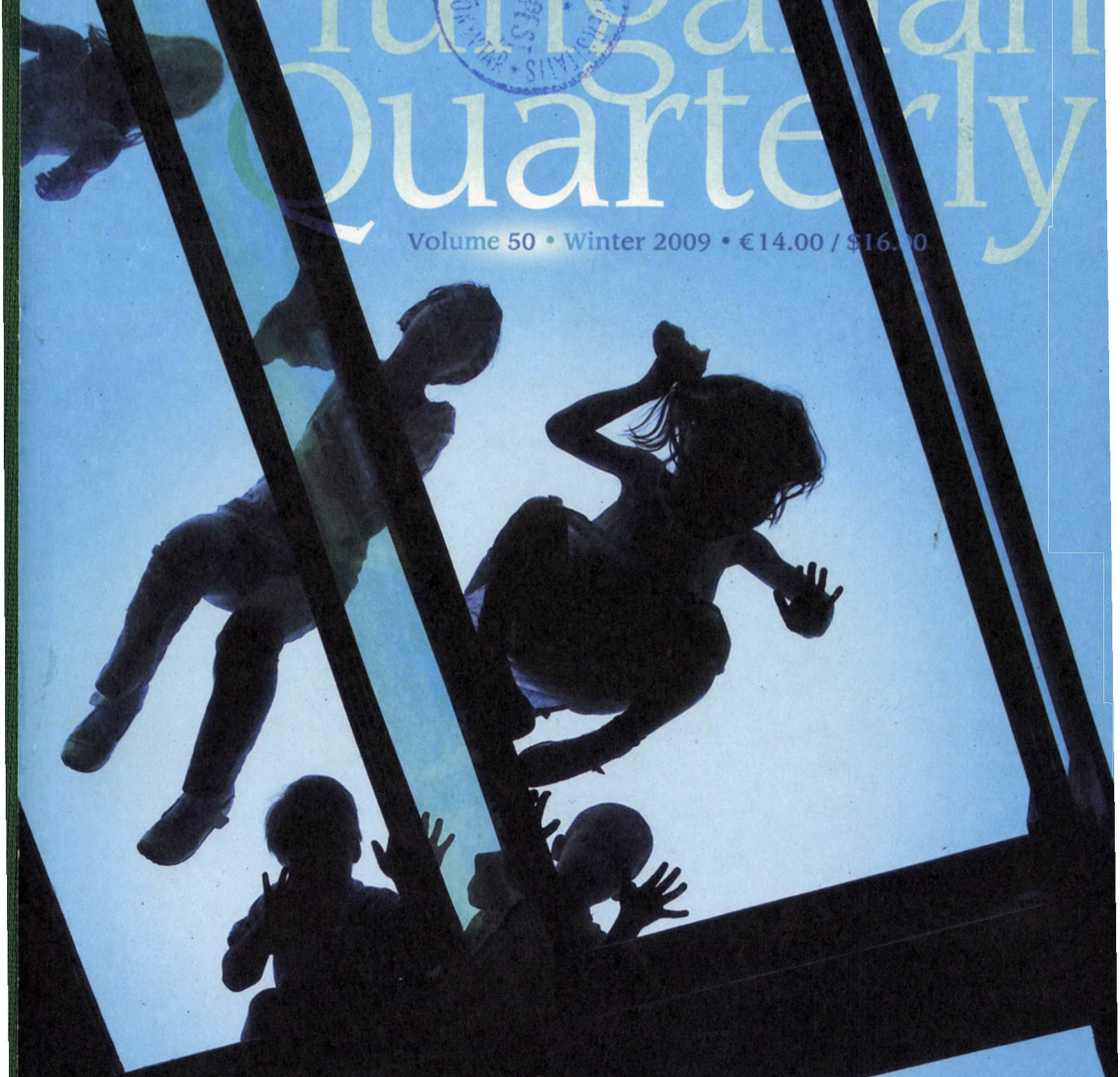

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Tibor Frank

Patronage and Networking

The Society of The Hungarian Quarterly 1935–1944

Now that *The Hungarian Quarterly* celebrates fifty years of publication, it is indeed fitting and proper to remember the prewar predecessor of the journal and look at its roots that go back to the troubled times of Hungarian politics in the mid-1930s.

Former Hungarian Prime Minister Count István Bethlen (1874–1946) gave a series of lectures in Britain in 1933 to be published in London the following year as *The Treaty of Trianon and European Peace.*[1] Bethlen's lectures and book probably prompted the 1934 publication of R.W. Seton-Watson's *History of the Roumanians,* the single most important history of Romania ever published in English. Seton-Watson went as far as to describe Bethlen's ten years' tenure in office (1921–1931) as governance "in intelligent anticipation of Nazi methods."[2]

1 ■ Count Stephen Bethlen, *The Treaty of Trianon and European Peace.* London–New York–Toronto: Longmans, Green and Co., 1934.

2 ■ Tibor Frank, "Editing as Politics: József Balogh and The Hungarian Quarterly," in Tibor Frank, *Ethnicity, Propaganda, Myth-Making. Studies on Hungarian Connections to Britain and America, 1848–1945.* Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1999, p. 265; Count Stephen Bethlen, *The Treaty of Trianon and European Peace, op. cit.*; R. W. Seton-Watson, *A History of the Roumanians. From Roman Times to the Completion of Unity.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1934, quote: R. W. Seton-Watson, *Treaty Revision and the Hungarian Frontiers.* London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1934, p. 59; Ignác Romsics, *István Bethlen: A Great Conservative Statesman of Hungary, 1874–1946.* New York: Columbia University Press, 1995, pp. 312–317.

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This was a far cry from reality for anybody who knew Bethlen's political career and the circumstances that prompted the Hungarian aristocrat, by then out of office, to launch suitable measures to counteract anti-Hungarian, pro-Romanian propaganda. Of Transylvanian origin himself, the former Prime Minister was particularly involved in endeavours to reclaim the lost territories of Hungary and became a staunch advocate of Hungarian revisionism. In Hungary, "Trianon" was the watchword of the entire interwar period and though Bethlen was anything but a Nazi, he did everything he could to reverse the provisions of the Peace Treaty and recreate Greater Hungary.[3]

Stepping down from office, Count Bethlen realized that Hungary's revisionist arguments and claims had not reached the right people in the right form. He realized that Hungary would never succeed through cheap daily propaganda. Bethlen became convinced that the Hungarian arguments, historical, political and cultural, should reach the actual makers and shapers of French and British policy, and reach them in the proper form. After re-starting in 1932 Hungary's pre-World War I *La Revue de Hongrie* as *La Nouvelle Revue de Hongrie,* a quality journal in French,[4] he set out to complete his propaganda campaign in 1934 by planning to launch *The Hungarian Quarterly,* a new Hungarian journal in English and publishing an abridged English version of *Magyar történet* (Hungarian History) by Bálint Hóman and Gyula Szekfű, the leading historians of the era. The ideas Bethlen came up with in the early 1930s intended to convince influential public opinion in the former *Entente* powers such as France and Great Britain that Hungary was a nation with an ancient European culture, with historical ties to both France and the English-speaking world, and with a Christian, constitutional and freedom-loving heritage.

An Anglo-Hungarian Society was first founded in 1930, to be followed in 1935 by The Society of The Hungarian Quarterly.[5] In its early years the SHQ considered many different and ambitious plans. Under their sponsorship, they expected a variety of visitors: British and American politicians, journalists, scholars and artists to come to, and lecture in, Budapest, such as Sir Arnold Wilson MP (for Hitchin since 1933), Frederick Charles Gordon-Lennox (9th Duke of Richmond and 9th Duke of Lennox since 1935), and motor racing promoter, and Sir Josiah Stamp, industrialist, economist, statistician, banker and civil servant. The Society also planned to set up a Hungarian Chair in London with possibly the British historian C. A. Macartney as the professor. A handwritten

3 ■ Bryan Cartledge, *Mihály Károlyi and István Bethlen: Hungary.* London: Haus Publishing, 2009.
4 ■ Mária [Czellérné] Farkas, *A Nouvelle Revue de Hongrie mint kultúraközvetítő folyóirat.* Budapest: Gondolat, 2004; Henri de Montety, "La Nouvelle revue de Hongrie et ses amis français (1932–1944)". Ph.D. Diss. Université Lyon 3 Jean Moulin / Eötvös Loránd Tudományegyetem, 2009.
5 ■ Tibor Frank, "Anglophiles. The 'Anglo-Saxon' Orientation of Hungarian Foreign Policy, 1930s through 1944". *The Hungarian Quarterly,* Vol. 47, Spring 2006, p. 68.

note also mentioned some of the most illustrious Hungarians living in London in the mid-1930s such as the celebrated portrait painter Philip A. de László, the sculptor Zsigmond Kisfaludi Strobl, and the internationally acclaimed film director [Sir] Alexander Korda, with the probable intention to lure these celebrities into their orbit.[6] Even a journal in Italian was among the many plans of The Society of The Hungarian Quarterly.[7] The Society repeatedly attacked the *Danubian News* (1933) and the *Danubian Review* (1934) of the Hungarian Revisionist League which they found counterproductive to the Hungarian cause as it used cheap and simplistic propaganda methods. Plans were made to merge that paper with *The Hungarian Quarterly* then already in the making.[8]

Bethlen took great care to put it about that his arguments originated with the Hungarian ministers in London and Washington, D.C. He asked the two diplomats to support his views regarding *The Hungarian Quarterly* and he got emphatically positive answers. Count László Széchényi, Hungarian Minister to the U.K., expressed Bethlen's views as his own conviction when reporting to Foreign Minister Kálmán Kánya that

> the undeniable interest in the Hungarian cause in the English-speaking world can only be sustained and furthered, the walls of our linguistic isolation can only be broken through, if we call on England and America in their own language [...] we have to find the ways and the financial means to enable us to present our problems to the English-speaking peoples. And I do not think here of the methods of the so-called popular propaganda [...] but rather of a high-quality journal capable of informing the small group of thinkers and the shapers of the fate of the English-speaking nations.[9]

János Pelényi, Minister in Washington, D.C. remembered even in 1940 that "the launching of *The Quarterly* fulfilled my old dream (I alluded to the necessity of such a journal on the occasion of my every Budapest visit) and I was among those who stood at the cradle when it was born..."[10]

Right from the beginning, both the French and the English journal was patronised by their corresponding societies which were umbrella organizations to provide the necessary social, political, and cultural guidance and background on behalf of the Hungarian élite. The societies made it possible for the

6 ■ Meeting of the Society of The Hungarian Quarterly, 3 March 1936, Országos Széchényi Könyvtár Kézirattára [OSzK Kt]: Fond 1/1525/13894.

7 ■ György Ottlik at the SHQ committee meeting, 13 November 1936, OSzK Kt: Fond 1/1525/13896.

8 ■ Minutes of the 2nd committee meeting of the SHQ, 3 January 1936, OSzK Kt: Fond 1/1525/13892.

9 ■ Count László Széchényi to Kálmán Kánya, London, 5 January 1935, OSzK Kt: Fond 1/1525/14041.

10 ■ János Pelényi to Tibor Eckhardt, Washington, D.C. 16 September 1940, OSzK Kt: Fond 1/1525/14056.

editors to do some useful networking, channelling the wide variety of national and international ties and connections into the journals. The Society of The Hungarian Quarterly was indeed a cross section of Anglophile Hungary. In a country where only a tiny minority of the intellectual and political élite spoke English and relatively few people had any personal experience of life in Britain or America, the Society's role was to serve as a governing and advisory body to keep Anglophile Hungarians together and turn them into a more active and more self-conscious group.

As soon as the idea of the English journal first emerged in 1934, József Balogh, the Classical scholar and editor of the Hungarian quality journal *Magyar Szemle,* suggested on 3 July 1934 that "a society exercising patronage should be brought about as a framework of the H[ungarian] Qu[arterly], with a Hungarian, an English and an American section. These societies are in themselves suitable instruments of high quality Hungarian propaganda."[11] It was a year later, on 10 June 1935 that Count István Bethlen suggested "the establishment of a society under the name of a 'Society of The Hungarian Quarterly' to act as the proprietor and patron" of the planned *The Hungarian Quarterly*.[12] The idea of the Society was modelled on a similar body sponsoring *Magyar Szemle* and the Society acting as its mentor organization. Another year later, when the Society was formally established on 7 July 1936, the politically relevant Committee members of the two societies proved to be almost identical, including cabinet minister Bálint Hóman, Béla Imrédy, President of the Hungarian National Bank, Ferenc Chorin and Baron Móric Kornfeld, industrialists and members of the Upper House, Tibor Eckhardt, President of the Independent Smallholders' Party and Gyula Kornis, Deputy-Speaker of Hungarian Parliament and Rector of Pázmány Péter [today Eötvös Loránd] University of Budapest. Both societies were chaired by Count István Bethlen. "Intellectually and organisationally, *The Hungarian Quarterly* is served by the same machinery which has helped both *Magyar Szemle* and the *Nouvelle Revue de Hongrie* to come about and has sustained them", said József Balogh, founding Secretary General of the Society.[13] As a further token of networking, the Society intended to revitalise the Anglo-Hungarian Society in Britain and tried to bring about a close relationship between that association and the Advisory Board of *The Hungarian Quarterly.* This way they hoped to get some influential British patronage for the Advisory Board of the new Budapest journal.[14] An American Advisory Board was also envisaged with important U.S. men of letters such as e.g. Philip Marshall Brown

11 ■ József Balogh, Előadvány [Report], OSzK Kt: Fond 1/1525/14033.

12 ■ Count István Bethlen at the founding assembly of the SHQ, 10 June 1935, Minutes. OSzK Kt: Fond 1/1525/13883.

13 ■ Note by József Balogh on *The Hungarian Quarterly,* Budapest, 8 January 1934. OSzK Kt: Fond 1/1525/14027.

14 ■ Emlékeztető feljegyzés Szászné őméltósága londoni útjára [Aide mémoire for the London trip of Her Excellency Mrs. Zsombor Szász]. Budapest, n.d. OSzK Kt: Fond 1/1525/14054.

of Princeton, Eldon R. James of Harvard, Philip C. Jessup of Columbia Universities, George Creel, head of Woodrow Wilson's famous Committee on Public Information, and Nicholas Roosevelt, former U.S. minister to Hungary and a distant cousin of the President.[15]

In a few years it became evident that the Society could be made a lot more effective if it served as a two-way street between Hungary and Britain, channelling not only Hungarian propaganda into Britain (and to some extent, the United States), but also British propaganda to Hungary. By 1938 leaders of the Society had increasingly seen it as a body "that aimed not only at making Hungary known in England but—albeit (for the time being) within a more modest framework—served the purposes of Anglophile publicity in Hungary as well. In the last season, it organized ten lectures in English in Budapest to this end alone and the success of its work has been shown by the ever growing public attending its lectures this year."[16] A lecture by the British mountaineer Hugh Ruttledge (1884–1961) was attended by some 500 people, that by Sir Ronald Storrs (1881–1955), a writer and official in the British Foreign and Colonial Office, by nearly 400.[17] What's more, some of the British lecturers even went out of Budapest and spoke to an English-speaking audience in the South Hungarian university town of Szeged. Sir Richard Winn Livingstone (1880–1960), President of Corpus Christi College, Oxford visited Szeged in 1938 and spoke of the role of British schools in public life. Quite obviously, in line with the conservative views of its publishers it was Britain that was targeted by The Society of The Hungarian Quarterly in the English-speaking world in the first place. The Society aimed at being the chief vehicle of Hungarian propaganda to Britain. When His Highness the Royal Prince (popularly Archduke) József Ferenc considered the possibility of establishing a new and rival English-Hungarian association in 1938, Count Bethlen raised his voice in an effort to gently oppose the plan. Nevertheless, the Archduke went on with his project.[18]

Founded and presided over by Count István Bethlen, the Society was guided by, and served the political purposes of, the former Prime Minister. Throughout its existence to the beginning of 1944 when Nazi Germany invaded the country, Bethlen ensured the functioning of the elaborate structure of the Society and its journal—politically, financially, and even intellectually. *The Hungarian Quarterly* was his journal, The Society of The Hungarian Quarterly was his Society. Upon publication, the new journal was launched by Count

15 ■ Suggested Draft of Advertisement in *Young Magyar-American*, OSzK Kt: Fond 1/3351/29891.
16 ■ Count István Bethlen to Archduke József Ferenc, 22 February 1938. OSzK Kt: Fond 1/1660/14920.
17 ■ *Idem.*
18 ■ Count István Bethlen to Archduke József Ferenc, 22 February 1938, OSzK Kt: Fond 1/1660/14920; Archduke József Ferenc to Count István Bethlen,18 March 1938, OSzK Kt: Fond 1/1660/14921.

Bethlen in person, whom the editors specifically asked to preside over the ceremony in his capacity as President of The Society of The Hungarian Quarterly. "In no other way could we secure the attention of the press but through your own person, Your Excellency", the Society's Executive Vice President György Ottlik wrote to the former Prime Minister.[19] Prince György Festetics served as Joint-President of the Society, with a family name whose bearers were Anglophile members of the top echelons of Hungarian society ever since the 18th century. József Balogh was called upon to act as Secretary General, as it was "in actual fact he himself who took care of the business of the Society from the very inception of the idea."[20] Balogh turned out to be the motor of the Society and its journal.[21]

At lower levels, too, the Society was well-endowed with bodies and leadership positions. The Committee was chaired by another former—and, indeed, also future—Prime Minister, Count Pál Teleki.[22] Professor Gyula Kornis, Deputy-Speaker of Hungarian Parliament became President of the Advisory Board of *The Hungarian Quarterly* with members such as László Ottlik, Zsombor Szász, Count István Zichy, Arthur B. Yolland, as well as the two co-editors, György Ottlik and József Balogh.

Membership of the Society was like a *Who Was Who* in interwar Hungary, recruited from the Anglophile section of Hungarian high society, possibly with an anti-Nazi flair. Carefully selected, almost handpicked, the list was the brainchild of József Balogh, György Ottlik and, most probably, Count Bethlen. Letters of invitation were signed by Bethlen himself—and he received enthusiastic answers. Budapest University Professor of English Arthur B. Yolland "saw in the connections, particularly established by Your Excellency, linking Hungary to England the strongest safeguard of the future happiness of Hungary."[23] British-Hungarian explorer and orientalist Sir Aurel Stein drew a parallel between the significance of Bethlen's 1933 lectures in Britain and the new journal in serving the Hungarian cause.[24]

The list of members included Hungarian aristocrats such as Count György Apponyi, Count Béla Hadik, Count József Mailáth, Baron Antal Radvánszky and Count Károly Széchényi, with Habsburg Archduke Albrecht at the top, members of the government such as Bálint Hóman and Andor Lázár, former cabinet ministers such as Gusztáv Gratz, Béla Imrédy, Béla Kenéz, Tibor Scitovszky and

19 ■ József Balogh, Note, 12 March 1936, OSzK Kt: Fond 1/322/3187; György Ottlik to Count István Bethlen, 13 March 1936, OSzK Kt: Fond 1/2440/21678.
20 ■ Minutes of the 2nd SHQ committee meeting, OSzK Kt: Fond 1/1525/13892.
21 ■ Tibor Frank, *Ethnicity, Propaganda, Myth-Making*, op. cit., pp. 265–308.
22 ■ President: Count Pál Teleki, OSzK Kt: 1/1525/13883.
23 ■ Arthur B. Yolland to Count István Bethlen, Budapest, 8 August 1935, OSzK Kt: Fond 1/1525/13933.
24 ■ Sir Aurel Stein to Count István Bethlen, Oxford, 31 August 1935. OSzK Kt: Fond 1/1525/13936.

Lajos Walkó, members of Hungarian Parliament such as Pál Biró, Tibor Eckhardt, Pál Fellner and Sándor Mándy, members of the Upper House of Parliament like Ferenc Chorin, Károly Erney and Baron Móric Kornfeld, members of the Hungarian diplomatic corps such as Elek Nagy, Jenő Nelky and Domokos Szentiványi, members of the financial aristocracy such as Baron Marcell Madarassy-Beck, Baron György Ullmann and Fülöp Weiss, professors at Hungarian universities including Zoltán Magyary, Gyula Szekfű, Béla Vasady and Arthur B. Yolland, with the addition of a few distinguished Hungarians living in Britain like the Baroness Charles Rothschild and Sir Aurel Stein—just to mention some typical SHQ members.[25] A map showing the homes of these people would show the best addresses of Budapest—the palaces on Buda Castle Hill, the villas on Rózsadomb, the townhouses along Eszterházy utca and Andrássy út, and their, at the time, elegant neighbourhoods.

The idea to extend membership beyond Budapest was soon mooted. The Society tried to establish local groups in the university towns of Szeged and Debrecen. Szeged was a real success. Based on the recommendations of Szeged university professor Tivadar Surányi-Unger, an economist of standing and head of the Department of Statistics, Bethlen contacted some thirty people in Szeged. The list of the local members of the Society was compiled "partly on the basis of the social position of the prospective members of a potential English-Hungarian group, partly according to the members' interest in English as a language and culture."[26] Half of them were professors at the University of Szeged and thus colleagues of Surányi-Unger, including the philosophers György Bartók and Hildebrand Várkonyi, the legal scholars László Buza, István Ereky, Barna Horváth and Sándor Kornél Túry, the pathologist József Baló, the paediatrician Jenő Kramár, the physicians Rudolf Engel and Béla Purjesz, the mathematicians Béla Kerékjártó and Frigyes Riesz, the physicist Pál Fröhlich, as well as the biochemist and Nobel Laureate Albert Szent-Györgyi. Several of them were admirers not so much of Britain but of America. In the 1930s Tivadar Surányi-Unger was in Los Angeles on three occasions as visiting professor, others studied in England (such as Barna Horváth, a student of Harold J. Laski in London in the late 1920s) or the U.S. (such as Jenő Kramár, a Rockefeller Fellow in 1924–25). Both Horváth and Kramár ended up, after 1945, as professors in the United States. Surányi-Unger knew exactly whom to recommend for membership in The Society of The Hungarian Quarterly to Count Bethlen. The Szeged list moreover reflected a cross-section of local society with merchants like Mátyás Csányi, Miklós Reitzer and Albert Székely, members of the Piarist teaching order such as János Szűcs and László Zányi, Calvinist minister László Bakó as well as local administrators. Even a general,

25 ■ SHQ membership list, OSzK Kt: Fond 1/1525/13901.
26 ■ Tivadar Surányi-Unger to Count István Bethlen, Szeged, 3 December 1937, OSzK Kt: Fond 1/1525/13957.

Antal Silley, was included. As late as 1937–38, some people on the list, such as Professors Purjesz and Riesz as well as the crop-merchant Miklós Reitzer were Jewish. All of the Szeged dignitaries were honoured and willing to be included into Count Bethlen's select circle.[27] The first meeting of the Szeged group included a lecture by Sir Richard Winn Livingstone and even Professor Szent-Györgyi expressed his hope of seeing Count Bethlen on the occasion, thus personally meeting the former Prime Minister.[28] László Zányi Sch.P. thought it was a good opportunity to ask the Count to help him obtain a scholarship to travel to Britain.[29] Some, like attorney Lajos Szekerke, just felt proud "to be included in the work destined to serve the vitally important interests of our fatherland."[30]

Bethlen's efforts to recruit members in Debrecen met with much less success. Bethlen first contacted University Rector Sándor Csikesz who, however, proved reluctant to provide the necessary information for the President of The Society of The Hungarian Quarterly.[31] Bethlen then turned to the Calvinist theologian Professor Béla Vasady of the University of Debrecen. Vasady was the right person to choose as he spent some two years at Dayton and Princeton in the U.S. in the mid-1920s. (He left for the United States after World War II.) Vasady did his best to contact the Anglophiles of Debrecen but the success of Szeged was not repeated there.

The Society was sponsored by both the Hungarian government and especially the Ministry of Foreign Affairs as well as the leading industrial and financial institutions of interwar Hungary.[32] Prevalent among them were the Association of Savings Banks and Banks (TÉBE) and the National Association of Industrialists (GyOSz) who gave large subsidies over three years. The Baroness Rothschild, a native of Hungary in London, undertook to cover the costs of paper for *The Hungarian Quarterly* for two years and contacted the firm Rowlandson and Co. to guarantee the supply.[33] (Even the "Pastouchi" matrices were imported for the journal from Britain.[34]) In 1935 it was also expected that the Society would succeed in securing "major financial contributions from England."[35]

27 ■ For the letters of acknowledgement see Count Bethlen's circular and the answers, OSzK Kt: Fond 1/1525/13957-14007.
28 ■ Albert Szent-Györgyi to Count István Bethlen, Szeged, 16 March 1938, OSzK Kt: Fond 1/1525/13992.
29 ■ László Zányi to Count István Bethlen, Szeged, 12 May 1938, OSzK Kt: Fond 1/1525/14007.
30 ■ Lajos Szekerke to Count István Bethlen, Szeged, 15 March 1938, OSzK Kt: Fond 1/1525/13987.
31 ■ Count István Bethlen to Béla Vasady, Budapest, 15 July 1938, OSzK Kt: Fond 1/1525/14008.
32 ■ Minutes of the SHQ founding assembly, 10 June 1935, OSzK Kt: Fond 1/1525/13883.
33 ■ Minutes of the 1st SHQ committee meeting, OSzK Kt: Fond 1/1525/13885.
34 ■ *Ibid.*, OSzK Kt: Fond 1/1525/13885.
35 ■ Minutes of the founding session of *The Hungarian Quarterly*, 3 July 1935, OSzK Kt: Fond 1/1525/13884.

György Ottlik and József Balogh offered their services to the journal free of charge. In turn, *The Hungarian Quarterly* helped them in some ways, e.g. by popularising Ottlik's Budapest radio lectures such as the one on Hungary and European solidarity on 20 March 1936, by sending out advertisements in English to all quarters.[36] The new Society hoped to use the facilities of the *Magyar Szemle* Society but the two societies were separated at an early date, at the very end of 1935.[37]

The Society provided social and logistical support to visiting British dignitaries. A good example was the 1937 visit of the historian Arnold Toynbee and Mrs. Toynbee to Hungary[38] which showed how the Society tried to cement friendship between Hungary and Britain or, as the similar visit by George Creel showed in 1936, the United States.[39] The Toynbees were expected to reach Budapest on Thursday, 13 May and a major reception was given by Count and Countess Bethlen in their honour that same evening, in the reception hall of the Interior Ministry. Bethlen also gave a private lunch for the British visitors. Next day, on Friday 14 May, Toynbee lectured, and this was followed by a dinner at the home of Professor Gyula Kornis, Deputy-Speaker of the House and University Rector of Budapest University. The British guests stayed in Budapest on Saturday, 15 May, to go to the Opera.—Sunday, 16 May there was an excursion planned for the Toynbees, who went through Székesfehérvár, Balatonfüred and the Lake Balaton area to Ireg, Baron Móric Kornfeld's[40] château, where they stayed until Tuesday, 18 May to return to Budapest some time in the morning. One evening was spent with the British Minister to Hungary Sir Geoffrey Knox, and the Foreign Ministry also organized a meal for the visitors. The entire program was put together with great care and sophistication by SHQ Secretary General József Balogh. He knew perfectly well that Toynbee would appreciate an emphatically friendly welcome in Hungary: his Budapest lecture included references favourable to the revision of the Treaty of Trianon,[41] words by the Director of Studies of the Royal Institute of International Affairs dear to Hungarian ears.

With increasing threats of war, The Society of The Hungarian Quarterly and the Société de la Nouvelle Revue de Hongrie anticipated and prepared for their own disappearance from Hungary. According to an undated document,

36 ■ Information on György Ottlik's radio lecture, 20 March 1936, OSzK Kt: Fond 1/1525/14071.
37 ■ Note of 21 December 1935, OSzK Kt: Fond 1/1525/14009.
38 ■ József Balogh to Baron Móric Kornfeld, Budapest, 28 April 1937, OSzK Kt: Fond 1/1826/15909.
39 ■ Tibor Frank, *Ethnicity, Propaganda, Myth-Making, op. cit.* pp. 245–246.
40 ■ On the Kornfelds and Ireg see the editor's introduction to Ágnes Széchenyi, ed., *Reflections on Twentieth Century Hungary: Hungarian Magnate's View.* Wayne, N.J.: Centre for Hungarian Studies and Publications, Inc.; Boulder, CO: Social Science Monographs; New York: Columbia University Press, 2007. pp. 47–54.
41 ■ Arnold Toynbee quoted by Thomas L. Sakmyster, *Hungary, the Great Powers and the Danubian Crisis 1936–1939.* Athens, GA: The University of Georgia Press, 1980, p. 201.

in case of war *The Hungarian Quarterly* / the *Nouvelle Revue de Hongrie* would be compelled to cease its appearance in Budapest and their respective editors in London and Paris would take over the journals, declaring that "As the events of the war discontinued the connections to their proprietors, The Société de la Nouvelle Revue de Hongrie / The Society of The Hungarian Quarterly, I take over the editing of the journal previously published in Hungary and I take sole responsibility for it; it was a Group of Friends of The Hungarian Quarterly / a Comité de Patronage de La Nouvelle Revue de Hongrie that undertook to publish the journal instead of The Society of The Hungarian Quarterly / the Société de la Nouvelle Revue de Hongrie. We look forward to receiving the continued support of the never-failing friends of the Hungarian cause."[42]

In different ways, most members of The Society of The Hungarian Quarterly became victims of World War II or its aftermath. As twin symbols, József Balogh was murdered by the Nazis or their Hungarian servants in 1944, Count István Bethlen died in a Soviet prison in 1946. The list of the casualties of Society members is huge. The project they cherished proved to be wishful thinking and died with the war. They represented a small and weak minority in prewar Hungary's social and political landscape—their plans came late and proved to be ineffective. However, they deserve more than a nod of approval by a later generation which appreciates their courage and sacrifice. ❧

42 ■ Note, n.d., n.p., OSzK Kt: Fond 1/1525 (unnumbered, concluding document in the folder).

István Kemény

Dear Unknown

Excerpt from the novel

The hip flask of spirits that was left over on August 21st was finished off under rather unusual circumstances. The walk in the woods was disturbed by a seemingly trivial incident: that summer the evolution of the human race truly did come to a halt. A few weeks after man had walked on the moon. Just like Doc once said in the toilets, though admittedly he was talking about human progress, which is something slightly different. But back then when a person talked about the evolution of mankind they were thinking about so-called human progress, the speed of light, photon rockets, space exploration and in the meantime a love life of happy promiscuity. In that context, Doc's idea that all that was on hold now of all times, at the very moment the Moon had been conquered, was alarmingly revolutionary. He could not have known then that from this point on history—at least in respect of the human race—was on a downward path, in the direction of another species to which humanity would give rise.

This inaugural moment was lived through by 'Uncle' Olbach's crew on János Hill on the western edge of Buda. The moment was not blatant, and the subsequent decades seemingly passed in much the way as earlier ones had. The difference amounted to nothing more than that new discoveries, from then on, did not serve the goal that they ostensibly served, which is to say the prosperity of the human race, but precisely its extinction, albeit in the most humane manner possible. In truth, they served the quiet putting to sleep of the species and experimentation with a more perfect new breed and the preservation of human knowledge in that... I myself, in writing these lines in twenty-o-eight,

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István Kemény

is best known as a poet with eight volumes of poetry and a volume of essays to his name. Kedves Ismeretlen *(Dear Unknown, 2009) is his second novel. It is reviewed by Tibor Bárány on pp. 119–120 of this issue.*

am working on that process; that is what I make my living from. But don't let us race ahead of the late afternoon of August 21st nineteen-sixty-six.

The wonder juice worked on Ervin Gál just like any ordinary hooch would. It turned a cowardly, awkward 32-year-old who had set off on a steep spiritual decline into a brash daredevil; he took a third swig at the bottle and was already throwing himself down in front of an oncoming car in order to act the tough in front of Emma. He did not have a child yet, which is why he reckoned it would be a nice trick if he only needed two bounds to leap across to the far side of the highway in the wood and in front of the taxi, which was doing an amazing speed when it appeared at the bend in the road. Had he made it across he would cock a snook at Emma from the far side; but he didn't, he fell prostrate in the middle of the road. Its brakes screeching, the taxi came to a halt inches from Ervin Gál's head. The shouts of 'What the bloody hell do you think you're playing at, you crazy fool!' died down; silence fell. Two seconds must have passed by when the taxi driver executed some strange manoeuvre and began to reverse back up the slope to disappear in a trice at the bend, among the trees, in the direction from which he had come. That was a startling response, alarming, nigh-on super-natural, as if time itself had gone into reverse; yet it reminded one of nothing so much as a simple case of hit-and-run, so 'Uncle' Olbach and Patai paid no attention to the darker side of the incident. That is to say, they noticed; how could they not? Indeed, both immediately jumped to the same thought: the cusp between Pisces and the age of Aquarius, but, being both of them enlightened men, they would have been ashamed to say that to one another's face. And so, counting as among the wisest men of their years, it was not then they noticed a change in world epoch was taking place, but a good while beforehand, and in connection with other events. Both of them had long, long ago been clear that their whole life happened to coincide with an epochal change, and they would be entirely wiped out. In short, they were well past recognising that, so the dawning of the age of Aquarius did not even come to mind then and there, but they simply began cursing in frank and forthright fashion the taxi driver's parentage, and Ervin Gál, staggering to his feet, escaped any serious dressing down.

In fact, his first words to Emma, as if he had not even blinked were:

"So who's dead?"

He was still being dusted down. Being familiar with the dumb, old answer to Ervin Gál's dumb, old question, Emma, despite the fright she had been given, riposted with the grin of a six-year-old:

"Louis Kossuth."

The four of them took a stroll in the woods, or rather, the three of them took Emma for a stroll. Patai, true to his word, had come without Clarrie, while Ervin Gál, a misery guts if there ever was one, just tagged on. 'Uncle' Olbach muttered to Patai and Ervin Gál before they set off his idea that they could talk about anything in front of Emma, only not about her parents. Both nodded;

weasel Patai and clodhopper-faced Ervin Gál. Neither was much to the liking of 'Uncle' Olbach, and he took no pleasure in the thought that in recent times they had become thick as thieves. He was frankly afraid of Patai, and although Ervin Gál merely nauseated him, he was still not thrilled that the absurd lunk now seemed to look on Patai as his master—in the same way as he had looked up to him till then. Though heaven knows why he was tagging along with them... or could it be that they had tagged him on? Could it be that it was not Patai but Ervin Gál who was ruminating over 'Uncle' Olbach's oeuvre?

For all that, the excursion started off well enough. Emma already knew them well from the library; she was fond of them both, with Patai playing the part of the rich uncle, Ervin Gál the witty uncle. The three of them took turns in holding her hand, at least to start with they did.

In the buffet room at the Mount Széchenyi terminus on the Pioneer Children's Railway line, not far from János Hill, Patai buttered up the lady at the counter with three grand gestures of flattery before pointing to the cake display cabinet:

"Your entire stock, if you please!"

The cake display cabinet contained five Ischl cakes and three petits fours, all eight of which were well past their sell-by date, but Patai intended it to be a grandly munificent gesture. Being born into a thrifty family of scholars, Emma was later to use that as a mark for a grandly munificent gesture against which all other grandly munificent gestures in which she had a part were to be measured. She was greatly impressed by Patai's manner, and her grandfather did not like that one bit. 'Uncle' Olbach growled that Emma would ruin her appetite with all the cake, but Ervin Gál came up with an answer for that. The trick of gobbling up the cakes one by one before the eyes of the child fitted the role of playing the 'witty uncle' to perfection, though he took care that it would not end in tears by leaving two of the petits fours for her, who was not so keen on Ischl cake.

They travelled with the steam train on the Pioneer Children's Railway as far as the János Hill stop, then they set off on the path towards the look-out tower and before long reached the road through the woods which led up to it. Everything went according to plan, and even the strange incident with the taxi did not dampen their mood.

"Taxi drivers, the thieving, loutish scum!" yelled 'Uncle' Olbach. "Didn't even dare get out of his car, the pig! Not for three decrepit old dodderers!"

"So who's the third," joked Ervin Gál, who may have been decrepit but certainly not old. "Thinking of Emma, are you, 'Uncle' Bandi-Wandy?"

"Of you, young Ervin, of you," Patai sniggered. "Don't hold out any hopes of living to a grand old age! I'll be tapping out yet, on a mildly astonished typewriter, an obit about a talent that went sadly all too young if you keep on smoking two packs a day of those coffin nails!"

"Two and a half," Ervin Gál countered with pride. 'Uncle' Olbach for his part could not let go without comment.

"With a little bit more luck, we could have been composing that obit here and now," he smiled. "Ervin Gál, a poet of mediocre talent, ended his wretched life under the front wheels of a taxi..."

"With comic abruptness!" Patai guffawed.

Ervin Gál had the role of puffing up his own importance, which he duly did. He didn't understand why the old boys were pulling his leg with this donnish jest, but as there was no way of hitting back decently, for want of a better idea he merely took note of the gibes.

The excursion was going well, therefore. The trouble began when it started to grow dark, but despite that Patai thrust down their throats his brainwave of walking on from the look-out tower and through the woods to Ságvári Park station on the Pioneer Railway line, which was far too big a stretch for a child of five and a half. Dusk was drawing in, as it was, because they had spent too long in the garden premises of the János Hill look-out tower.

Needless to say, no one had a pocket torch, though the path dropped steeply in places. 'Uncle' Olbach would not allow Ervin Gál to carry Emma in his arms ("That's all we need") and instead held her by the hand. That too was to no purpose. Emma could cope with the walking, but fear got the upper hand in the darkening wood. It would have been better if Patai and Ervin Gál had taken her by the hand on either side and her grandpa had brought up the rear. That would have been the most reassuring for her, but as it was the path in the woods was too narrow: there was room for two people to go next to each other, so as a result Patai went in front and Ervin Gál, in whom of the three men Emma had the least trust, stumbled along behind. Emma's back was therefore inadequately guarded, and it was little use having her grandpa hold her left hand because on the right-hand side was the night-time wood itself, with its trees and its bushes, and the foliage of the trees and bushes and all its dark secrets. Despite that, Emma put on a brave face and there would have been no problem if the devil had not got into Patai. 'Uncle' Olbach would have to take some responsibility for that, although he was to deny it till his dying day. Somewhere at the back of it was the hip flask of wonder juice that they had forgotten all about after the incident with the taxi, but it was still slopping about in its bottle in the inside pocket of 'Uncle' Olbach's jacket. He fished it out and offered it around, and it did the round twice over before it was finished off. Those two swigs, along with the two pints of beer each that they had downed at the look-out tour, were more than enough to set Ervin Gál off being even dafter than he was already and for the devil to get into Patai, leaving 'Uncle' Olbach to turn, for a short while—in line with the wonder juice's bad reputation—into a gutless, spineless worm (as indeed he felt later on). That is the state in which they entered the wood beside the look-out tower.

At which point Patai, casting his comments back over his shoulder, started explaining what goblins were—those hairy-footed sprites that trooped around amid the trees not far from there.

"Behind us, or even beside us, little Emma. They're escorting us. If you listen closely, you can hear their hairy feet slapping on the ground! Are you quite sure you can't hear? Shall we stop a moment?"

"No, don't do that!" said Emma bravely. Her grandfather tried to persuade himself that this meant Emma was not frightened. "I can't even hear them."

"But I can!" Patai whispered, twisting his head in mock alarm, and came to a halt nonetheless. "Oh dear! They're slapping their hairy feet on the footpath, to be sure! Slapping, I'm sad to say, very much slapping them. Hairy-footed hobgoblin folk!"

"So who's dead?" Ervin Gál had overtaken them. By then Emma was in no mood to riposte "Louis Kossuth". Her grandpa could feel from the tightening of her grip that the child was frightened. He even thought she needed it: a little bit of fright would do her no harm at all. Any child who had not been scared at least once in their life by deadly funny family friends in a dark wood had not been fully schooled for life. He really did think that, and he might have been right, but the devil that was in Patai's periscope wanted much worse.

They managed to get down the path in the wood without trouble, even though hairy-footed wood goblins were parading along all the way—a fact about which Patai kept Emma constantly informed in a jittery voice. When they stepped out from the trees, though, the goblins fortunately stayed back there. They reached Ságvári Park station on the Pioneer Railway line. For a moment the matter seemed to have resolved itself, but it became clear straight away that they were going to have to wait half an hour for the next service. The station was a scary place of an evening. There was no one else but them waiting for the train, and the platform could only have been lit by some three light bulbs; the thin narrow-gauge rail tracks gave the appearance of having huddled so close together out of fear. They sat down on a bench; the wood around them rustled restlessly in the evening breeze, and that was when Patai chose to tell Emma the following story:

"Once upon a time, long, long ago, even before the time of King Matthias the Just, there lived in Bohemia, or rather the bit of it that is called Moravia, a monk. That means he looked a bit like a priest, only the crown of his head, the bit up here, was bald. Just look here, Emma!"

"And was he evil?" Emma enquired.

"Not in the slightest! He wasn't allowed to be evil! The whole reason for having monks is for them to be good—like children. Anyway, this monk was not evil, but in all honesty you couldn't say that he was all that good either. What do you think he was called?'

"Was it Pritsk?" Emma asked, with a hissing 'tsk' sound.

"Well done, young lady! Got it in one! The friar was called Pritsk, not with an 'i' but with a 'y'; 'Prytsk'. Can you hear the 'y'?"

"Yes, I can."

"Good, well anyway this Friar Prytsk had a ladylove."

"Oopsy-daisy!" said Ervin Gál.

"Oh yes he did! And he wasn't really allowed to have a ladylove because that's one of the things that monks are forbidden to have. What do you think this ladylove was called Emma?"

"Was she a girl?"

"No, she was a lady!"

"Greega."

"Right again," said Patai. "How do you manage to guess these names? Prytsk and Greega. So one fine day this wretched Prytsk finds himself in big trouble. Greega, you see, also had a husband, and one day that husband of hers goes home and she is nowhere to be found! The husband runs to fetch an axe and races round to Prytsk's home, because by then—I forgot to tell you this!—this Prytsk was no longer a monk but made his living from poaching, and he lived in a cabin at the edge of the small town, and by then the hair had completely grown back over the bald patch on the crown of his head. So Greega's husband bursts into Prytsk's cabin, because the unhappy man had a suspicion about where he should burst in with his axe to find Prytsk and Greega together. He lifts the axe and is just about to slaughter both of them when Prytsk hops out of the bed, wrenches the axe from his hands, and whacks him on the head!"

"But why?" Emma asked.

"Yes, indeed: Why?" asked 'Uncle' Olbach, who was only now starting to get a sinking feeling.

"You'll have to wait till I get to the end! Greega yelled and screamed so loud and long that half the town came running. And they all went for Prytsk and Greega. That was when they could have made good use of those hairy-footed goblins!"

"Why was that?" Emma asked.

"Because if the hairy-footed wood goblins had come out of the woods right then, they would have freed Prytsk and Greega and made them king and queen. Unfortunately that is not what happened."

Emma did not ask any questions this time, just listened.

"The people came and set light to the cabin," Patai continued sorrowfully. "Greega was choked to death by the smoke, but Prytsk got out and was caught by them and hanged in the market square. But there's more! The two of them were buried in a ditch in the cemetery where the criminals and suicides are buried; there they were laid to rest in the ground. And this all happened in Moravia in a town by the name of Krumlovice in fourteen-o-two."

Emma was disgruntled.

"But that's not a happy ending!"

"Who says that is the end of it?" Patai asked. "Who said it ends unhappily?"

"That's just what I was afraid of," groused 'Uncle' Olbach, "that it all ends unhappily."

That was his biggest mistake. Because that was all he said, but sad to say he too was now very curious about Patai's story. Because some people, as you

might know, had spread the rumour that Patai himself was a defrocked clergyman.

"Let it have a happy ending!" Emma pleaded.

"A happy ending?" Patai mused. "We can try. After all, it really was a happy ending. It only started badly. Hmm! Well it also carried on badly, but it has a happy end!"

"Promise!" Emma implored.

"Promise!" said 'Uncle' Olbach in a menacing tone.

"Yes, do promise, Peter!" beseeched Ervin Gál.

"I promise," the devil in Patai responded solemnly. "It will have a happy ending, you can be sure of that!"

'Uncle' Olbach, casting his eyes up heavenwards, was suspicious and took Emma onto his lap.

"Tell me if you're frightened, sweetie-pie."

"Carry on!" Emma demanded of Patai. "I'm going to have bad dreams anyway."

Ervin Gál tittered. How sweet!

"Prytsk lay there in his grave; just lay there," Patai continued, "and for a long time nothing came to his mind. Then one day, what should happen, many, many years later, but another monk wrote up their story in a book. He wrote their story into a big book, and as he was writing the story of Prytsk and Greega into the book Prytsk and Greega came to life in their grave. And by the time that other monk had written the whole story into the book they had fully come to life. That's when they started to put their heads together.

"Hey, Greega!" said Prytsk. "Our story has been written up in a book! I can sense it! I feel it in my bones! And I'll get no rest until I find that book! I'm going to destroy it!"

"But Prytsk wasn't evil!" exclaimed Emma.

"No, he wasn't up till then. But now he decided that he was going to take revenge on the people who had killed them and, more than that, written their story into a book. Now, how do you think a person gets out of their grave? Well, as I've already told you, they were buried at the edge of the cemetery, in a trench by the footpath, quite close to the footpath. In fact, the grave was dug just an arm's length from the footpath. Anyway, Prytsk thought about that a little, then slowly, ever so slowly poked his ice-cold arm out of the grave, and..."

"Get lost, Patai! Emma, sweetie, don't believe a word that he says!"

"And then?" Emma asked.

"Like I say, he poked his long, ice-cold arm out of the grave and caught hold of a... how can I put it...he caught hold of a stag's ankle."

He was almost on the point of saying 'little girl' instead of 'stag'.

"And did the stag save him?"

"Yes, he pulled him out of the grave. If only he hadn't, though! Because ever

since then Prytsk has been travelling round the world in search of the book into which his story was written. Travelling and travelling, looking and searching all over the place. It's not entirely out of the question, to be sure, that he isn't looking right now, in this very wood. He may be ransacking and rummaging right now somewhere in the dark. Looking and searching. Here, behind us, among the trees."

And Patai pointed casually at the darkness behind them. Emma braced herself.

"So where's the happy ending?" asked Ervin Gál.

"That's it, Comrade Gál!" Patai expostulated. "So ever since then Prytsk has been searching for the book in which his story is written. First of all he hid in a stag, then in a water-carrier girl, then in a carter, and so on and so forth. He travelled around the world, looking for the book, so that he could destroy it. But what do you think happened to the book in the meantime?"

"Did someone read it?" Emma asked.

"Right! And not just anyone either, but the young King Matthias, when he was doing time in a gaol in the city of Prague, before he was king. He read it, to be sure, and it wasn't to his liking. Not at all to his liking. The truth is it was a dreadfully evil book! Young King Matthias had a good mind to rip it into shreds. He was no shrinking violet as a boy, and he would have done well to tear the book into shreds. Instead of that, what do you think young King Matthias did with the book?"

"Gave it back to his Daddy?" said Emma uncertainly.

"But his Daddy couldn't read. No, what young King Matthias thought to himself was: 'That book was not much to my liking, but some day someone else will like it.' So he decided that if, by some stroke of luck, he were to become king one day after all, or in other words if his head were not cut off in Prague's main square, which looked more than likely at the time—anyway, he would set up a library for the book back home, in his palace in Buda. And so he did. Ever since then the book has been kept in the royal library in Buda—guarded by librarians, what's more. Lots and lots of librarians. And they guard it in all deadly seriousness too, each librarian in all the more deadly seriousness than the next, but the most deadly seriously of all by the head librarian. Have you any idea who it is nowadays who guards that dreadful book the most deadly seriously of all?"

Emma shook her head. Patai pointed at 'Uncle' Olbach.

"Your Granddad!"

After a brief pause to take that in, Emma started to cry inconsolably.

"But that means Prytsk is after you!" she sobbed to her grandfather.

"Patai!" 'Uncle' Olbach started off mildly but menacingly, stroking Emma's head.

Patai calmly raised his hands.

"Just be patient. Now here comes the happy ending. It could be he's already found it!"

"Grandpa?!" exclaimed Emma. "That's not a happy ending!"

"Fair enough. Then I won't tell you what the ending is," Patai shrugged his shoulders.

"For Pete's sake get it over with, Patai!" fumed 'Uncle' Olbach.

"Do you want me to, Emma?" Patai asked her.

"Yes, tell me!"

"Prytsk travelled and travelled around the world, hiding here in an animal, there in a human. He went round the world disguised as them, and that's how he has been going round until the present day, always disguised as someone else. Now who do you think Prytsk ended up hiding in, Emma? In whose disguise is he travelling round the world?"

Patai looked enigmatically at Ervin Gál. He was standing a few paces away, irately puffing away at a cigarette on account of the 'Comrade Gál'.

"Him?" Emma pointed at him.

"No, good Lord no!" the devil in Patai shook his head. "Certainly not! He hid himself in... in you, Emma!"

"You dumb ass!" 'Uncle' Olbach jumped up, Emma in his arms. "You twisted, sadist pervert! How can anyone tell a story like that to a child?!"

Patai still kept his nerve to start with.

"Excuse me, Bandi, my friend, but you also wanted to hear me out, didn't you? Why are you only speaking out now, I ask you? It's not such a bad ending as all that, is it, Emma?"

Only now did Emma, who had been staring in alarm at Patai from her grandfather's arms, launch into a sobbing and wailing at such high pitch as only infants are capable of. It was more of a shriek, which faltered briefly every now and again. Steady and unbearable. The devil whisked straight of Patai, to be sure, and with a hop, step and jump turned tail into the woods.

"I'm sorry," Patai stammered. "Do forgive me."

Patai had never been in the habit of stammering, but there was no mollifying 'Uncle' Olbach now.

"Get away from us, both of you! Away!" he roared, and both Patai and the blameless Ervin Gál scuttled off to the end of the platform on the opposite side. When the little red engine finally arrived, Ervin Gál climbed into the open coach, whereas 'Uncle' Olbach with Emma got into the covered carriage.

Patai did not get on but vanished into the wood. He had decided to go home on foot, cutting across the wood. He and his wife lived on an upper floor in a block of flats at 30 Rustlings Road on Freedom Hill. It is just possible it crossed his mind that it might reassure Emma if she were to see from the train that he dared to go into the dark woods, but if that thought did cross his mind, he miscalculated because the sight of him sauntering into the woods was anything but reassuring. Emma was to have no rest until she herself—not then, of course, but seventeen years later—was to go the same way after him. ❧

Translated by Tim Wilkinson

László Lator

Poems

Translated by George Szirtes

The Space, the Objects

A tér, a tárgyak

Seventh of the month and seven years. Years, years!
What does it mean to say: year, hour or day?
Life can't be portioned out in terms as clear
as 'anniversary' and neatly tidied away.
My time is loose-weave fabric, leaking everywhere.

Space trumps it all, omnipotent in its sphere.
She has no body now but it's her body I meet
collapsing beside the stone wall down our street.

Such fierce light trapped in objects, such dense air!
This curious pallor conjures up her skin.
How many death masks does it take to prepare
the face we recall and hope to hold in trust
as the negative of worlds long turned to dust.

László Lator,

a poet, has been an editor and translator for most of his life. His first book of verse was banned following the Communist takeover so a first volume only appeared in 1969. Since then he has published several volumes of verse and verse translations as well as essays on classical and contemporary poetry. Lator's translation and creative writing seminar was perhaps the most influential workshop in the eighties and nineties. He is now working on his memoirs.

Alert half-consciousness can help re-write
a faded script that's all but lost to sight.

Freed from dark corners, things lost to the light
escape confinement, one by one take flight:
so shawl, comb, face powder, vanity case slip
neatly back into their first relationship.
Electricity courses through them, lets them burn,
warming separate components into feeling.
Could soul itself, of some vague kind, return
to repossess its long deserted dwelling?

No, not the soul, a kind of plasmoid mass,
an almost-body, a reduced form of existence
lost in the rude tractless realms of space
subject perhaps to some greater will's control
has been allowed to meander into sense,
and so from fractions conjures up the whole.

(2002)

Forest

Erdő

This unexpected flash of light,
this shower of glass, shadow of fire,
the forest says: all that is broken
will be mended. Things feebly surrendered
that offered themselves up and melded
into earth will suddenly be woken,
emerging and erupting everywhere,
all spinning, all burning, all bright.

Untenanted matter that has lost all form
shall rise from blindness and decay,
and in one momentary display
of enthusiasm imagine itself reborn
with a new body. Nothing is lost,
repeats the forest, time and again:
all will be reassembled from mere dust,
each flavour recalled, each subtlety made plain.
Or maybe the forest simply tells us what

we need to hear to quench the spirit's thirst?
How else could it struggle with the worst
life offers us and still emerge intact?

No, says the forest, there's no resurrection
and wild rejoicing: everything within
the body or beyond it faces the same corruption,
our flesh, our very cells are paper thin.
What has been, will be, and yet not the same:
if things come back at all they might pass through
some other medium—that's the only claim
the body could make, nor is that body you.

The forest says—but forests cannot speak.
They tell us nothing, one way or the other.
They only encourage the foolish and the weak
to indulge in the usual round of mystic blather.
This forest says… it might address us so—
it could say this or that for all I know.

It draws us in: rejects us and expels us.
Both Stay! and Go! it says—that's all it tells us.

(2004)

What Festival Is This?

Mi ez az ünnep?

What festival is this? What is it to me,
this grey square with nothing to brighten it?
Why here precisely? Why choose the spot?
No house, no hill or valley, not a tree—
how could anyone take delight in it?

Long tables, some tents, a considerable crew
who've never met before, whom no one knew.
I doubt they can hear or see me at all,
though some I faintly recognise while the rest
are strangers, each one playing a required role:
in both groups I find something to detest.

My utter isolation makes me fret,
my failure to understand the place I'm in.
I don't want to be here at all, and yet…
She's there at the centre, her pale skin
contrasting with the dark tight dress she's wearing.
Her gentle manner suggests a purpose of some kind.
She looks at me and I understand from her bearing
that I should go somewhere I've never gone before.

And I know that even if I ever did find
my way back there'd be no one here anymore.

Someone's planning something, some cheap plot.

Maybe there's time to stop it, maybe not.
Or should I leave now and forget the lot?

(2005)

Setting Straight

Igazítsd egyenesre

You, whom the rotting house of detention can't detain,
but lets you still visit home, touch, touch me again!

Without me now there's nowhere you could be.

We've grown into each other like limbs of a tree.
Our fibres are so grafted we give each other life:
We are each other's life-blood, you and me.
I love you as myself, both man and wife.

If I say this or that, it's your voice I hear, not mine.
Whatever part you speak I recognize my line.
I live in your past blindfold, it couldn't hide you,
your future's mine until I'm buried beside you.

But this or that, neither is worth much study
it's just stray words,
a long-vanished mortal body—

If you, spirit, exist in some other shape,
you'll understand the kind of double purgatory
I burn in, exiled from my estate.
Untenanted flames consume me since you've gone:
when in disgust I look for reasons that your flame
has gone out, they leap again and this time twice as strong.

Because they're incapable of resisting death,
in their struggle they seek refuge in flesh.

Take pity on me, oh being beyond time.
One way or other adjust my crooked fate.
Lead me out of the maze and set me straight.

(2007)

Noémi Szécsi

Communist Monte Cristo

Excerpt from the novel

"Who was most excited about Father Christmas in 1956?"
"Comrade Stalin. He already put his boots out in October."
Budapest joke, 1956

The police commandos came for Great-Grandad only in April, and just when he'd made such a nice adjustment to the people's republic and its tattered legitimacy. He rose at five, went to work by six, he didn't shoot his mouth off, and he didn't read the papers. His lifestyle reminded him of the First World War and the innocent years of his youth, and the long-familiar routine of work-dinner-sleep made his head lull pleasantly. He even arranged for his son's family to move in with him. Gyuszi must have made up his mind, possibly still back in the Soviet Union, that nothing would come between him and his good cheer. Certainly, no one except for him would have thought in 1957 that it was worth fathering a child for this dismal world, because Gyuszi's wife Eta found that she was pregnant once again. Grandad was expecting his third grandchild.

Which is how she opened the door for the police, with a bulging belly. Pinning her hopes on the universal solidarity felt for expectant mothers, she was just explaining that her father-in-law was not at home, when Great-Grandad appeared behind her.

"Have you come for me, gentlemen?"

Somewhere in the back of his mind he'd been expecting them. After all, when they take down your particulars and enter them in the police records, it's bound to give them ideas—unless, of course, someone should see fit to "misplace" them.

So it's off to jail, Great-Grandad commented and headed for the linen closet for clean underwear. Now that his daughter-in-law was doing the wash for him, he had plenty of clean underwear. He packed his rucksack with the old

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familiar routine and the unmistakable sense of relief that comes when your worst fears are realized. He felt this way every time—for instance, when the three children stuffed themselves full of sweets on Christmas Eve, gobbling down the after-supper dessert, the fancy candy off the tree and the neatly sliced Christmas cake, too, then went dashing up and down the corridor, screaming and yelling, their patent leather shoes echoing in a different part of the apartment every moment.

"Take care, or you'll be sorry," Great-Grandma warned, wagging a finger. Nobody listened. Why would this stop a child? And before long, one of the three suffered a bleeding head, mother's string of real pearls was torn, and the bright sky of a much-awaited winter vacation was overcast by a physician's visit, darkened by a sickbed and being confined to your room.

Should the protesting criminal masses gathered on Heroes' Square on October 23 have been warned, "Hungarians! Don't stuff yourself with the Christmas cake of freedom, or you'll be sorry"? Anyone saying something like this would have found themselves up shit street before they knew what had hit them.

"For once I'm happy and you go spoil it," Sanyika howled when Great-Grandma told him that he could now consider Christmas over and that a surgeon would have to stitch up his head.

In October, too, Great-Grandad knew that he'd be sorry, but he just couldn't curb that overstrung revolutionary instinct of his. After five a neighbour from the building came back from Kossuth Square for a flag, which is how Great-Grandad learnt that the people were headed for Heroes' Square. Time was of the essence. They cut the coat of arms out of the flag as they marched. Great-Grandad chipped in. He stretched the material so the knife could slide through it quicker. And once there, he ate roasted chestnuts out of his pocket. He stood a bit off to the side, as if he were not part of the crowd. But there were too many people standing there for him to separate himself properly. It's not such a great big square as all that. Hungary has no big squares.

"Freedom for the people," Great-Grandad shouted suddenly, absolutely without thinking.

"What're you shouting for, old man?" a man in a cloth cap turned on him. "You're splitting my eardrums."

"Old people want democracy, too," Great-Grandad said humbly as he prodded a roasted chestnut free off the roof of his mouth with his tongue.

"So do we all. That's why we're here. But you've had your democracy, so stop shouting."

He's a filthy provocateur, Great-Grandad thought, but turned to the young man amicably just the same.

"Might you be referring to Horthy's dictatorship? Don't make me laugh! That's when I was young, when I got married, that's when my children were

born. I felt fine, all told, but we all knew that we were living in a regime that's rotten to the core. Now we're facing more difficult times. But we can do so freely and honourably."

"What're you talking about? We're here to bring down Stalin's statue, or haven't you heard?"

"Indeed? That's good, then, because I'm here for the same thing," Great-Grandad said, then softly but clearly he shouted, "*Abzug,* Stalin!" and for a moment he felt once again like a schoolboy during the Monarchy, and would have liked nothing better than to head for Gizella Square to buy some Kugler pastry. But just then the crowd around him started roaring again, urging on the men busy with the statue. Great-Grandad's head veritably whirled, for he could clearly see Napoleon Bonaparte sticking his head out from behind the grey clouds.

"Hungarians!" he holds forth, his pronunciation impeccable as he surveys the crowd. Great-Grandad looks back at him, his face beaming with enthusiasm.

"Hungarians! The time is here for you to win back your lost freedom!"

Actually, that's not how; he said it in a more old-fashioned way, like this:

"Hungarians! The time hath come for you to wrest back your long-lost freedom!"

Then he added, "My troops are gathered for deployment just outside Győr. I have a score to settle with the Russians."

"This is a bloodless revolution. Still, long live Napoleon! If we need help, we'll let you know," Great-Grandad said smiling affectionately at the Emperor.

They'd wound a rope around Stalin's leg by then, but everybody knew that this would not do the trick. They didn't skimp on high-grade iron in those days. Meanwhile, Great-Grandad panned the crowd for familiar faces, though not like the others, so that when the froth had settled and it was denunciation time, they'd have a story or two up their sleeve. No. He was simply curious to know what people who had the red star stuck to their foreheads so fast you couldn't have removed them without ripping their heads off into the bargain were now thinking.

And right away he spotted Józsi, two rows up, a bit to the left. You could tell by his pate fattened on Party benefits that he wasn't building socialism with his own two hands. But on that day he was dressed like the simple folk. There was a man in a black coat standing next to him, his driver, probably, because his features and gestures betrayed no emotion, personal or otherwise. Józsi spotted Great-Grandad, too, and after motioning to the driver, he quickly elbowed his way to his old comrade.

"Who knows what tomorrow will bring. We may have to die for the cause," he said by way of a friendly greeting.

"And when we haven't even lived yet," Great-Grandad replied as courteous as could be.

Were it not for the memory of the mud wrestling in '45, and if the crowd weren't just bringing down Stalin's statue, they might have even exchanged a knowing laugh. But they were both nervous. Their paths hadn't crossed since '45. Back then, had Józsi wanted to, he'd have returned with a Soviet battalion in half an hour and have Great-Grandad shot through like a sieve, without consequences. But then he must've realized that with the siege over, he could no longer do it without consequences. And when he could have done it again without consequences, he couldn't find Great-Grandad in the old apartment, just the Okolicsányi family. Besides, so much of his time was taken up with organizing and running the Communist police that something as trivial as having an old friend shot in the head was not worth the bother of finding him.

Now Józsi took Great-Grandad into his confidence as if nothing had happened. He grabbed him by the shoulder and whispered in his ear, "Now that business has gone sour, one's tempted to question Comrade Rákosi's words of wisdom. Still, there's some truth in the fact that it's no hayride, building socialism with nine million fascists. Just look around you!"

Then, by way of camouflage, he bellowed, "Bring it down!"

"If it were indeed the case that Comrade Rákosi had to make do with nine million fascists," Great-Grandad said, "he wouldn't have retained his health quite the way he has, and he wouldn't be treated for hypertension in the Soviet Union right now, I assure you! They'd put him through the grinder, then flung him to the dogs, like he did his comrades. Alas, the truth is that he had to make do with nine million Magyars trembling for their lives."

"Freedom for the people! Down with the Soviet yoke!" shrieked Józsi, then lowering his voice to an angry whisper, he leaned into Great-Grandad's ear:

"I always knew you were an inveterate clerical. But that you're a nationalist as well?"

"The Soviet Union has taught me that there's no true friendship between a small nation and a world power, just as there's no true friendship between a man and a woman."

"Indeed. The stronger dog gets to screw the weaker."

"You put that beautifully. Like our golden-tongued Lajos Kossuth. Go to the base of the statue and make a speech. You cut a fine figure, Józsi. You could become a politician in the new regime," Great-Grandad said and, taking advantage of the forward movement of the surging crowd, beat a quick retreat.

Though Great-Grandad was elated to see the Hungarians stand up for themselves once again, he was dismayed that on such a memorable occasion Józsi should be the first person he met. He couldn't understand what a political officer was doing on the street at a time like this. During the last revolution the people paid a house call to shoot Pista Tisza through the heart. Of course, that was out of the question now, with Rákosi on vacation with the Soviets. No wonder. Still, back then, the White army officers by this time were packing their

trunks to catch the Vienna express, while this man here is working the crowd in disguise, inciting them! Let him do as he pleases, Great-Grandad thought, we're not going to flee arm in arm. Not this time.

"Take care, or you'll be sorry," he told himself, whereas it wasn't even him crying now, but his daughter-in-law. He went to the back room to comfort her. Gyuszi pulled a long face. You could tell that an "I told you so" was on the tip of his tongue, so Great-Grandad didn't dare take his leave of him.

"An expectant mother mustn't cry."

"What, then, is an expectant mother supposed to do?"

Women can tell if they're not going to see you again. Men aren't afraid of death until they see the verdict of the People's Tribunal, typed in duplicate.

"God bless you, dear. I'll be back soon."

"Will you get a move on, old man," the boys in the uniform said.

Am I really that old, Great-Grandad thought. Even these young henchmen have lost respect. ❧

Translated by Judith Sollosy

János György Szilágyi

The Real Question

Cultural Property—Who Owns What?

The shock produced by the Second World War, primarily in those countries which suffered most, drew attention in the transitional phase of relative peace and tranquillity not only to the losses caused by the hostilities, but to the threats which war posed to the objective heritage of science and culture. This recognition, in which guilt feelings played a far from small part, led to the foundation of UNESCO within the United Nations in November 1945, only a few months after the cessation of hostilities, with the aim of protecting and caring for the values created by the human spirit.

But it was not years of peace and reconciliation that followed.

Protecting cultural artefacts did not disappear from the agenda altogether but the body's efforts increasingly became the blunt pretext for the pursuit of other interests. One after another, institutions came forward with agreements and declarations signalling their determination to enforce their interests at all cost. Getting the relevant laws drafted met with only partial success. In 1954, the Hague "Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict"[1] was penned, but its second draft, which came into effect in 2004, has not been ratified by the United States or Britain to this day.

1 ■ The earliest regulation concerning cultural property as a category enjoying special protection in the event of war was drafted in 1863 in the U.S. as a set of regulations for the military. See Margaret M. Miles, *Art as Plunder. The Ancient Origins of Debate about Cultural Property.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2008. pp. 149–151.

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Ceramica etrusco-corinzia figurata, *2 vols., Florence, 1992, 1998.*

The Hague Convention regulated protection in the event of war, but other problems surfaced in the decades which followed. New and ever more comprehensive agreements were drawn up for their remedy. One thing which united them was their often irrational aims and wording which gave rise to multiple interpretations, sometimes in direct opposition to the original aims for which those agreements had been forged. A constant flurry of draft agreements urged ever tighter regulation. The UNESCO agreement of 1970 obliges its signatories to prevent the illegal export or possession of cultural property, concentrating particularly on artefacts originating in Classical Antiquity. The UNIDROIT agreement of 1995 went one step further, making it mandatory for possessors to return objects which had been exported illegally beyond state borders, including all kinds of artefacts from various periods, from the beginnings to the present day. Two years later the UN's Human Rights Council drew up a proposal to protect the heritage of aboriginal peoples, defining heritage as everything and anything that an ethnic group believed to possess or to be characteristic of their identity—leaving the drafting of a final definition entirely up to the community in question.

Meanwhile more and more states signed up to the various agreements. Economic and other (largely media-driven) motives led to greater attention being channelled towards the objects that were subject to those agreements, especially objects which in one way or another could be classified as *objets d'art.* Rising demand for such objects brought an unforeseen proliferation of definitions for what an art object might be. Abstruse scientific questions suddenly came into the limelight, while, at the other end of the scale, broad debate emerged over familiar moral dilemmas of ownership. Alongside legal ways for obtaining highly desirable and marketable objects, there were illegal ones, too. These were diverse and growing in number. Objects attributed to Antiquity were highly sought after on the market from the very beginning. Their illegal trade promised fat profits, so the most widely known way of acquiring them, through illegal excavation, began to spread. Obviously there are no exact data, but it is safe to say that since the adoption of the UNESCO Convention of 1970, trade in objects which surfaced via illegal excavations has grown.

The bulk of the objects excavated in illicit diggings were dispersed among museums and private collections worldwide via international art dealers. At the end of the 19th century, Rodolfo Lanciani, one of the outstanding scholars of Ancient Rome at the time, was quite happy to sell antiquities retrieved during his diggings to interested foreign travellers. The situation has changed dramatically since: the issue of ownership of antique objects has created a battlefield in the international arena. The most powerful initiative emerged from scholarly circles. At a round table held two decades ago in what was then West Berlin—part of an international conference of Classical Archaeology which was held every five years—ten great and world-renowned scholars sat opposite one another. As they

outlined their intentions at the time, representatives of the world's five richest countries sat opposite those of the countries which were the world's five richest in artefacts still awaiting excavation. (In line with the centuries-old traditional view, the talks centred on the relics of Ancient Greek and Roman culture and their catchment areas.) The two sides, neither of which had official authorisation to make binding statements, agreed on two points, which are to this day the focus of official and scholarly debates. First, they agreed that any object derived from illicit excavations and traded on the international art market is inevitably removed from its original archaeological context, thereby reducing the chance for appraising both the set of finds and the individual object and causing a considerable loss to historical, art historical and other research. Second, as they stated, the main reason for the widening popularity of illegal diggings was growing demand by museums and private collectors for artefacts retrieved in such a way, usually with legitimate dealers acting as go-betweens.[2] The remedy proposed in Berlin was that states should sign an undertaking to disbar their museums from purchasing any object of art (the proposals refer to items which appeared after the UNESCO Agreement of 1970) whose legal provenance could not be shown either by documentation showing them to have been known before 1970 or by the availability of official permission from a competent authority permitting its sale. (The art trade is subject to the same rules, but each state can regulate the scope and severity of their regulations.) With the above amendments added, most of the states involved ratified the relevant agreements albeit with delays, and most art dealers, too, complied, at least as far as their open activities were concerned. It was, of course, up to each state to define the rules regulating trade in various types of objects and enforce them within its borders.

None of this however completely solved the legal problems, and perhaps solved even fewer scholarly ones. We must start out with two given facts: on the one hand, the theft of goods belonging to others—either in private or state hands—is subject to penalties under the laws of the state in question, and on the other, states must do their best to enforce every provision of signed and ratified agreements. In practice though most of the definitions used in the agreements allow for several, even contradictory, interpretations. And as the content of the agreements gradually expanded, it became clear that the original bona fide goals of the authors (and most of the signatories) were not being unequivocally served. This should come as no surprise given that over the past decades of globalisation a number of new aspects came to the fore.

In several cases contradictory considerations can be validly defended. The first such case worth mentioning is the interpretation of the category of property owned by others. Some two decades ago an Amerindian community organised

2 ■ *Akten des XIII. Internationalen Kongresses für Klassische Archäologie,* Berlin, 1988. Mainz am Rhein: Von Zabern, 1990., pp. 642–643.

a protest demanding the return of objects displayed in a museum which had the very aim of boosting knowledge and appreciation for that community's culture. None of the objects they claimed were classified as being illicitly procured according to the above-mentioned agreements.[3] The demonstrators did not want to exhibit the objects. On the contrary, they claimed that these objects had been removed from graves where they had served the purpose of accompanying their ancestors on their last journeys, thus they constituted their property; their lawful demand was that the objects should be put back in their original place. Another case from Alaska also showed that the category of "illicit excavation" stood on shaky ground: an indigenous collector of ancient Alaskan bone carvings, which were sold for high prices on the art market, defended himself against the charge of illegal dealing, explaining that just as his ancestors had used bones in their subsistence economy, so must their descendants use them, though in a different way, but for the same purpose.[4] This is known as "subsistence digging". Similar cases can be seen all over the world. Here the moral obligation to protect human life has to be balanced with the imperative to protect objects unearthed or still underground.

The most problematic concept goes under the heading "the property of others". Signatory states all consider themselves to be in ownership of objects of art found or hidden on or under ground within their borders. It was as early as the 16th century that disputes raged over this very question. Thus Tuscany under the Medicis and the Papal States, vied for antiques. The most intact monumental ancient bronze statue known to this day (the *Arringatore*) was found with an Etruscan inscription near Perugia on territory that was part of the Papal States. However, a liegeman of the Medicis anticipating the Vatican officials smuggled it across the border to Tuscan territory. Today it is one of the most precious treasures in the Museo Archeologico in Florence.[5] A more contemporary example affects Hungary. The only archaic Greek artefact to have been part of a legal excavation on the territory of present-day Hungary is the bronze *hydria* found in Ártánd in the grave of a Scythian prince. Ártánd lies on the Hungarian–Romanian border where the current border was drawn up making an adjustment to accommodate a quarry. The *hydria* was found on territory which was part of Hungary after the adjustment; if the line of the border had curved in the opposite direction the find would be the pride of Romania, unique as the only archaic Greek artefact apart from those from Greek seaside towns on the Black Sea litoral.

These two cases, far apart in space and time, serve as a warning of something little discussed in this context: referring to state borders, which are

3 ■ *Archeo* 10 (1995), marzo.
4 ■ *Cambridge Archaeological Journal* 17 (2007), p. 231.
5 ■ Tobias Dohrn: *Der Arringatore. Bronzestatue im Museo archeologico von Florenz.* Berlin: Gebr. Mann, 1968.

often disputed and prone to change in the course of time, is not exactly helpful when making decisions on ownership.

Decades of experience suggest that regulations, no matter how strictly enforced, are not able to put an end to the practice of subsistence digging, which in some parts of the Middle East is regarded as a traditional source of income: in destitute families, the family member or members who have been punished according to the law are often respected for sacrificing themselves for the family (I know this from my own experiences in Italy). Art objects thus unearthed mainly end up in private collections abroad, moving through illegal channels. The scholarly community necessarily regards these objects as non-existent. Countries which feel a special urge to repent employ such absurd forms of self-restraint as the *American Journal of Archaeology,* which at one point made it a rule to refrain from publishing "illegal" artefacts (it eased its rules later)[6]. Or there is the highly esteemed German journal *Antike Welt,* which in the headline of a relevant article denounced all private collectors as potential thieves[7].

Countries rich in art treasures have such a large quantity of material in private collections, retrieved or salvaged from legal diggings, that there is little opportunity for their publication let alone for conservation and safe-keeping even when it comes to the most important excavations. Examples are endless. Italy is engaged in an ongoing struggle with illegal diggers and smugglers. At the same time, it has still not published anything on large scale of the results of major excavations in Spina, in the Po Delta, between 1954 and 1956. The museum set up in Ferrara to present that find is closed[8]. A French archaeologist leading the excavations of a shrine in a town near Capua found the objects unearthed there packed in two thousand unopened boxes two decades after the end of the digging[9]. A large number of similar cases, and not only in Italy, shows what a large proportion of legally excavated objects fail to reach the scholarly community, let alone the general public. In contrast, more often than not, art objects of an unknown or suspicious provenance, thanks to their wealthy owners, are often described in lavishly illustrated catalogues.

It is not that the institutions guarding the objects are negligent; they are simply short of curators and restoration staff and short of storage space in countries abundantly rich in art treasures. All these difficulties were eliminated, however, in places and at times when richer countries interested in Classical Antiquity were also offered the opportunity to participate in research; in this respect

6 ■ *American Journal of Archaeology* 94 (1990), pp. 525–527, and 111 (2007), p. 3.
7 ■ *Antike Welt* 2 (2007): *Beutekunst und Grabraub* (thematic issue).
8 ■ P. E. Arias, *Eutopia* 1 (1992), p. 106.
9 ■ J.-P. Morel, in: *I culti della Campania antica. Atti del convegno internazionale di studi in ricordo di Nazarena Valenza Mele, Napoli, 15-17 maggio 1995* a cura di G. Greco e S. Adamo Muscettola. Roma, 1998, p. 157.

French excavations in Delos and Delphi, German in Olympia and Kerameikos in Athens, or American in the Agora of Athens must be mentioned. (Just to give an idea, the publication of the excavations in Delos is now in its 41st volume; the Agora of Athens in its 34th.) Luckily, recently we have seen a return of this practice with off-location countries receiving ever more opportunities to get involved, albeit in excavations of somewhat lesser importance.

On the other hand, the earlier practice of giving foreign participants, donors of funds and scholars a share of the finds is on the verge of disappearing altogether. The motivation for this must be found in what Arnold Toynbee over half a century ago called the debate between head and heart in history.

What should we think in our globalising world about an Italy, in 1983, asking the United States to implement special extraordinary measures against the illicit import of objects of their cultural heritage, arguing that these objects were "sources of the identity and pride of the modern Italian nation"? In response to the Greek delegation's demand that Britain return the Parthenon Marbles at a meeting in 2000, the U.K. Culture Secretary Chris Smith couldn't agree less. He told the Greeks that Britons were also inheritors of the Classical Tradition: the spread of ideas, values, and artefacts over two thousand years had profoundly contributed to the historical process that created Britain as it is today. Why should this process be reversed? Mr Smith asked.

James Cuno, head of the Chicago Art Institute and former head of the Courtauld Institute of Art, brings up examples to show that the two positions are reconcilable[10]. He starts out from the premise that no culture exists or can exist without external influences. The borders of cultures, if they can be drawn at all, are not to be equated with the borders of the nation-states of today, which have been in a state of constant flux over the course of history. He argues that the broadest possible dissemination of the cultural heritage, regardless of borders, can help not only to increase knowledge and an appreciation of a culture, but can also greatly help to overcome barriers between different peoples. One of the main tools for doing so would be via encyclopaedic museums which can present the unique character of different cultures side by side. This, of course, does not contradict the fact that some communities will feel closer to works of art that express the characteristics of their own culture in a more poignant, recognisable way. And it does not in itself encourage isolation. On the contrary, used in an imaginative way, it spurs curiosity and openness towards other cultures. In the words of Marcus Aurelius Antoninus, the Roman philosopher and emperor: "My city and country, insofar as I am Antoninus, is Rome, but insofar as I am a man, it is the world.[11] Cuno says the argument denying the validity of this principle is:

10 ■ James Cuno, *Who Owns Antiquity? Museums and the Battle Over Our Ancient Heritage.* Princeton–Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2008.
11 ■ Translated by George Long.

"the fig-leaf worn by modern nations" that impose laws which are merely there to conceal their real interests.[12] We have only to think of the way the problem of legal–illegal excavations is merged with the regulation of the cultural-property trade. As regards the former, there are no arguments in favour of illicit digging besides social need. Putting all else aside, it is natural for states to allow legal excavations within their borders and to consider the designation of the excavation site to be within their scope of authority. But this is true only with some qualifications. It is well known that during the "colonisation period" major excavation sites were chosen by the colonising countries to cover up their political aims. There is no denying: this practice survives to the present day.

Here however another circumstance has to be born in mind. The technical conditions and requirements needed now at excavations of scientific merit have changed fundamentally. In fact, ever since those diggings began, mostly in the 19th century, they have been changing constantly. Not to mention the fact that by now evaluating the finds has become a multidisciplinary pursuit and the excavation process itself the subject of wide-ranging scrutiny involving the natural sciences. Technical aspects, both on-site and in the laboratory, have created panoplies of partially or wholly independent disciplines which only a few rich countries can afford at a satisfactory level and countries rich in archaeological finds usually much less so than countries pioneering in natural science research. Luckily there have been quite a few examples over the past decades of excavations run as joint ventures. Understandably though authorities are much more inclined to support excavations from which their own countries are likely to obtain a share of the finds, even if only a modest one. In other words, projects which serve the enrichment of their own culture.

Earlier, depending on the time and the country in question, it was customary for the financing country providing generous, sometimes full, financial or scientific support for an excavation to complement in return its own museum's collection. That appeared to be reasonable as a reward. Yet over the past decades this practice has been cut back drastically to the point of total elimination. There is no scientific justification for excluding a country having made such efforts from showcasing representative material—not necessarily the most valuable items—in its own museum. After all, it concerns the discovery of a culture financed by the taxpayer's money, a culture which the majority of its citizens would be otherwise deprived from learning about.

In 1964, Italy conducted an experiment for a few months in Vulci, one of its richest Etruscan excavation sites, allowing a consortium to make decisions freely about the fate of one third of the material retrieved in the dig, including the possible sale to a foreign country. Another third of the find came into the hands of the owner of the land and another third went into state ownership.

12 ■ Ćuno, op. cit., p. 117.

(I myself have seen in Amsterdam, in Leiden, in Stockholm, as well as at the University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, which has a special interest in the parallel presentation of world cultures, to mention only the countries that traditionally have an interest in Etruscan culture, complete sets of grave goods, objects that were not particularly striking, but still highly representative of Etruscan culture as a whole, bought legally and precisely for this purpose, restored and labelled to a very high standard.) The state's third of this excavation of Vulci, which boasted a find of 181 graves, is still unpublished and unrestored, stashed away as it is in a dusty local storeroom inaccessible to visitors. At the same time, permission for the legal sale of some of the excavation material to foreign countries had soon been withdrawn: under current legislation, the objects discovered on the land of Italy must, without exception, remain in that country.

The broadly discussed situation in Italy and Greece has become the easy subject of bestsellers and television programmes. Cuno tried to shed light on the real reasons underlying this situation giving little known examples from three countries: Iraq, Turkey and China. In Iraq, support for archaeology and archaeological museums increased after the Ba'ath Party came to power; and gained further momentum after Saddam Hussein's rise to the presidency in 1979. In his speeches Saddam made no secret of his political message: to promote the global importance of a renaissance in Iraq under his leadership, to prove the unity and Pre-Islamic origins of Arabic civilisation, and to accentuate the idea that Iraq's present-day culture is an organic continuation of a prehistoric Mesopotamian ancestry.

As the Professor of Prehistoric Archaeology at Istambul University put it, the fast-growing pace of archaeological research in Turkey has more to do with the ideology of the modern republic than with the country's present capacities in archaeology. The export of art objects had already been banned at the end of the 19th century, and current legislation prohibits their private ownership even within the country's borders. During the turbulent years of Turkish history one thing remained unchanged: the idea that cultural goods should primarily serve the purpose of strengthening national identity. However, two issues might stand in the way. Mustafa Kemal, the head of the republic established in 1922, had wanted to build a new Turkey based on an Anatolian identity. He chose Ankara as the country's capital with this in mind, setting up the Museum of Anatolian Civilisations and supporting research on Prehistoric Anatolia (mainly on Hittite culture). The parties and leaders who later came to power, and who gradually eased the secularisation process that began with Kemal, now look upon the Ottoman Empire as the identity-forming predecessor of modern Turkey, and, therefore, assert claims to all the archaeological heritage which was discovered on the territory of the Ottoman Empire and which had earlier been collected in

the Ottoman Imperial Museum established in 1846—thus in principle momentarily closing, but hardly putting to rest, the widely raised question regarding the ownership of treasures found at Schliemann's Trojan excavations.

The other long-standing and unsettled issue concerns the country's ten-million-strong Kurdish population. The country's leaders, inclined to create a Turkish history albeit with changing preferences, have argued that the Kurds never ruled a country of their own, and will not hear of an independent Kurdish history. But it is unfathomable at the moment how they can make what they consider to be the root of their identity acceptable as such to the Kurds, too. The present official Turkish archaeological position openly declares that decisions on selecting an area for archaeological excavation are made primarily according to the dig's potential ethnic significance and thus will not recognise a cultural heritage as Kurdish, that is, as anything distinct from Turkish.

China's example offers a litany of lessons drawn from across various periods, areas and social systems. Legislation of diverse content and scope was drafted on the protection of cultural property from the 1930s onwards, but a real turning point came only in 1979, with the partial thaw, almost synchronously with Deng Xiaoping's reforms. In 1982, legislation came into effect which allowed the private ownership of cultural property within the country's borders while strictly limiting their export, even with state permission. At the same time, state spending on the protection of the cultural heritage was raised four- or five-fold and hundreds of new museums were envisaged. Until 1980 there were no auctions of art objects in China, but in 2006, artefacts worth two billion US dollars changed hands at auctions, ending up mainly in new private collections. At the same time, from 2005, as a result of careful planning, enormous amounts of money have been spent on the purchase and return to the homeland of Chinese artefacts on sale at international auctions: Christie's handled the majority of auctioned Chinese items worth a total of 10 million dollars last year, and obtained by Chinese bidders. At the same time the Chinese government turned to the United States with a request to tighten regulations on the import of Chinese artefacts from the Palaeolithic period to 1911. Cuno bitterly remarks that the answer to this question will be dictated by foreign policy rather than the interests of archaeology or American museums. One must note in the wording of the request, however, the definition for the period and the geographic location (which can be rendered exactly only in relation to state borders), which states that all objects ever made on Chinese territory shall be considered Chinese, regardless of whether they were discovered within the existing state borders and irrespective of the ethnic background of the culture of which they are a product. According to the official standpoint, this heritage is part and parcel of the roots of present-day China and the items' display in Chinese museums should strengthen the patriotic identity of Chinese youth. It is an open

question, however, how much of this view is shared by the over 50 minorities living in China today, and not least, what characteristics could be used as a basis for defining cultural products as Chinese. The aim of this concept is overt and clear: in Cuno's words, "to legitimize the current government by reference to an ancient Chinese culture, as if the People's Republic of China were the rightful, indeed natural, heir to [thousands of years of] Chinese dynasties".[13]

In countries prohibiting exports and drawing up laws with the aim of unilateral isolation, a new role for archaeology (and, one might add, in some cases for museums, too) is defined primarily in political terms. Yet finding solutions for existing scientific problems, as far as it depends on human resources, usually requires a fair amount of goodwill, and the first signs of this are already apparent in certain areas. Permanent loans, exchanges or sales of published objects and other gestures can contribute to creating a worldview aimed at presenting a broad range of cultures side by side. This would be all the more desirable in pursuit of the creation of what now seems like the only way to salvage civilisation—an intellectual globalisation.

Laws, state borders, cultural patterns, as Cuno suggests throughout his book, are ever-changing and do indeed change, as do the legal ownership of the products of man-made culture. The cultural heritage of mankind, however, raises another ownership issue, too, which Cuno only touches on, though the issue is raised. The products of past eras and cultures and those of contemporary culture, too, have a more profound, an intellectual value, which transcends their material as well as ownership status, and on this, no legal dispute is possible. Who owns *St Matthew Passion* or *A Midsummer Night's Dream*?

One spark to the debate about the "voyage of artefacts" was a 2,500-year old mixing bowl *(krater)* made in Athens, whose decorations are signed by a master called Euphronios. Upon completion, the vase was exported to the Etruscan Cerveteri and retrieved from an excavation there before being taken via illicit channels to the Metropolitan Museum of New York. As a result of a three-decade tug-of-war and understandably indignant correspondence, the object was repatriated to Italy on the basis of an interstate agreement, which closed the legal debate over its ownership once and for all. However, anyone spellbound by the magic of the master's craft will be its owner, whether a native of Rome or of the slums of Mexico, and he will own an equal and unalienable share of human culture. London University's Accordia Research Institute organises annual lectures on the subject of Ancient Italian culture. The closing lecture on 5 May 2008 was delivered by Marina Papal Sokal of University College London with the following title (the scare-quotes indicate where the real problem lies): "Who 'Owns' the Euphronios Krater?" After all, this is the real question. ❧

13 ■ Cuno, op. cit., p. 105.

István Riba

It Is a Wise Child

The Conquest and Its Riddles

When it comes to the circumstances of the Hungarian Conquest, even the most basic facts are in dispute. There is controversy about the origins of the Hungarians, about the area of the steppe that can be associated with them before they moved into the Carpathian basin, about the time of their possible arrival, and even about the numbers involved. Similarly, there have been conflicting theories concerning the origins of the Hungarian language, the etymology of the names of the Hungarian tribes, as well as the names and functions of the ruling princes that led the alliance of the seven Hungarian tribes, and the order in which they ruled.

Most historians agree that the Ancient Hungarians began their occupation and settlement of the Carpathian Basin in A.D. 895, despite the fact that this particular date was in fact first stipulated by the Hungarian government, in 1892. With the thousandth anniversary of Hungarian statehood approaching (1000), the Hungarian Academy of Sciences was given the task of setting a date for the Conquest, and with that a go-ahead for the millennial celebrations. The Academy's scholars were unable to decide on a particular year, agreeing only that it must have occurred between 888 and 900. The year 1895 was chosen though there was no consensus amongst scholars. To complicate matters, for budgetary reasons Hungary was finally able to celebrate only in 1896, which made an impact on historiography, too, as for many years 1896 figured as the accepted date and was taught in schools. At present, though, most historians accept 895 as the year when the Conquest took place.

The Ancient Hungarians travelled a long road before reaching the Carpathian Basin. Where this journey started and the route taken are still disputed. According to the linguists and, in their wake, the great majority of historians too, Hungarian is a Finno-Ugric language. In other words, the

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forebears of the Hungarians must at some point have shared the area they occupied with other Finno-Ugrians. This cohabitation may have taken place in the 4th-3rd millennium B.C., after which time the populations speaking Ugric languages parted company with the speakers of Finno-Permic languages. Linguists have attempted to find their way back to this early homeland via language, wishing to match words of Finno-Ugric origin with the occurrence of particular plants and animals. According to some historians, the early homeland was on the European side of the Ural Mountains, others argue that plants with Finno-Ugric names were indigenous only on the Siberian side of the range. All we know about the Ugrian period, which lasted approximately until 500 B.C., is similarly through language, by way of comparison with the vocabularies of Vogul and Ostyak, languages which likewise belong to the same family. In this period, the Ancient Hungarians probably lived in western Siberia; according to others who disagree, they always lived to the west of the Ural Mountains, in other words in Europe.

After the dispersal of the Ugrians, the presumptive ancestors of the Hungarians disappear from history for more than a thousand years. We do not know where they were living at that time. As it is not possible to attribute to them specific artifacts on the Asian steppe there is no way to locate them there on archaeological evidence. Of course, occasional finds unearthed on that huge territory often display parallels with Conqest-period specimens in the Carpathian Basin, a definitive attribution however is impossible. One territory where such finds crop up is Bashkiria, and accordingly many have surmised that at one time the Ancient Hungarians lived there. At one point, they came into contact with Turkic peoples, first and foremost with the Volga Bulgars, and acquired a good number of Bulgar-Turkic loanwords which are still part of present-day Hungarian.

Critics of this ancient homeland theory claim that it was not necessary for the Ancient Hungarians to migrate in order to acquire loanwords. It is conceivable, too, that different populations merged, each retaining some of its own vocabulary, and that this led to the formation of Hungarian. If the above hypothesis is correct then the territory from which the Ancient Hungarians started out need not be linked to the one-time Finno-Ugric and then to the Ugric language area.

It was only in the early 9th century that the Ancient Hungarians reappeared, as one of the migrating populations on the southern Russian steppe. According to a 10th-century account by the Emperor Constantine Porphyrogenetos, the Ancient Hungarians lived in Levedia, an area occupied by Levedi, their first ruling prince. The expression "first ruling prince" would indicate that the seven tribes had entered into an alliance and had chosen a leader for themselves. Although it is not clear where exactly Levedia was, that much seems certain: it was to the west of the River Don.

Ancient Hungarians appeared in a war in the Balkans in the 830s as auxiliaries of the Danube Bulgars. At this time their tribes were part of the

Khazar Empire. It was then that the name used in other languages when referring to them was coined, a name of Turkic origin: "Hungarian", "ungarisch", "vengerski" which can be traced back to the name of the Onogurs. The Onogurs were a different tribe, but at this time the Hungarians, too, were called Onogurs in various accounts and so the name remained with them.

Because of attacks by the Pechenegs, the Hungarians fled westwards from the Khazar Empire in the middle of the 9th century and arrived in the Etelköz region. Where this area may have been is likewise disputed: most have located it in the territory between the Dniester and Pruth rivers. The Hungarians only spent 20-odd years in the Etelköz, as in 895 they appear to have reached their future home in the Carpathian Basin albeit, as some sources tell us, in a weakened state as Tsar Simeon of Bulgaria had routed their army and the Pechenegs drove those still remaining in the Etelköz out of that region. It was then that the nomadic Ancient Hungarians, under the leadership of Prince Árpád, crossed the Carpathian passes, first occupying territories east of the Danube and then, after 900, the area west of that river.

In the Carpathian Basin the conquerors found a local population. Slavs, Moravians, Bulgarians, Franks, Bavarians, Carantanians and the remnants of the Avars of the Avar Empire. As to in what numbers and what the numbers of the conquerors were, historians can only guess. There have been those who started out from the premise that for the conquerors to impose their language in a very short time span was only possible because they were more numerous than the population they encountered. According to others, the Hungarians possessed a powerful army, so even if they were in a minority they could easily gain the upper hand in the Carpathian Basin and by doing so ensure the survival of their people and their language.

There are other unanswered questions. With tens of thousands of excavated burial sites the archaeological evidence remains obscure. What is certain however is that in the late 9th to early 10th century people were being buried in the Carpathian Basin whose culture had no precedent there. That in itself is a problem but not the only one as no cemeteries of the kind that appeared here in that period have been found east of the Carpathian Basin either. If we regard these new burials as the archaeological heritage of the conquerors who, as written sources tell us, moved in at this time, then this was a population which had left no trace at all to the east of Hungary. There are, of course, possible parallels regarding individual artifacts here too, even the similar orientation of the burial, but not with the type of cemetery as a unit. If from an archaeological point of view it is practically impossible to trace back the population that moved into the Carpathian Basin even for a couple of decades then a process of acculturation must have taken place with those who already lived there.

For more than a hundred years it has been customary to divide the archaeological remains of the 9th- to 10th-century cemeteries into two parts: the less numerous burials including richer finds and the more numerous humbler burials, approximately five times as many as those rich in grave goods. The view used to be that the richer burials were those of the conquering Hungarians, while the humbler ones were those of Slav commoners the Hungarians encountered here. Since the early 1960s archaeologists have seen this issue differently arguing that the two different types of burial refer not to ethnic but to social differences, i.e. that the humbler burials were burials of commoners who were ethnic Hungarians. This contention is supported by the fact that cemeteries have been excavated in which one or two burials with richer finds appear among a mass of poorer ones. This view would suggest however that there are hardly any cemeteries left belonging to the population the conquerors encountered here though clearly that population was numerous.

Recent anthropological research does not support the above argument as it has become evident that the great majority of the inhabitants in the Árpádian age (i.e. the period beginning from the 11th century) were not descendants of the conquerors, but of those who lived in the Carpathian basin before the Conquest.

Carbon (Carbon-14) or radiocarbon dating is also challenging archaeologists. There are many finds which according to radiocarbon tests were buried at points in time differing from those established earlier now on the basis of traditional archaeological dating. The most recent example of this is the burial of a Hungarian warrior with rich grave goods that came to light in a small town in Lower Austria. On the basis of traditional archaeological methods, experts dated it to the middle of the 10th century, surmising that the warrior may have been buried after the Battle of Pressburg in 907 as the accessories—belt mountings, saber and coins—too, all pointed to this. Radiocarbon tests at a Vienna laboratory however suggested that the warrior had been buried in the period between 980 and 1018. This presented historians and archaeologists with a dilemma (which is still unresolved) since received Conquest-era chronology, based on the received dating of its burial sites, excludes the possibility of such a late find.

Genetic investigations are still in their infancy and for the present more convincing conclusions cannot be drawn, still they adumbrate a similar picture: while the footprints left behind by the Conquest-era occupants of the commoners' graves can be traced in the present-day Hungarian population, the occupants of the rich graves did not pass on their genes. If this is so, then this means no less than that the conquerors were very few in number. ❧

The Ethnogenesis of Hungarians and Archaeogenetics

An Interview with Csanád Bálint, Director of the Archaeological Institute, Hungarian Academy of Sciences

István Riba: *You recently completed a vast research project conducted jointly with the Institute of Genetics of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. It uses the genetic study of skeletal remains to shed light on that perpetually elusive question: the origin of Hungarians. Would you please first explain historical genetics and the financing of the project?*

Csanád Bálint: Ever since the field emerged in the 1980s, historical genetics has helped us to gain a clearer understanding of mankind's origins, the dispersal of populations and early migrations. Hungarians were quick to embrace the work of one of the field's great pioneers, Luigi Luca Cavalli-Sforza (even if the single sentence about Hungarians in his seminal work[1] contains half a dozen basic errors). Attempts since to understand the genetic origins of Hungarians have met with mixed results both in and outside Hungary. To start with, there are serious methodological objections. We knew that examining the earliest skeletal remains of Hungarians, whose origins and language are unique in Central Europe, would be a valuable historical undertaking, but it was crucial to get archaeologists and geneticists to cooperate in the use of sound methods. The Archaeological Institute of HAS together with the Institute of Genetics attached to the Biological Research Centre of HAS in Szeged collaborated between 2001 and 2007 on the project and applied for a grant to finance it. As part of this project, the Laboratory of Archaeogenetics of the Archaeological Institute was established. At least 150 skeletal remains from the 10th and 11th centuries were analysed. In 90 cases this was successful, a high

1 ■ Luca Cavalli-Sforza, Paolo Menozzi and Alberto Piazza, *The History and Geography of Human Genes,* Princeton University Press, 1994.

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proportion for protohistorical bone finds. In the end, we were able to establish the haplotypes[2] of sixty individuals.

You mentioned the importance of a sound methodology; what then are the pitfalls of archaeogenetics?

Geneticists have tended to address vital historical and linguistic questions without knowing enough about these fields. Their overreach means that conclusions are drawn about the origins of peoples and their interrelatedness, overlooking the fact that only individuals, not groups, can be regarded as biological entities. Groups and peoples are the product of history and are moulded socially. By co-operation with the geneticists in Szeged we wished to avoid these mistakes. Think of it this way: you could take genetic samples of Budapest residents today, but this would tell you precious little about the origin of the city's inhabitants, given the city's historical flux. Today's populace is not a living fossil of the ancient one. Since there is a danger that the genetic sample can predetermine the outcome of the project, we wanted to be clear about the origin of samples and the basis for their selection. This is why the archaeologists in our project guided the geneticists in one direction or another. Before deciding what to use of the 10th–11th century genetic material, we thought long and hard about principles of classification: territorial (the principal regions of Hungary), chronological, social position and "rich" and "poor" graves (the presence of grave goods can have a great many different explanations) and the presumed culture to which the group belonged. In addition the geneticists took samples from people living in Hungary today and from Székelys in Transylvania.

You mentioned the rich–poor divide in 10th-century burials. In the 1960s and 1970s these graves were classified according to ethnicity. Is this approach valid?

10th-century burials were divided into rich and poor around a hundred years ago and matched with Hungarians and Slavs respectively. However, in recent decades it has become usual to regard them as graves of the elite, the middle stratum and the common people. The ethnocentric approach was, once at a time, in the past, the general practice in most countries. To our surprise, it is still that today in many places. In Communist Hungary it was expected, for ideological reasons, that finds and data should contribute to narrative history. These days it is clear what archaeologists mean when they say that a culture is not linked to ethnicity: the area where artefacts belonging to a culture are found is not necessarily identical with the area in which a particular people lived.

2 ■ Closely linked genes which are usually inherited as a unit.

Are there cases in which Carbon-14 tests contradict our historical knowledge?

No doubt the dating of Conquest-period finds could be more exact. It is doubtful, however, that this can be achieved. An exciting case to have emerged recently was the discovery of a young man buried in Gnadendorf, near the Czech border in Austria: the grave goods, including coins, show a perfect match with those of tenth-century burials in Hungary. On this basis, archaeologists pinned the burial to the middle of the tenth century. However, Carbon-14 tests in a Vienna laboratory place this burial date in the early 11th century, conflicting with historical knowledge. Living and burying in the Hungarian way in that area and at that time is out of the question. Much has been written on the Carbon-14 method, which is currently undergoing a reassessment. It is fairly reliable in the case of prehistoric finds but becomes less and less so as we approach our own time. On the other hand, the laboratory in Vienna has a high reputation, and for the period around the 11th century the method is tolerably reliable.

Can archaeogenetics expand our understanding of earlier findings? Is the set of data sufficiently large?

Our database was notably large by international standards and certainly the biggest in Central and Eastern Europe from a single archaeological period. Still, the historical classification of genetic data has its limitations, and we should be wary of drawing sweeping conclusions. Much more research and evidence is needed: the involvement of genetics will not finally solve or clarify the ethnogenesis of Hungarians. Genetics is a new method which offers a fresh point of view rather than a key to ethnohistorical knowledge. There is no such thing as absolute truth when it comes to ethnogenesis.

Nevertheless, the geneticist István Raskó has shown conclusively that no genetic continuity exists between conquerors whose finds have come to light from richer burials, and Hungarians today.

True, and for this reason the trend widely practised the world over within historical genetics which seeks to determine the origins of early populations using samples collected from the living is basically flawed.

What is the scholarly consensus on the graves with meagre grave goods? They used to be regarded as belonging to Slavs.

It is still the scholarly consensus that skeletons found in cemeteries where grave goods are meagre are those of the common people. But "common people" is a collective term which does not tell us anything about ethnic composition. They could be the descendants of surviving Avars, three different kinds of Slavs and the remaining Bavarians. Women captured in raids in western Europe and in Italy may have been among them as well. These people

together made up the "common people", and on the basis of the burials we cannot say who belongs to which ethnicity.

With regard to the burials rich in grave goods, can we claim that they were those of the conquering Hungarians, possibly of those belonging to the retinue of Árpád's family?

Conclusions about ethnicity based on burial sites should only be drawn cautiously, if at all. We learnt this lesson from research dating back around fifty years which identified the archaeological evidence left behind by the Kabars, who had joined the Hungarians. Even if we accept that a burial is rich, it is still not certain that it was that of a "chieftain". Moreover, artefacts can, for many reasons, get into a particular burial site where they do not "belong".

Has genetic research in Hungary yielded any surprises?

The results of the analysis of genetic data from the cemetery at the village of Harta (on the Great Hungarian Plain) confront Conquest-era archaeology with a serious problem. It had been taken for granted that cemeteries were established along clan or kinship lines. When we looked at the whole cemetery we discovered that no one was related. It would be worth examining a couple of larger cemeteries in order to study this issue more deeply.

Will you have an opportunity to continue this project, and possibly to repeat the examinations using larger samples?

Our grant has run out. Much work has to be done outside Hungary too: analysis of samples deriving from the Turkic peoples of the steppe and from the Finno-Ugrians of the Volga region is just as important. A lot of money is needed—genetic research is very costly. Anyone who is passionately interested in the ethnogenesis of Hungarians is welcome to fund such research. ❧

Nándor Dreisziger

The Lessons of Genomic Research

The dawn of the 21st century witnessed the birth of the new science of genomics. This event coincided with the sequencing of the human genome in the year 2000. Genomics is also known as "deep ancestry" and has significant implications for the study of our distant past. Hitherto our knowledge of ancient times, even the second half of the first millennium A.D., derived mainly from such fields as archaeology, anthropology, mythology, paleo-linguistics, paleo-musicology as well as the examination of very rare manuscript sources such as chronicles, travel and government reports. In the case of peoples without a tradition of keeping written records, these latter sources invariably originated with foreigners who often had very limited knowledge of the events and conditions they described. To these means of elucidating the distant past genomics offers a new and potent instrument.

The impact of this new science on historiography has already been felt in countries where genomic research was undertaken as soon as this new science, one might say new branch of genetics, became known. A good example is the United Kingdom where several scientists applied genomics to the re-examination of British prehistory. Perhaps the most prominent of them, Stephen Oppenheimer of Oxford University, in a massive study of the pre-history of the British Isles concluded that most of the invaders of these islands (the Celts, the Romans, the Angles, the Jutes, the Saxons, the Danes and the Normans) have left minimal genetic footprints. He also argued that the people who brought the proto-English language to England

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were not the Angles and Saxons of the early Middle Ages as believed hitherto, but migrants who arrived centuries earlier.[1]

Scientists in Hungary did not wait long after the debut of genomics to begin applying it to the study of Hungarian pre-history. The most significant of such studies was done by a team headed by Professor István Raskó of the University of Szeged's medical school and director of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences' Biological Research Centre, Institute of Genetics. The project focused on the Hungarian Conquest of the Carpathian Basin in the late 9th century A.D. and its genetic legacy.[2]

The decision to focus on this subject was an important one since there are many unanswered questions relating to this supposedly momentous event in Hungarian history. The Conquest (the Hungarian word is *honfoglalás,* which translates literally as "taking of [a] home") is one of many such developments in Europe during the Dark Ages—and it had an outcome that differs from the others. It could be said that, if it happened as it has been portrayed throughout the centuries, it defies the logic of the history of conquests in the early medieval period.

In the Hungarian case, according to the received version of this event, the Conquest resulted in the establishment by the conquerors of a nation that, for a while at least, continued the traditions of the newcomer—including a nomadic lifestyle and wide-ranging military campaigns in search of tribute and booty. More importantly, in this instance the conquerors are known to have imposed their language on the local autochthonous population. In this latter aspect especially, the Hungarian Conquest seems to have been highly a-typical, one might almost say unique. In all other significant conquests during Europe's Dark Ages different patterns prevailed. Among the conquests that had dissimilar outcomes were those of the Scandinavians—whether called Norsemen, Vikings, Norwegians, Danes, Swedes or Varangians. Scandinavian warriors occupied and then settled large areas in eastern and northern England—the land known for some time as Danelaw. Other Scandinavians ravaged and then occupied northern France, about the same time as the "Hungarian Conquest" happened. Later, in 1066, the descendants of these people, by then known as the Normans, conquered England and installed themselves as the ruling elite there. Other Scandinavians, known as the Varangians, imposed themselves as the rulers of ancient Rus—in Novgorod, then in Kiev, and then elsewhere. Closer to Danubian Europe and somewhat earlier, Turkic-speaking Bulgars established their rule over local, mainly Slavic-speaking populations in the Lower Danube Valley. In all of these cases, the conquerors failed to impose their language on a long-term basis. In fact, in

1 ■ Stephen Oppenheimer, *The Origins of the British.* London: Robinson, 2007, pp. 477–82.

2 ■ The background of this research project is described in the introductory paragraphs of Csanád Bálint, "Az ethnos a kora középkorban (a kutatás lehetőségei és korlátai) [The Ethnos in the Early Middle Ages (Chances and Limits for Research)]," in *Századok,* 140, 2 (2006): pp. 277–348.

a few generations they all learned the language of their subjects. Even the Normans of Normandy (whose ancestors in the mid-10th century still spoke Scandinavian dialects) were unable to impose their recently acquired French language on their English subjects, even though they, in particular the priests that came with them, had a well-developed tradition of literacy.[3]

Why was the Hungarian Conquest supposedly different? One answer could be that in this case we had a large conquering population taking over a sparsely populated area. Many but certainly not all the historians and archaeologists who had examined the story of the Hungarian Conquest have said that this indeed had been the case. Would genomic research confirm or contradict these conclusions? The project undertaken by István Raskó and his team was to throw light on this riddle or possibly even solve it.

The results of the research began to appear in print in 2007. Two papers were in English and appeared in major international journals.[4] The first study examined and compared the mitochondrial DNA of Conquest-era women and present-day Hungarian women. Mitochondrial DNA (mtDNA) is passed on by women to their children, but it is not passed on by men to their offspring. It is, as a result, a means of studying the bloodlines of women. The researchers obtained mtDNA from two groups. One of these was made up of slightly over one hundred women living in present-day Hungary—along with 76 female residents of the Székely counties of Transylvania, Romania. (The inhabitants of these counties, it might be added, are overwhelmingly Magyar-speaking Székelys.) DNA was also extracted from the bones of women who were interred in post-Conquest-era graves. This group was further subdivided into two categories. Some bones came from graves of the elite, presumably wives and daughters of the "conquerors." These graves were identified by the rich grave goods they contained. The other group represented subject peoples whose bones were found in graves of the common people, as identified by the lack of rich grave goods.

When the mtDNA of the modern Hungarian (including Székely) women were compared to the two groups of the ancient ones interesting results emerged. It became evident that the variance between the present-day populations' mtDNA

3 ■ Later, in the early Modern Era and after, conquerors with traditions of literacy, schooling, and in command of a major "world" language, were much more likely to impose their language on autochthonous populations.

4 ■ István Raskó, et al., "Comparison of Maternal Lineage and Biogeographic Analyses of Ancient and Modern Hungarian Populations." *American Journal of Physical Anthropology,* 134 (2007), pp. 354–68. Also, Raskó, et al., "Y-Chromosome Analysis of Ancient Hungarian and Two Modern Hungarian-Speaking Populations from the Carpathian Basin," *Annals of Human Genetics,* 72, 4 (2008), pp. 519–34. Both are available online. The members of Raskó's team include, in alphabetical order: C. Stephen Dowes, E. K. Conant, Bernadett Csányi (corresponding author for the Y-Chromosome study), Klára Csete, Aranka Csősz, Ágnes Czibula, Tibor Kalmár, Péter Langó, Balázs Gusztáv Mende, Katalin Priskin, Gyöngyvér Tömöry (corresponding author for the mtDNA study) and Attila Zsolnai.

and that of the occupants of graves of the elite was considerable. This suggests that present-day Hungarian (and Székely) women are not descendants of the conquerors. At the same time no significant distance was found to exist between the mtDNA of women in post-Conquest era commoners' graves and the mtDNA of modern Hungarian women. Since most of the occupants of commoners' graves must have been members of the subject peoples who made up the majority of the Carpathian Basin's population in the 10th century, these findings clearly indicate a genetic link between the region's pre-Conquest population and its present-day inhabitants. The finding that many present-day women in Hungary and in Transylvania's Székely counties are related by blood or may even be directly descended from the common people of the Carpathian Basin in the 10th century is significant. It means that immigration into this part of Europe in the last millennium, however substantial it had been at times, did not result in a complete replacement of the region's genetic stock. The genetic footprints of centuries of immigration are no doubt there in Hungary's present-day population, but the genetic drift caused by it has not been total.

The other article that Raskó's team produced resulted from the research that examined the DNA of men. In this project the researchers looked for the incidence of Tat polymorphism, i.e. the marker Tat C allele, in the Y chromosomal DNA of two populations: male occupants of 10th-century graves and modern-day Hungarian and Székely men. It should be noted here that Y chromosomes are passed on by men to their sons only and as such are sources of study for male bloodlines. In the case of the ancient DNA, extraction took place from the bones of men resting in "rich" graves identified by grave goods: weapons, horse harness or even the head of a warrior's horse. These individuals were no doubt the "conquerors" or their sons. In the case of present-day residents, DNA samples were collected from nearly 200 Magyar and Székely men. The results of the investigation were startling. The research revealed that while in the ancient DNA the Tat polymorphism was common, among the modern samples it was virtually absent. Only one man, a Székely, carried the Tat C allele.[5]

The most important of the findings of Professor Raskó's team is emphasised in both their reports, namely that the size of the population which arrived in the Carpathian Basin at the end of the 9th century was small. In one of the studies the team concluded that, once the invaders established themselves there, they made up only a "small fraction" of the land's total population.[6] Those who are familiar with the historiography of the Hungarian Conquest know that this interpretation is not new or unique. More than a century ago, the internationally-known archaeologist József Hampel (1849–1913) came to

5 ■ According to the article's authors, this finding, i.e. the virtual absence of this C allele in modern Hungarian populations, is consistent with the findings of several other research teams.
6 ■ In the study of the female bloodlines (mtDNAs), "Comparison of Maternal Lineage...".

the same conclusion, i.e. that the conquering Hungarians were "only a small minority" of the Carpathian Basin's population.[7]

Despite this conclusion about the size of the conquering population, Raskó and his associates never suggested that the conquerors were not Hungarian in language and ethnicity. Instead, they assumed that, because of their superior position as the political and military elite, the conquerors were able to impose their language on a much more numerous local population. But, as it has been pointed out above, this is not how societal evolution worked in the 9th and 10th centuries. The contemporary examples of the Scandinavians in north-eastern England and northern France, the Varangians in ancient Rus, the Bulgars on the Lower Danube, and the Normans in England, speak to this point. In all these cases the conquerors sooner or later assimilated to the more numerous autochthonous populations. True, at least two of them, the Varangians and the Bulgars, bequeathed to the ethnic groups they subjugated their name: Rus (Russian) in the first instance and Bulgar (Bulgarian) in the second. The conquerors of the Carpathian Basin did the same: the peoples they conquered became known by their name: Magyar. They also bequeathed the Hungarian nation their first dynasty of rulers, as well as a large portion of their mythology, including the myth that they, the conquerors, were genetic founders of the Hungarian nation.[8]

It might be asked at this point which among the several theories of the "Hungarian Conquest" or Hungarian ethnogenesis the results of this genomic research support? They certainly do not support the most commonly accepted theory, according to which the ancestors of the Hungarians arrived in the Carpathian Basin in 895, assimilated the autochthonous population and thereby established the genetic stock of the future Hungarian nation. The research also fails to endorse the second most commonly accepted theory of the ethnogenesis of the Magyar people, the theory of the Dual Conquest, put forth most forcefully by historian Gyula László (1910–1996) as well as others, before him and in recent years. This theory suggests that Hungarians arrived in the Carpathian Basin in at least two waves, the second or last one being the influx of 895. The researches of Raskó and his team, however, suggest that the conquerors of 895 were genetically unrelated to Hungarians, whether earlier arrivals or members of today's Hungarian populations.[9]

7 ■ Hampel cited in Péter Langó, "Archaeological Research on the Conquering Hungarians: A Review," in *Research on the Prehistory of the Hungarians: A Review,* ed. Balázs Gusztáv Mende. Budapest: Institute of Archaeology of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, 2005, p. 202f.

8 ■ According to historian Denis Sinor "Hungarians have always considered themselves the descendants of the conquerors." Denis Sinor, "The Outlines of Hungarian Prehistory," *Journal of World History,* 4 (3): pp. 513–540, accessed in June 2009 at http://forums.skadi.net /showthread.php?t=105291.

9 ■ This genomic research also does not support, or does not support completely certain less-accepted and less-known theories, such as the one proposed by Adorján Magyar (1887–1978) and re-invented recently by others, that the ancestors of Hungarians have lived in the Carpathian Basin since at least the last Ice Age, but groups of them had migrated to the east, and in 895 one such group returned "home" and helped to lay the foundations of a strong Hungarian state.

There is one theory of the "Hungarian Conquest" however, that the results of this genomic research support, and support unequivocally. This is actually the theory that there was no Hungarian Conquest of the Carpathian Basin at the end of the 9th century and its most outspoken advocate was archaeologist and historian Gábor Vékony (1944–2004). Vékony argued, in the very last book he published,[10] that the conquerors constituted a small invasion force—approximately 5,000 arm-bearing men and their families—and they made up a minute fraction of the Carpathian Basin's total population after they had imposed themselves there. Through the examination of the archaeological, linguistic and historical evidence, Vékony also concluded that the conquerors were not related to the Hungarian people either ethnically or linguistically: they were Turkic tribes speaking Turkic dialects. The people who spoke proto-Hungarian were already living in the Carpathian Basin, according to Vékony, along with other peoples including Slavs.[11] Even their lifestyles were different: these autochthonous inhabitants were settled agriculturalists while the conquerors were nomadic warriors. The locals had next to nothing in common with the newcomers, and, we now know from Raskó's and his team's researches, even their DNA was different.

The genomic research that had been done in Hungary in this first decade of the 21st century was very much a preliminary study. The science is in its formative stages. Every day, it almost seems, new discoveries come along that will no doubt soon enable geneticists to make ever more meaningful and precise observations on matters related to ancient history. Furthermore, the research done by Raskó and his team relied on a limited sample pool. A new research project using technologies not available before—and a much more substantial sample pool—might enable us to construct a different scenario of Hungarian ethnogenesis than suggested by the first genomic inquiries in Hungary, or such a project might further confirm the conclusions that can be derived from the genomic study described in this essay: there was no Hungarian Conquest of the Carpathian Basin at the end of the 9th century. ❧

10 ■ Gábor Vékony, *Magyar őstörténet—Magyar honfoglalás* [Hungarian Prehistory—Hungarian Conquest]. Budapest: Nap, 2002. Before his untimely death Vékony taught pre-history at Budapest's Eötvös Loránd University.

11 ■ Vékony does not offer a precise date for the arrival of the Hungarians in the Carpathian Basin. He suggests that this happened somewhere between the 6th and 7th centuries. (Vékony, p. 219.) Vékony's arguments had been disputed even before his book appeared in 2002. See István Riba, "Reading the Runes: Evidence of the Dual Conquest?" *The Hungarian Quarterly,* 41 (No. 157, Spring 2000), accessed at http://forums.skadi.net/showthread.php?t=105291. The same seems to be happening to my arguments. At the 2009 annual meeting of the Hungarian Studies Association of Canada that was held in late May at Ottawa's Carleton University, I gave a paper suggesting the need for a radical revision of the "Hungarian Conquest" story. My idea was greeted with skepticism. I plan to return to this subject in a much bulkier article about Székely origins, slated for a forthcoming special volume of the *Hungarian Studies Review* dealing with Transylvanian history, in which I hope to deflect some expected criticisms.

Julianna P. Szűcs

Deus ex machina

The Early Christian Necropolis of Pécs

The people living at the foot of the Mecsek Hills in the south-west of Hungary in the 4th century A.D.—Romans intermingled with Celts and Illyrians—were already familiar with the Te Deum. This beautiful hymn of praise says "When thou hadst overcome the sharpness of death, thou didst open the Kingdom of Heaven to all believers." *(Tu devicto mortis aculeo, aperuisti credentibus regna caelorum.)*

Immortality after death: that was the promise of the new religion. Preserving the corpse and preparing it for resurrection became immensely important for early Christians and drove them to bury their dead and worship within a single complex of buildings, unusual for religions at the time. The new joint priority is clear in the group of archaeological finds at Pécs: the remains of sacral buildings and tombs from late-Roman Sopianae, unique in Europe and perhaps anywhere. UNESCO inscribed the Early Christian Necropolis of Pécs as a World Heritage Site in 2000.

The southern slope of the site must have been filled with such mementos meant for the hereafter—the wealthy built semicircular memorial chapels above lavishly decorated burial chambers, but archaeologists have also found many simple brick graves. Some have been excavated, many more are presumed to be there. Clearly, those who lived there at the time obeyed the rule of the *Traditio Apostolica:* "Do not devise severe conditions for burial in cemeteries, for they must be accessible to the poor."

Chance led to the finding in 1782 of what to date still seems to be the most splendidly decorated chamber, the Peter and Paul Burial Chamber. Builders

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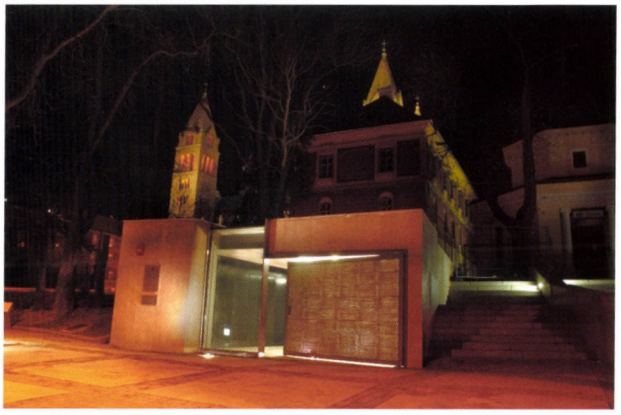

Entrance
to the Early Christian Necropolis

The light-transmitting concrete (LiTraCon) of the entrance panel is a material patented by Áron Losonczi, a young Hungarian architect: a mesh of optical fibre embedded in concrete. A curtain of water flows beside the concrete gate, referring to water as an ancient Christian symbol. Water also trickles across the glass ceiling, lighting up the corridor which leads into the Cella Septichora.

The Virgin Mary

Portraits in medaillons on the vault

The Peter and Paul Burial Chamber, uncovered in 1782

It was named after the Apostles Peter and Paul shown on the principal wall facing the entrance, pointing at a Christogram. The four portraits on the vault could stand for four martyrs, or symbolise the four rivers of Paradise or the four cardinal points of the compass.

Peter and Paul

The Wine Jug Burial Chamber

It was properly excavated in 1939, though first found around 1800 when digging out a cellar. It is on two levels, a burial chamber below and a chapel above, in which memorial and other services were held. There is a small niche on the northern wall of the burial chamber, showing a picture of a wine jug and a cup.

Above the Wine Jug Burial Chamber

Ground plan of the above-ground chapel of the Ancient Christian Mausoleum

Found in 1975. The remnants above ground suggest a large memorial chapel. The roof of the burial chamber has collapsed. Its murals, in a relatively good state of preservation, show the Fall, Daniel among the lions, and a sitting figure.

Ancient Christian Mausoleum. The underground chamber

Ancient Christian Mausoleum. Adam and Eve

Ancient Christian Mausoleum. Daniel among the lions

The Cella Septichora

Its ground plan is unique not just in Hungary, but in Europe. It is named after the seven arcs on seven sides of an elongated octagon, with the entrance on the eighth side. The building was probably never completed because of a barbarian invasion; it may have functioned as a kind of communal space for the living.

VII

The Early Christian Necropolis of Pécs

View of the Cathedral of Pécs from the Cella Septichora Visitor Centre

The earliest church was built in the 11th century and has been reconstructed several times since. The Cathedral acquired its present shape in the 1880–90s when it was completely rebuilt as Neo-Romanesque.

Pécs–Sopianae

Pécs, European Capital of Culture in 2010, is the largest city in Transdanubia. Its history goes back to 2000 years of almost continuous habitation. Starting with the second century A.D., the Romans gradually occupied Pannonia. The legions began building their camps along the Danube, first defended by timber palisades, later by stone walls, and behind these, in the hinterland, numerous civilian towns flourished. Sopianae was founded in the 2nd century A.D. in Valeria province—one of the four territorial divisions of Pannonia, an area bordered by the Danube and Drava rivers. By the 4th century A.D. Sopianae was the capital of Valeria and an important Christian centre. Many public buildings were erected, including shrines of the Roman Gods. These Roman gods usually incorporated the pagan gods of the Celts and Illyrians that had formerly occupied the area. Later on, new religions arrived from the east, and eventually, Christianity appeared in Sopianae as well.

Since few written records survive, and the stone inscriptions contain hardly any information about the era, it is only the relatively rich archaeological findings, most importantly the cemeteries, that provide information about life in the Roman city.

Excavations indicate that Sopianae was a juncture for several trading routes. Among the artifacts found were objects suggestive of relatively well-developed industry and agriculture. There are also signs of commercial ties with other provinces. The more ornate pieces, such as the reddish brown *terra sigillatas,* were brought to Sopianae from Italy, later from Gaul, and subsequently from Germany. ❧

were demolishing a Renaissance chapel attached to the Romanesque cathedral. It was judged to be superfluous, although it had survived the Turks, the Rákóczi wars and the Habsburgs. Fortunately the decision to demolish was rewarded as a richly painted vault (Christogram, peacocks, portraits) and generously decorated walls came to light (Saints Peter and Paul, Adam and Eve, Daniel, Jonah, Noah, the Virgin Mary, a martyr and three mysterious men, possibly the three Magi, hurrying along).

The next chapter of this story was written a century and a half later, in 1939. That was when the Wine Jug Burial Chamber was found. Archaeologists had worse luck this time. The ceiling—painted or not—had not survived; it had already been destroyed in the age of the great migrations. Squatters looking for safe hideouts had damaged the place: traces of fire and broken graves show that not only Vandals were responsible. Gepides, Longobards, Visigoths, Huns and Avars must have passed this way. And still: in a niche below ground the picture of a slender wine jug survived. This symbol of the Eucharist is known from 3rd-century Roman catacomb paintings, for instance in the secret chamber below the Santi Giovanni e Paolo basilica in Rome. A vine curls

Burying the Dead in Sopianae

Until the mid-2nd century AD, the prevailing way of dealing with the dead was cremation. As burials became more common, the corpses were placed in wooden coffins and buried in simple graves. Later, to prevent looting, an opening was dug at the bottom of the grave, and the corpse was slipped through it into a burial chamber of bricks or clay tiles, or else a sarcophagus was carved out of a single piece of stone. Even in pagan times, cemeteries were located outside the city. In Sopianae, most Early Christian graves were to the north of the city between the earlier pagan graveyards, beyond the ravines on the slopes of the Mecsek Hills, the only space left. For a century or so, several thousand Christians found their final resting place here, over an area of a few dozen acres. More than five hundred graves were found around the Cathedral. Several of these are two-storey tombs, serving both as places of burial and for holding religious services. The two-storey tombs belonged to rich citizens of Sopianae and the neighbouring areas, and to veterans—legionaries who served their quarter century and bought land and houses out of their pay. The tombs erected in Sopianae were typically sunk into the ground and decorated with paintings. Inside the vaults, corpses were placed into a stone or brick sarcophagus. The entrance was closed off with stones and the ramp leading up to it was covered with earth. The memorial chapel was built on the surface, above the burial vault. If someone else died in the family or community of those who erected the tomb, the ramp would be unearthed again, the stones would be removed from the entrance, and the deceased would be placed there in a new sarcophagus or brick coffin. Then the entrance would be covered up with stones again.

Occasional early 18th-century sources mention Roman burial finds in Sopianae. Proper scholarly excavations started in 1782 when the Peter and Paul Burial Chamber was discovered. The most recent excavation, that of the unique octagonal Cella Septichora, started in the year 2000. In the two centuries in between a total of sixteen burial chambers and several hundred graves have been excavated within the medieval city walls yielding more than two thousand late-Roman findings. The Early Christian necropolis, covering a relatively small area, is the largest and most important one outside Italy with murals which are comparable to those found in Roman catacombs. ❧

around it, a symbol carrying a message. The selfsame message can be decoded by its iconographical parallel, on the ambulatory mosaics of Santa Constanza in Rome, from the same period. To speak of parallels is, of course, an exaggeration. We know that the images in Pécs cannot be compared to those in the catacombs in the Eternal City or church ornamentation worthy of an empress. For example, though underground, they belonged to a legal Christianity, not a hidden, persecuted sect. In the same way the painted decorations imitating marble on the walls in Sopianae are a long way from the

elegant furnishings and multicoloured marble panelling of patrician luxury. The province of Valeria, to which Sopianae belonged may have been a long way from Rome but quite close however to the north-eastern limits of the empire; even imitations were highly valued out here.

More historic material kept appearing. Between 1913 and 2004, when archaeologists became aware that there was much waiting to be unearthed below the houses, four further sites with marks that bore evidence of sarcophagi were explored. Near the cathedral a decorated twin grave, next to it a strange, octagonal burial chapel that had been reconstructed while still functional, below the Chapter Archives of the Cathedral a chamber decorated with a Christogram that was totally sacked, and a few years ago an edifice where a father, a mother and their child who died in infancy seem to have been laid to rest together. That, at least, is suggested by the dimensions and placing of the coffins.

However, neither of them can vie in quality, workmanship or beauty with two other sites, one because of the quality of the art found there, the other because of its architecture, which was gradually revealed in the course of the excavation.

The Ancient Christian Mausoleum in the southern part of the necropolis was named because of its size and not its function. The memorial chapel, which was visible above ground level (at that time), and an underground chamber—with a huge sarcophagus and two other destroyed coffins—were a sensation in themselves. However, what Ferenc Fülep excavated in 1975 (it was restored in 1986, and following the death of this great archaeologist opened to the public in 2007) revealed richly painted decorations with Roman and Balkan motifs, another Adam and Eve, and a splendid Daniel amidst the lions. All this significantly raised the importance of the whole archaeological site. Three burial chambers with decorations is more than one burial chamber three times over: the first two lots of murals that appeared by chance were shown to be more than merely isolated, high-quality works of art. The murals in the mausoleum, unequalled documents of Christianity north of the Alps, start to present a systematic picture. Their sheer number suggests that it only takes hard work, money and a little luck to find more. Their location can be surmised the way the place of undiscovered elements were deduced by Mendeleev with his periodic table.

East of the richly decorated burial chambers is an edifice of unusual shape that still mystifies archaeologists. It is only the lower parts of the walls of the Cella Septichora that survived, with its characteristic openings in the wall suggesting the fitting of some kind of lifting device. Next to the openings is a solid structure of bricks and mortar alternating in regular rows. The structure was not painted (although coloured plaster was found among the rubble). No coffins, no sacral objects; besides three iron hoes and some silver treasure hidden in the vicinity, no real clues have remained. The archaeologists can only guess the height of the original windows and of the eaves. This huge building

might possibly have been quite low-set (as suggested by Zsolt Visy, the archaeologist in charge of the excavation). The thickness of the walls, however, would have permitted a tapering building (similar to those erected on the Caelius hill in Rome in the time of Constantine). But what we already know is fascinating enough. Seven apses were attached to the seven sides of the elongated octagonal ground plan by the anonymous builder. The ground plan is like a beautiful earring, or, staying with religious symbolism, a ripe bunch of grapes. Very likely it was not completed, and although it was built for the dead, it never saw any corpses. Its builders may have beaten a hasty retreat when the Huns, the "liberators" of Pannonia, arrived.

The installation as the interpretation of a score

According to the philosopher Schelling, architecture is frozen music. Goethe disputed this, suggesting a better metaphor: "architecture is music gone dumb". And what could we call an architecture that wishes to mediate the past for posterity, an architecture that, while preserving the remains as they are, does not deprive viewers of illusions? Background music? A musical accompaniment? Music that honours the past with silence?

Unfortunately, Goethe's metaphor does not really work even once we know that it was he who reinterpreted the relation between Antiquity and his own time. To us, relics are like a faded old score filled with puzzles. They can provide us with joy and excitement only if there is someone who deciphers this ancient score, then wants to make it public knowledge for moral and educational reasons, and is able to mobilize, for social and political reasons, financial resources to implement his plan. Returning to the opening image: only if the visitors get nearer to the customs of these ancient folk who sang the Te Deum and also hear the soft music does the metaphor work.

It is due to the architect Zoltán Bachman and his team, the members of the 'Pécs School', that the faded music of Early Christian structures can be sensed again, with modern know-how and materials.

There are those who prefer to ignore the passage of time and do not rest until they reconstruct a historic monument, all for the sake of creating an illusion. Sometimes what they do is backed by credible documents, the Royal Palace in Warsaw and the Frauenkirche in Dresden are good examples. When the ambition gets political backing, they can bring a dream to life, as was done by Saddam Hussein with the Gate of Nineveh, or when the team of archaeologists and architects doing the bidding of Mussolini rebuilt the knights' castle on Rhodes.

The other group of historians does not deny the passage of time. They do not feel obliged to present the past as it was. Painstaking attention is paid to the truth, details are highlighted that only specialists can appreciate. One such example is the Temple of Jupiter in Agrigento, with scattered rocks around it.

It was never completed by the Greeks, only some pillars are standing. The scale models in the museum are different versions of the possible complete structure. Another method is to reconstruct the original up to a certain point, but indicate clearly, using concrete for example, that a wall is the original up to a certain height and a mere prop above it. This anti-illusionist method was used at various historic sites in Hungary in the 1950s and 1960s.

And still: there is a third method, a third practice of reading the past that is practised rarely and only by a few. The secret of this method lies in the philosophy of its architect: "To me the most important thing in historic building", writes Bachman, "is to share my experience when, as an architect, I have found something valuable in an excavation. To share this feeling with people in possession of much less information, I need to introduce the building in a didactic and interactive way that everyone, even a young child, can understand." Great skills as an educator and even greater humility are needed to achieve this. And of course the total absence of the *hubris* which is such an occupational hazard for architects.

The presentation of the Early Christian Necropolis has no peer in Hungary and few in Europe. Perhaps the metal walkways of the Hypogeum in Malta—another burial site, albeit Neolithic—meandering deep into the ground most resemble the architectural devices in Pécs. The memorial park of the Museo di Santa Giulia in Brescia combining a forum, catacombs, an early Christian church and a palace into one single unit also attempts something similar.

In Pécs, the translucent concrete bricks of the entrance panel straight away transport the visitor into virtual space. This Hungarian innovation—light-transmitting concrete—welcomes you with a hazy light fit for time travel. However, the impression only lasts until the first theme, the octagonal space of the Cella Septichora appears. There the transparent glass ceiling built at ground level and the faint glittering of the floor dazzle the eyes. Wherever possible glass surfaces were placed on the level used by visitors to make it clear that what they enter were not catacombs but burial chambers that had once been above ground.

The Cella Septichora with its seven apses is also visible from the outside: the steel-and-glass structure which protects it makes it possible to see the coarse plasterwork covering rocks and bricks. The interior space itself can be used for public functions. Concerts, exhibitions, book launches, and even weddings are held there. Indeed, the out-of-service staircase leading to the surface, reaching it in front of the museum behind the cathedral, may well be open to the public in the future as it is much more than a cleverly-designed short cut. This secret path establishes an emotional connection between the various underground layers of Pécs. These include Christian Antiquity, once doomed to oblivion, and the carelessly handled, therefore fragmentary, medieval remains while providing a glimpse of the 19th–21st centuries: the

Neo-Romanesque Cathedral and the structure holding the huge glass wall that makes this imposing view possible.

For a while the road continues underground. More precisely, under the ground but elevated, on an artificial walkway built into the shaft. Metalwork and raw concrete accompany us into the underworld, deliberately different materials than offered by the view created by the excavation. Just as a good teacher (who is simultaneously something of an actor, a priest and a propagandist) lowers his voice before expressing the essence at the dramatic climax, Bachman and his colleagues restrain their style to convey their real message with a wide variety of architectonic devices.

At the Wine Jug Burial Chamber there is a steel frame that gently surrounds the core to protect it from humidity. The ground appears to open up, the chamber, "suspended" on metal columns, seems to levitate. And still: it shows itself inside out, emphasising the painted walls, the air-conditioning wards off the damaging breath of visitors, the eyes are up to the transparent ceiling replacing the destroyed vault. This allows you to marvel at the painted grape wine and creeping ivy, the wine jug and the artificial marble.

Continuing in the other direction, to the Peter and Paul Burial Chamber, we must descend even deeper. A winding staircase leads us down below a timber floor replaced by glass, offering a view of portraits on the vault and murals on Biblical themes without equal north of the Alps.

Leaving the mysterious tunnels starting from the Cella Septichora and the octagonal building with its exciting ground plan and the remains of the medieval walls above it, fascinating in their dimensions even without the paintings, the visitor reaches the surface to descend once more to Saint Stephen Square. By then he or she will understand how the Pécs School of architects and archaeologists employed a didactic method to evoke the past.

A lot of technology is used in the presentation of the Early Christian Mausoleum too. Dug-out soil around the chamber, a scaffold-like structure supporting the wall, a discreetly placed air-conditioning system ensuring an even climate for the frescos and cunning small pipes leading off the moisture of the soil. State-of-the-art presentation, just like the lead insulation covering the floor or the lime mortar on the outside protecting the quality of the paintings. But this is not all. There is something extra that is very difficult to define, an emotional plus.

The reconstruction of the ground plan of the memorial chapel above the chamber takes up some of the surface of the square. The sloping wall is covered with plants like laurel, fig, oleander. A small Mediterranean grove, a piece of sunken Antiquity, is imagined.

Deus ex machina: a God introduced by the machine of technology, one thousand and six hundred years after the Te Deum was sung. ❧

Ilona Sármány-Parsons

The Munich Road to Modernity

München—magyarul. Magyar művészek Münchenben 1851–1914
(Munich in Hungarian. Hungarian Artists in Munich 1850–1914).
An Exhibition at the Hungarian National Gallery, Budapest,
2 October 1989–10 January 2010.
Catalogue, Hungarian National Gallery, 2009, 337 pp + 351 ill.

In the 19th century Hungary had no Academy of Fine Arts and many of those who wanted to become artists went to study abroad. In its first half it was Italy and Vienna which attracted most of the young aspirant painters. However after the defeat of the War of Independence against the Habsburg rulers in 1849, Vienna became understandably unpopular with Hungarians. For different reasons, mid-century Italy too had lost its appeal as a place of training in the arts. By that time Munich began to rival Paris as a centre of art and not only for Hungarians, but also for Poles, Czechs, Scandinavians and Americans. Indeed up to the late 1880s, judged purely by the number of students it attracted, it was more important than Paris.[1]

Munich,[2] with its long tradition of art patronage and its important picture collections and museums, had become the centre of art education in Germany in the early 19th century. Strongly Catholic, and in this respect much like Vienna, the city had always belonged to a region embedded in a culture of the senses and the Wittelsbach dynasty generously supported painting, architecture, drama and music there. The Kings of Bavaria not only financed the Academy of Fine Arts (founded in 1808) but also erected new buildings for their ever-growing picture collections, the latter being used like the Louvre as places for artists to study their craft. The Bavarian state, and also the

1 ■ The Academy of Fine Arts in Munich made it easier for foreign students. Life was expensive in Paris and there was not much sympathy for poor foreign students who did not master French. Alongside the Hungarians, 322 Polish students studied in Munich before 1918. The third largest foreign community was that of Americans.

2 ■ In the second part of the 19th century Munich was not yet industrialized. The inhabitants were local patriots, cultivating the traditional life of leisure of a wealthy mid-size capital of a kingdom.

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inhabitants of the city, were highly conscious of the immense cultural and financial potential of the art scene and the art market, the latter being much ahead of those elsewhere in Germany, and in particular superior to that of the intensely disliked rival, Berlin. Even after the unification of Germany, Bavaria could, up to a point, console itself with the plausible claim that Munich, rather than Berlin, was the real cultural capital of the Germans.

With its vibrant artistic, theatrical and music milieu (it was after all host to the experimental staging of many of Wagner's operas), as well as the Bohemian life of cafés and beer cellars, Munich became a magnet for the new generation of artists in Europe and America, being cheaper than Paris.[3] Nearly four hundred Hungarian painters studied here between 1850 and 1914, the great majority before 1896.

The exhibition at the Hungarian National Gallery highlights this intimate relationship. "Munich in Hungarian" (the title is somewhat enigmatic) shows about three hundred and fifty works (paintings, graphics and sculpture) selected from some sixty years of Hungarian artistic activity in the Bavarian city. But while it is well known, at least in Hungary, that Munich, especially its Royal Academy of Art, was the preferred location for Hungarian painters in the second part of the 19th century, this exhibition and its catalogue re-evaluates, and in some aspects changes fundamentally, the traditional image of this long and fruitful symbiosis. Such a re-evaluation is certainly overdue, since the "Hungarian Munich School" was for long merely seen as a breeding ground of conservative, old-fashioned and mannered pictures, indeed anything that was "conventional" and opposed to modernism. An exhibition such as this may or may not succeed in modifying this ingrained image, but it certainly stimulates the viewer to rethink what was going on in this period of Hungarian painting.

We cannot expect a comprehensive overview of the artistic relations between the city and Hungarians, nor a display of the nuances of artistic development, over a period as long as sixty years. One has to select mercilessly from what was a broad stylistic pluralism, both of individual painters and themes, and pick out the best of those who seem to be the most important to our age. The curator of the exhibition, Orsolya Hessky, who also created the concept for the catalogue, has put on show not only hundreds of Hungarians who were active in Munich, but also a few works by their Munich teachers and other contemporary colleagues. A few works by French masters of seminal

3 ■ See Rainer Metzger, *Munich—Its Golden Age of Art and Culture*. London: Thames and Hudson, 2009. In the catalogue of the Hungarian National Gallery's exhibition two studies discuss the favourable cultural climate of the city, Orsolya Hessky, "Az Akadémiától a modernizmusig. München és a magyar művészet 1850–1914 között" [From the Academy to Modernism. Munich and Hungarian Art between 1850–1914], pp. 21–38; and Ágnes Kovács, "Nemzetközi kiállítások Münchenben és magyar résztvevőik" [International Exhibitions in Munich and Hungarian Participants], pp. 87–99. See also Zsuzsanna Bakó, "Hungarian History Painting and the Munich Academy," pp. 67–86.

influence at the time are also on display.[4] Otherwise we have to rely on textual references in the Catalogue to understand the contemporary international context in which students from three generations of Hungarian and other nations worked in Munich. (The Poles, who were the second largest foreign ethnic group studying in Munich, are also represented by a few works,[5] and the activities of these Polish students are closely discussed in a study by Anna Szinyei Merse, who has reconstructed their attendance at the special classes held by Hungarians, especially Sándor Wagner, thus revealing an important link between Hungarian and Polish painting.[6])

Specialists might object that some major works by Leibl, Whistler, and certain Scottish painters whose influence was undoubtedly great are not on show, but in these financially stringent times it is well nigh impossible for a museum with a limited budget to obtain on loan chefs-d'oeuvre from the great collections of Western Europe. Nevertheless the show is varied and extraordinarily rich, nearly to the point of confusion. The catalogue contains eight essays and such pictures as are not discussed in detail are grouped in the second section in five categories: history painting, religious subjects, genre pictures, portraits and landscapes. It is rounded off with a list of Hungarian painters who participated in exhibitions in Munich between 1869 and 1914 and a select bibliography.

The "Academic Artist": a notion reconsidered

The first essay, by the Munich-based art historian Walter Grasskamp,[7] focuses on the typology of the artists, pointing out the contradictory aspects and evaluations of the "academic artist" as a role model, who, in the 19th century, had become the epitome of the scholarly and humanist creator of art. This image has subsequently been overshadowed by the cult of the avant-garde artist as the authentic genius, and one whose career is a lifelong heroic struggle against the conservative academy. These contrasting models gradually became a matter of ideology in the art-political journalism of the early 20th century. They were later adopted by the professional academic discourse, and, as a result, polarised opinion makers. The effect was to stigmatise retrospectively the entire academic establishment and art practice in Central Europe as conservative and retrograde. Liberating the products of academic and history painting from the unjust and undifferentiated label of "official pseudo-art" has been difficult everywhere; not least in Hungary.[8] It is to be

4 ■ A Bastien-Lepage from the Musée d'Orsay, a Dagnan-Bouveret from Lyon and an Uhde from Munich are the most remarkable loans from abroad.

5 ■ By Józef Brandt, Maximilian Gierymski, Stanisław Lentz, Włodzimierz Tetmajer and Teodor Axentowitz.

6 ■ Anna Szinyei Merse, "Magyar festőtanárok lengyel tanítványai Münchenben" [Polish Students of Hungarian Teachers of Painting in Munich], pp. 101–118.

7 ■ Walter Grasskamp, "Akadémiai művészek" [Academic Artists], pp. 11–19.

hoped that the sociologically more sensitive and more tolerant approach of the post-modernist "turn" in cultural history may however gradually rescue the tradition of the academies from unqualified negative judgements.

Grasskamp argues that the recognition impartially given both to the "court artist" and the modern or "exhibiting" artist, is also the due of the academic artist, who should not simply be dismissed with hostile rhetoric. Recent studies by Hungarian art historians have discussed in depth the historical, stylistic, technical and iconographical issues raised by Hungarian painting that was produced in Munich or created under the influence of the Munich School. Issues of quality and sensitivity to contemporary trends of modernisation lie at the heart of such a discussion, but even a more traditional approach has brought new discoveries and reshaped the old clichés with which this period in art history is barnacled.

Orsolya Hessky[9] offers the first overall view of the intricate and multifarious relationship of Hungarians with Munich, not only with its Academy, but also with the city and its art life in general. When Munich celebrated the 200th anniversary of the foundation of its famous Art Academy with a huge exhibition in the Haus der Kunst in 2008, German scholars were themselves surprised to discover how important the city had been for the many foreigners studying there. Munich was revealed to have been more important up to the late 1880s as an educational centre for Northern and Central Europe, and even for some countries in the Balkan peninsula, than was Paris. Such a discovery is totally at odds with the consensus on the history of painting in Europe in the second half of the 19th century, which adamantly argues that the centre for painting was Paris and only Paris, with the Impressionists at its core. If stylistic modernity has exclusively formal characteristics, modernism can of course be reduced to the famous formula of Clement Greenberg. He argues that modern painting should focus only on what painting alone can do (namely to focus on the flat surface and colours, omitting any figures, objects or content). If this is true, then the hitherto consensus view of Paris is correct; but if art, and painting, are interpreted on a broader basis (that is, as having different pluralistic functions in society and following different stylistic ideals in the light of those functions), then painting becomes necessarily polycentric, synchronously producing varied works and styles of high artistic quality in diverse art centres.

The historic construction of the canon of 19th-century European painting, which actually came into being only in the early 20th century, was heavily influenced both by politics and ideology. A one-sided focus on Paris was the rule and all other educational centres and art markets in Europe were labelled retrograde and conservative, by implication therefore less important, less valuable or

8 ■ For more on this issue see Ilona Sármány-Parsons, "Constructing the Canon of Modern Hungarian Painting, 1890–1918". *Centropa,* Vol. 8, No. 3, 2008, pp. 224–243.
9 ■ Hessky, idem.

even non-artistic. Paris being the yardstick, all other schools were marginal in terms of artistic "progress", and their relative value was simply measured against the style of contemporary Paris painters. Even within the amazingly varied and rich painting of Paris from the time of Courbet onwards, the many stylistic variations that actually existed were narrowed down to the main line of formal experimentation centred on Manet, Monet and their circle. Other trends were neglected or mentioned only to be dismissed as parochial and backward.

In view of all this, it is hardly surprising that the history of German painting and that of the Munich Academy was at first considered only in terms of art "at the margins", at least by the creators of the international canon, and Munich was subsequently labelled as a conservative oasis which regrettably could never quite catch up with Paris. One reason for this, among several others, was that the commercial unification of the European art market around 1900 occurred under the leadership of a network of commercial galleries in Paris. Naturally these dealers, motivated by their own financial interest, accorded French painters the highest aesthetic merit, an opinion which was reflected also in their prices.[10] For the next one hundred years, French art thus became dominant on the world art market, as well as in scholarship.

This view of European art was set in concrete after the First World War and even more so after the Second World War in an atmosphere where, because of the crimes and racism of the Third Reich, even earlier periods of German culture were viewed in a dark light. Retrospective considerations blurred the perspective of art historians unable or unwilling to identify and deal with even the most convincing liberal values of pluralistic and tolerant German cultural centres. Time and historical perspective now enable us to rediscover this "other side" of 19th-century German culture, which provided a fertile and stimulating educational field, not only for its native youth, but also for the intellectual and artistic elite of the smaller nations of Central Europe, those "neighbours, friends and (occasionally) enemies" as Lonnie Johnson labels them.[11]

What could be learned in Munich, and why was it so vital for Hungarians, Poles and, to a lesser extent, Czechs, Croats, Greeks, Scandinavians and even Americans who studied painting in the city? Firstly it was an excellently taught craftsmanship, a honing of their professional skills that attracted the vast majority. Technical brilliance and virtuosity were the hallmarks of Munich training. But Munich offered also something else beside virtuoso craftsmanship: its most famous and distinguished teachers handed down to their disciples an enlightened humanist ethos, the idea that it was the responsibility of the artist to serve not only his own nation, but also mankind. Such an educational ideal saw art as a vehicle for improving the mind and soul, so that artists should be in some

10 ■ The pioneering work on this issue is: Robert Jensen, *Marketing Modernism in Fin-de-Siècle Europe.* Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1894.

11 ■ Lonnie Johnson, *Central Europe. Enemies, Neighbours, Friends.* New York: Oxford UP, 2002.

way the moral and intellectual pace-setters of their age, the prophets of their closer or wider community. This message was particularly strong in the educational ambience of Munich, more so than in other academies in Europe which had a more pragmatic approach. For the intellectual and artistic elite of the smaller nations of Europe (almost all of whom were concerned about national identity and the modernisation of their society) such an ideal gave support and hope. They felt strengthened in their vocation to educate their own people so that the latter should take their place in the front ranks of European civilisation. The dignity of man, it was felt, could be best achieved and expressed through art, which was the appropriate means to teach a nation its history and to provide it with ideals. The generation of Historicist academic painter-professors (typically Karl von Piloty, Wilhelm von Kaulbach, Sándor Wagner, but also many others) believed in the power of art as a means to disseminate belief in human virtues and to celebrate human dignity. This belief was genuine, even if, retrospectively, our cynical age is amused to see how little this generation took into account the financial and material aspects of the artistic calling.

The first generation of Hungarians in Munich: the masters

The above-mentioned ideals had as much to do with the Humboldtian Enlightenment as with the passionate Romanticism that was also manifest in the outstanding works of Historicism produced by the first generation of Hungarians studying in Munich. Textbook art history stresses the technical solutions and the theatricality of Piloty as the basis of the Munich School of History Painting. What is infinitely more important is that Piloty encouraged all his students to experiment, to decide for themselves over their style and subject matter and thus to "find themselves" as creative artists. He was a popular, indeed charismatic, teacher, and his more gifted students were able, thanks to his inspiration, to develop a personal vision and a style of history painting that suited their individual temperaments.

History painting in Hungary in the late 1850s and early 1860s was a highly topical and significant genre that expressed the despair and trauma of the nation in the aftermath of the defeat in the War of Independence. It served as a *lieu de mémoire,* with its oblique symbolism, apparently referring to the nation's historical catastrophes, but suggesting through representation of these the pain and suffering caused by more recent events. Scenes from the Middle Ages of lost battles and poignant farewells conveyed such authentic emotional messages that they seemed convincing even to those who had no knowledge of the events they represented as a kind of "cover story".

These many-layered tragedies had an enduring resonance for several generations. For more than a century, their protagonists embodied the cardinal events of Hungarian history to the nation, becoming models for human dignity

in times of misery. Any Hungarian, when thinking of the disastrous battle of Mohács in 1526 at which the Hungarian army was annihilated by the Turks and the young king found his death, tends to see it as Bertalan Székely conceived it: a national tragedy personalised in this image of the young king drowned while making his escape, his sorrowing nobles thronged around the corpse under a heavy grey sky. Likewise in *Queen Isabella's Farewell to Transylvania* (1863) by Sándor Wagner, the young Queen displays the dignified melancholy of a noble woman facing the sad fate of exile.

Canvases such as these became emblematic of Hungarian history, and Hungarians know them so well that they overlook the fact that they were the youthful masterpieces of artists who had already mastered the painter's craft on such a virtuoso level that they were able to focus totally on psychological authenticity and on the historical and political "message" of the scene. Székely went back to Hungary and became one of the leading history painters and the creator of great mural cycles of the Magyar past, while Sándor Wagner was appointed to teach at the Munich Academy, where he instructed four generations of artists, many Poles among them.[12] So far no monograph has been devoted to Wagner—he is no exception in that respect among those who taught in Munich—and his oeuvre is much dispersed; however, the few records we have of him and the works in public collections attributed to him demonstrate his extreme versatility. He worked in a large number of genres, becoming *inter alia* an excellent painter of horses and a brilliant Orientalist (*Alhambra,* 1880).

Three Hungarian painters, after finishing their own studies, were soon appointed as professors in Munich.[13] One of them, Gyula Benczúr, was coaxed back to Hungary in 1882 and became not only the much celebrated history painter of *The Baptism of Vajk* (King Stephen, 1875) but also the preferred portraitist of officialdom, painting several portraits of the Emperor Franz Joseph and the Empress Elizabeth. A fine essay by Gábor Bellák in the catalogue[14] re-evaluates the genre of representative portraiture, which until recently, at least by Hungarian art historians, was an undervalued and mainly neglected genre. He focuses mainly on Gyula Benczúr and on the much younger Fülöp László, who painted the European aristocracy and later settled in England where he is known as the virtuoso society portraitist Philip A. de László. There is no monograph in Hungarian devoted to László's work, although there is now one in English by the British art historian Christopher Wood.

12 ■ He is better known as Alexander Wagner (1838–1919) in German art history. He lived all his life in Munich, where he taught from 1866 on. Gyula Benczúr taught there from 1876 on.

13 ■ Sándor (Alexander) Wagner, Sándor (Alexander) Liezen-Mayer, Gyula Benczúr. Later Frigyes Strobentz was also appointed a professor, and after 1886 Hollósy had his own private school in Munich.

14 ■ Gábor Bellák, "A portré müncheni magyar mesterei" [Hungarian Portrait Painters in Munich], pp. 205–210.

Any exhibition of Hungarian painting of this age should include a few works that are landmarks of the national canon, although hardly known abroad. The most famous of them on display at the National Gallery is the early masterpiece *Picnic in May* (1873) by the landscapist Pál Szinyei Merse, painted in Munich at a time when his studio was next door to Böcklin's. It is a bold early attempt at *plein air* painting in the Central European art scene. Painted without any knowledge of early French Impressionism, it has the intensity of colour of an early Monet.[15] The relative lack of positive critical response upset Szinyei Merse so much that he abandoned this style and for a time painted very little. In the 1890s he returned to his palette however, after gaining belated acknowledgement by the Hungarian artistic community, who began to identify him as a Hungarian Impressionist. Nevertheless it was not Szinyei's firework colours which characterised Hungarian landscapes painted under the influence of the Munich school, but the tradition of *paysage intime* as applied to the vernacular characteristics of the Hungarian countryside with its bright sunshine and characteristic vegetation (Géza Mészöly, Lajos Deák-Ébner). Much attention has been focused on the Barbizon school by art history writing, but there is a well-established landscape tradition in German and Austrian painting as well, with an emphasis on light and the atmospheric effects of the "national" landscape. The faithful and sensitive depiction of local characteristics in terms of sky, sunshine, foliage and topography has also produced masterpieces. In Hungary it was the *Alföld*, the Great Hungarian Plain, which, in stark contrast to the Austrian Alpine landscape, became the quintessential "national landscape" enriched with ethnographic details.[16]

The rural population, somewhat stereotyped (shepherds, Gypsies and so forth), was the permanent backdrop for these Hungarian pictures, which had a booming market in Munich precisely because of their ethnographic interest and vivid, sparkling colours (Mészöly, Deák-Ébner, Sándor Bihari). It was the near mass production of the simplified formulae of these peasant and Puszta genre pictures by mediocre Hungarian painters (who settled in Munich in order to exploit the benefits of a well-functioning art market) which contributed to the Munich painters becoming the epitome of kitsch, giving a bad name to many of its genres in the eyes of modernist art historians. In reality Munich was a pluralistic and professionally demanding art centre where diverse trends of modernism flourished and outstanding early masterpieces appeared in each decade of the second half of the 19th century.

15 ■ Szinyei had not visited Paris earlier and lived a great part of his youth and ripe years on his estate in the county, becoming a local politician and only painting occasionally.

16 ■ See the excellent exhibition entitled "In the Current of Impressionism—Hungarian Painting 1830–1920" on show at the Kogart Gallery in Budapest (with a catalogue in English) in the summer of 2009.

Because each teacher at the Munich Academy had different ideas about teaching and different historical ideals[17], there were, from the very beginning, various "schools" within this umbrella organisation, and not only depending on whether its classes specialised in history painting or landscape or some other genre. More importantly, each of the three generations were disposed to the new *Weltanschauung* inspired both by the changing intellectual climate of the age and by new artistic ideals initiated by the big international art exhibitions arranged by the Munich Künstlerverein in 1869, 1879, 1883, 1888, and on a yearly basis from 1889. These latter speeded up information exchange in the arts among all the national schools of Europe and widened the horizons of artists, art critics and the public alike. The exhibitions were indeed overcrowded (typically several thousand works would be on show), competition became desperate and lobbies or factions became more and more combatant.

Apart from absorbing the curriculum of the Academy, any sensitive and ambitious young artist could shape his artistic profile according to the latest trends on the international scene. There was one general rule in this pluralistic carnival of experimental styles: each gifted painter had to create a unique manner or style which would effectively enable him to stand out in the art market. Novelty at any price: this was the only way to establish a name, win prizes and be written up in the newspapers, and thus to establish a niche in the exhibition trade and sell pictures.

Apart from the seminal influence of French realism, as represented by Courbet in 1869 and by some painters of the Barbizon school[18], from the mid-1880s the contemporary realistic landscape painting of the Hague School and the vogue for literary naturalism emboldened young painters to abandon the hitherto axiomatic 17th-century genre patterns of Historicism as taught in the Academy. They embarked on individual formulae for depicting contemporary life and the "soul" (better: "the psyche") of modern man. Parallel to the influences from abroad, that of the German realist painter Wilhelm Leibl was profound and continuous.[19] The "realist turn", which gradually changed the compositional norms of academic Historicism also in genre painting, as well as the few French

17 ■ E.g. the highly popular Wilhelm von Diez chose to follow the technical solutions, brushwork and colour scheme of some masters of the past such as Teniers, Terborch and Rembrandt.

18 ■ Although, because of his contemporary media presence, Courbet's influence is always emphasised, the really long-lasting and profound inspiration came from the Barbizon masters, Diaz, Daubigny, Troyon and Corot.

19 ■ Leibl's role in inspiring realism in German painting has still not been given the importance it deserves. His meticulously precise realism and his "old master-like" style earned him the label of the "modern Holbein". He eschewed the narrative element in his pictures and this stamped him as the master of *"nur-Malerei"*, a German version of *l'art pour l'art,* rejecting anecdotalism. He was an undisputed idol also amongst Hungarian artists.

examples of naturalism (Bastien-Lepage, Dagnan-Bouveret, Alfred Roll, Raffaelli) on view at the international exhibitions, encouraged the third generation of Hungarians (Otto Baditz, László Pataky, István Csók, Simon Hollósy and his circle) to choose "modern" themes. They began to paint large-scale scenes of contemporary life, though not that of the cities, but of the rural poor in Hungary. The palette adopted was appropriately subdued, greyish in tone, but sometimes in a lyrical vein.[20] Modern Hungarian painting now fell into line with the international trend of naturalism (as an alternative to Impressionism).[21] (See for example Otto Baditz's *Rehearsal,* 1889; or László Pataky's *Potato Harvest,* 1894.)

The school, founded privately in 1886 in Munich by the 29-year-old Simon Hollósy after he won an Academy prize, prepared students for the entrance examination of the Academy. Due to charismatic teaching by Hollósy (whose early works betray the influence of Leibl's virtuoso technique) it soon developed into an institution with a reputation, absorbing the theories of naturalism in painting and cultivating the style of the Bastien-Lepage type of French Salon naturalism. (See Csók's *Haymakers Resting,* 1890; and *Holy Communion,* 1890.) From the late 1880s onwards many young Hungarian painters commuted between Paris and Munich and so were able to experience at first hand the Parisian styles which were exhibited in those years at the Salons or at the World Exhibition of 1889.[22]

There was also another—and until now forgotten but nevertheless profound—influence on the Hungarians in Munich in the first years of the 1890s, namely Scottish painting and the nocturnes of Whistler shown at the Munich International Exhibitions. The first encounter with Whistler (including his graphic work) was in 1888, and the astonishing success of Scottish masters such as the Glasgow Boys on the European art scene in 1889, 1890 and 1891 also influenced some of the painters studying in Munich. James Guthrie, E. A. Walton, William McGregor and John Lavery introduced the young Magyars to a flat and broad type of brushwork and to a meditative, northern perception of nature represented in lyrical and melancholy tones. Their work seemed to validate the already existing preoccupation of noted Hungarian painters with rural models, harvest scenes and the portraiture of the dignified poor. Moist and foggy green meadows or gardens from the Celtic north found their parallels in the canvases of the young János Vaszary (*Girl in the Vegetable Garden,* 1893[23]), while the "musicality" of Whistler

20 ■ The silvery greyish tone of some of their canvases might have been inspired, beside the French models, also by some Scottish painters, like James Guthrie or Robert McGregor.

21 ■ This statement presupposes the concept that modernity is not restricted exclusively to formal renewal in the arts (in painting) but also embraces from time to time the subject matter and themes chosen as reflecting contemporary social reality.

22 ■ The best-known Hungarians who studied in the late 1880s or early 1890s in Paris at the Académie Julian were Csók, Vaszary, Ferenczy, Iványi-Grünwald and Thorma. Nevertheless, other half-forgotten masters like László Pataky or Hugo Poll also spent longer times in the French capital.

23 ■ A close parallel to this Vaszary picture is a painting by James Guthrie, *A Hind's Daughter,* 1883.

Bertalan Székely: *The Discovery of the Body of King Louis II,* 1860
Oil on canvas, 140 × 181.5 cm. Hungarian National Gallery, Budapest

Sándor Wagner: *Queen Isabella's Farewell to Transylvania,* 1863
Oil on canvas, 128 × 167 cm. Hungarian National Gallery, Budapest

Gyula Benczúr: *The Baptism of Vajk,* 1875
Oil on canvas, 358 × 247 cm. Hungarian National Gallery, Budapest

Sándor Wagner: *The Alhambra,* around 1880
Oil on canvas, 356 × 240 cm. Museum of the Arts, Târgu Mureş

Pál Szinyei Merse: *Picnic in May,* 1873
Oil on canvas, 123 × 163.5 cm. Hungarian National Gallery, Budapest

Lajos Deák-Ébner: *Village Scene,* around 1880
Oil on wood, 34.4 × 50.5 cm. Hungarian National Gallery, Budapest

Simon Hollósy: *Good Wine,* 1884
Oil on wood, 26.2 × 34.4 cm. Hungarian National Gallery, Budapest

István Csók: *Haymakers Resting,* 1890
Oil on canvas, 115.8 × 136.8 cm. Hungarian National Gallery, Budapest

László Pataky: *Potato Harvest,* 1894
Oil on canvas, 170 × 264 cm. Museum of the Arts, Târgu Mureş

Otto Baditz: *Interrogation by a Judge,* 1889
Oil on canvas, 151 × 240 cm. Hungarian National Gallery, Budapest

Arthur Halmi: *After the Examination,* 1890
Oil on canvas, 125 × 186.5 cm. Hungarian National Gallery, Budapest

István Csók: *Orphans,* 1891
Oil on canvas, 121 × 136 cm. Hungarian National Gallery, Budapest

János Vaszary: *Girl in the Vegetable Garden,* 1893
Oil on canvas, 85.5 × 56.5 cm.
Kovács Gábor Private Collection, Budapest

Károly Ferenczy: *Birdsong,* 1893
Oil on canvas, 106 × 78 cm.
Hungarian National Gallery, Budapest

Frigyes Strobentz: *Adagio,* 1909
Oil on canvas, 127 × 103 cm.
Hungarian National Gallery, Budapest

portraits is echoed in a celebrated elegy in blue (*The Orphans,* 1891) by István Csók, which is his Symbolist *chef-d'oeuvre.*

The founding of the Munich Secession in 1892 further enriched and complicated the panorama of experimental painting, offering not only greater possibilities for exhibiting, but also introducing the latest art from abroad, as well as the latest works of the *enfants terribles* of German painting such as Liebermann, Uhde, Corinth and Klinger. It was possible to engage with German, Dutch and Belgian symbolists, Scandinavian landscapists and early examples of Art Nouveau/Jugendstil. This constituted the second intellectual turn in aesthetics and *Weltanschauung* and may be seen as a "spiritual-symbolist turn". Although it did not stem the flow of realist and naturalist pictures, it heralded a deepening rift between the artistic credo of members of the third generation and their predecessors and a new creative crisis for restless experimenters.

As previously mentioned, in this pluralistic carnival of experimental styles, a gifted and ambitious young painter was obliged to create an individual style, a unique manner that would enable his talent to stand out in the art market. Even minor painters, having adopted contemporary themes and the now fashionable and technically meticulous naturalism, often achieved momentary success (for example Arthur Halmi with his *After the Exam,* 1890). Artists who had studied for a few years in Paris in the late 1880s at the Académie Julian went back to Munich and painted large, atmospheric compositions in the realist mode. They integrated the influence of the German Secessionists and Symbolists into their work, while preserving their individual artistic personalities (e.g. István Réti: *The Christmas of Bohemians Abroad,* 1892; János Thorma: *Sufferers,* 1893; Károly Ferenczy: *Birdsong,* 1893). The main feature of such works was nevertheless a concentration on the state of mind of the models, an emphasis on the spiritual element lurking behind the visible phenomena (Csók, Réti, Strobentz, Iványi-Grünwald, Vaszary). Pure naturalism was no longer enough for this self-appointed painters' elite.

The majority of the Hungarian colony and its extended Bohemia moved back to Hungary in 1896, the year of the Millennium Exhibition. Some of them (the disciples and colleagues of Hollósy) founded the Nagybánya art colony in the same year. Although this did not mean the end of the special relationship between Munich and Hungarian art, it symbolised a fundamental change, whereby Hungarian painting was finally placed geographically, rather than just spiritually, in a Hungarian context.[24]

The first generation of painters at the Nagybánya art colony, but also their older colleagues who had shared some of their Munich years with the founders of the colony (Vaszary, Zemplényi, Csók), continued to paint themes which, in the 1890s, stood for modernism, namely the problems of modern man and his attitude towards nature and society (e.g. Károly Ferenczy: *Sermon on the*

24 ■ The "exodus" from Munich was partially caused by the shrinking of the Munich art market and the perception that the Hungarian art market may have finally come of age.

Mount, 1898; *Three Magi*, 1899; *Painter and Model in the Wood*, 1901; István Réti: *The Burial of a Honvéd*, 1899; *Old Ladies*, 1901).

There were still scholarships to be had for the Academy in Munich and the Hungarians regularly sent their works to Munich exhibitions and commercial galleries. Frigyes Strobentz, an important Hungarian painter and close friend of Károly Ferenczy, who had stayed on in Munich, helped to keep contacts alive and arranged special Hungarian shows for his fellow countrymen. After 1900, the main shows of Hungarian paintings took place in Budapest and also in other art centres, while Paris became by far the most important place for a young artist's aesthetic orientation and study.

One could paraphrase the title of this show as "the Hungarian Vernacular in Munich," since all the outstanding works by the Hungarian painters studying or living in Munich have their own distinctive "dialect" when compared with the other national schools. They differ from the rest in their choice of subject matter and they try to be different in a "Hungarian" way. But what is that way? What constitutes that apparently tiny, but crucial difference? One has to analyse it painting by painting, but such a difference is undoubtedly present. In some works it is of course simply the subject matter, the ethnographic detail of the costumes featured or the *puszta*. But when the themes are more general and typical of the age, it is usually the palette, which is always intense, even in the most melancholy and atmospheric landscapes. Is it perhaps an urge on the part of the painter to live up to expectations about the proverbial Hungarian temperament, which was sometimes seen as running to extremes—either fiercely happy or desperately sad? Most of these "bohemians" (who were often workaholic painters living modestly as middle-class gentlemen, but maintaining an anti-intellectual, bohemian façade) tried hard to be *zeitgemäß*, that is, up to date, topical but always patriotic. From the late 1880s onwards, their favourite topics were not the dramatic themes of Hungarian history or the leisured life of the wealthy, but modern life with all its social and psychological problems. If they chose modern subjects from contemporary life, it was often the life of the rural poor in Hungary, on occasion also that of the deprived underclass in the city[25] (Pataky, Baditz, Csók, Réti). They refused to idealise the past, and if they featured it, they did so typically like Réti in his *Burial of a Honvéd*, showing the painful discrepancy between the idealism of the previous generation and the gloom of contemporary reality. There is an element of pathos in all this: the one ideal that all the important Hungarian painters studying in Munich cherished to the end of their lives was a belief in the power of art to improve man and to enhance his dignity. ❧

25 ■ This was understandable, since most of them came from the country and Budapest was their milieu only for a few years before they moved to Munich. The *"vidéki Magyarország"* (provincial Hungary) was their authentic homeland. For more on this see in the catalogue Ilona Sármány-Parsons, "München szerepe a modern magyar festészeti szemlélet és stílus megteremtésében" [The Role of Munich in the Creation of the Modern Hungarian Style in Painting], pp. 149–171.

Gorbachev's Go-Ahead

András Schweitzer in Conversation with Mark Kramer

Nothing was inevitable. If the Soviet Union had wanted, it could have easily stopped the process that led to the dissolution of the Communist bloc in 1989—says Professor Mark Kramer, Director of the Cold War Studies Program at Harvard University. As he sees it, the changes were ultimately caused by three factors, neither sufficient in itself: the fundamental change in Soviet policy reflected in Mikhail Gorbachev's commitment to promote far-reaching reform and avoid the use of violence in Eastern Europe, the willingness of millions of ordinary people to go out onto the streets to demand freedom, and the rapid demoralization of hardline East European leaders as they realized that the Soviet Union would not come to their aid against internal rebellion.

András Schweitzer: *Western leaders were more than reluctant to support the historic events of 1989. Apparently, they did not want to leave behind the bipolar world order, which they found stable and predictable—this is what a Hungarian historian, László Borhi,[1] claimed at a recent conference.[2] Do you agree with his statements?*

Mark Kramer: I don't fully agree with László, although I agree with him up to a point. It is not really accurate to say that Western governments wanted to keep the status quo indefinitely. I would distinguish the short term from the longer term. Even though large bureaucracies normally prefer to stick with the procedures and situations they are familiar with, that was not the main constraint on Western policy in 1989. Western leaders never accepted the permanent existence of

1 ■ For an article by László Borhi on this see "A Reluctant and Fearful West", *The Hungarian Quarterly,* Spring 2009, No. 193, pp. 62–76.

2 ■ The Year 1989. A conference jointly organised by the Institute of History of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, the Working Group for the History of Europe of the Social Science Centre of HAS, the Európa Institute in Budapest, and the monthly *História,* 20 October 2009, Budapest.

András Schweitzer
is an editor of the weekly HVG *where a shorter version of this interview appeared in Hungarian on 14 November 2009.*

Communist dictatorships in Eastern Europe, they very much welcomed the changes that were going on in the late 1980s, but they also wanted to ensure that the process of change would be orderly and would not veer out of control, perhaps leading to chaotic violence. It's easy nowadays, with the benefit of hindsight, to argue that Western governments were too timid and too modest in their goals. But many people at the time were worried about the limits of Moscow's tolerance and the prospect of a violent crackdown if events proceeded too fast and too far. These concerns were perfectly understandable, even if ultimately unfounded. There was a lot of uncertainty at the time—it is reflected not only in public comments in the West, but also if you look at the declassified transcripts of conversations that various officials in Poland and Hungary were having among themselves. Given the record of 1953, 1956, 1968, and 1981, no one until 1989 could be fully certain that the Soviet Union would not put pressure to move things back. Some concern still existed in Hungary as late as July 1989, even after the reburial of Imre Nagy in mid-June.

What were your expectations back then?

By early 1989, after Imre Pozsgay's characterization of the Hungarian Revolution as a "popular uprising against a dictatorship that was humiliating the nation" failed to elicit any reprisal from Moscow, and especially after the June elections in Poland I regarded the Brezhnev Doctrine as dead. And I am not saying this just in retrospect. I wrote an article that appeared in the American journal *International Security* in the late summer of 1989. I had written it back in April. Its title was "Beyond the Brezhnev Doctrine" because basically the argument was that Gorbachev had done away with the Brezhnev Doctrine. I remember I laid out a few scenarios, one of them was that the whole bloc would collapse: communism would come to an end and the Warsaw Pact would dissolve. But I did not yet regard that as likely. Another scenario was along the lines of what Gorbachev was seeking, the continued existence of the Warsaw Pact with reformist governments. But the problem with that was that there were still four governments out of the six that weren't moving in a reformist direction at all. Another scenario that I laid out was that the Soviet military would seek to move against Gorbachev. The fourth scenario was that Gorbachev would decide that his policies had gone too far and would send military forces into Eastern Europe. I regarded that as very unlikely. When that article came out, I was criticised by many readers as being too naïve or too bold. They expected Gorbachev to clamp down. Within a few months it turned out that I was not bold enough.

At the conference you claimed[3] *that even a year before those events, there was no one who would have forecast them, because they were far from being inevitable. So how did you view the situation somewhat earlier, say in the symbolic year of 1984?*

3 ■ "The World in 1989". Lecture delivered by Mark Kramer at the conference The Year 1989, 20 October 2009, Budapest.

Back then, as a first-year graduate student, I thought it was inconceivable that communism would disintegrate in Eastern Europe. I was in Hungary at that time and even though Hungary was not as unpleasant as, say, Czechoslovakia or Romania or East Germany, all of which I visited in that same trip, it was still a Communist country that I found quite oppressive to be in. It wasn't anything like Romania though. In Romania I was followed even though I was just a young graduate student, only 21 years old. And they obviously wanted me to know I was being followed. In the case of East Germany, I later found out from my Stasi file that the desk clerk there was reporting on when I left and when I came back to the hotel and what I said. By the way, although the desk clerk reported quite accurately, the file wasn't all that interesting, but what he did report was true. I remember I had made one comment on the phone at a certain point, I said something like: I don't know how anyone can live in this stupid police state. And he reported it word for word quite accurately. But to answer your question, I know no one who in the mid-1980s was predicting that by 1989 communism would disintegrate. No one.

Were there any predictions at any point in time that came somewhat close to what finally happened?

A Russian dissident Andrei Amalrik wrote an essay in 1970 with the title "Will the Soviet Union Survive Until 1984?" and in it he said the Soviet Union would be gone by that time. But the reasons he gave were wrong. He thought there was going to be a war with China. Adam Ulam, a Polish émigré, a former colleague of mine at Harvard, at the height of the oppressive Brezhnev era in 1975 was speculating that if a truly reformist leader who wanted entirely to do away with the Stalinist legacy somehow came to power in Moscow ten years later—as it coincidently happened exactly in 1985—such a leader would be unable to deny the same liberalisation to Eastern European countries if they wanted it. So Adam, who died in 2000, was one of the very few people who basically got the dynamic correct. But he readily acknowledged that he didn't think it would actually ever happen. He didn't think any such Soviet leader would ever really come to power.

Retrospectively, where do you see the turning point from where the dissolution of the Soviet bloc could have been foreseen?

The real turning point came in mid-1988, because it was that time that Gorbachev had to make choices about which way he was going. He was given advice by his military officers—by Marshal Sergei Akhromeyev, who was then chief of the Soviet general staff and subsequently became Gorbachev's personal military adviser, and by others—and they were telling him that things were going too fast, and that he had to slow things down and not endanger the Warsaw Pact, which they were claiming he was doing. He went against their advice. To do that—and I am talking about this retrospectively, I didn't know at that time that he was going against his advisers—signaled a real commitment to carrying out genuine

changes instead of just cosmetic changes that, say, Brezhnev had made. When Brezhnev announced changes they were usually phony. Similarly, in terms of Soviet domestic policy, the XIXth Party Congress of the Soviet Communist Party was held in July 1988, and that's when they decided to dismantle the central party apparatus and to hold competitive elections starting in 1989. Both things were extremely important in pushing things ahead. But even then it remained to be seen what Gorbachev would decide if push came to shove in Eastern Europe. And the test came in East Germany in October 1989. Erich Honecker, the hard-line East German leader, was convinced until the end that the Soviet Union would come and bail him out. In the wake of the Tiananmen Square massacre in China in June 1989, Stasi boss Erich Mielke and Honecker were talking enthusiastically about implementing a "Chinese solution" in East Germany.

Were there such hardliners in the Soviet Union too?

They did not want to let it go as far as it had gone in China, to allow that scale of demonstrations. There were hugely damaging strikes by coal miners in the Soviet Union in 1989 and there were people at the KGB who argued that they had to clamp down right away because otherwise the situation was going to approach something like the Tiananmen Square protests. Committing mass bloodshed was something most of those high up were reluctant to do. Even in East Germany they wanted to clamp down before it got to that stage. When mass demonstrations did break out in October in East Germany there were calls within the KGB to try to rein in the situation. But there is no indication that in the Soviet Politburo anyone was recommending the direct use of Soviet military force—including Vladimir Kryuchkov who was the head of the KGB. Eduard Shevarnadze who was then foreign minister has claimed that there were people, like Defense Minister Dmitrii Yazov and others, who did recommend that, but the evidence doesn't bear that out. Nor does the evidence really show that even Dmitrii Yazov was arguing in favour of a forceful clampdown in East Germany, even though he was horrified by what was going on. There were military commanders in the Soviet Army who would have favoured a crackdown, but they were not the ones who could have made the decision to use force. Some of them though said openly after the Soviet Union broke apart that there should have been a forceful reaction in East Germany.

At the Budapest conference there were participants who suggested that it would have been too much for the Soviet Union to crack down in so many countries in Eastern Europe at once.

They wouldn't have had to face that choice. The Polish leader Wojciech Jaruzelski would have used force if he had been given the green light by Moscow. It has been disclosed that there was planning by the Polish Ministry of Internal Affairs to impose martial law after the elections, but nothing came of that because Moscow

refused to back it. In Hungary, after Imre Pozsgay had made his statement in January 1989 about the Hungarian Revolution, it could have sparked a severe protest from Moscow both publicly and privately and military exercises held in Hungarian territory by the Southern Group of Forces might have been just such a protest, albeit in veiled form. A slightly more open demonstration of anger, or dissatisfaction, that type of thing would have been enough. But instead of voicing a protest, one of Gorbachev's closest aides on the Politburo, Alexander Yakovlev, made a statement that it was entirely for the Hungarians themselves to judge.

What would have happened if the Soviet Union had decided, say in the summer of 1989, that it was time to reassert a more orthodox system?

It probably could have been done without resorting to violence. Unlike the situation that developed in the GDR by October 1989 and in Czechoslovakia by November 1989, with mass demonstrations against the hardline regimes occurring every night, the changes in Hungary had been proceeding in a relatively orderly fashion. The faction of the Communist Party affiliated with Miklós Németh and Imre Pozsgay were much bolder than the faction affiliated with Károly Grósz, but even Grósz was willing to put up with significant change. So, most likely, the Soviet Union would have backed Grósz against Pozsgay and Németh and ordered him to put an end to the Round Table Negotiations[4]. Most of the reforms could have been kept in place for the time being, but eventually the Soviet Union would have pushed for Grósz's removal and the gradual reversal of the reforms. This might have been feasible up until September-October 1989. All that said, I find no evidence that any major leader in the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party was making contingency plans for this scenario. Even though, as late as July 1989, they were worried about Soviet reactions, they did not seem to have a plan for what they would do if the Soviet Union did clamp down.

How come the Soviet Union didn't even try to intimidate those who wanted change in Eastern Europe?

For the reasons that Adam Ulam mentioned, Gorbachev found that his domestic objectives, seeking to eliminate all remnants of Stalinism, would elude him so long as he tried to maintain an orthodox Communist bloc in Eastern Europe. He also thought that by liberalising the Soviet political system he would be able to win public support for a bold economic-reform programme. His objective from the beginning was to revive the Soviet economy and to restore it to fast growth, for example, by giving individuals and factories greater control over how they handled

4 ■ What became the trilateral National Round Table talks, involving trade unions and quasi-civic organisations alongside Party and Opposition delegates, started in March 1989. The talks repeatedly broke down but ended with an historic agreement signed on 18 September involving six draft laws that covered, among other fundamental measures, an overhaul of the Constitution, the establishment of a Constitutional Court and the scheduling of fully free elections for March 1990.

their own affairs. Of course he did not succeed, he ended up with something that was neither a market nor a centrally planned economy. He created an incoherent mix of the two. When he came to power, the Soviet economy was slowing, but as a centrally-planned economy it essentially functioned. By 1990 the Soviet economy was in a real crisis as a direct result of Gorbachev's confused and destabilizing policies.

Did the whole chain of events happen solely because of Gorbachev? In this part of Europe people like to believe that they played an important part, on the other hand, of course, we are aware that it is not the tail that wags the dog.

It was a prerequisite that Gorbachev was determined not to use military force in Eastern Europe. Once that became clear to people, as it certainly did by October 1989, they went out onto the streets in vast numbers and pushed for the removal of the regimes they had lived under. In earlier decades (in 1953, in 1956, in 1968, in 1981) the Soviet Union was willing to use military force to keep things under control. If Soviet policy hadn't changed, no matter how many people in Eastern Europe had wanted change, they wouldn't have been able to make it, because Soviet troops would have intervened. So the drastic change in Soviet policy was a necessary condition, but it wasn't a sufficient condition. The sufficient condition was the combination of the change in Soviet policy and the willingness of millions of East European people to take that opportunity into their own hands and push for radical change before it could be stopped.

The East German authorities weren't about to move in a Gorbachev-like direction, they wanted to maintain an orthodox repressive Communist system. So it took those hundreds of thousands and millions of people to go out to the streets to force the East German regime to back down. The East German regime would have clamped down at an early stage if they had received Soviet backing. But Gorbachev denied that backing. By that time in Hungary and Poland events had already proceeded very far. In Poland, millions of people had voted for Solidarity at the elections, they obviously felt no fear about doing so. In Hungary three hundred thousand people attended the reburial of Imre Nagy, which until 1988 would have been impossible because János Kádár would have never put up with that. Prague is a city of just over a million people, but at the height of the Velvet Revolution more than a million people were out on the streets of Prague, which meant that people had also come from nearby. The Czechoslovak regime, when faced with demonstrations like that, wasn't going to survive very long. They used violence on the 17th of November but—contrary to what happened in China, where large-scale coercive violence proved to be very effective—they used it on a very limited scale, which could only have a counterproductive effect: it made people angrier and spurred them to come out on the streets in defiance in ever greater numbers.

People's sense of fear was disappearing everywhere in the region. I can give you a personal example. My father's family, 27 Latvian Jews, were deported to

the Gulag by the Soviet NKVD on 13–14 June 1941; there were only three who made it back after being imprisoned in the Gulag for sixteen years. As a result, the three who came back tended to be very timid and unwilling to engage in any public protest, because they knew the consequences could be very severe. In the spring of 1988 I found out that two of my cousins had joined the Latvian Popular Front, which at that time was supportive of Gorbachev's liberalization, but it was the type of organization that would have been impossible to form in the past. It would have carried enormous risks if you had tried to do this. So at that point I realized that something was changing in the Soviet Union. Because if my cousins felt they could do that, it must mean that people weren't held back by fear any more from engaging in non-official politics.

With the archives still opening up in Eastern Europe, have there been any new surprises for you lately about the events of the Cold War?

For example the fact that on the 30th of October in 1956, the Soviet Presidium, as the Politburo was called at that time, made the decision to pull Soviet troops out of Hungary, and to let the Revolution proceed. That decision was reversed the next day and two hundred thousand Soviet troops moved in. One of the things that brought this about was the Republic Square incident on the 30th, when state-security officials were lynched and severely beaten. That was mistakenly assumed to be the start of a larger wave of violent reprisals, whereas in fact we know now that that incident caused a backlash in Hungary, and if anything, behaviour tended to calm down. Another important factor for the decision was the spillover effect from Hungary to Romania and to Czechoslovakia and especially to Western Ukraine. In Transylvania, there were large demonstrations, the Romanian authorities were alarmed, the Romanian Politburo was meeting daily to discuss what to do. That's why Romania volunteered to join the Soviet Union in invading Hungary. Khrushchev turned down that offer. But I was amazed; in fact I was stunned to find out that even for a day the Soviet leadership had considered letting Hungary go. Now if you think about it, thirty-three years later it was exactly what Gorbachev did, basically to stand aside as things were falling apart in Eastern Europe. Many commentators described the Soviet invasion of 1956 as the "first nail in the coffin of the Soviet bloc" and the "first step in the collapse of Communism." In reality, precisely the opposite is true. If Soviet leaders had not undertaken a full-scale invasion on the 4th of November and had instead allowed the Communist system to collapse in Hungary and permitted Hungary to leave the Warsaw Pact, the consequences would have been enormous. The events of 1989 showed that the collapse of Communism in one Soviet-bloc country could rapidly spread to others. By resorting to a large-scale invasion in November 1956, Khrushchev preserved the Soviet bloc for a couple of decades. ❧

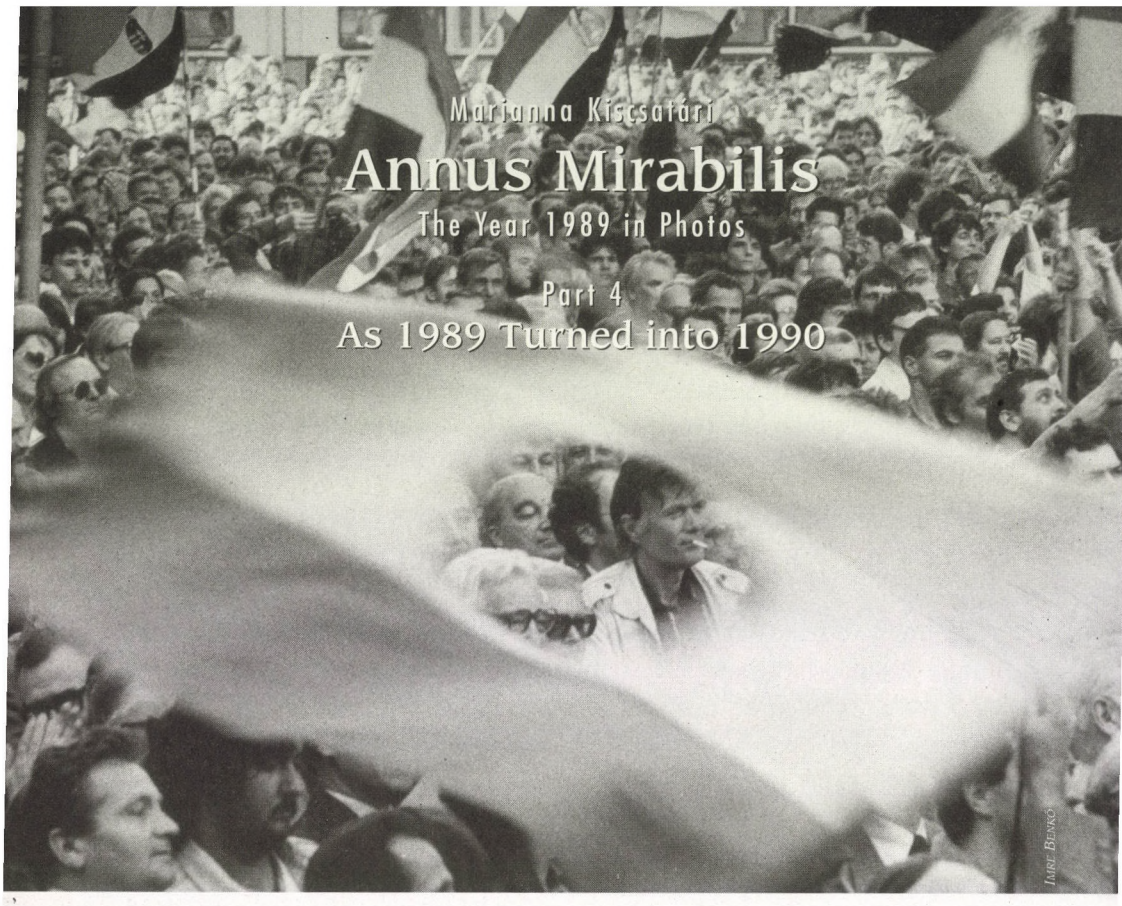
Marianna Kiscsatári

Annus Mirabilis

The Year 1989 in Photos

Part 4

As 1989 Turned into 1990



IMRE BENKŐ

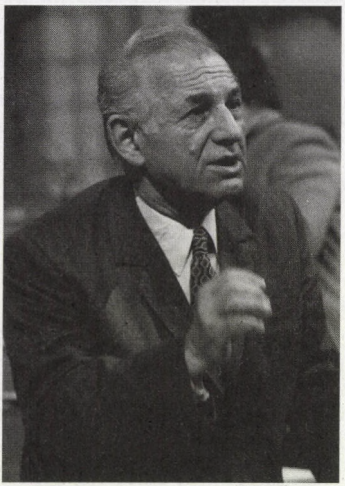
As 1989 drew to a close, the party-state and state socialism gradually ceased to exist in both a legal and everyday sense. After a 40-year detour, Hungary returned to the path marked out by István Széchenyi, Lajos Kossuth and Ferenc Deák, the nineteenth-century founding fathers of the Hungarian parliamentary state.

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 except where otherwise indicated.
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 National Round Table Negotiations, which began on 13 June 1989, concluded on 18 September with a broad agreement making clear that the elections scheduled for 1990 would take place without restrictions on the basis of a free contest between parties—the de facto launch of the election campaign. Parties drafted programmes and held rallies in schools, community centres and on the street. Red stars were torn down. Such acts symbolised the irreversibility of regime change. The Socialist Workers' Party (MSZMP), which had over 860,000 members in the mid-1980s, continued to shrink. Around 10,000 per month left the party throughout 1989 and fewer and fewer paid their membership dues. Still, its membership was strong compared with the new parties. The Party convened the XIVth Congress for 6–9 October to decide its future. Most of the 1,200 delegates were first-time participants who joined openly organized platforms before the deliberations. The largest of these was the Reform Alliance with around 500 members. The opposing "law and order" conservatives formed several platforms. Although the possibility of a split was mooted repeatedly, in the end the majority chose to stay together. Among the compromise decisions, the most important, on 7 October, was to end the MSZMP and form the MSZP, the Hungarian Socialist Party. In subsequent weeks, the dismantling of the state party apparatus and the registration of new members began. ❧

IMRE PROHÁSZKA

The Red Star on Gellért Hill is taken down. Budapest, November 1989



IMRE PROHÁSZKA

Rezső Nyers, a leading reformist, addressing the XIVth Congress of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party. Budapest, 7 October 1989

Laws were enacted to create the constitutional framework for a democratic state governed by the rule of law. Two laws which came into force on 15 October 1989 were pivotal. The first amended the Criminal Code, the second criminal procedure, and their essence was to narrow the scope of crimes against the state and fortify individual liberties. Another law amended the 1949 Constitution and came into force on 23 October 1989 (a respectful nod to the 1956 Revolution). After the noontime tolling of bells on that same day, Speaker of Parliament Mátyás Szűrös proclaimed the Republic on Kossuth Square (and hence became acting president of the Republic). He cited Lajos Kossuth, Mihály Károlyi and Zoltán Tildy as the forerunners of the renascent Hungarian democracy. Thus the party-state and state socialism came to an end *de jure*. After a forced detour of 40 years, Hungary returned to the parliamentary system whose foundations were laid by the founding fathers of the modern Hungarian parliamentary state in 1848–1849. ❧

IMRE BALATON, MTI

Proclamation of the Republic. Budapest, 23 October 1989

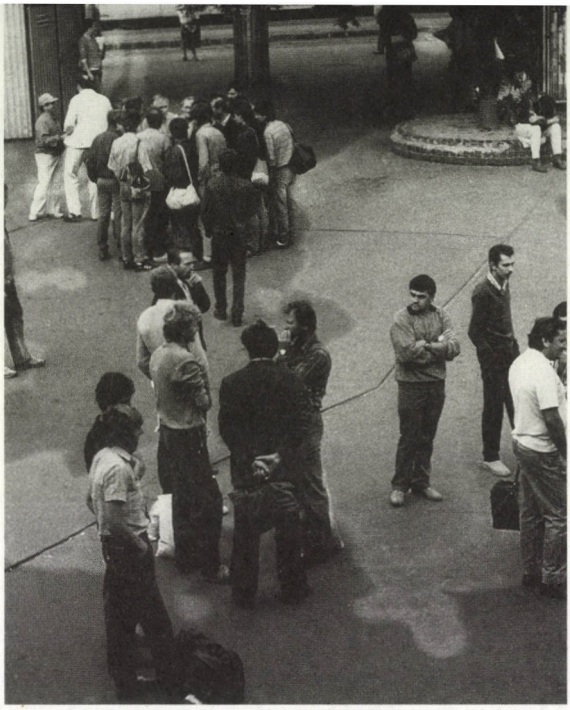
Parliament continued ratifying the basic laws of the new Hungarian Republic. On 30 October, another law made way for the establishment of the Constitutional Court. The body, unprecedented in Hungarian constitutional law, was granted wide-ranging authority. Members were to be elected by Parliament for a nine-year term. The Court's duties included the preliminary and subsequent exam-

Csilla Cseke, MTI

The newly elected members of the Constitutional Court, Antal Ádám, Géza Kilényi, Pál Solt, László Sólyom, and János Zlinszky together with László Nyikos, the Deputy President of the State Audit Office, are sworn in.Hungarian Parliament, 23 November 1989.

ination of bills and acts of Parliament. It was to handle complaints about violations of constitutionally guaranteed rights, interpret the Constitution and end jurisdictional conflicts between central and local authorities. In defence of the Constitution and constitutionality, the Court could nullify any act of Parliament in violation of the Constitution or any government measure violating the law. The Constitutional Court thus acquired a privileged status in the system of checks and balances. Its first president was László Sólyom, an internationally known legal scholar and a former adviser to an environmental lobby group. (Sólyom has been President of the Republic since 2007.) The body's size was eventually reduced from the originally planned 15 members to 11. Parliament passed 58 acts in 1989, more than ten times the average between the years 1950 and 1985, and more than twice the number in 1988. With the establishment of the constitutional framework, Parliament decided to dissolve itself on 21 December 1989, and effected the manoeuvre on 16 March 1990—not without some grumbling from the predominantly Socialist deputies who had been 'elected' in 1985. ❧

The state budget came close to collapse several times in the course of 1989. The planned figure for the annual balance of payments deficit was reached within two months. In May, the International Monetary Fund announced its refusal to release the final $350 million instalment under an earlier agreed credit agreement. Consequently, the government decided to devalue the forint twice in succession (by 5 per cent in March and 6 per cent in April), to halt the Nagymaros dam project in May, and to submit new budgetary amendments to Parliament in June. These efforts were directed towards pushing down the annual deficit to 20 billion forints, in line with the expectation of the IMF. Further loans were sought from various organizations and banks. Success came in the closing months of the year as various Western banks extended immediate aid.



IMRE PROHÁSZKA

Day labourers for hire on Moscow Square Budapest, November 1989

IMRE PROHÁSZKA

Blackmarket foreign exchange dealers in Váci Street. Budapest, November 1989

Imbalances were exacerbated by a trade surplus within Comecon, mainly in trade with the Soviet Union. The government's aim in this area was to boost imports and reduce exports in order to satisfy growing domestic demand. In reality the opposite happened. Hungarian firms exported 500–600 million roubles in excess of what they imported. This was almost two and a half times the 1988 figure. The basic cause of the failure of this policy was that most Hungarian industrial goods could only be sold on the Comecon market.

In order to avoid impending bankruptcy, on 18 September the government tried to control foreign currency reserves held by the public by legalizing them. When this failed, on 2 November it suspended the convertible currency allowance for Hungarians travelling abroad for 17 days. At the same time, it was announced that tourists travelling to the West could purchase at most $50 annually. Finally, on 10 December the forint was devalued by a further 10 per cent.

In 1989 Hungary's largest bus manufacturer Ikarusz had a workforce of 8,000. It used to produce 12,000 buses annually for the domestic market and for export to Socialist countries, mainly the Soviet Union. The company faced difficulties when these markets collapsed and technological limitations circumscribed its competitiveness on western markets. Partial privatization started in the autumn of 1989 assuring the Soviet Atex consortium a 30.4 per cent share. Trade nevertheless continued to decline. A crisis management was appointed to no avail, in spite of apparent interest from abroad. A consortium

IMRE PROHÁSZKA

Ikarusz buses "demonstrate" in front of Parliament against privatization
Budapest, November 1989

headed by Gábor Széles produced a revival which proved to be fleeting. (By 1995 the workforce had been reduced to 2,846 and the number of sold buses dwindled to 1,574. Debts accumulated in spite of various reorganizations. Ikarusz ceased operating on 31 December 2007.) ❧

By dismantling barriers and allowing East Germans to cross freely to Austria, Hungary literally tore a hole in the Iron Curtain. An estimated 10,000 'vacationing' East Germans headed westward from Hungary (see Part 3 of "Annus Mirabilis: The Year 1989 in Photos" in *HQ* 195), more than 2,000 between 21 and 24 August alone, the largest wave of emigration since the construction of the Berlin Wall began in 1961. Others who sought refuge in West German embassies in Prague or Budapest were taken by special trains to West Germany in early October. By the end of 1989, the total number of GDR citizens who had left the country stood at 345,000.

On 18 October, amidst countrywide demonstrations, Egon Krenz took over as party general secretary from the hated hardliner Erich Honecker. His concessions came too late. People took to the streets in the large cities and a crowd of some half a million people near the Alexanderplatz in Berlin demanded a complete political change. The entire leadership resigned. On 8 November, the German–German border was opened both in and outside Berlin. At midnight, after hundreds of people converged at crossing points, permission was given for gates along the Wall to be opened. The crowd surged through cheering and shouting and was met by jubilant West Berliners on the other side. Ecstatic, they immediately began to clamber on top of the Wall and hack large chunks out of the 28-mile barrier.

The Berlin Wall came down on 9 November 1989, heralding the reunification process of the two German states. ❧

PÉTER HORVÁTH

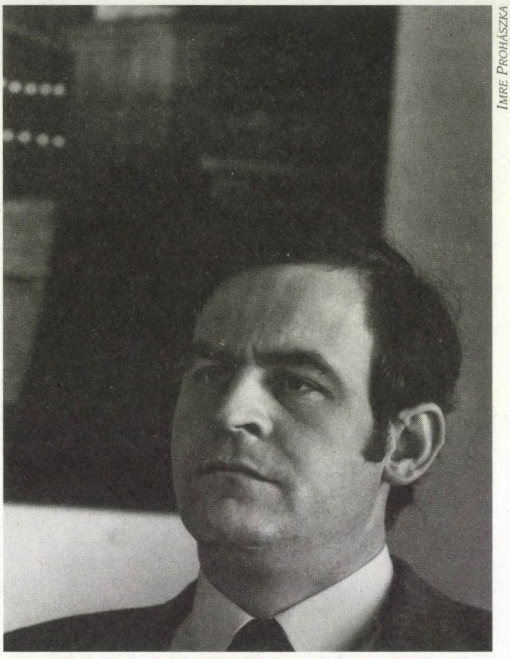
Celebrating young people on the remnants of the Berlin Wall Berlin, 31 December 1989

Lajos Soós, MTI

Helmut Kohl, the German Federal Chancellor, addresses the Hungarian Parliament Budapest, 18 December 1989

Due to the deteriorating economic situation, budgetary imbalance and, not least, the expectations of an IMF threatening to withhold credit, the Németh government submitted an extraordinarily strict budget to Parliament in December 1989. It entailed price increases on an unprecedented scale. Miklós Németh threatened to step down should the budget proposals be rejected. To avoid this, Helmut Kohl, who came to Budapest to express his thanks to the Hungarian nation for their help, appeared at the 18 December session of Parliament and endorsed the proposal. It was probably thanks to him too that, despite the heated debate, members finally passed the proposal by a large majority on 21 December. ❧

In Romania Nicolae Ceauşescu ruled for nearly a quarter of a century at the helm of the most regressive regime in the entire Soviet bloc. Brutal repression went hand in hand with a personality cult that perhaps outdid Stalin's. By the early 1980s, the standard of living had sunk to unprecedented depths. Permanent shortages led to food rationing. The annual ration for a family of three in Braşov in 1987 was 10.5 kg of sugar, 8.5 kg of meat, 2.5 kg of flour, 10 litres of milk and 10 eggs.



IMRE PROHÁSZKA

Rev László Tőkés. Timişoara, December 1989

Despite the terror that kept virtually everyone in dread, the first cracks in the structure of the Ceauşescu regime also appeared. In March 1989, in an open letter, six previously high-ranking state and party leaders condemned the "genius of the Carpathians" for human rights abuses, the destruction of the economy and illegalities perpetrated by the Securitate. In the spring of 1989, numerous international organizations, among them the European Parliament and the UN's Human Rights Commission, condemned Ceauşescu, as did Eugene Ionesco, the noted Romanian playwright who lived in France. Yet the biggest breach in the regime's façade, and the one which eventually led to its collapse, was opened by László Tőkés, a previously unknown Hungarian Calvinist minister in Timişoara (Temesvár).

László Tőkés was born in Cluj (Kolozsvár) in 1952. He was a successful young pastor who eventually extended his criticism of the Reformed Church to a condemnation of the entire Romanian regime. He spoke out in defence of the rights of the Hungarian minority. In 1988, he condemned the village systematization plan. The number of faithful who came to hear him preach grew continuously in the autumn of 1989. The Securitate sought to frighten him by every means available.

Tőkés had become a symbol of resistance and individual courage, and the authorities finally decided to remove him from Timişoara by force. The date of the eviction was set for 15 December. Tőkés resisted, and the multitude gathered around his house forced the authorities to retreat. On the following day a crowd assembled in the vicinity, forming a human chain in defence of

Tőkés and his family. By then the majority were ethnic Romanians. The demonstrators removed the coat of arms symbolizing the regime out of the centre of the flag and chanting the slogans—Freedom for Everyone! Down with the Dictatorship! Down with Ceauşescu!—they overran the streets of the city centre. They smashed the windows of bookshops and burnt Communist books as well as pictures of the dictator. The Romanian Revolution had begun.

The Timişoara militia and Securitate acted brutally, beating and injuring many. On the orders of Ceauşescu and his wife, armed forces began shooting at demonstrators on 17 December, and this continued throughout the night and on the next day. The number of victims exceeded one hundred. László

JÓZSEF ESSIG

Demonstrators on Victory Square in front of the Romanian Cathedral
Cluj, 21 December 1989

ZOLTÁN FEJÉR

A procession on Rákóczi Avenue celebrating the victory of the Romanian revolution Budapest, 22 December 1989

Tőkés and his wife in custody were taken to a small Transylvanian village.

Believing that the revolt was over, Ceauşescu travelled to Iran on 18 December for a three-day visit. Infuriated by the murders, 100,000–150,000 citizens of Timişoara —one third of the city's population of 350,000—once again took to the streets on 20 December. The military behaved passively on this day, and a few of them in fact openly fraternized with the demonstrators. Then most units disappeared from the city overnight. Even today, we cannot know for sure whether they acted on local orders or on orders from Bucharest. On their own,

the Securitate did not dare confront the crowd. The Ceauşescu regime fell on 20 December in Timişoara. Overnight, the Action Committee of the Romanian Democratic Front was formed, demanding the departure of the leadership in Bucharest, and on 20–21 December it seized control of the entire county.

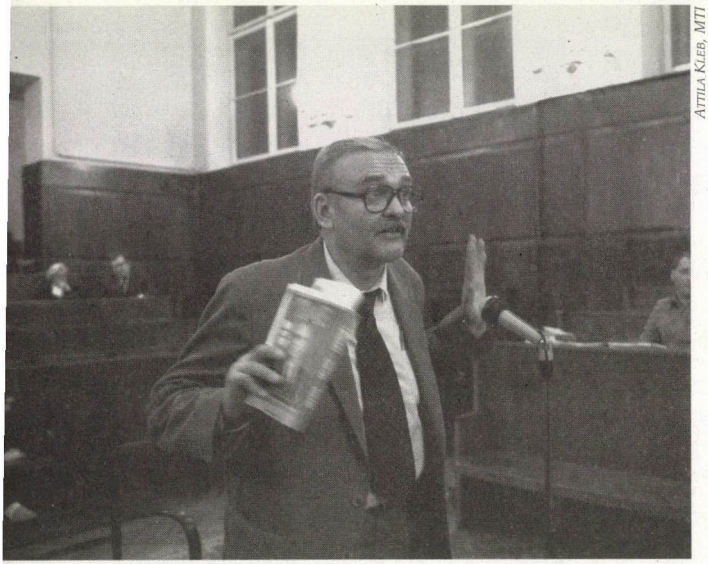
On returning home from Iran, Ceauşescu, unaware of the momentous changes, in a televised speech on 20 December called the hundreds of thousands of protestors in Timişoara "a few hooligans" and had summoned a mass rally for the following day on the square in front of the presidential palace. But the rhythmic applause and cheering to which he had become accustomed in previous decades failed to materialize. The crowd began to shout, at first barely audibly, then ever-more loudly: Timişoara! Rat! Death! We Want Bread! Down with the Dictator! Since TV broadcast the event live, many were able to see first the confused, and then the terrified facial expression of the "Great Leader". Ceauşescu attempted once again to influence the crowd, with even less success. A few took aim at him with raw potatoes and their shoes. The Conducător thereupon withdrew inside the building, gave the order to disperse the crowd at any cost, and then, boarding a helicopter, fled the city with his wife.

Chaos and confusion followed, but by 23 December a National Salvation Front Committee was formed. Various declarations and the conduct of the army eventually gave rise to the suspicion that the Romanian Revolution was perhaps not a revolution at all but a coup d'état, the predetermined schedule of which had been disrupted by the uprising in Timişoara. Whatever it was, it ended with Ceauşescu's hurried execution following summary proceedings on Christmas Day, 25 December 1989, a sordid and humiliating spectacle which, televised, was watched by the whole world with horrified disbelief. ❧

LAJOS KÁRÁSZ

A boy lighting a candle on the main square of Timişoara, January 1990

The year of the first free elections started in with a political bomb. The fuse was lit by the Alliance of Free Democrats (SZDSZ) and the Alliance of Young Democrats (Fidesz) at a press conference on 5 January. They revealed that as late as November and December, officers and secret agents of the notorious Department III/III of the Ministry of the Interior had been keeping tabs on the activities of more than 20 political parties and several well-known opposition politicians. The reports were submitted to top officials. In the meantime, a large-scale project of document destruction was under way at the Department III/III Files with agents' reports and other sensitive documents were being systematically shredded and records of what was destroyed were rarely kept. The scandal, called "Dunagate", was widely aired in the media. It led to the resignation of the Minister of the Interior and several top officials, and provided further ammunition to the Opposition parties in their election campaign. ❧



ATTILA KLEB, MTI

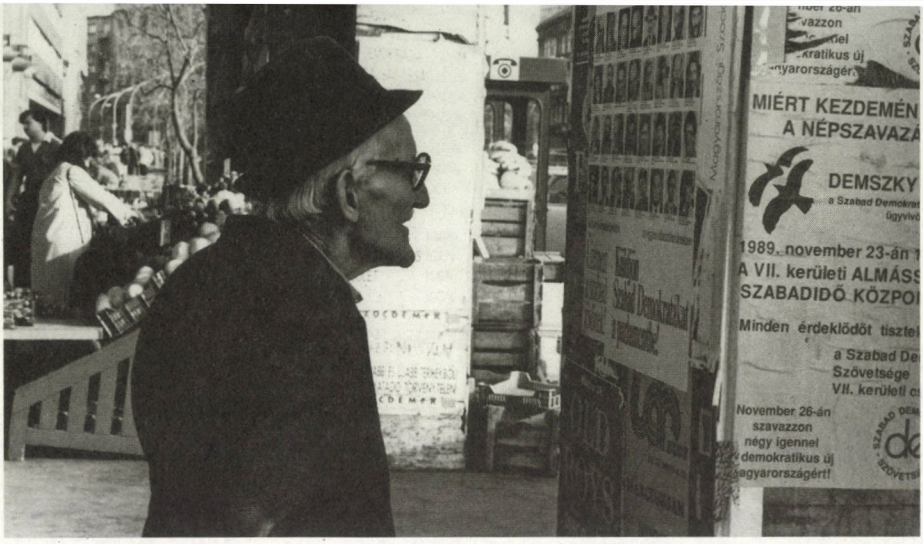
Major József Végvári, the Dunagate whistle-blower, exercises his right as an accused, and has the last word in his own defence. Budapest, 29 November 1990

Amidst demonstrations and strikes protesting against the closure of factories and soaring prices; and against the backdrop of the scandal in the Ministry of the Interior, the Németh government made every effort to embrace the spirit of the new age. Act IV of 1990, passed on 24 January, declared freedom of conscience and religion to be a basic human right and established complete legal equality among denominations. The law repealed agreements previously reached with the Vatican under which the Pope could appoint Hungarian prelates only with the prior consent of the Hungarian state. On 9 February, Hungary established diplomatic relations with the Vatican—second only to Poland among the countries of the Soviet bloc.

On 1 February, bilateral talks on the complete withdrawal of Soviet troops began. The timetable for the withdrawal had to be made dependent essentially on the capacity of the Hungarian railway junctions, mainly at Záhony-Cop. The Hungarian negotiating team wanted the withdrawal of the troops to be

The Soviet evacuation is completed

completed by 30 June 1991, something that Czechoslovakia had managed to secure earlier. A drawn-out debate ensued, ending with Moscow accepting the date proposed by the Hungarians. Although no settlement was reached on financial questions, the agreement was signed on 10 March in Moscow by Soviet Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze and Hungarian Foreign Minister Gyula Horn. Also present were representatives of the Hungarian Opposition parties. ❧



LÁJOS BAITAI

Baffled by party posters. Budapest, February 1990

The elections of 25 March and 8 April were a plebiscite of sorts passing judgement on the Communist past. Twelve parties entered the elections. Six parties dropped out after the first round having failed to cross the 4 per cent hurdle. The Hungarian Democratic Forum (MDF) obtained 43 per cent and the Alliance of Free Democrats (SZDSZ) 24 per cent. Under Prime Minister József Antall, the MDF formed a centre-right coalition government with the Independent Smallholders' Party (FKGP) and the Christian Democratic People's Party (KDNP) to command a 60 per cent majority in Parliament. The Socialists achieved a humiliating 8.5 per cent and the emerging liberal Alliance of Young Democrats (Fidesz) an impressive 6 per cent.

The elections completed a peaceful process of political and legal transformation, a process which became known befittingly as the "negotiated revolution". ❧

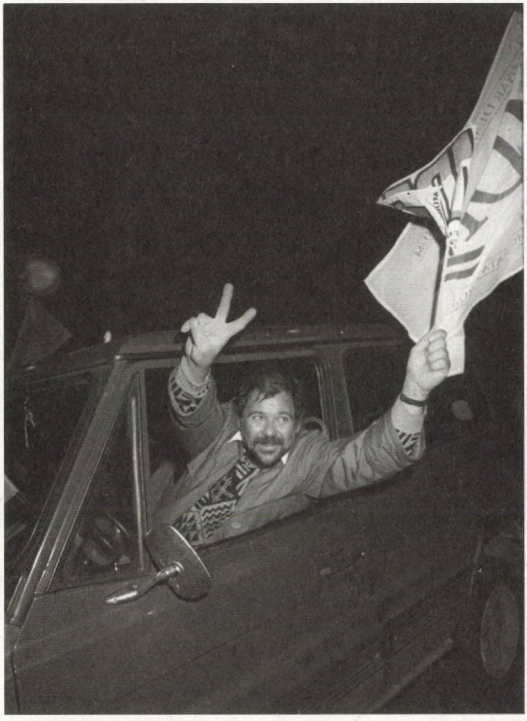


PHOTO MTI, ATTILA MANEK

A Hungarian Democratic Forum sympathizer giving the victory sign after the party's victory in the 1990 Parliamentary elections, Budapest, 9 April 1990

Zoltán Tábori

Guns, Fire and Ditches

A Report from Tatárszentgyörgy on the Roma Killings

An old Gypsy woman forages in the meadow behind the birch trees. Her bicycle lies on the bank of a ditch. She could easily pedal off. Instead she waits for me to come over and shows me a handful of small white funnel-shaped mushrooms in a plastic bag. "For soup," she explains. "Sometimes there are lots, others when it's hard to find any at all. This is enough for soup."

"Do you too live at the edge of the village?" I ask. She nods. As we amble along the skies rumble: Tatárszentgyörgy, a short drive from the capital, adjoins the biggest military range in Hungary, and has done since pre-WWI Imperial days. Villagers haven't flinched at the sound of gunshot for generations. Her home totters on the village outskirts, festooned with colourful clothes hung out to dry.

"Aren't you afraid living here with the constant gunfire?"

"No, there's nothing to be afraid of. They were caught; one from the next village, another here, and a third from Pest."

She vanishes inside.

Hers was not the house torched on the night of 22 February 2009. That house stood at the other end of the village. Home to a man gunned down along with two of his small children as they fled its burning timbers, it proudly stood alongside four fenceless houses on a manmade road. Opposite, waist-high shrubs and acacia mount a swathe of sand. A sparse pine copse is a stone's throw away.

The front door of the last house in the row opens directly onto the trees. It was spanking new, nicely plastered and painted, and it had double-glazing sturdy enough to even withstand a petrol bomb. An attacker would surely have sought out a filthy shanty with broken windows. After all there were plenty around. But this was the house they wanted.

Zoltán Tábori,
a sociographer and translator, is an editor on the staff of the monthly Mozgó Világ.

Next door lives the father of the murdered 27-year-old man (the murdered five-year-old boy's grandfather). His front window looks onto the burned-out wreckage—a daily reminder of what happened. He is a short 48-year-old with a head of thick grey hair and a small silver ring in his left ear. Two concrete steps lead up to the front door. He points towards the small room on the right.

"That was where they were sleeping when they were attacked."

I step up beside him and look in but I am outflanked by a little girl, who nips ahead and stops in the wreckage of what had been the largest room in the house, in the middle of the living room.

"It wasn't there, but here!"

"Okay then it was there. The telly was probably on; they would lie down here. My son stuck by my grandson, come rain or shine."

"Which of the three?"

"The one who departed this life, the one he always had slept with; he took him away with him."

We go outside again. Inside the house is just one big pile of rubble.

"When was it built?"

"Three years ago. They had just started their life together; the state child subsidy payment went on it—there were three kids. My daughter-in-law has moved back in with her parents in the village and won't to talk to me."

He does not say so, but I get the feeling that his daughter-in-law pins the blame on him. Whatever the case, the family has broken apart, with one of the two surviving children here, the other there.

"What will happen to the house?"

"I don't know. Maybe I'll take it over on behalf of my younger son."

"How many children do you have?"

"Eight boys, one girl. Seven boys now."

When he was young he used to work on a factory assembly line in Budapest. He later came back to the village where he works as a car repair man. Usually two or three cars stand in front of the house.

"A garage will charge twenty or thirty thousand forints; I'll do it for four or five."

"Was your son also a mechanic?"

"He was more into wheeling and dealing. He used to work on building sites in Budapest." He falls silent before deciding that I am likely to be well-informed and therefore will know that his son was charged with stealing timber worth half a million forints. So he chooses to broach the subject himself: "It happened this winter. It's all true, but everyone was filching—Gypsies and Hungarians alike."

In the photograph the young man who was killed is showing off his muscles in a grey t-shirt, arms crossed. He is well-proportioned, and even if there is no hint of a smile, he looks serious rather than hard-faced.

"So, this is where they died, in the snow?"

"No, I picked my son up, took him into our place and put him on my bed. That's where he bled to death."

"And the little boy? Shouldn't he have been seen to first?"

"Nothing could be done to help him. His little head... at the back there was a big chunk missing. That was the exit wound. Eighteen fragments of shot were dug out of his body."

The car mechanic's house is a huge Kádár-era mud-brick house, at least twice as big as the one belonging to his son. The wall of countless small, brown mud bricks presents a bizarre sight. He sees that I am inspecting his house.

"I built it with my own hands. There must be twenty or twenty-five thousand mud bricks in it; every one I laid myself. We were always hard at work; we don't have enough bread to eat, let alone to spend on guns. If I had the money, I'd buy one. But that's not going to bring my son back, or my grandson."

"What happened that night?"

"Around half-past midnight, my wife was woken up by a loud bang, a crackling of flames: our son's house was on fire. I raced out but didn't see anyone. I dashed into the blazing house, and no one was there either. It was only when I came out again that I saw them lying there in the snow at the edge of the acacia grove: my son and grandson. My son was still alive, groaning. I reckon he knew who his attackers were, but he couldn't get it out. I carried him onto the couch inside and wrapped him up. He was cold all over. There were three holes in his back; the detective said a spiked beam probably fell onto him—that's what did it..." His voice choked.

"The little girl was injured as well. Where was she? Where did you find her?"

"There. Look, she'll show you herself where."

I look up. The dark-eyed six-year-old girl, raven hair, is crouching three feet up one of the acacia trees. She was probably as far away again from her father and younger brother lying in the snow as they were from the front door of the burning house. Not far—the blink of an eye if you're running. Right now she is sitting in the tree just as she did then, but then she comes down and over to us.

"She was shot on her finger and also her back."

The grandfather hauls up her dress and shows the wounds. I can see four angry red puncture scars that are within a matchbox length of each other. The scar on the finger is not so obvious.

"'Stop it!" the little girl says angrily, the first vocal sign she has given of her presence. She is the sole eyewitness. I might try asking but haven't the heart to do so: she has been interrogated more than enough.

The first to arrive at the scene was the police, followed by firemen and finally an ambulance. Their job was not easy: snowfall, wind howling, dark and cold, an isolated house on fire with no one in sight. Then it turns out that

The Seeds of Wrath

Gypsies first appeared in Hungary at the end of the Middle Ages. Their skills as musicians, horse-copers (a dealer, not necessarily an honest one), makers of mud bricks and wooden troughs, basket-weavers and tinkers were in demand almost up to the present day. Since the time of Maria Theresa and Joseph II repeated attempts have been made to assimilate or (latterly) integrate them into the mainstream. In the course of Communist forced industrialisation after the Second World War, Gypsies were recruited to work in factories and on building sites. Many unskilled Gypsies found jobs too; even if this was often akin to being on artificial life support. Others stayed in villages and worked for local co-operatives. Most of the Roma commuted and many got used to regular work; quite a few got qualifications and their families were able to step up the social ladder a rung or two.

Jobs linked to their traditions and skills dried up in parallel with Hungary's transition to democracy and its adoption of a market economy. Fashions changed, too. Whether it was Gypsy music in restaurants, wicker tables or knick-knacks, demand simply evaporated. And the state's long arm of command and control withdrew. The Roma, comprising around 7 per cent of the country's total population, were largely left high and dry.

Successive governments have thrown money at the problem. The trouble is many well-meaning but badly designed government policies which aim to lift the Roma out of poverty have tended to have the perverse impact of reinforcing difficulties associated with them: segregation in schools, squalid living conditions—often in shanties on the outskirts of villages—petty crime, jobless fathers upping and leaving the family.

An apt illustration concerns subsidies for schools which promise to abolish classroom segregation: schools chase after funding whatever its stated purpose, some only paying lip-service to fulfilling the strings attached—with impunity. Others dutifully abide by the rules before giving up when non-Roma families withdraw their children from the newly desegregated school.

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people have been injured. It's just that their relatives have taken them indoors into a neighbouring house: you can imagine the uproar that greeted the police, fire fighters and ambulance service.

What happened next is common knowledge: even though everyone from the emergency services saw the dead bodies, no one stopped to think a crime had been committed. A report written on the spot recorded two unexplained deaths. It was only in the morning, after the cartridge cases had been discovered, that a fresh search was ordered and the crime scene was taped off. Meanwhile outrage was mounting as the similarities with other petrol-bomb attacks targeting Roma households on the outskirts were becoming more obvious. There were reports of a black SUV from several places such as the village of Nagycsécs, near Miskolc in the north, where, at daybreak on

Weeding out ghettos, poverty and ignorance requires long-term action which rises above government cycles. Training programmes which seek to lift Roma out of unemployment may cut joblessness among trainers but have few benefits otherwise. One fifty-year-old former factory worker I got to know has learned a roster of skills—including shorthand! He is still without a job, naturally.

Poverty and poor education are highly correlated. Squeezed out of the legitimate labour market and for want of a better education the Roma have had little chance of living on the edge let alone climbing back on board. Today children of 25 per cent of Roma families fail to complete eight years of primary education.

In our competitive society, villagers vying for job frown at subsidies or benefits granted to the Roma by the state or local council. Double standards at local level produce the greatest outrage. "I pay for my electricity; why can the other guy be left alone to steal it? I shelled out money for my driver's licence; why are others let off scot free when they drive around without one? How come the Roma kid got into nursery but my kid didn't?" they ask themselves (understandably).

In tough times anti-Roma sentiment grows apace.

In October 2006, a teacher was driving his car through a village largely inhabited by Roma. He was unfortunate to bump into a Roma girl (she was lightly injured) and was beaten to death in front of his own children by a group of Roma as a result. On another occasion a Roma beat an old man to death for an oil heater. Naturally stories such as these captured a lot of media attention. They also unleashed a tirade of anti-Roma polemic.

Four bouncers working in Debrecen clubs decided to take matters into their own hands. They first fired shots at and broke some windows of Roma homes on the outskirts of villages; later they hurled petrol bombs into the houses. During the period of over 12 months until their arrest they killed six people and injured three at nine different locations. The attack in Tatárszentgyörgy was the seventh in a row. ❧

Z. T.

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3 November 2008, two houses on opposite sides of a street of Roma houses had petrol bombs lobbed at them. József Nagy, 43, and his 40-year-old wife likewise had been killed with a shotgun.

The media went on for weeks about the blunders during the investigation of the incident at Tatárszentgyörgy. The public was bombarded with distorted accounts. Under enormous political pressure, the national police chief got his act together and said his force would now investigate the killings as serial murders which had put the entire Roma community in fear of their lives since July 2008. The reward for information leading to the capture of the culprits was being raised to 50 million forints (€200,000).

"Do politicians and the media have any idea of the damage they are causing with these reports?" says Mrs Imre Berente, Mayor of Tatárszentgyörgy. "They

shouldn't keep on and on about racism, because this is a tinderbox. Roma are stirring up trouble. Some pupils are saying that they have been getting abuse for being Roma, and in bars people are saying their glasses haven't been washed properly or filled up to the mark because anything is good enough for a Gypsy. That's what gets the far-right going."

It is Monday, 8 June 2009, the day after the election of Hungary's new members of the European Parliament. Tatárszentgyörgy has 1,415 people on its electoral roll. Only 28.4 percent vote: the anti-Roma far-right party Jobbik has won just over 17.9 percent, the Roma Alliance party just 6.7 per cent.

Close to Budapest and on the western fringe of the Great Plain, the village appears prosperous. Its public buildings are modern and in a good state of repair. Apart from two officials who share the mayoral duties, seven other employees oversee a total of 42 people—around 80 per cent of them Roma—locally employed in public works. Unlike most northern Hungarian communities with an equally large Roma population, not only the streets but individual houses too are hooked up to public utilities. The mayor insists that the village has more than one string to its bow but potential investors find the military range off-putting.

"In the villages round here people are employed on industrial estates; there is no reason why we should not have one as well. I have held talks with a number of firms, but the military range is off-putting, as the roads leading to the properties are subject to closure at unpredictable times."

"Is unemployment high in the village?"

"That depends on how you look at it. A Roma can qualify as disabled, get child support, be a full-time mother or be employed in public works. That means they work for nine months for the legal minimum wage to get them started. As soon as that's done they qualify to receive dole money again. There are always going to be people prepared to do this kind of thing."

"Was that father with the three small children who was shot dead known to social services?"

"Not really. He was not employed in any of our public works projects, did not draw any benefit payments, and, as far as I know, he worked on construction sites in Budapest from spring to autumn. He bought the plot of land on which he built his house from the local council; he used state child subsidy payment to fund the building and even had the electricity supply installed in the standard way. His father lives nearby, though, and tapped his supply; and, because there was such a tangle of cables, at first they thought the fire had been caused by a short circuit."

"People in the village are saying that the culprits have been arrested, with talk about a Gypsy gang from a neighbouring village."

"It would be no bad thing if it turned out that it wasn't locals. Being put

down as a racist village is going a step too far. It looks as if an attempt is being made to stoke the hysteria."

"But it was here, in December 2007, that Magyar Gárda [the uniformed arm of the far-right Jobbik party, since outlawed] held its first public march in Hungary. What was their reason for choosing this particular village?"

"That was something I asked them myself. They said that two or three of their members were from Tatárszentgyörgy. They made the proposal, claiming that the mother of one of them had been assaulted."

In the village I had heard about an elderly woman being knocked about and robbed, but no one had been able to name her. Neither could the mayor.

"They referred to the crime rate being statistically high. That's true; mainly property-related offences, pimping or drug-dealing. And then there are always traffic offences like driving without a licence. It is not unheard of for a young offender to be picked up by the police and they are powerless to bring charges; the kid has no job and therefore no income. That is when attempts are made to employ them in public works, but then this expires. Only this morning I received three letters to say that the community-service term is up and has to be cancelled. Unless the car can be confiscated they will keep on playing the game for ever. They don't have a clue why they're being harassed. 'Driving without a license—is that a crime?' I constantly put in requests for there to be a permanent police presence in the village. For a month after the murder not a word was to be heard about break-ins, and the Roma went around on foot, because there were police patrolling all over the place; one month later, though, it started all over again. There is a police officer assigned to this district, but he is often detailed to other duties, and as soon as he goes off duty he can no longer be reached by phone. If I am woken at night by the noise of youngsters joyriding in the village, it's no use calling him because his phone is off the hook. But then again, why would he bother? That gang just jeers at the police. People are arrested, but the people he arrests get home even before he gets off duty. Everybody points the finger of blame at someone else. That makes room for Jobbik. A lot of the villagers say that it's not a policeman that's needed but one of the old-style gendarmes. You've probably heard that as well; it's grown louder since the tragedy. Matters relating to the Roma have always been swept under the carpet, and now political leaders are helpless. Jobbik has been hailed as the saviour."

"What proportion of the village population is Roma?"

"Over 20 per cent, but in the general school it is around 30 per cent and the nursery school has already reached 40. There are now 130 infants in a nursery school designed for 75. The fact is that it could be filled just with Roma infants alone, especially now there is that extra financial support for nursery-school children from families on social support. Places for the children of the so-called 'multiply socially disadvantaged' are now at a premium, so children

whose parents work must be rejected. Those parents are asking whether it's fair that their child has no place in a nursery while the child of a Gypsy who just lazes around at home is accepted."

"So education is the real breaking-point, isn't it?"

"That's the usual line, but the headmistress of our general school recently told me about some Roma girls in their final year. She had been urging them to go on to further education but they told her, 'You won't get me studying any more! I'll have children and get more money by claiming social benefits.' She was stunned."

"I was assigned to Tatárszentgyörgy in December 1964 because they were having trouble with Gypsies!" grumbles 'Uncle' Mick, the district's retired police officer, now into his seventies, over a pint. "No one had what it takes to tangle with me! A hundred and sixty lads got the hell out of here I was such a hard bastard!"

Weighing in at nearly 300 lb, 'Uncle' Mick is one of the Mini Café's regulars. It is a drinking hole with a clientele of both Roma and non-Roma.

"I've beaten up more men than the rest of the force put together! I preferred dealing out a few good punches to a low-life to getting him banged away in a cell so his family would miss him. The five-day suspensions that were handed out never scared me!"

His square jaw implacably grinds out sentences.

"There was one occasion when a complaint was lodged that I had worked someone over. I took these things very personally. It's just in my blood to hate a thief."

"What's the word on this, on the double murder?"

"The culprits have been identified. They were from the neighbouring village; they've been arrested. It's just that it's not been made public."

Uncle Mick's popularity doesn't go deep. This is a farming village; there is not much respect for the police force. The owner of the bar, a retired lieutenant colonel, is an industrious man, always doing this and that in the huge plot of land that surrounds the place; right now he is in the process of watering the plants.

"Hey Józsi! A bit more care about how you clip that grass! Look at what you missed here: you'd better go over that again!" A Roma man in his thirties is clipping the area around the bar. "His brother-in-law is among the men who have been arrested," he whispers to me. But then, as if to deter me from questioning anyone on his payroll, he adds: "Of course, what would I know! The whole thing might be nothing more than gossip." The man turns round with the trimmer and comes over hesitantly. Swarthy and humble, he is slow in his movements. The toe-caps of both shoes are split, as if to flaunt his poverty.

"You had a bite to eat, didn't you? Not just a drink?" the lieutenant colonel chides. "You know I don't like it if all you do is drink!"

"Sure I did, Uncle Béla!" he responds with a nervous laugh. We take a seat in the beer garden. "I'm a suspect as well," he says, almost shamefacedly. Then, on seeing my look of incomprehension, adds: "I've also got a bit of wood at the edge of the village where trees vanished. Reason enough to get even!"

From time to time farmers drop in with bits of news; they take a seat next to us.

"Bandi's lot has finished digging the ditch."

"Is it deep enough?"

"You won't get even a tractor over that!"

In this part of the world, timber is not filched by the bicycle load like up north, but by the truckload, and the owners of woodland try to bar the way to trespassers by digging ditches. Tatárszentgyörgy is now a village of ditches: the ditches are intended to keep timber thieves out of the woodlands and joy-riders off the communal football pitch. Now the Roma have dug ditches across the man-made road around the street where the murdered lived, with thorny trimmings piled up in the ditches as an added obstacle.

We are standing at the edge of the football pitch, looking up at what was originally built as a gendarme barracks. It has been properly restored, incorporated into the wing of a nearby building, the loft spaces converted into rooms. It is at least as big as, if not bigger than, a whole eight-year general school with its own yard.

"It's for sale," the lieutenant colonel explains. "I was thinking of buying it as a guesthouse; this sports field is part of it. But then again, you'd hardly say tourism was thriving in the village."

"Is that because of the murders?" I ask.

The lieutenant colonel shakes his head; that is an explanation he will visibly have no truck with.

"What a great property! Don't you know anyone who might be interested? The street façade has even retained the helmet of the gendarme's coat of arms."

"There's a lot of properties for sale round here," I muse, looking along the street, starting with one at the far end, which is in a state of semi-collapse.

"Yes, even my neighbour is selling up. A lot of people have got sick of the place, and if it were up to them, they'd get out."

"Why is that?"

"There's a lot of burglary. Not long ago the entire stock of meat in a deep-freeze belonging to a poor young man was cleared out. His wife has died and he is bringing up his young daughter as a single parent. He works in the bakery, so he is never home at night. That is common knowledge around here; while the daughter was sleeping they could empty the freezer in the outside kitchen without fear of being disturbed. The other night all the hams and other preserved meats belonging to a single mother with her two children were

burgled from her pantry—that's over there, just a few houses away. An eye is kept out for where the most vulnerable people live, and that's where they hit."

"Is that last night, you mean?"

"Absolutely!" He comes out of the gate to show me which house it was. "When the Soviet Red Army arrived at the end of '44, the saying that went round was, 'From now on we're going to be living with the goats and poultry!' Hungary has now degenerated to the point where we must sleep with any animals we own to make sure they are not stolen."

It is clear that the single mother with the two children won't report the theft; the mayor reckons that there are countless such cases which will never show up in the crime statistics. This is going to be one of them.

"I told them, and I'm not going to mince words: 'The first one of your kind that comes over my fence is going to get blown away like a dog. I don't care what comes of it! Take note of where I work'."

I have: the military range. He is a ruddy-cheeked, blue-eyed fine figure of a man of 45 years, wearing flame-resistant twill slacks and army boots as he grazes a dozen or more goats and sheep on the hedged meadow next to the village sports ground. A hill rises behind the sports ground; there was a time when this was a cemetery. Now it is an illegal moto-cross circuit. Not long ago a ditch had to be dug around the football pitch because of all the joyriding that goes on here of an evening.

"Should I take that to mean you have already been robbed?" I enquire.

"Me? No way! And I don't advise it either. No one's going to lift my potatoes and get away with it."

Built like a tree, the man says this with so much determination it is as if the intactness of his yard and garden were a matter of honour, and if it were lost, he would no longer be able to face the village.

"Could you make a living from rearing animals?" I ask him.

"Out of the question. I only keep these as hobby; gives me something to unwind with after work."

"I've got four kids, and I have to watch every single forint I earn. The smallest is at nursery school; I get no concessions. Gypsy kids get free grub; my own don't even get 50 per cent off. A Gypsy can get exemption even if he has fewer kids than me."

"Does your wife stay at home?"

"No, she works for Tesco."

Most people in Tatárszentgyörgy try to make a living raising animals or working the land and many make a success of it. One of the finest-looking farms lies not far on the other side of the highway. Like the man I just spoke to, the farmer is likewise forty-five but is a lot more hot-tempered.

"I'll tell you my opinion, but only if you write it down!"

"Why wouldn't I write it down?"

"Because I didn't like it one bit how those dirty Gypsies were protected. We had the murders pinned on us and get taken in as if we were Gypsies and time didn't matter! Gábor even got taken in twice!"

A few of his men are hanging about impatiently nearby; he points to the youngest, who strikes me as being a quiet, decent sort. He nods, sombre-faced.

"We are hunters, you see," the farmer continues. "We were on a hunt for three days, and they start accusing us of being the murderers. Last year, I got into a tangle with somebody at the local fête. I had my gun taken away, but no matter. I don't even have a weapon, but they still took me in for questioning. They took in everyone I had any contact with. They even took in my poor old neighbour, who can't even walk fifty yards, just because he owns a grey four-wheel drive! Another villager, a highly-respected figure, was hauled in for the same reason—and three times at that! I'll tell you where they got that invention about a grey four-wheel drive! The forestry men go around in grey four-wheel drives, and the Gypsies see them on a daily basis, so they immediately recall seeing something like that on the evening in question. Gypsies spout any old rubbish, especially if it's a matter of a complaint being lodged. They can get people to defend them, as well, for a big enough fee. Let anyone else have a go at making a farm like this pay; then they can open their gob! Someone should take a look at who has paid their taxes and social security, and how much. All they need say is that they live off casual work. As to where and what the casual work was, and is there any paperwork to back that up—that's of no possible interest to anyone. Look at them: off to the village fields to steal."

He is gesturing towards the highway where a horse-drawn cart is trotting speedily along, two young Gypsies on the box. I can't let that pass without saying something.

"How do you know they are off to steal something?"

"Come off it! Why would anyone take a cart to the village fields at noon? No one's around at noon!"

"Even so, there might be lots of reasons..." I start to protest, but he brushes me off, "People who don't live round here don't know what's what."

There is a pause of aggrieved silence before I go on:

"Did you vote?"

"No, but if I had, I don't mind telling you that I would have voted for Jobbik. Their programme was much to my taste. None of your foreign multinationals telling a small village like this what to do! Co-operative farm properties being juggled around with cute banking tricks, and the mayor's office have not pushed hard enough for them to be brought back under their authority. Now it's like the bank boss's private land: four thousand acres of conference and

leisure centre, and he gets the same amount of state support as an ordinary farmer like me does."

He himself is not doing badly. Along with the land and livestock, he figures out any number of other schemes, including getting hold of some horse-drawn Gypsy caravans. They got hold of four recently, took the horses out of harness; the caravans are standing there, parked alongside each other on the grass, their bright colours making them look like circus wagons. Each has been given its own name, so I climb up onto a yellow cart named "Stefi" and peek inside: a small cooking range in front with bunk beds in two tiers behind it, with a couch at the back, under a window. Lighting is given by a paraffin lamp, drinking water by a can. Anyone who fancies living a Gypsy life can hire a caravan and drive it away for a week.

"There's demand for this?"

"Among foreign tourists, sure. It's mainly Germans who go for it. They are given a road map, a pair of horses; then it's up to them. They can go off fifty, sixty miles into the wilds."

The price in euros is roughly as much as one would pay for a cruise down the Danube from Passau with full service, but here one has to look after the horses, provide them with water and fodder and groom them. Everything needed for the ordeal of nomadic travel: a whip, a water bucket, a spare wheel.

The farmer accompanies me to my car.

"They had to be really stupid Gypsies, though, that's for sure," he declares, shaking his head. "Doing that when there's snow on the ground, leaving tracks to show where they went! Couldn't they have waited a week until it had melted? No wonder they were caught."

"They've been caught?" I feign surprise.

"They've been arrested, only they're keeping the news under wraps. There were three of them in it, one of them from Tatárszentgyörgy."

"But why keep the lid on the news?"

"They don't want it to be known. It would be grist for the Jobbik mill."

I asked the father of the young man who had been shot what he thought about the arrests.

"To be honest with you," he responded enigmatically, "I would also do a stretch of seven or eight years if by confessing I could get my hands on a reward of thirty, forty or fifty million. Too right, I'd confess! I get out, and with that much money you can live the life of Riley for a few years!"

I was taken aback, but then I had heard so many stories already, why not add this one, too?

Epilogue

The dreadful message of the tragedy in Tatárszentgyörgy was that even Roma who try to fit in are not wanted. The same message was delivered exactly two months later, at Tiszalök, a small town about twenty-five miles due east of Miskolc. At about 9:30 or 9:45 in the evening, Jenő Kóka, a Roma, was shot dead as he was stepping out of the front door of his house. He was setting off for the night shift at Alkaloida Pharmaceuticals, where he had been employed for 33 years. He was an upright, honest man who lived for his family and his work; he had no grudges, no known enemies; he did not smoke or drink. His only sin was that he lived in the very last house on the outskirts.

What many people suspected proved to be the case: areas of Roma dwellings on the outskirts of villages had become the target for coordinated attacks. After raids by special forces on the evening of 21 August 2009, four men, 28 to 42 years of age, from Hajdú-Bihar County in eastern Hungary were picked up at a night club in the city of Debrecen. One of the men is a former soldier. They are the prime suspects in a series of attacks on Roma that have led to six deaths. The 120-strong special unit of the National Bureau of Criminal Investigation has charged two of the men with a total of eight offences, while the other two have each been linked with one of the attacks. It is a series of criminal offences that started in July 2008 and has no parallel in Hungary's criminal history. Sources inform us that the police have gathered a lot of evidence, but the men charged with the offences are saying nothing, and there have been no further arrests of accomplices as yet. ❧

Gergely Brückner

Riding the Carousel: Hungary's Chinese Underbelly

The Chinese mafia is global and always pitches a tent where work can be done discreetly. As a logistics centre for Chinese criminal groups, Hungary's underbelly is warm and soft.

Carousel fraudsters do a lot of harm. Goods which evade the customs and excise radar put Hungarian products—fashion, leather, cigarettes and alcohol among others—at a competitive disadvantage. Above-board retailers cannot hope to compete with the black market. The state loses billions of forints in revenues while Hungarian firms and labour are squeezed out of the market. The advantage for low-income consumers with access to cheap Chinese products is dwarfed by the damage done to the economy as a whole. Lost revenue is one thing, outright theft another: carousel fraudsters also cream off taxes paid by others by reclaiming phantom value-added taxes.

Budapest's tenth district is home to a huge warehouse quarter. Many wholesalers there are Chinese. Footwear is displayed in neat rows, but instead of going by the pair they are sold by the container. In a dawn raid on July 28, customs police smoked out three gangs from the Far East dealing in clothing and household goods. The action was part of a synchronised operation at 64 locations nationwide involving 210 officers. Tax offences totalled HUF 4.8 billion, or around €18 million. The damage was not only financial: one unlucky excise official was bitten by a Chinese trader.

The criminals did not manage to destroy the invoices in a septic tank: this time they did not have any time to, and were caught red-handed. Since 2006, the three gangs nailed had been trading goods without paying VAT using falsified documents. In spite of making billions of forints, they were out to save money where they could: customs officers were amazed to see one Chinese security guard putting out pigeon traps for meat.

Some years ago the Hungarian branch of a German multinational was beset by a scam in which the identities of homeless people were bought for a few thousand forints. Their names were used to establish shell companies for the purpose of transferring huge sums of money. The same trick was repeated with a dash of the

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Four Cases

Hungarian customs authorities are investigating four independent cases in connection with the July 28, 2009 operation. They suspect the cases might be connected.

■ The two main suspects of the core case—Chinese brothers—are on the run. They supplied Chinese and Vietnamese traders with products from the light industry. They forged documents in the name of several companies registered in Hungary and elsewhere in the EU so that they could deliver goods to their Chinese and Vietnamese clients at the lowest possible price, without payment of tax. They had been importing goods to Austria and Slovakia since 2006 and declared in the so-called 42.00 procedure that they would pay tax in Hungary, which they failed to do. The forgery was mainly the work of a Vietnamese operating in Budapest.

■ In this case, too, the main suspects are Chinese citizens, their leader has lived in Hungary since 1990. The method used was similar to the previous case: they put the goods arriving from China through customs checks in Slovakia, Austria and Germany before transporting them to Hungary. In the course of the customs clearances, the goods went through a chain of Hungarian, German, Slovak, Italian, Bulgarian and Czech companies. No VAT was paid and the chain helped them to enormous unlawful profits. The gang charged HUF 1.2–1.7 million for taking a container through customs and delivering it to Hungary. The process involved customs management by Hungarian partners, too.

■ The Chinese suspects in this case brought goods from Hamburg on the road. Containers transported in this way went through customs in Slovakia, both Hungarian and foreign companies figured as buyers. But even in the case of foreign companies the containers were in effect taken to Hungary. The drivers received new documents after customs clearance in Slovakia, with the names of both the shipper and recipient companies changed. The goods nearly always ended up in Budapest's 10th district.

■ Chinese citizens brought in clothing items from China through Slovakia, which they sold in Budapest without paying VAT. They established an organisation in which participants worked according to a strict division of labour. A Chinese citizen, believed to be the leader of the gang, made all the decisions concerning payments and receipts. Chinese and Romanian citizens transferred a part of the profits to his mother. ❧

Far East: "Operation Beijing" is Europol's long-running action in pursuit of the Chinese mafia. Hungarian customs first joined its mobile team last November. This time round they caught eight Chinese, one Vietnamese and a Hungarian. During the investigation, the officers followed leads that took them to Austria, the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Germany.

Drop in the ocean

After the clampdown, Chinese markets were clearly depleted of supplies and prices rose. But this big catch was a drop in the ocean. Stephan Palm, a senior analyst at Europol, said carousel fraud causes €80–100 billion of losses annually to the budgets of European

member states—an amount roughly equal to Hungary's total gross domestic product.

Goods must be as pricey as possible when leaving the country to maximise reclaimed VAT but cheap on the way in so as to keep custom taxes low. The fraud usually involves at least three participant and occasionally innocent companies—an exporter, an importer and at least one, but sometimes 8–10, traders in each country.

To take one simple example: company A registered in Hungary sells hardware worth HUF 1 million plus VAT to company B also registered in Hungary. Company B then resells to company C registered in Ukraine and reclaims the VAT. The state transfers the money. But company A, which should have paid VAT to the state, vanishes. VAT payments are always delayed, so authorities fail to notice the fraud in time. Preventing such crimes is tricky. Reverse VAT—when the buyer pays VAT—does help but is not really a solution.

Carousel fraud comes in many shapes and sizes. Expensive goods such as high-tech components, mobile phones, game consoles and alternative medicine products can be transported cheaply thanks to their favourable price/size ratio. Often goods do not travel at all, remaining in a container while exchanging owners 8–10 times. Simple scams and multiple ones abound. One type has a phantom middleman: goods are sent in a circle so that all companies with an entitlement to reclaim VAT do so while a single fake company in the middle fails to pay the VAT.

Then there are the so-called 42.00 cases named after a procedure in the EU's customs code. A convenient loophole exists for VAT on goods entering at one point of the EU, checked by customs there, to be paid in the country where they are sold. In one way or another goods "go missing" somewhere along the way and are sold at railway stations or Chinese markets. The 42.00 scam involving Chinese criminal gangs came into the public eye in Hungary when officially disclosed in May 2006. The story was that a gang had imported goods worth HUF3.5 billion to Hungary, Slovakia and Austria from the Far East using false documents and seals.

Due to cheap and less strictly regulated labour and lax environmental restrictions, nearly all production has been squeezed out of Europe, mainly to the Far East. Even quality producers are setting up or commissioning production in China, Bangladesh or Vietnam, and the same production lines—sometimes taken out of mothballs—are used to make fake products in huge quantities which are then sent on their way to Europe. Most often the goods arrive in Hamburg by sea (clothing items, trainers, but increasingly technical components or even excise goods). Huge cargo ships dock almost every minute. Naturally, containers cannot be examined item by item as this would slow down commerce. Although German customs authorities have one of the most advanced risk-assessment mechanisms in the world, some items slip through nevertheless, even if EU member states provide all necessary information and the system makes efficient hits in finding dodgy shipments. Who is the shipper; what is the product's name; how is it insured; how many times has it changed hands; in what kind of business is the seller; who is the buyer—all this is valuable information when tracking down suspect goods.

Signs suggesting you are dealing with carousel fraud

Hungary's customs police have a variety of tools at their disposal during probes: gather information, infiltrate organisations, set up a front company and try to make a preliminary assessment of the gang's assets, so that later the damage caused is compensated as much as possible.

Suspicions arise if:

- an export–import company has huge turnover with almost no employees;
- there are inexplicable items of goods movements as stipulated in the documents, for example if goods from the seller's country reach the buyer's after unnecessary detours.
- A company can be suspected of using a front man if a non-resident Chinese national suddenly appears in a Hungarian-registered company providing only a postal address (often one in Panama) or if a Hungarian company's primary banking contact or account manager is a foreign bank.
- Carousel fraud is typical in the trade of mobile phone parts, IT gadgets, trucks, cars, alcoholic beverages, toys, clothing and alternative medicine products.

Tracking down carousel fraud—why so hard?

VAT fraud generally relies on someone on the inside of a customs agency; the Chinese mafia is no exception. Great battles are allegedly fought behind the scenes, and when a link is weakened somewhere the mafia moves into a neighbouring country. However, no crooked Hungarian customs officers have been uncovered to date.

But measures to cut red tape have unintended consequences. Union pressure to reduce the amount of time spent on administration and the Hungarian government's action to slash business registration to less than an hour while cutting administrative costs helps criminals to set up businesses at record speed. Carousel fraud requires fictitious companies, which go bankrupt quickly, and, though the criminals behind them seldom go under, there is still the need to set up new firms all the time. If this is too straightforward, fraud picks up pace.

There's no doubt that VAT dodgers are illegal. But the same is not necessarily true for the place where state funds evaporate: the company which reclaims the VAT. Tax authorities typically check re-claimants, but these are often bone fide since carousel fraudsters generally have genuine turnover, and in the end someone does buy the dragged-around goods.

While the European import of Chinese goods is growing at a breakneck pace, the number of law enforcement staff isn't. Low customs capacity at big docks poses a grave obstacle since customs officials are capable of checking only a small fraction of incoming containers. A further problem is that European authorities find it hard to catch fraudsters from the Far East, who move skilfully in and out of European cities and whose Asian faces they find hard to distinguish, especially since they frequently change identification papers.

So the carousel spins round and round. Hungarian customs inspectors have been doing a good job for years. Still, German sources indicate that European authorities believe the bulk of legal or illegal shipments are taken to Budapest from Hamburg only to travel onward from huge depots on the outskirts of the city to various EU destinations. Slovak, Czech, Polish or even Lithuanian, Italian and French trucks set out en masse from the depots located near known Chinese markets in Budapest. The three gangs nailed recently all had different practices, but they were all specialised in garments and fast-moving consumer goods. They did not pay any taxes, the goods they received they ran through a system and in the end these were shipped abroad at which point they reclaimed the VAT content.

The really abominable thing about these tax frauds is that the perpetrators not only fail to pay their taxes but they drain off monies paid by the taxpayer. It is not by chance that these cases lapse only after a longer period of ten years compared to a simple tax fraud and that they are given bigger penalties. This is still unlikely to fend off "expert" fraudsters, as they rarely get caught and the potential gains are enormously tempting. Some years ago there was an urban legend about a gang (not Chinese but Hungarian) which made so much money that its ringleaders were too lazy to count it, instead weighing ten-thousand forint notes on scales. In the United States a few years ago one of the gangs, which often use cash even for payments in the billions, had a larger amount of dollar stacks go rotting in a damp storage room and one of the groups in Hungary had its cash stack chewed up by mice in the basement.

Tibor Bárány

Small Stories and the Big Narrative

Noémi Szécsi, *Finnugor vámpír* (Finno-Ugric Vampire). Budapest: József Attila Kör–Kijárat, 2002, 200 pp. • *Kommunista Monte Cristo* (Communist Monte Cristo). Budapest: Tericum, 2006, 440 pp. • *Utolsó kentaur* (Last Centaur). Budapest: Ulpius-ház, 2009, 288 pp. • István Kemény, *Kedves Ismeretlen* (Dear Unknown). Budapest: Magvető, 2009, 472 pp.

"How did it happen, why is it necessary, that in Hungarian literature today the sentence (its beauty) is the single most important thing, pressing virtually everything else into the background?" The question was posed by literary historian and critic László Szilasi in his regular column on litera.hu, the prime Hungarian literary website, back in April 2007. A month later he refined his position:

> It seems there is, nonetheless, a nascent new contemporary literature which does *not* place the sentence at its centre. I fear that critics have taken too much to heart poet and writer Endre Kukorelly's *bon mot*: "In a novel there is no Julien Sorel, sunset or truth; what there are in novels are sentences." In truth, nowadays novel writing in its full armour, with its break with the aesthetician's approach centred on the sentence and language, has conquered the reading public.

With a shift that occurred at the very end of the 1990s and the start of the new millennium the plot returned to literature. Doubt still remained about the possibility of Big Narratives, yet this did not lead to attacks on plot, but rather to an unsettling of the narrator's position, a collision of how participants see the action, a loss of linear storytelling, and an opening-up of the various narrative and fictional textual layers to each other. In short, a return not so much of the plot as to its variants in a range of genres: historical novels, adventure stories, diary novels, social novels, novels of growing up (the *Bildungsroman* as it is still sometimes called by English critics), hard-boiled detective stories, artist-novels, socio-political satire, philosophical novels, fairy tales, novels about secrets, documentary novels, essay-novels... the list of genres with their own clichés and conventions goes on and on.

It is not all the same, however, in what form the various devices make their

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Excerpts from Dear Unknown *by István Kemény and from* Communist Monte Cristo *by Noémi Szécsi reviewed here are on pp. 13–22 and pp. 27–31 of this issue.*

appearance. It is customary in Hungary to demand that fiction be radically innovative to be good; a minor poetic revolution needs to break out, one might say. However, contemporary Hungarian literature is increasingly ignoring this expectation. One after the other, a whole string of novels have appeared which sought to *employ*, rather than overturn, the conventions of the genre that they invoked. Where they made use of the codes of more than one genre at once, this was not just so as to subvert them. These writers put their faith in handling the chosen conventions to achieve their aesthetic goals. None of them thought this would just generate polished, "crafted" middle-brow literature. The three novels that Noémi Szécsi has produced in recent years and the bulky tome by István Kemény under review here exemplify the clever use of conventions deserving genuine interpretative effort.

Born in 1976, and so among the youngest writers in Hungary today, Noémi Szécsi had her debut novel published in 2002. *Finno-Ugric Vampire* immediately attracted attention. It was not so much a vampire novel as a parody of the vampire novel (this was before popular fiction was gripped by the latest wave of vampire mania, before anyone had heard of the fantasy novels of Stephenie Meyer and others).

Finno-Ugric Vampire is not just a bloodthirsty parody of a horror story, replete with nocturnal escapades, blood-sucking, erotic seduction, and the main figure's loveable bumbling. The text also conjures up a whole range of other genres, not least novels about growing up. On the first few pages we are introduced to the protagonist, Jerne Voltamper, a naïve art student (whether male or female is not clear as the text constantly plays on sexual identity), who has never tasted human blood and lives with her several-hundred-year-old vampire grandmother in Budapest at the time of the millennium. By the final pages we encounter a living-dead person, experienced in every respect, who renounces her/his vampire nature for the sake of art (writing works of fantasy). *Finno-Ugric Vampire* is also a novel about becoming an artist: Jerne fights for her/his freedom, frees herself from her grandmother and chooses the life of an artist—that is to say, writes a rib-tickling story of how he/she deals with her vampire nature and his/her calling to be a writer. (Moral: it is not enough to be a born vampire/writer; one has to grow into the role.) Szécsi shows her credentials as a "literary" writer, with the text abounding in quotations and literary references, to say nothing of the constant parodies (Bram Stoker's *Dracula* and Virginia Woolf's *Orlando* are the main models, though a long list could be compiled of works by other authors that are briefly evoked).

Thanks to a narrative language that is nicely pitched, a well-judged pace and witty dialogue, *Finno-Ugric Vampire* is a highly entertaining read, though it has to be said that a reader might justifiably ask what purpose is served by all this parodying of styles and genres. One answer is that it offers a chance to shift perspectives: the narrator uses customary horror-tale clichés (blood-sucking, seduction, sleeping in coffins, etc.) set in Budapest at the turn of the millennium. The reader peers into the familiar world of mundane Hungarian life as if from the outside. Szécsi's diagnosis of historical and socio-political ills is less assured than in the novels to follow—using fewer genres as building blocks might actually have been more productive. Besides, a

subtle analysis of the modern age's problems of identity is not an easy bedfellow for strident social critique. Nonetheless, the context of a parody of genres allows the narrator a refreshingly disrespectful tone. Taboos in portraying present-day Hungarian society, not least Hungarian literature itself, can be cheerfully ignored.

Communist Monte Cristo, which appeared four years later, is a far more ambitious venture. This bulky historical novel tells the story of butcher's boy Sanyi ('Alex') from Hungary's short-lived Soviet Republic of 1919 through to the months immediately after the suppression of the 1956 Revolution. Sanyi, a strict vegan, belongs to what is at first the illegal Communist Party. In the final weeks of the 133-day Soviet Republic, he carries to Vienna the stolen jewellery (the Party's "wealth") that his comrades have entrusted to him. Then, after an adventure-packed journey home on which he poses as a White Russian terrorist, he returns to Hungary only to be thrown into jail not long after. After his release, with the help of false identity papers, he lives life in the grand style, marrying into a bigoted right-wing family, a neo-Baroque life under an increasingly fascist Horthy regime. Meanwhile he founds a clandestine Communist cell, and gets entangled in an affair with a Jewish woman. Then come the war years when he loses his lover and a son, including the fall of the Horthy regime, and the siege of Budapest at the end of 1944 and early 1945. The immediate postwar years of coalition government pass without incident (at least the novel has nothing to say on this period) but, no wonder, the Stalinist dictatorship brought in by Rákosi leads to renewed tribulations. After Sanyi is accidentally mixed up in the events of the 1956 Revolution he finds himself being arrested again, but he does not survive torture in prison. He is accompanied throughout his career by Józsi, an ex-Communist whose life he saved in 1919 and who finally repays him for that good deed, by playing an active part in torturing Sanyi to death forty years later.

It will not be apparent from that quick sketch of the novel's plot but *Communist Monte Cristo* is a devastatingly funny, beguilingly witty book. "I can't write that," the protagonist's great-granddaughter, who is the novel's narrator, says on the last page, before adding: "I'm only used to writing funny things." Given that this comes at the very end of a lengthy novel, the lame apology is obviously meant to be ironic as the closing episode is nothing but painful satire. *Communist Monte Cristo* sets down Hungarians' shared story (that of their immediate predecessors, whether parents, grandparents or great-grandparents) of their country's terrible history during the twentieth century, as if from a distorting mirror. It indiscriminately mocks the mythic events and personae created by successive political propaganda machines, who to the present day, like it or not, still determine the way Hungarians think: the Communist martyr, the Communist mass murderer, the White terrorist, the anti-Semitic army officer, Béla Kun, the bourgeois-devouring Communist leader in 1919, Miklós Horthy and his entry into Budapest at the end of 1919 riding a white horse, the assimilant Jew of the upper middle-class, the cultured representative of the Christian middle class, the Hungarian Nazi Arrow Cross janitor, the soldier of the liberating Red Army, the soldier of the Red Army that went on to occupy the country

amidst widespread rape and pillage, the officer of Rákosi's barbarously cruel secret police, the counterrevolutionary who threatens the pseudo-democratic state, and the national hero who fights against Communist dictatorship.

The protagonist of *Communist Monte Cristo* is searching for an identity. He does not know who his father is and has no memories of family life to fall back on. He even drifts into the Communist movement almost by chance and stumbles into a mess of extravagantly overblown figures and chillingly grotesque situations. The sole dependable point is the calculating vileness which dogs Sanyi, cropping up from time to time in the form of Józsi.

The novel is ferociously witty and entertaining throughout, due in no small part to the epigraphs at the head of each chapter, which are a cavalcade of quotations from momentous and less than momentous, well-known and now largely forgotten texts of political mythopoeia. Still, the tone of the novel gradually darkens as it goes on. In the three main parts into which the book is divided it is by turns cheerful, sad and painfully sardonic. Only as one of the guiltless victims of the reprisals which follow the crushing of the Revolution does Sanyi begin to understand what is really going on around him: how the man-made monsters of political myths come to life, then how they engulf precisely those for whom these myths promised to define their own identities.

This novel did not attract the critical attention that it deserved. Maybe Noémi Szécsi's view of history was just too hard to digest in a country where, instead of a process of dealing with the traumatic events of the past from several angles, we still have the competition of simplified rival versions of history. It did not help that it was brought out by a small publisher not known primarily for literary works. In any event, in the autumn of 2009, not long after her third novel came out, Noémi Szécsi was one of 12 writers first awarded the European Prize for Literature by the EU, specifically for *Communist Monte Cristo*. This will hopefully earn it retrospective attention.

Communist Monte Cristo attempted to give a historical explanation for the political tensions that rack Hungary today; *Last Centaur* is a snapshot of the current state in Hungary. On the pages of the novel, which refers to itself as a "social frolic", bicycle couriers whiz around the streets of Budapest, and the twenty-year-old characters, born around the time of Hungary's change to a democratic regime in 1989–90, form a covert anarchist cell. They carry out minor "terrorist acts" (in reality student pranks *pour épater les bourgeois*) in a capital city that they regard as simply uninhabitable. Readers get to encounter all the major political events of the last few years, starting with the street disturbances in the autumn of 2006 and going on to some of the latest corruption scandals. In some of the characters one can pick out typical figures of modern Hungarian society, from extreme right-wing protesters to anti-fascist counter-demonstrators, from well-known intellectual trendsetters to leading figures in public life and the cultural arena. All get what is coming to them, the food writers just as much as the influential members of the political media, and that's before starting on the politicians.

Last Centaur is a book which draws on the devices of political journalism and the *roman à clef,* once again spiced with social satire. This is done less inventively than in

Communist Monte Cristo, but no less entertainingly and just as ironically. We get a sketch of society in which democracy and public life means no more than the coexistence of turbulent political "subcultures" which sometimes resort to violence. The notion of Hungarian history as consisting of episodes that stagger from one bloodbath to another, but seen from the outside are ridiculous and absurd is supplanted by a portrait of a society with grotesque rituals and in ideological confusion. The author's undisguised intention is "if we can laugh at our peculiar dividedness, our annoying mannerisms and our tiresome inanities, then that may have a liberating effect on readers," to quote Noémi Szécsi in a recent interview.

Born in 1961 and hitherto seen mainly as a poet, István Kemény aroused major expectations when his second novel came out. One of the key Hungarian writers of his generation, he is a thoroughgoing "literary" man, and an influential representative of a poetry that makes no aesthetic concessions to the reader.

Dear Unknown comprehensively changes what people think of his oeuvre. It is a carefully thought out, cunningly structured novel with an almost impossibly fast pace. The narrator, Tamás Krizsán, relates how he grew up. The plot as such revolves around a St Nicholas Day party held jointly by the State Corvinus Library and the Institute of Encyclopaedia Editors (both invented institutions), who are responsible for assembling a multivolume *Great Hungarian Encyclopaedia* in the early 1980s. The library is home to many odd characters, a place where lifelong loves and friendships are formed (and also ended). The most important of these for Tamás are the two young intellectuals of similar age, Gábor Kender and Kornél Hajnal (a few years later the latter will become Central Europe's "living conscience"). At every turn, however, the narrator breaks off telling the story to jump back in time and relate in detail crucial events from his teenage years. Apart from Buda, an important second site for the plot, both magical and mysterious, is the fictitious village of Nyék on the Danube bank, which belongs to the catchment area of Greater Budapest. This is where Tamás lives with his parents and two older sisters. It is from there that they go to the capital to celebrate family holidays at the home of Tamás's semi-retired Uncle Lajos and his wife.

A central category for *Dear Unknown* is the secret, or in the novel's overarching metaphor, the Big Narrative. At the back of the strictly choreographed family rows hover various unspoken and unspeakable secrets. The fates of certain figures (in themselves mysterious) are obscurely connected with each other. Present events are explained by events in the past, but that sense still lies in the future and for those who are in the know. The initiation ceremony is conducted by the Masters: Uncle Lajos, the repository of all family secrets; 'Uncle' Olbach, the director of the Corvinus Library and incidentally also one of Nyék's inhabitants and the grandfather of Tamás's wife-to-be; and Mr Patai, teacher and a part-time employee of the Institute of Encyclopaedia Editors, the Devil incarnate, who enters into contracts with his students laying claim to the students' souls in exchange for explaining to them the world's otherwise puzzling system of connections (he is a Master for Tamás and his two friends).

Dear Unknown has such an extraordinarily rapid pace because it is, in

narrative terms, a mapping of an adolescent's imagination and interpretation of the world. These are built out of hints, suspicions, a holding back, hiding and clever feeding of bits of information, delays, a careful build-up to twists and turns—thanks to all this, Tamás Krizsán's secrets also become the secrets of the book. The Big Narrative is more than just a structuring metaphor, it is being shaped as the narrative proceeds. Of course, that includes its deconstruction: those puzzling links turn out, in reality, to be based on banal misunderstandings; it is not unspoken common secrets that lie behind the silences and strange hints but simple inability to communicate; there is little purpose to having the sense of past events disclosed when that says little about events in the here and now. 'Uncle' Olbach, the Good Master and creator of a Danubian mythology, is not an omniscient savant of the secrets of existence in Central Europe but an essayist and scholar who once had a neat way with words and has been compensated by the political powers-that-be for that career being shattered by giving him a job at the head of a state institution. Patai, the Devil, is merely a cynical old buffer who has a past of petty criminal acts, rather than the big villainies that are attributed to him, and who tries to make up for what has been lacking from the wreck that is his own life by controlling the fates of "pupils" whom he has gathered around him.

Against the backdrop of a structure of secrets Tamás Krizsán is at some times a teenager, at others a young man in his twenties. He is sometimes present at the events that are being related at the time they are happening, at times as an active participant, but in most cases just as a sharp-eyed observer. He is also the adult who is recollecting his adolescence and trying to come to terms retrospectively with traumatic events. At yet other times, one picks out the voice of an omniscient narrator who knows more than both the adolescent reporting on events and the grown adult trying to make sense of them in hindsight. That shifting narrative presence does not, however, slow down the reading process. The well-crafted storytelling stops it even occurring to you to think the protagonist would not have an integrated, stable identity. The solid core is unchanged by events.

If the Big Narrative becomes an empty shell, what ensures the integrity of identity? When it comes down to it, *Dear Unknown* responds, even if ironically: identity hinges on the unconditional love we feel for the major figures in our lives. At one key point in the text, a volume of poetry by Attila József comes to hand into which a "dear unknown" hand had copied out St Paul's Hymn to Love, to which had been added the comment "Try love, why don't you, fathead!" (Many Hungarian readers will see an allusion to Géza Ottlik's iconic 1959 novel *Iskola a határon*—the 1966 English translation by Kathleen Szász was called *School on the Frontier.* There are many further parallels between the two works.)

Ultimately, *Dear Unknown,* by its self-assured use of familiar literary devices, steers clear of radical technique. Rather it offers aesthetically refined complexity and well-considered irony to a rather radical proposition. That proposition is that the Big Narrative is the freedom to love your neighbour as yourself. ❧

Béla Nóvé

Hungarian at Heart

Attila Z. Papp (ed.), *Beszédből világ: Elemzések, adatok amerikai magyarokról* (A World of Speech: Analyses and Data about Hungarians in the US). Budapest: Magyar Külügyi Intézet, Régió Könyvek, 2008, 514 pp.

At first glance *A World of Speech* is an odd title for this particular study but, on reflection, it makes sense since it largely comprises interviews with members of Hungarian communities in America. Immigrants face many challenges. Yet language bonds and shared roots help them to form a diverse range of communities, even if heritage siphoned from the homeland to the new world leaks along the way (an idea which is nicely depicted by the montage on the front jacket: the red of the Stripes blends with green while the Stars contain Hungarian symbols—Sándor Petőfi, a flag of the 1956 Revolution sans hammer-and-sickle and the Transylvanian coat of arms among them). Attila Z. Papp and his team[1] examine the linguistic, cultural, social and political links of Hungarians who settled in the US and the vast changes, emotional and material, between them. The ill-fated 1848–49 Revolution sparked the first major wave of emigration. *A World of Speech* is the first attempt since to document the variety of church and civic organizations, schools, media, the social strata and the geographical distribution of ethnic Hungarians in America. The reasons for the gap, both political and practical, are readily understood; that it has been filled so comprehensively is impressive.

Hungarian émigré groups in America had long urged a scholarly analysis of their demographic make-up, size and composition for use by homeland institutions. After years of negotiations, the Government Office of Hungarians Abroad was asked to do a survey, handing the job over to the Teleki László Institute in Budapest at the end of 2005. Almost a year later, the office which had commissioned and funded the project folded and so did, in 2006, the Teleki László Institute. Yet it

1 ■ Gábor Czoch, János Márton, Szilvia Németh and Levente Pakot.

Béla Nóvé

is a writer and historian. His main interests are 19th- and 20th-century Hungarian history. Author of a two-volume history of the Hungarian Soros Foundation 1984–2004, he is also known as a scriptwriter and a special adviser of a number of documentary films, the most recent of which is Szétlopott ország *(A Country up for Grabs), released in May 2009.*

was completed against the odds and published eighteen months after.

Zoltán Fejős, head of the Museum of Ethnography, outlined the study's broad concept in 2005. In the late eighties, he had been the first to publish an up-to-date sociological and historical account of American Hungarians.[2] His plan had been to set up a database of American Hungarian organizations, conduct a sociological survey of the membership and activities of these organizations, and a demographic analysis of American Hungarians with the aim of forming a picture of this large overseas community. The actual work started in the autumn of 2006.[3] In the course of a month, around fifty representatives of Hungarian organizations in the main American Hungarian centres—Los Angeles, San Francisco, Sarasota, Chicago, Cleveland, Washington, D.C., New York and New Jersey—were interviewed. The transcripts arranged by Papp with a commentary make up almost two thirds of the volume. It amounts to a highly personal and captivating narrative.

The idea was to sketch the "self-image" of the immigrant community with self-evaluations of their organizations. The researchers were not specifically interested in individual careers or how these changed through the generations[4] (though quite a lot was incidentally revealed about both). It is striking that three quarters of the interviewees were male, all over 40, and came from just four cities: Chicago (12), Cleveland (11), Los Angeles and New Brunswick (7 each)—a narrow sample. Still, the data was processed convincingly: the qualitative analysis was preceded by a quantitative screening of interviews, which used computer citation frequency to identify twenty-two subject areas ranging from Hungarian food and its power to bind a community to assessments of the Hungarian government and foreign diplomacy.

The transatlantic world of America's Hungarians with their autonomous and self-sufficient civil society based on the solidarity of individuals in voluntary associations must be the envy of Hungarians in the homeland. However, surveys also show that barely one in ten American Hungarians takes part in such self-organizing minority groups, testifying to the zeal of Hungarians who have been sustaining Hungarian schools, churches, newspapers and foundations for five or six generations, or running

2 ■ Zoltán Fejős, "Magyarok az Egyesült Államokban az 1980-as években (demográfia, társadalmi adatok, fogalmi problémák) [Hungarians in the United States in the 1980s (Demographics, Social Statistics and Conceptual Difficulties)]," in *A Magyarságkutató Intézet évkönyve* [Yearbook of the Institute for Hungarological Research], Budapest 1988; ibid.: *A chicagói magyarok két nemzedéke 1890–1940* [Two Generations of Hungarians in Chicago, 1890–1940]. Budapest: Közép-Európa Intézet, 1993.

3 ■ It is an odd coincidence that around the time the interviews were taking place many of the organizations concerned happened to be holding commemorations of the fiftieth anniversary of the 1956 Revolution, as is repeatedly indicated by the interviewees.

4 ■ See, for instance, books by Julianna Puskás, *Ties That Bind, Ties That Divide: Hundred Years of Hungarian Experience in the United States.* New York & London: Holms Meyer, 2000; Éva Huseby-Darvas, *Hungarians in Michigan.* Chicago: Michigan State University Press, 2003; and Kati Marton, *The Great Escape: Nine Jews Who Fled Hitler and Changed the World.* New York: Simon & Shuster, 2006. Among the titles that have appeared in Hungarian in recent years are: Miklós Szántó, *Tengerentúli magyarok* [Overseas Hungarians]. Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 2001; Béla Várdy, *Magyarok az Újvilágban* [Hungarians in the New World]. Budapest: A Magyar Nyelv és Kultúra Nemzetközi Társasága, 2000; and László Tanka ed., *Magyar Amerika. A tengerentúli magyarok mai élete történetekben és képekben* [Hungarian America: The Life of Overseas Hungarians in Stories and Pictures]. Salgótarján: Médiamix, 2002.

support and lobby groups, music and dance ensembles, scout troops, Hungarian culture centres and restaurants.

Proclaiming Hungarianness means something different altogether on that side of the Atlantic. Actively participating in running Hungarian organizations is its essence, as interview subjects make clear (sometimes with a touch of self-irony, though mostly quite seriously), divulging the mundane reality as well as conveying their delight in the festive rewards. Their patois speaks volumes. Fifty years after leaving their homeland they speak noticeably idiomatic Hungarian mixed with Americanized expressions (or even occasional outpourings in English). "Although we are American, *a szívünk magyar* [our hearts are Hungarian]." The hardest test for an immigrant is retaining his native language while learning a new one—a recurring topic, and understandably so, since relationship to the mother tongue is crucial to ethnic identity. The volume contains examples of how the mother tongue is lost and how strategies are made to preserve it at individual, family and communal levels. Mixed marriages and practical dilemmas, such as choosing a school, are prime models. How is it possible for languages to be swapped, whether spontaneously or intentionally, within one or two generations? In several post-1956 émigré families, it was taboo to speak English at home. In fact to the present day some Hungarian scout troops overseas do not accept new members unless they speak basic Hungarian. Mass linguistic division between generations, though, is largely a result of the real dividing line: education.

Emotional and cognitive ties are just as important as language, illustrated by America's Irish, Italians or Swedes. Which ethnic groups does the Hungarian émigré see as positive and negative models for the Diaspora? What kinds of image do their communities retain of "Hungarianness" and of the mother country? How do they view themselves?

One contributor responds to the first question by taking a socio-psychological approach[5]. American Hungarians take the least assimilated communities of the Jewish, Greek and Armenian diasporas as their models for the successful assertion of self-interest (Poles and Romanians too are often cited) and put themselves higher on the moral scale. This is hardly surprising: as the editor points out:

> The ethno-social identity of American Hungarians lies closer to that of Hungarian ethnic minorities in Transylvania (and elsewhere in the Carpathian Basin), whereas the Hungarians of Hungary are often considered to be either unpatriotic or insufficiently patriotic.

Discord, envy, intrigue—the Hungarian "curse" as some call it—are ever present even in the New World.

> In California fondness for the law manifests itself in constant litigation and there is a great tradition of that between Hungarian organizations [...] We hear of dreadful conflicts in Cleveland, with the North- and Southsiders having nothing to do with each other.

The cause or pretext of such conflicts may be generational, political or social, regional or local, strictly personal or financial, trivial matters of taste and

5 ■ Edwin Poppe compares the "moral" and "efficacy" assessments that diaspora groups have of themselves and of others, drawing both direct and indirect inferences from the comparison. Edwin Poppe, *National and Ethnic Stereotypes in Central and Eastern Europe. A Study among Adolescents in Six Countries.* Utrecht: Ercomer, 1998.

preference, or a combination of any of these. As far as the first three go, it would have been helpful to have at least an outline of the successive twentieth-century waves of emigration from Hungary to America. Distinct groups made up the Hungarian Diaspora of the interwar period and similarly the DPs (displaced persons) of the 1945 "nationalist" and 1947 "democratic" wave sharply distanced themselves from each other. Likewise it would have been helpful to examine the impact the mass arrival of post-1956 emigrants had on the existing American Hungarian community, to which were added many thousands of new Kádár-era "orphans"—many of them "economic refugees"—during the Seventies and Eighties. The book leaves aside the two-way traffic after 1989 (some resettled in the country of their birth) and those who make up the second, third and nth generation of American Hungarians (a good 90 per cent by now), or the sociological characterization of an even later trend, that of the dispersion of the ethnic Hungarian minorities in the Carpathian Basin.

The interviews suggest that the differences in political and ideological attitudes that marked the earlier waves of emigration are fading as the generation holding them leaves us. The new dividing line is drawn between the older established "Americanized" populace and whoever makes up the current wave of immigrants, the fobs ("fresh off the boat"). It is also conspicuous that

> whereas in the case of the leading bodies—presumably due to the higher political stakes—the subjects of our interviews reported almost exclusively on conflicts in local communities, any conflicts seemed to be counterbalanced by cooperation.

Changing identities

Empathizing with subjects helps in tackling identity. The team was well placed in this regard and beat a path through the jungle of "determined identities" thanks to its members' experiences in trans-border Hungarian minorities in Transylvania and Slovakia.

Papp's hundred-page discussion, quoting liberally from the interviews, makes a convincing case for distinguishing three conceptually distinct levels of ethnic identity: individual self-determination, group affiliation, and ties to the native land. In the case of new immigrants even decisions that are seemingly neutral and a part of private life—choice of partner, behaviour as parents—can test ethno-personal identity. This is tested further over time by language use or choice of names. Conversely, "chain migration" and the "marriage market" are linked to a person's ethno-social identity as well as life in the local Hungarian community. As time goes by, some kind of dual identity emerges out of necessity, though this may take many forms, largely depending on the extent to which integration into American life occurs via occupational connections, or the local Hungarian community, or a combination of the two. Ethnic self-identity, moreover, is situational: "During the week you are American and at the weekend, Hungarian," as one of the interviewees puts it, "because from Friday evening until Sunday evening your spare time is Hungarian." As far as the sense of belonging to a nation and the level of cultural identity is concerned, this is not necessarily linked to the sphere of personal or communal experience. The emotional-

cognitive scale can run all the way from a sense of cultural superiority through concern for the nation or, as formulated by the writer László Németh: "the justification for a minority's existence is quality", all the way to shame, even denial of one's origin, as may be deduced from the sometimes banal but at other times upsetting confessions that are quoted.

In his conclusion, Papp adds further nuances to this picture by outlining eight types of "identity construction" among American Hungarians, from the actively Hungarian to the fully assimilated (the six intermediate stages are designated as: local Hungarian, cautious Hungarian, private Hungarian, Hungarian at heart, ceremonial Hungarian, and Hungarian for census purposes). The designations are debatable; still, juxtaposing them against the three levels of ethnic identity displays instructive correlations. More to the point, the eight identity constructions yield a convincing model of the various approaches to assimilation across four successive generations. One begins with loss of the language, the second with a weakening of ethnic identity, and the third with dropping out of organized communal life. All three lead to complete assimilation within three or four generations unless there is something to slow down or even reverse the trend such as intentional ethnic-cultural revitalisation.

"Boskola" and "Wassuli"

Schools, like the mother tongue, are basic institutions for transmitting a culture and securing a minority's survival. In her study, Szilvia Németh considers a whole series of fundamental issues such as: how long have Hungarian schools been operating on the other side of the Atlantic; who founded them and who keeps them going; what forms do they take and what methods do they employ; what is their exact number?

The history of Hungarian schools functioning in the United States goes back at least a century.[6] Initially, establishments run by the churches provided tuition in Hungarian at the weekends or during holidays and were targeted mainly at the teaching of elementary reading and writing skills and scripture classes. The curriculum was expanded according to the needs of the waves of emigration from Hungary following the First World War; Hungarian culture also became an important part of it. By the time of the interwar period, every Reformed (Calvinist) Church congregation ran weekend classes, and the Catholic Church had also set up regular day and boarding schools. The appearance of Hungarian scout troops abroad after 1945 brought a marked change, with the scouting movement increasingly taking over the organization of weekend schools. The bulge of refugee children from the 1956 Revolution substantially boosted

6 ■ Éva Kovács, "Magyar iskolák az Egyesült Államokban – 1996-ban" [Hungarian Schools in the United States in 1996]," in *A magyar nyelv és kultúra megtartása. USA 1997* [Keeping Hungarian Language and Culture: USA 1997], Károly Nagy and László Papp eds. Budapest: Magyar Nyelv és Kultúra Nemzetközi Társasága, 1998, pp. 34–35; Zoltán Fejős, "Az anyanyelvi oktatástól az etnikus kultúra átörökítéséig. Magyar iskolaügy Amerikában 1890 és 1940 között" [From Instruction in the Mother Tongue to Transmission of Ethnic Culture: Research into Hungarian Schools in America between 1890–1940]," in Gyula Juhász ed., *Magyarságkutatás, 1990–1991* [Research into the Hungarian Community 1990-91], Budapest: Magyarságkutató Intézet Évkönyve, 1991.

recruitment, whereas church schools, with few exceptions, generally withered. A wave of young and enterprising job-seekers from Hungary after 1989 led to the appearance of independent schools, crèches and nursery groups, in many cases enlivening the system with new attitudes and linguistic vigour. A recent development has been, in more than a few places, the involvement of parents from the Hungarian minorities in Transylvania, Slovakia or the Vojvodina in organizing and running such institutions.

Sadly, as regards facts and figures, only very patchy data have survived on such schools.[7] The number of known Hungarian schools over the period 1965–2008, on the basis of a total of five one-off surveys, moved in the range 20–29. With very few exceptions, the sketchy data indicate that two pronounced extremes—day and summer schools—have virtually vanished, leaving responsibility for Hungarian-language education and tuition almost entirely to schools that operate only at weekends.

Németh takes a closer look at five of these extant schools based on the interviews as well as other sources. In particular these are: Sunday School of the First Hungarian Reformed Church of Los Angeles (founded 1928 & 2003[8]); Westside Hungarian School of Cleveland (1958); Széchenyi Hungarian Community School and Kindergarten of New Brunswick (1973); Bartók Béla Hungarian School of Boston, widely known as the "Boskola", which has a weekend kindergarten (2000); and the Wass Albert Hungarian School of Sarasota, or the "Wassuli" (2001). That is not a big enough sample to draw any quantitative conclusions, but enough to illustrate a representative spread of schools and take a glance at their distinctive microcosm.

As the years in which they were established indicate, the five schools are the product of initiatives by at least three generations. They have survived to the present day despite grappling with many difficulties. The biggest of these, based on enrolments, and also the two institutions that have been longest in continuous operation, are Cleveland (75–80 pupils) and New Brunswick (80–85). Of the three established (or re-established) since the start of this millennium, the one in Boston (40–45) is medium-sized, whereas the ones at Sarasota (25–30) and in Los Angeles (18–20) are small. One of the five is maintained by a local church (LA), two by a parental collective (New Brunswick and Sarasota), and the other two (Cleveland and Boston) by a social organization. Weekend classes are held in groups graded according to knowledge of Hungarian and/or age by qualified school-teachers in Boston, New Brunswick and LA, whereas in Cleveland and Sarasota teaching is undertaken by unqualified volunteers (the majority of them parents of children at the schools). The scouting movement sustains the most conspicuous presence in Boston and Cleveland; the

7 ■ Sources of data include Károly Nagy, "Magyar iskolák az Egyesült Államokban" [Hungarian Schools in the United States]. *Új Látóhatár* (Munich), 1965/3–4, and *A Külföldi Magyar Cserkész Szövetség kimutatása, 1974* [Report of the Federation of Hungarian Scouts Abroad, 1974 Survey], András Sándor and Éva Kovács eds., 1996. To these can be added the database set up by the present research initiative.

8 ■ This reflects what was in reality a genuine new founding of a school that had been operated for many years by the Los Angeles congregation of the Hungarian Reformed Church, but then ceased functioning for a while.

main (Hungarian) national and religious holidays are everywhere celebrated in communities, and additional community events are also held (Hungarian festivals, lunches and suppers, charity balls).

The assessor singles out the relative dearth of information and large distances as being among the major headaches, along with a general lack of curricula, textbooks, qualified teachers and consultation.

> Every school is different not just in respect of what arrangements safeguard their operations, but also in the teaching material and, indeed, the approach to the teaching of the Hungarian language.

There are barely any links with institutions in Hungary. Not even schools run by the Churches distinguish themselves when it comes to cooperation. Only in the case of schools run by the scouting movement is there a likelihood of establishing regional links. As one of the interview subjects notes:

> ...each Hungarian school is a minuscule autonomous achievement. Never mind their being ready to lay into the Turks, but even into other Hungarian schools, on the principle of "Don't dare touch what's mine!"

The grief over textbooks speaks for itself. Except for a few titles published by Apáczai Kiadó, deficiencies in background knowledge and language skills mean there is almost nothing that the schools can import from Hungary itself, so for the most part they use sets of notes produced by the scouting movement or else "home-made" jottings, or emigrant manuals that were badly outdated even at the time of publication. It is symptomatic that in Cleveland they are still using, even today, a geography textbook written about forty years ago by the generation that emigrated to America around the time of the Second World War, and a history of Hungarian literature of similar vintage by Father Veremon Tóth that was published in South America—books that are photocopied anew, year after year. Repeated efforts to work with Tankönyvkiadó (the main publisher of school textbooks in Hungary) have fallen through. The needs of the New World schools approximate most closely to *Társadalmi ismeretek I–II.* (Social Primer, 2 vols.), which was published in 1996 for use by auxiliary schools in Hungary, but, unfortunately, it is no longer in print. Admittedly, Tankönyvkiadó has since brought out *Haza a magasban* (Homeland on High), which is specifically intended for use by Hungarian schools in the West, but in fact even this is not usable by American Hungarian students as it is based on assumptions of a set of experiences, language skills and a level of knowledge that are utterly foreign to them.

The database of organizations

The chief practical benefit of the research project is that, thanks to a well-integrated team effort, an important (albeit far from exhaustive) body of information has been produced about Hungarian organizations in the U.S.[9] (Mailing lists and occasional registers for special purposes had been assembled by various American organizations, the Hungarian embassy in Washington D.C. and the Hungarian National News Agency, but their coverage was much more limited than the present

9 ■ The database is accessible via the internet home page of the Institute for Minority Research of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences (www.mtaki.hu).

survey.) The task of analyzing that database falls to János Márton, a young Transylvanian-born political scientist and student of minorities.

It is worth indicating at the very start that a fairly high margin of uncertainty attaches to any statistical digest of this kind, including any conclusions drawn from it, for two reasons. First, the database is constantly being added to (the team leader reckons that it now comprises getting on to 700 addresses); Second, it is virtually impossible to determine how many of the organizations are actually functioning in any meaningful sense. That caution appears justified by a quick look at a checklist of the data on how the organizations may be reached, with only 460 of the listed 607 providing a telephone number and/or postal address, 206 an e-mail address, and just 159 (barely one quarter) have an internet home page. Not all of those are genuinely active entities either, as in many cases it is not direct access to an organization so much as a point of contact that is provided.

The geographical distribution is instructive in its own right. Almost half of America's Hungarian organizations operate in just three states—Ohio, California and New York—and if one adds in the data for New Jersey, Florida, Pennsylvania and Illinois, then just seven states provide more than three quarters of the organizations listed. In another 18 states, by contrast, not a single trace was found of a Hungarian organization, and, perplexingly, that includes South Carolina, where census data indicate a population of seven thousand who describe themselves as being of Hungarian origin. Another table gives a breakdown by town, according to which six cities head the list: New York (44 organizations), Cleveland and Los Angeles (29 each), Washington, D.C. (23), Chicago (17) and New Brunswick (15), together accounting for somewhat more than 25 per cent of the total (the 607 organizations listed are spread over altogether 270 settlements).

The year of foundation is an important statistical index from an historical perspective, but sadly that information was given by not quite 20 per cent (119) of the organizations. The oldest is the Verhovay Brotherhood, founded in 1886 (now known as the William Penn Association), while a further 18 were set up before 1920; 114 between 1921 and 1945, seven between 1946 and 1956, 63 from 1957 to 1989 and 16 more recently. Clearly, that closely mirrors the major turning-points (and waves of immigration) of the past century, and indicates that bodies founded by the 1956 émigrés have maintained a slight numerical predominance to this day.

As far as areas of interest are concerned, these can be grouped into more than a dozen and half categories. In terms of sheer numbers, the list is headed by organizations run by churches (157) or communities (135), but includes cultural associations (56), the scouts (36) and lobbying or educational bodies (36 each) while there are a fair number of Hungarian restaurants (25), music and dance groups (24), newspapers (118), foundations (17), internet chat-groups (16) and even political organizations (5). It is probably no surprise that ecclesiastical organizations are both the oldest and most numerous of these. A strong presence is still maintained by the community, cultural and lobbying groups set up by the wave of 1956ers.

Márton discusses the questionnaires sent out to these organizations. It emerges that although only 45 out of the 350 organizations returned a completed

form, the total membership of those organizations is over 36,000, which is one third of American residents who speak Hungarian at least within the family and who actively participate in émigré organizations. As far as their membership and activities are concerned, they vary from circles of friends of no more than a few dozen to national umbrella organizations of several tens of thousands, such as the American Hungarian Foundation, the Federation of Hungarian Scouts Abroad or the American Hungarian Reformed-Church Union. It is commendable that the organized aspects of Hungarian life in America function on a largely voluntary basis, with paid employees being confined to the larger church or cultural bodies. Membership fees range from $5 to $400 per year, but are mostly in the range of $25–30 per year. As in the general population, there is a slight preponderance of women over men, 2–3 per cent in the membership, while the data also show disproportionately high numbers of middle-aged and elderly members, with nearly two thirds (635) of the total number over 45 years old. Overwhelming majorities have Hungarian ancestry (90 per cent) and speak Hungarian (about 80 per cent).

Interestingly the aims of the organizations and their spheres of activity have changed little since their foundation, or if they have changed (in around one out of three cases), only by expanding the range of their activities. Typical of such expansion has been the active role that Hungarian communities in America have taken in providing support for Hungarian refugees from Transylvania and Vojvodina. Their network of allied organizations now frequently stretches far beyond the borders of Hungary throughout the whole of the Carpathian Basin.

Finally, an attempt is made to outline a statistical image of the typical leader of an American Hungarian organization.

> On the whole this will be a man 57–58 years old, most likely born in Hungary or Transylvania and resident in the United States since 1972. He is likely to be well educated, with at least three years in higher education, though one in two also has a higher degree. He probably has a leadership function in more than one organization and he is retired, a priest or a teacher. His average annual income is above $30,000 (in 40 per cent of cases over $40,000). For the most part religious, he either lives according to tenets of his church or abides by his own lights. He usually has a partner of Hungarian nationality of somewhat lower academic qualifications. On average they will have 2–3 children, with Hungarian as the language most often spoken in the home (many also use English) and around half the children in such families speak fluent Hungarian.

Demographic facts and riddles

The fifty interviews were not designed to give answers to a whole series of important questions, such as: how many people in the US see themselves as being of Hungarian origin; how many speak Hungarian; where were they born, and with which wave did they (or their forebears) cross the Atlantic? Have they retained their Hungarian or, if they came from outside Hungary's borders (Romanian, Yugoslav/Serbian, Czech/Slovak etc.) citizenship?

These are questions to which Levente Pakot, a young Transylvanian-born historian seeks to give accurate answers. The title of his chapter "Characteristics of the American Census of the Year 2000 and its implications for a Survey of American

Hungarians" indicates that before anyone can attempt to provide numerical data it is necessary to clarify in advance points of principle and methodology.

A person's extraction, and specifically ethnic or national affiliation, is perceived as "sensitive" information everywhere, and nowhere more than in the United States—inextricably multiethnic throughout its history and a nation of immigrants. There is no better illustration than the continual changes to the principles and practice by which official statistics of ethnic affiliation and "race" have been collected over the past 220 years, a summary of which is provided in this volume by two separate appendixes with self-explanatory titles ("Racial categories used in population censuses of the United States, 1790–2000" and "Questions relating to language usage in population censuses of the United States and features of the published tables, 1890–2000", pp. 391–393). In a democratic society that strives to maintain respect for individual freedoms the fundamental principle has to be the individual's self-definition of origin and ethnic descent. All the same, a whole series of other considerations conflict with the freedom to choose one's identity, including the principle of aiming for effective integration; the ability of the authorities to keep track of immigration and citizenship; the political legitimizing force of the size of the electoral roll; and, indeed, the light in which ethnic minority groups are regarded, which is highly variable by age and place.

Numerical estimates of the American Hungarian population can be gained—with a duly critical eye[10]—from the answers returned to the questions in the US population census regarding descent, the language used at home, and place of birth. As Pakot notes: "In the course of the 2000 census around 1,398,000 persons—0.5 per cent of the total US population—saw fit to declare that they were 'Hungarian' or else 'Hungarian and other' by extraction. Among them, around 903,000 designated Hungarian as being their primary and 494,000 as their second line of descent." A total of 1,288,425 individuals (92.1 per cent of the total) were born in the United States and 110,227 (7.9 per cent) in another country. Of the latter immigrants, 75,000 arrived prior to 1980 (91 per cent are now naturalized US citizens), another 16,000 came between 1980 and 1989 (64 per cent have since become naturalized), and 19,000 between 1990 and 2000 (15 per cent naturalized). These are facts and figures but also a launching pad for estimates that strive to get round the lack of data and the deficiencies in the questionnaires.

Statistics collected for a census are by their nature "questionable"—in particular as regards the questions asked. For instance, if Hungarian is not specified among the "Languages spoken at home", then the researcher is going to have to dig out even those who profess to be Hungarian in origin from the category "All other languages". It is likewise due to inconsistencies in either questions or answers that the listing of results shows not just close to 1.4 million individuals who regard themselves as "Hungarian" in origin but also, separately, well over 700 who answered "Magyar". This suggests that the frequent changes in the wording of

10 ■ In US practice, the census data on descent or ethic origin are arrived at on the basis of a sampling procedure, so that the question is sent only to households that are selected for the sample (one in six, on average).

questions probing into origins mean that data collected at successive censuses are not commensurable (which is why the many contributors to the present volume express such strong reservations in their handling of such data as the alarming apparent rate of "decline" of America's Hungarian population by 10.9 per cent between 1980 and 1990, then a further 11.6 per cent between 1990 and 2000, i.e. a fall of close to 400,000 in just two decades!

It is to the credit of the research backing the present volume that it does not rely on just the findings of the 2000 census but also took the opportunity to process the entire 5 per cent sample of around 14 million records that make up the IPUMS database[11] and, moreover, also the interim findings of a third, the American Community Survey of 2004.[12] It is hard to believe that America's Hungarian population could have come under such close sociological screening without the help of that substantial slab of extra data, as displayed by the tables and figures of the supplements with which the volume closes. Without that it is clear that a whole set of important statistics would have been entirely lost in translation or obscured, such as the fact that around 117,000 individuals still speak Hungarian at home, or indeed that of the nearly one and a half million Americans regarding themselves as Hungarian, barely 92,000 were born in Hungary itself, and of them one in two is aged over 60 (the bulk of them are of the generation that emigrated from Hungary after the 1956 Revolution). Without that additional background it would have been nearly impossible to have estimated, from the data supplied on place of birth and use of languages in America, the rough numbers of ethnic Hungarian immigrants from Transylvania (7,940), Slovakia (2,980) and Vojvodina (2,060).[13] Nor would there be any information on mixed marriages by American Hungarians as suggested by the nationality entered as second country of extraction: German (85,000), Irish (58,000), Polish (35,000), British (30,000) and Russian (20,000), or the extent to which immigrant Hungarians show differences from the US average when it comes to age distribution, fertility index, scholastic attainment, mobility, income, home ownership and family structure.

The countdown to the next snapshot has already started. In order to find out just how much things have changed over the past decade it is necessary only to stitch on around six months (at time of writing) until the next "moment of truth": the 2010 census, though that is assuming that a check on the findings and their analysis do not take a further nine years.

11 ■ IPUMS = *Integrated Public Use Microdata Series* covers a 5 per cent sample of the 2000 population census and is made available by the Minnesota Population Center and the University of Minneapolis as part of a research programme in 2008.

12 ■ Following the population census of 2000, US Census Bureau introduced an annually repeated statistical analysis called the American Community Survey, which is based on a comprehensive and representative sample of the US population. This enables continual updating of findings during the decade between successive full censuses.

13 ■ It should be added that similar reasons preclude disclosing the exact ethnic complexion of the around one and a half million émigrés from Hungary before World War I as the US immigration statistics only recorded the country of origin, which in this instance was the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, comprising 11 distinct ethnic groups.

Summa Hungaroamericae

In his bilingual (Hungarian and English) summary of the overall findings, Papp places the facts and trends as set out hitherto within several new interpretative frameworks. One of the main lessons is that the major shifts that have occurred over the last two decades have, in part, made obsolete and, in part, blurred the previously sharp outlines of organized life in the American Hungarian community. A typologisation by waves of emigration from Hungary may still be possible in principle, but as Papp underlines:

> Today, at one and the same time, you have the first, second and third generations of DPs, the first and second generations of 56ers, the economic refugees known as "Kádár orphans" from the sixties to the eighties, and the economic migrants of the nineties.

Meanwhile the older émigré organizations have been undermined by the very fact that with Hungary's democratic transformation and the conclusion of the Cold War, the figure of the Soviet foe, which had been the basis of their legitimization for decades, has faded. Added to that is the ageing of the leaders, a serious challenge for organizations that seek to survive.

Papp considers that in spite of a slowing process of assimilation the distinctive ethnic attitude will disappear. Only a fraction of the segment of the US population that professes to be Hungarian plays an active part in that community's organizations—ten per cent at most—which roughly corresponds to, but is not absolutely identical with, the proportion that regularly speaks Hungarian at home. (Telling differences between the two could be revealed by a fresh research project a good deal more extensive than the present one.) It seems the scouting movement may well be the surest base for successors of both organizations and leaders of Hungarian life in the West, except that at many places its somewhat antiquated image of Hungarianness, its militant rigidity, and its restrictiveness in matters of taste and ideology might backfire on it. On the other hand in the absence of initiatives and of national organizations, scattered local communities, having very little contact with each other, cannot take on the task of keeping alive a sense of ethnic awareness. On that basis, Papp, agreeing with Julianna Puskás and other researchers, concludes that the community of American Hungarians exists more as a theoretical construct than a genuine ethnic unit, and that the collective term in itself covers no more than an accidental agglomeration of islands and scattered localities which do not, in truth, fulfil the criteria of a Diaspora (a uniform awareness of origin, strong political, religious and cultural resistance to assimilation, a tight network of élites, etc.).

Finally, in raising the dilemma of "rootlessness" versus "transplantation" Papp interprets an apparent contradiction, namely, localized Hungarian communities, however ethnically enclosed and exclusive they may seem, facilitate integration into American society. Their organizations, he argues, bound intimately to the old country, the native land, various cultural models and political traditions, in truth are exemplary at putting into practice American norms of civil society, being without exception self-sufficient and building on trust and solidarity:

> So-called "flag-flying Hungarianness" in practical terms reinforces integration and does not necessarily contribute to closer ties with the motherland. All this is part and parcel of America's cultural pluralism... a distinctively American blend of rootlessness and transplantation.

The book draws some important conclusions but still leaves a number of gaps. There is, as yet, no comprehensive history of 160 years of emigration from Hungary to the New World based on modern research while meeting high academic standards. For that we need an extension and thorough revision of the hitherto scattered studies of local history, much as there is a whole list of core overseas Hungarian institutions with a distinguished past whose source material has yet to be collected and the monographs have to be written: churches, schools, the scouting movement, to say nothing of the diverse world of political and cultural organizations.

Historical research should be complemented with research into current processes. For sociologists, linguists and anthropologists alike this is a dynamically changing field, with further demographic analysis itself including more than a few aspects that await study. One example is the way in which changes in immigrant status affect how a multiple sense of identity evolves. Other topics that also immediately suggest themselves from the foregoing are research into preferences in mixed marriages and their quantitative analysis, what are the degrees of assimilation and the loss of language and culture that they entail. The big question, of course, is whether such research is desirable, and whether it coincides with a collective interest in self-knowledge, on the part of the American Hungarian community and its scholars.

Life has speeded up both in the old and the new country. The sixty-four dollar question is whether research—and the desire for collective self-knowledge—can keep up with this accelerated pace. ❧

Ivan Sanders

Very British

Magda Czigány, *"Just Like Other Students": Reception of the 1956 Hungarian Refugee Students in Britain.* Newcastle upon Tyne, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009, 216 pp.

Reading Magda Czigány's meticulously researched and detailed book on the reception of Hungarian refugee students in England, one is struck by how small and quaint and poor mid-twentieth-century England appears today—especially to a reader (and reviewer) who also left Hungary in 1956, was nowhere near university age then, and ended up in the United States. It is surprising to learn that at first only 150 Hungarian students were admitted to British institutions of higher education. During the months that followed the crushing of the Hungarian Revolution, with a flood of refugees seeking safe havens all over Europe and overseas, this number was increased to several hundred. Eleven years after the end of World War II, Great Britain's economic recovery was not complete; thrift was still the watchword of everyday life, and the stipends and scholarships offered even by the great British universities were modest. Yet the Hungarian refugee students in time discovered that compared to the Continent, life in England in the 1950s was not only more staid and insular, but more civilized as well. Indeed, it was this aspect of Britain that attracted them to the island nation in the first place.

We learn from Magda Czigány's book that as in other Western countries, the outpouring of sympathy for Hungarian refugees and the desire to lend them material and moral support could be felt in every walk of life and emanated from all segments of British society. What is more, when it came to evaluating Hungarian refugee students and placing them in British universities, the actions taken were swifter and the programmes devised by university administrators better organized and more efficiently carried out than similar endeavours in other countries. As early as the middle of November, 1956, a three-men team was dispatched to Vienna to interview newly arrived prospective students. A number of prominent British scholars and experts on Hungary and Eastern Europe, as well as young academics who would later become important in the field—people such as C.A. Macartney, Hugh Seton-

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Watson, Max Hayward, G.F. Cushing, Denis Sinor and D. Mervyn Jones—were actively involved in setting up English-language classes for the newcomers, at times becoming language instructors themselves, and finding the right school and department for individual candidates. (One young lecturer in classics at Oxford, Mervyn Jones, who was recruited as a language tutor, became so fascinated by the Hungarian language that he took it up and turned with great interest to Hungarian literature as well. His book, *Five Hungarian Writers* [1966], is a thoroughgoing and novel examination of aspects of nineteenth-century Hungarian literature.)

Czigány offers a great many facts and figures on operations aimed at helping students find their bearings in their new academic environment and in the process reveals more about the financial aspects of the various programmes, about allocations, budgets and funds than the general reader would care to know. More interesting than dry statistics are individual experiences—the human side of a momentous transition and transformation, which is the true subject of this book. The author provides us with details of her own background to suggest what she was up against in Communist Hungary and how her experiences affected the adjustment to her new life in England. Magda Czigány came from a provincial middle-class family with strong Catholic roots. Both she and her parents knew that these were two strikes against her if she wanted to continue her education. Her punishment for being a "class alien" was particularly harsh even for those times: at age fourteen she was denied entry in the local secondary school. But through the kindness of teachers and friends with some pull, she did complete high school, with distinction, in 1954 and shortly thereafter entered the University of Szeged.

Magda Czigány remained more conservative in her new home than many of her fellow refugees who, while passionately hating the totalitarian régime of Mátyás Rákosi, retained their leftist ideals and sympathies in England. Czigány, too, realized of course that class divisions were still a fact of English life. The University of London's Westfield College, where she became a student in 1957, was a "ladies' college", and most of the young women enrolled there came from upper middle-class homes. Students who were not part of this elite formed a club called the "plebs" and made Magda Czigány an honorary member. Although she didn't agree with the club members' enthusiastic support of the Labour Party and tried to explain to them that "socialist ideology was not compatible with human nature," she felt comfortable in their midst, the friendships forged there have lasted. Half a century later, the former "plebs" still meet once a year. Czigány also takes issue with the view, expressed by many former refugees as well as chroniclers of Hungarian migrations, that the majority of the 1956 escapees, especially those of university age, left Hungary not necessarily because they participated in the revolution and therefore felt threatened, but because they thought this was their chance to start a new life in freedom and take advantage of opportunities that were not available to them in their woebegone homeland. Magda Czigány, even fifty years later, has nothing but disdain for people who escaped in '56 "to seek adventure and an easy route to riches". But why must such aspirations always be considered frivolous, selfish, unpatriotic? After all,

the ancient dictum *"Faber est quisque fortunae suae"* (Everyone is the architect of his own fortune) is well-known in Hungarian, too.

Czigány's narrative is more illuminating when she focuses on differences between Hungarian and English educational systems and suggests underlying cultural differences, including those that expose deficiencies in her native intellectual and educational traditions. She thought it odd, for example, that in a German literature class at Westfield College, students spent an hour each week for three months analysing one little-known nineteenth-century German short story, concentrating all that time on structure and style. In Hungary, she tells us,

> there would have been first and foremost the authoritative canon, regardless whether it was Communist or non-Communist, to which everyone was expected to adhere. There would have been the commonly accepted milestones of events and the "giants" of literature, around whom, working inwards from the perimeter of the large picture through narrowing the perspective step-by-step, we should have finally woven the lesser individual authors into the big tapestry.

It took her a while to understand the value of the opposite approach: moving from the particular to the general. Other refugee students felt the same way. A survey conducted by two sociologists in training on Hungarian attitudes toward things British found that Hungarian students were particularly impressed with the high academic standards of British universities, the "deeper and more thorough knowledge" they had gained and "the absence of dogmas". It also became clear that the Germanic Hungarian system of education with its heavy emphasis on theory and high abstractions could lead to fuzzy thinking. This is what one Oxford don noted about a gifted Hungarian student still struggling with the English language:

> Though a poor linguist, his real trouble is mental constipation, marked by the usual symptoms: polysyllabism, endlessly involved sentences full of abstract terms, inability to think simply and correctly.

In recalling her student days in England, Magda Czigány mentions difficulties that may seem minor now, though to her and to other Hungarian students at the time they were major roadblocks to understanding and retention. For one thing, they had to learn how to take notes, for printed lecture notes, which were readily available to students in Hungarian universities, were unknown in England. During a lecture on medieval French architecture, the professor discussed the transition from Romanesque to Gothic forms and named the French towns where fine examples of chapels and churches built in these styles could be found. Czigány tried hard to catch the names of the towns and jotted them down the quickest way she knew how, by using Hungarian phonetics. Her list included *Perigő, Poátyié, Tulúz, Zsümiezs.* Only later, with the aid of dictionaries and atlases, did she match up these weird place names with Perigueux, Poitiers, Toulouse and Jumièges.

Czigány discusses more serious problems refugee students faced: loneliness, homesickness, anxieties about the future and the like. Yet, I don't think she is being facetious when she writes:

> Food, of course, was the greatest problem. Porridge, served up for breakfast, was almost impossible for a Hungarian to swallow, especially when instead of the addition of cold milk and jam to make it more palatable, it was liberally salted. Kippers proved to be a slowly acquired taste and lunch and dinner were not much better. The student dining halls had set menus and the Hungarian students found it a trial to eat greasy mutton chops, potatoes disintegrating on the outside but uncooked in the middle, or cabbage leaves boiled to death.

Of the 500 or so Hungarian students who were enrolled in British universities and technical schools in 1957–58, roughly 300 obtained their first degree. About a third of these went on to do graduate work in England, while quite a few of the original graduates continued their studies at American universities and many of these eventually settled in North America. One gets the impression from present-day recollections that the former refugee students themselves believe that the real British-Hungarian success stories culminated in America. Czigány quotes a student at Oxford who remarked early on: "We are all preparing to go to the USA except we do not know it yet." The author also quotes Mátyás Sárközi, a well-known man of letters living in England since '56, who in an essay of his own, "Fifty-sixers in England," concludes that

> the exodus of 1956 produced only a handful of respectable academics, one or two moderately successful film directors and musicians and a few entrepreneurs who had built up a reasonably prosperous business.

Sárközi is not being fair here. It is possible that only the U.S. could boast of such former 1956 Hungarian refugees as Andy Grove (alias András Gróf), one of the heroes and stars of the computer age, and celebrated cinematographers László Kovács and Vilmos Zsigmond, but the truth is that the "fifty-sixers" fared well wherever they settled. Which doesn't mean that they followed the same path or responded to success the same way. What happened in the fall of 2006, and is related by Magda Czigány at the very end of her book, could only have happened in England, I believe. Forty-nine former refugee students got together and decided to publish a letter in *The Times* on the fiftieth anniversary of the Hungarian Revolution, in which they would publicly express their gratitude to the British people and in particular to British institutions of higher learning for their wholehearted support. The letter appeared in Britain's newspaper of record on October 2, 2006. The signers may have remained Hungarian at heart, but their gesture was very British. ❧

Anna T. Szabó

Home, Love, Exile and Revolution

George Gömöri, *Polishing October.* Nottingham: Shoestring Press, 2008, 80 pp.

A year ago I was walking with my young son near the excavation site where the new metro station on Kálvin Square is being built. Under the makeshift fence we observed a heap of bricks, stones and yellowed bones tossed aside. Looking more closely it seemed to me that these bones were human remains. We stopped for a few minutes, and I tried to tell my son about the history of the city. We don't even have to go very far in time to see what historical layers lie under the pavement: the square played a prominent role both in the siege of Budapest in the Second World War and the Hungarian Revolution of 1956, both episodes when the dead were often buried in the streets. I was desperately trying to explain to my child how these events took place. I wanted him to remember and understand. It wasn't easy. I wasn't an eye witness.

George Gömöri, whose book I highly recommend to readers, is not only such a witness, who saw the *"tanks charging along in terror, their guns firing, / graves for teenagers dug in public squares",* but also an important figure in the revolution: as a young poet, following the tradition of Sándor Petőfi, he read out a poem to the assembled revolutionary masses, and edited a revolutionary university magazine. His whole life was changed by the revolution, and he has been returning to those majestic and tragic weeks in his writings ever since. *"And finally—autumn, autumn. Winged songs / arching to clear skies, flapping flags / holed in the middle, the bright hopes machine-gunned, / and the darkly gaping hollows of ruined buildings / in heavy rain that blends all into grey."* ("My Manifold City")

Autumn is the most important season in Gömöri's poetry. Unlike Petőfi's springtime revolution, the events of 1956 took place in October, the time of death, but it meant re-birth for the Hungarians after the hopeless years of foreign oppression and Stalinist terror. *"I could never before say the word 'Hungarian' / with my head raised so high and with such certainity, [...] I never before had the right to be proud of my nation".* That's why, for

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Gömöri and Hungary, October means the moment of truth, *"the words fleeing freely, that wild ecstasy"* ("Polishing October"), when the young poet has seen the victory of poetry—or at least the truth and freedom in which poetry believes—over the grim realities of those times.

However, victory was only temporary. The revolution was suppressed and the time of lies returned. Hungary and the whole of Eastern Europe again became a place *"where screws and assistant caretakers / teach philosophy"* and likewise *"philosophers / become night watchmen at the zoo"* ("A Phantastic Topography"), a place where *"there are no plugs in the baths / lavatory seats aren't sat on but vomited over / offices smell of cabbage / culture of cheap eau de Cologne"* ("From a Traveller's Notebook") and people wait in vain for "the spotless white of liberty" ("Waiting for the Clean Shirt"). Soon the revolution was named a counter-revolution, and no one was allowed to speak about it any more.

The revolutionary tradition could only be continued outside Hungary. Along with so many other revolutionaries George Gömöri, who was then a university student and already a poet (his first poem was published in 1953), was forced to leave the country, never forgetting what real liberty should mean for Hungarians. By leaving his homeland, the young poet took upon himself the burden of exile. *"At this stage we suspect and yet should know / there's no way back"* ("Christmas 1956"). He knows that what follows is *"in our case Oxford, for friends who stayed behind / the well-known prisons, semi-skilled employment"*, and shoulders the responsibility for those left behind, translating their poems, writing about them in both Hungarian and English, and later, as a teacher of Hungarian and Polish at Cambridge, inviting them over to Britain for readings, trying thus to establish small islands of freedom for his countrymen.

In an essay in his book on 20th-century Hungarian poetry that bears the telling title *Freedom, Come!*, Gömöri meditates on the use of the word *"hazám"*, trying to find a good translation for it that fits a poem ("my fatherland", "my land", "my country", "my native parts" are some of the possibilities), but concludes that the word has such a rich tradition in Hungarian poetry that one cannot find its precise counterpart for an English translation without quoting the relevant stanzas in full. "Hazám" is also the title of a poem by Attila József that Gömöri recited in public during the revolution, and a key word in Gömöri's oeuvre. "Homeland", for him, does not only mean the country and the city of his origins, but even more that decisive moment in October when Hungary and freedom meant the same.

Leaving one's birthplace means losing security for ever. The Hungarian language is able to distinguish between a first home, *itthon* ("here-home") and a second home, *otthon* ("there-home"); the word *hon* on its own means homeland. Gömöri's life-work shows that one can create a homeland of one's own which includes both versions of home. In a similar way Gyula Illyés, in the poem "Haza a magasban" (Homeland on High), suggests that one can create a magic circle out of poems and history which then becomes a homeland. Illyés's poem is about how to survive a dictatorship, but it takes no less determination for Gömöri to find a home in another land, however pleasant it is, while knowing that one's own country seems to be lost.

"Fake semblances of Odysseus", Hungarians wandered *"over the planet"*, knowing full well that they could not return to their down-trodden country. George Gömöri chose his own island, England, a place of exile but also of security. In "A Kind of Ode to England" Gömöri speaks of *"my fortress-isle: my England"*, but knows that however accepted, he still remains *"a stranger / pregnant with otherness"*, who knows the differences between the history of a victorious empire and a small country that happens to be wedged between the East and the West. The garden and the battlefield, Renaissance leisure and the loss of a country are juxtaposed in the poem "Henry VIII Puts on His Football Boots": *"So the King puts on his boots and in light attire / runs out with his lads on to the pitch; in the mean time / the Turkish guns in ambush open fire"* and the Hungarians are defeated at Mohács in 1526, which led to the fall of Buda. Even watched from the perspective of a flourishing garden of someone in England, for a poet living in the time of the cold war and Eastern-European dictatorships all peace seemed relative. As a Hungarian George Gömöri is always on the side of small nations, which *"as a rule peep out of the pockets of big ones / and there they rave and wave their arms about: / 'vile usurper!' / or / 'dearest friend!'"* ("Data for a Natural History of Small Nations").

"The political poems learn their lesson from a history where the small get their heads kicked in by the big who use them as footballs. There is a certain wry comedy involved in the process but the stakes are high: defeat and exile are for real, as is the pain", George Szirtes says, agreeing perhaps with the poet István Vas, whose favourite poems by Gömöri were the political ones. "Pain" is a crucial word indeed, and irony is only a means of soothing it. Gömöri believes in his ideals, but he is never blinded by them when he is speaking about history: he is well aware that *"fresh victims are needed all the time"* ("Restless March"), but knows that *"the survivors learn how to live"* ("Letter from a Declining Empire") and life *"lives and keeps on living."*

"Hope, what an inexhaustible cornucopia / you are! What an eternal obsession!" ("~~Miracle in Manhattan~~"). The quoted poem is not a political one: it is about a tree the poet has seen on the top of a skyscraper, resembling a sentinel that protects something that is still poetic and free and beautiful in a mechanical world, a living organism always capable of regeneration: *"...the tree called to mind / a lone sentry, intently watching, / who stands his ground for us."*

The tree is a recurring image in post-war Hungarian poetry. In a poem by László Lator the tree hanging on a cliff's edge is a living example of hope. The sentry motif was elevated to a symbolic position by the early twentieth-century poet Endre Ady. George Gömöri as a literary historian, too, is well aware of this and continues to develop both motifs as a poet.

Accordingly, a person can be a sentry as well—one who knows the realities of history, just as the poet does, who, from his faraway island, can see the seemingly hopeless situation of his homeland: *"he who lives across from a watchtower / he whose window looks out into a gaol / will not be dazzled by vain hopes / will not be seduced by sham perspectives"* ("A Situation"). Gömöri's political poems display a chilling knowledge of how things go in this world: "Yes, No" is a simple but painfully efficient poem about the banality of evil, based on the yes-no answers of *"an average sort of person"*, a guard at the Nazi

extermination camp Sobibor; "Food for the Dead" speaks of the vampire-like ghost of the Romanian dictator by evoking the everyday tradition of feeding the dead; "Gloss on Nadeshda" speaks about the impossibility of even the most simple everyday moments of security in a *"state / which struck all other opinions, / all private beliefs and private lives stone dead"*. These poems show the eternally tragic fate of the victim, and that's why some of them go back to the time of Christ, presenting the unchangeable human condition. "The Man from Nazareth" shows how unbearably absurd mass murder can be, *"numerically speaking"*; "Lazarus" presents the pain of resurrection, while "Conversation in Jerusalem" again returns to the banality of murder in a world where the dinner of the Proconsul is more important then the crucifixion of the Son of God.

Gömöri evokes historical circumstances in which it must be very hard to remain independent, compassionate and true to one's ideals. The poet knows that *"there is no hope that a more beautiful future / will make us forget the crimes of our century"* and we are *"unable to see behind us or before us"* ("Dream on the Last Day of the Year"). We must never forget the crimes of the twentieth century, even when we *"honour the past too late, / always too late"* ("Westerplatte, Autumn 1981"). Only the one who travels has the chance to see the world from different perspectives, trying to keep track of all his memories in the process.

In one of his poems (not included in the present collection) titled "Kirke's Island", Gömöri talks about the way power itself, added to the condition of living in a dictatorship, transforms people into animals; meanwhile the sailor, the Odysseus-like traveller (the image of the poet) can freely wear his own face. In another poem published only in Hungarian, again using the travel motif, he describes the past hundred years as the century of forced travel, people being carried to death in war or deportation, while others are forced to seek refuge after lost revolutions. Similarly, in "Memories of a Train Journey" he describes the traveller's situation in quite a different manner than that of the free Odysseus: *"you've just got to live like this, like a stray dog, / just shuttled back and forth between no fixed stations"*. Travel is not enough in itself. Only if someone can find an aim for his travels, can he transform his stray-dog identity into Odysseus's legend.

For a man who has lost his home, the only possible aim can be finding another one in which the lost home can be recreated. On the sea of exile, home is an island where you can experience your own fate. The classical topos of the sea traveller has a long tradition in Hungarian poetry, going back to the early-nineteenth-century poet Dániel Berzsenyi, who, in his "To the Hungarians", compares the world to a frothy stormy sea and states that only a good steersman can withstand the dangers and lead the way to national freedom. In Gömöri's poems the sea motif resonates in many ways, recalling the image of the sea of fate. In "Arion Sings a Poem" he shows the archetype of the poet whose performance is *"heard by the whole* thalassa", while in "When..." two lovers, *"clung to each other / as castaways to a plank of wood, / wave upon wave dashing over us"*, outshouting the storm by crying to each other the most poetic of all confessions: *"My only love!"*

Gömöri's beautiful and tender love poems to his wife (also in his previous,

second English collection *Poems for Mari,* 2006) are among the most memorable. Love, although never light and easy—*"isn't it scandalous that you're not me?"* ("The Contradictions Resolved")—is the organising power of life: *"we wondered, beggars seeking a place to sleep, / from house to house. Perhaps this had to be / so that, forgetting pain, however deep, / at length you'd find your home again in me."* ("A Dedication") Only love can be strong enough to create a home: *"for twenty years now I have had a home, a real one, / where music's played and festive fragrance reigns"* ("For an Anniversary"), and this home gives grounds for return: *"It was worth leaving and, now, it is more worth coming home"* ("The Message of the Rosie"). Home is an island, and home is on an island, even when the poet, after countless nights of *"dreaming of Budapest dawns"* ("On a Dawn Road"), is again allowed to return to his native city, Budapest.

One of the most moving poems in the volume, "On a Homecoming", speaks about the impossibility of finding one's lost home again: the birthplace, the shabby capital awakens in the poet a *"strong desire"* for the Montparnasse, and he must arrive at the painful conclusion that between East and West, *"there is nowhere to return to".* But still, love, *"like a distant gas-lamp, keeps / blinking on the Buda shore".* The lamps of that particular October, however far in the past now, are still lighting up the poet's life. *"My memories fade as gaslamps fade at daybreak, / but my faithless loyalty will last out my life / [...] and know that what awaits me at the end of the road is home."* ("On a Dawn Road")

"I admit [...] that all I've given I brought with me from home" says "Autumn Monologue" which is about the *"tart sweetness"* of October apples, the fruits of the tree rooted in the homeland soil. A similar apple is shown on a polished tray on the cover of the volume *Polishing October,* looking like the navel of a body, the place that reminds of one's origin. Gömöri has written all his poems in Hungarian, his mother tongue because for him this is the language of freedom; as the opening poem says, *"In my mother tongue alone I can stammer out / the words that compose sunset, make it glow"*—a magical gesture that evokes the ancestral and original function of poetry. Wonderfully, though, I believe that the poems in the translated volume will have the same effect on English readers as the original versions have on a Hungarian audience. This is thanks to translators, above all to the author and the outstanding poet-translator Clive Wilmer, long-time collaborator of George Gömöri in translating Hungarian poetry into English, and in addition the translators of four poems, George Szirtes, Tony Connor, Nicholas Kolumbán and Mari Gömöri. ❧

Zoltán Farkas

The Ballad of the Amorous Sun

A Kurtág Premiere in Cluj

"Kurtág completed his composition almost a year ago and, turning down a request from the Paris Contemporary Music Festival, he insisted that the world premiere take place in Cluj." *Szabadság*, a Hungarian-language daily in Transylvania, reported on 27 February, 2009. If this is indeed how it happened, Kurtág certainly made the right decision. The Cluj (Kolozsvár) premiere of *Colindă-Baladă* (Op. 46), on 29 March, 2009, was part of a concert which included colinda-based choral music by six Romanian composers. These works provided a background, revealing its spiritual roots and the soil from which it had sprung; in other words, they offered a context, to use a word that is fashionable these days. The concert was presented under the title *Romanian Archetypes* during the Modern Festival of Cluj; the previous day, a musicological symposium had been devoted to the same topic.

The extremely difficult composition was sung by the Cluj State Philharmonic Chorus under the direction of Cornel Groza. Intimately familiar with the text and the melody of the colinda, they also mastered Kurtág's musical idiom to a remarkable extent. They spared no effort in learning the music: according to reports, they had no fewer than 120 rehearsals over many months. Matei Pop had rehearsed the instrumental ensemble; the tenor solo was sung by Ştefan Pop. The quality of the performance was worthy of the significance of the work.

Kurtág's composition recalls Bartók's *Cantata profana* even in its sixteen-minute duration. The colinda on which he based his work is mentioned in a 1933 article by Bartók, published in a Swiss periodical. Discussing Romanian folk music, Bartók wrote:

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> The most important part of these texts—perhaps one third of them—have no connection with Christmas. Instead of the Bethlehem legend we hear about a wonderful battle between the victorious hero and the—until then—unvanquished lion (or stag), we are told the tale of the nine sons who—after hunting for so many years in the old forest—have been changed into stags, or we listen to a marvellous story about the sun who has asked in marriage the hand of his sister, the moon...[1]

The love of the Sun for the Moon is a characteristic motif in the colinda repertoire, indeed it provided the title of a bilingual collection of traditional Christmas carols edited by Gábor Lükő with Hungarian translations by István Komjáthy: *The Sun's Wedding* (1947). Unlike Bartók in his *Cantata profana,* Kurtág used the original melody as well as the text. The source is melody no. 9 and the corresponding text no. 14a in Bartók's colinda collection[2]. As always in Kurtág's works, text and music are in an extremely close, intimate relationship with one another.

Reading archaic folk poetry such as this, one is awed by the ancient lore it reveals. The Sun, searching for a bride, wanders for exactly eighteen years before he returns to his point of departure, having failed to find a better mate than his own sister, Anna Fairest-in-the-World. Eighteen years happen to be the exact length of the *Saros* cycle identified by Mesopotamian astronomers as the periodicity of solar and lunar eclipses (the cycle is actually 6,583 days, that is, 18 years and 11 days long). That is the time that passes before an almost identical constellation of these two heavenly bodies occurs again. The composer Adrian Pop, director of the Cluj Academy of Music and organiser of the festival, gave Kurtág valuable advice, chiefly on matters of Romanian prosody, so that the composer called him his best composition teacher ever. Adrian Pop drew my attention to the parallel between Anna Fairest-in-the-World and another great mythological procrastinator, Penelope, in the motif of the wedding dress to be woven. Anna sets two impossible conditions for her suitor, and both have to do with the building of a bridge. Now we know that the bridge that has become so central in interpretations of the *Cantata profana* is not mentioned in the original colinda about the nine stags; Bartók had mistaken *p'unde* ('where') for *punte* ('bridge'). Realising his error, Bartók corrected it in his scholarly publication, yet he kept the bridge image in the *Cantata,* for obvious poetic reasons. In *The Sun's Wedding,* on the other hand, the bridge is most definitely there, inspiring and stimulating the modern imagination trying to decipher the myth, and giving rise to many exciting hypotheses. The text mixes pagan and Christian elements with a disarming

1 ■ Béla Bartók, *Essays,* selected and ed. Benjamin Suchoff. Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1976, p. 120.

2 ■ *Rumanian Folk Music, vol. 4: Carols and Christmas Songs (Colinde),* ed. Benjamin Suchoff. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1976, pp. 52, 253–255.

naturalness (a duality already pointed out by Bartók): Anna Fairest-in-the-World sends the Sun to Adam and Eve to get permission for his incestuous designs. Of course, he cannot get that permission; instead, Adam and Eve tie him up and throw him down to Hell.

Throwing the sun down to Hell, in turn, can hardly mean anything but a solar eclipse. The second trial, the building of a monastery to be placed in the middle of the bridge and the creation of a waxen priest, is another instance of Christian imagery used to bring the cosmological story down to earth. Finally, God seals the fate of this sinful desire when He places the Sun and the Moon, brother and sister, on complementary celestial paths so they may never unite in forbidden love. It is a true deus ex machina. Anna Fairest-in-the-World is not identified with the Moon until the very last line, and even there we get no more than a hint—a beautiful example of the ambiguities of ballads. Among several variants of the colinda, Kurtág picked the fullest and the most poetic. In one variant, for instance, the story comes to a brutal end after the second trial. When the two characters reach the middle of the bridge spanning heaven and the sea, the Sun's sister exclaims: "Great Sun, I will throw myself down to the bottom of the sea, on the cliffs, in the darkness with the fishes, rather than be your whore!" Or else a great King woos his sister Solomia (Salomé!) and wants the holy Sun and Moon as witnesses at the wedding. The Sun and Moon duly appear, but at that very moment the earth splits in four. Yet another version has God himself preventing the priest from blessing an incestuous union.

Colindă-Baladă is scored for tenor solo, double chorus and an instrumental ensemble consisting of viola, cello, clarinet, bass clarinet, horn, trumpet, trombone and percussion (including the *toaca,* the traditional wooden board used in orthodox monasteries). Kurtág's music narrates the story, comments on it and illustrates it, and the musical form observes the repetitions in the plot. Therefore, one gets the illusion that there is much in the music itself that can be recounted in words. The introduction *(Molto misurato, pesante, giusto)* is based in its entirety on the colinda melody. It is a single continuous growth. After the simple, monophonic presentation of the melody, a strongly marked countersubject appears. As the instruments enter in succession, they emphasise certain motifs in dark tones. Each time the melody is repeated, it starts on a different pitch; the rhythms, meanwhile, get faster and the intervals wider. When the women's voices enter, the number of voices reaches eight. Although the process had started with original folk material, it eventually encompasses that "quasi-folk" style characterised by highly ornamented vocal writing as in Kurtág's Russian choruses and the Akhmatova songs. The impressive exposition is followed by "increasing complications." The journey of the Sun is depicted in a *Vivo* section in mixed metres (later *molto agitato*), where the sixteenth-notes become the basic metric unit. This section is

analogous in dramaturgic function to the hunting fugue in *Cantata profana*. The nine dead and nine tired horses are represented in an irregular *hora* in 5+5/16 time, and an instrumental measure marked *come gemiti* (like a groan) pays tribute to the poor creatures breathing their last. This section culminates in the frightened exclamation of the chorus. The colinda refrain *(Ioi Domnului Doamne!)* is reinterpreted as the commentary of an ancient Greek chorus. It is in an unpitched, whispered passage that we learn the name of the Sun's beloved: she is none other than his own sister Ana Sânziana. The utterance of her name is like a magic word, calling forth a *Berceuse-Siciliano*, to be performed with great longing. The minor thirds of this passage and the use of the clarinet inevitably reminds the Hungarian listener of the Miraculous Mandarin's desire in Bartók's pantomime. Kurtág set the words "his own dear sister" to full but muffled triads and *ppp di Gesualdo* dynamics. These measures are among the mystical moments of the score: are they a symbol of purity, or an expression of horror because of the sin? One might be inclined to prefer the second explanation (because of Gesualdo, if for no other reason), yet the harmonies are no different from Kurtág's chorus on St Paul's words, which concludes the collective composition *Requiem of Reconciliation* (1995), in which fourteen composers including Luciano Berio, Friedrich Cerha, Krzysztof Penderecki, Wolfgang Rihm and Alfred Schnittke participated. The refrain-like return of the objective colinda sound marks a resumption of the main thread in the narrative. Entering after an impassioned introduction, the tenor solo impersonates the amorous Sun in an idiom reminiscent of the favourite son, turned into a stag, in the

He has gone, departed
Mighty son of daylight,
That he might get wedded.
While he journeyed thus,
About eighteen years,
Upon eighteen steeds,
Nine steeds came to die,
Nine got tired out,
Yet he found no bride
But his sister fair,
Ana Sânziana,
Sister of the sun.
Lo, the mighty sun then
Spoke and said to her:
Weave, Ana, start weaving
Thread of gold and silk,
Silken gowns to fashion
That you might my bride be.
She spoke out and said:
Mighty sun of daylight,
And my little brother,
Only then shall I be
To yourself a true bride
Till time everlasting,
When you shall have made me
A ladder of iron
From the bed of seas
Up to the high sky.
Up to Father Adam
And to Mother Eve.
And you'll ask of them:
Be it rightful thus
In the world to wed
A sister her brother,
A brother his sister,
In the world of yearn?
Mighty sun of daylight,
With his mind gave thought,
The ladder was made,
And he climbed on it
Up to the high sky,
Up to Father Adam,
And to Mother Eve.
Father Adam dear,
I have come to question,
Ask of you a question:
Be it rightful thus
In the world to wed
A sister her brother,

A brother his sister
In the world of yearn?
Father Adam with
Mother Eve together
Bound the mighty sun,
Thrust him into hell.
Hell was lighted up,
Darkened was the world.
Father Adam with
Mother Eve together,
What else did they think?
They brought up the sun,
Set him free again.
Thereupon he went
To his sister fair:
Weave, Ana, start weaving,
Shirt for me to fashion,
That you might my bride be.
Ana Sânziana
Spoke and said to him:
Mighty sun of daylight,
And my little brother,
Only then shall I be
To yourself a true bride
Till time everlasting,
When you shall have built me
A fine silver bridge
Over all the earth,
At the bridge's end, too
A tall monastery
And a priest of beeswax,
As there's none on earth more:
'Twill be here who'll wed us.
Mighty sun of daylight
With his mind gave thought,
And the bridge was built.
By the hand he took
His own sister then.
On the bridge set off.
Hurried was the sun,
Melted was the priest.
God then took him up,
Set him in the sky.
When the moon now rises,
Sets the sun of daylight.

English translation by E. C. Teodorescu, from: *Rumanian Folk Music, vol. 4: Carols and Christmas Songs (Colinde)*, ed. Benjamin Suchoff. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1976.

Cantata profana. His agitation is expressed by wide octave leaps and angular semitone inflections as he makes his unlawful plea for Anna, haltingly at first (as if panting with desire) and gradually hitting his stride. Anna Fairest-in-the-World is not just the primeval Woman suggested by the *Berceuse-Siciliano*; she remains a real person throughout. Significantly, her lines are not sung by a soloist but by a women's chorus, and the music always preserves the objectivity of the original colinda. Her words, in which she presents her conditions to the Sun, quiet, hurried, and filled with great tension, are a miracle of musical psychology. As the composition proceeds, the musical and dramatic action magically accelerates. It takes only a few measures for the Sun to pass the first test: the ladder reaching from the bottom of the sea to the heights of heaven is rendered by a rhetorical figure known in the 17th century as *anabasis*. The Sun's second solo, the address to the primaeval parents Adam and Eve, strikes a confidential, flattering tone, as though the request were a trivial one. Adam and Eve's immediate punitive action is the dramatic counterpart of the agitated *stile concitato* heard during the Sun's journey.

Kurtág's musical idiom is highly expressive and yet extremely terse. One glimmer in the violin harmonics is enough to convey the line *"Hell was lighted up"*; the words "Darkened was the world" are commented by *pizzicato* (plucked) strings and the muffled sounds of the horn and clarinet. From then on, we have what could be called a shortened reprise, with the second aria of the Sun and the second test imposed by Anna. The latter momentarily evokes the pertness of the female choruses from Bartók's *Village Scenes*

and Stravinsky's *Les noces.* Particularly concise is the final dénouement of the ballad: in a single few lines of only six notes, we learn that while the Sun, all aglow with passion, is holding his love by the hand, his fire melts the waxen priest who was going to marry them (a true feat of female ingenuity!). The poetic ending of the work leaves no doubt as to the composer's empathy with the Sun, whose love remains unrequited. After numerous earlier ascents, the descending intervals of the "sunset" lead into the heart-wrenching epilogue of the clarinets, derived from the colinda melody. A series of repeated perfect fifths, like a swinging pendulum, gradually fading, makes us feel that desire is eternal. Over the last measure of his score, Kurtág inscribed the closing lines of Mihai Eminescu's famous poem "To the Star": *lumina stinsului amor / ne urmăreşte încă* ("The light of the extinguished love / still follows us in flight"—tr. Andrei Bantaş). These lines are whispered by the chorus and then recited by a single male voice over the perfect fifths of the clarinet, elevating the story from the naive folkloristic sphere of the colinda into a more universal human dimension.

It is very telling that Kurtág chose to emphasise the love story among the many aspects of the colinda's mythic plot. This love narrative is, moreover, joined by the expression of another emotion, just as intense, that of homecoming and reconnecting with the composer's youth. The composition is dedicated to the memory of Felician Brînzeu, Kurtág's teacher at the Lugoj high school, who taught him Romanian and who instilled in him a love of Romanian culture. After an absence of many decades, Kurtág recently visited his hometown of Lugoj where he was made an honorary citizen and where he deposited the original manuscript of his work. The Eminescu quote at the end of the composition is further evidence of his devotion to the Romanian language. (Adrian Pop said that his job revising Kurtág's Romanian prosody was a very easy one.)

Kurtág has added an important major work to his oeuvre. The *Colindă-Baladă* is, in many ways, rooted in the composer's late style: it shares its harmonic idiom, its timbres and gestures with several recent works. Although it isn't part of the subject of this review, strictly speaking, I would be remiss if I kept silent about the good feeling I had for a long time after the concert in Cluj. How wonderful to experience the peaceful coexistence of neighbouring peoples on the artistic level of an Endre Ady, an Attila József, a Bartók or a Kurtág. The several hundred people in the Cluj concert hall gave a warm welcome to the Hungarian composer's colinda composition, which was the high point of the *Romanian Archetypes* evening. It was good to be Hungarian that night, and I believe it was good to be Romanian as well. It was good to be European together. All I can do is hope this was not a fleeting, unrepeatable moment in my life. ❧

Paul Griffiths

Years of Plenty

New Kurtág Releases

Those who remember the 1970s, when a couple of Hungaroton LPs represented almost the entire output of this abstemious composer, and certainly the entire recorded output, cannot but wonder at the productivity Kurtág went on to achieve in his fifties, sixties and seventies, and is happily continuing through his eighties, a productivity now quite substantially and variously documented on record. Inevitably it is the smaller pieces that have gained most attention, and especially *Játékok*. Alongside the complete edition coming out on the BMC label from Gábor Csalog and friends, selections have recently been recorded by other eminent artists, Leif Ove Andsnes and Jonathan Biss, both of whom regularly include this music in recital, alongside Schubert, Schumann or Chopin. For these musicians—as for Mitsuko Uchida, who does the same but has not so far recorded any Kurtág—*Játékok* shines a light, or more than one, into an older world of pianism, this light or lights being reflected back. The new illuminates the old, and the old the new.

With Marino Formenti, on the other hand, we begin to lose track of which is which, being led into a marvellous labyrinth where items from *Játékok* conjure, and are conjured by, the visitants introduced in the composed programme he calls *Kurtág's Ghosts,* and has recorded on a double album (Kairos 0012902 KAI). The title is apt, in drawing attention to how many of the pieces in *Játékok* are homages or elegies, and also in indicating how the other items in the sequence stand for the abundant contents of the composer's memory. At the same time, the word 'ghosts' does not quite suit either the intensity of Kurtág's music or the strength and intemperateness of Formenti's performances. The pianist delivers vehement anger in Messiaen's exotic stomp *Ile de feu I,* sees through the

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exhilaration to a dance of death in the eighth number from Ligeti's *Musica ricercata* and finds desperation in a couple of Schumann's *Davidsbündlertänze*—qualities that marry with his Kurtág interpretations and do not at all seem imposed, rather freshly brought to light by way of the newer music.

There is less of Kurtág's wit here, in the choice of pieces or in how they are played, and less of his simple delight in sound and imagery, except in the very early stages, when the piano chimes in discovering prefigurings of two folksongy pieces—homages from the third volume to the composer's teacher Ferenc Farkas—in songs by Machaut. It is just possible that Machaut, who travelled widely, heard a Romanian colinda at some point; more likely we are encountering turns of modal phrase that are universal figments of European music.

Further connections abound in this fascinating and powerful collection. Traits from the last of the Farkas homages turn up not only in Machaut but also in Kurtág's homage to Scarlatti from the same third book. The tiny *Russian Dance,* also from this third book, is discovered to echo—or pre-echo, as it is placed here—the fifth of Bartók's Hungarian Peasant Songs, while *Sirens of the Deluge,* from the sixth book, follows seamlessly after the earthquake from Haydn's *Seven Last Words.* Carefully plotted on the large scale as on the small, Formenti's first half works through modern and eighteenth-century connections to a destination in folksong, which is effectively where it began, and his second has much to do with Schumann and death, ending with a sequence of memorials from the sixth and seventh books interleaved with Liszt's tributes to Wagner and, less obviously but touchingly, "The Poet Speaks" from Schumann's *Kinderscenen.*

Apart from *Játékok* the work of Kurtág's that is enjoying the richest recorded life is his *Kafka-Fragmente,* of which a new version by Tony Arnold and Movses Pogossian (Bridge 9270 A/B) brings the number of commercial recordings to four. Clearly something is at stake here. So exposed for both musicians, the soprano and the violinist, the work's mostly tiny movements offer forty steps on the way to failing, and yet performers feel bound to come to the piece and fail again, in their own ways. One of the benefits of the new release, quite apart from the exceptional studio recording made by these artists, is that it shows us the context of failure by offering an ancillary DVD with excerpts from what was evidently a lengthy and exhausting rehearsal directed by the composer. This is invaluable as a record of Kurtág in action, but perhaps the most important words are Arnold's, referring to a different rehearsal, at which he was coaching a string quartet in Beethoven: "It seems that for Kurtág harmony doesn't simply affect rhythm, rubato and timbre in music, it actually creates them." And she seems to use this important insight in her performance with Pogossian—in, for example, the sixteenth fragment, where the degree of consonance or dissonance between voice and violin gives the music at once expressive force and dynamism.

Also on the DVD is a complete performance of the work, recorded in concert in Yerevan, but background noise makes one want to return quickly to the studio recording on CD. Besides, the video direction is elementary, and *Kafka-Fragmente* does not lend itself to the visual medium. At one point in the rehearsal sequence Kurtág asks Arnold not to 'dance'; what he seems to want is

an erect, stable, expressionless posture, with all the drama in the voice.

Arnold's drama is touching, with a sense, from the freshness of her singing and from her thoughtful involvement, that the experiences reflected, refracted or directly conveyed in these miniature scenes are happening to her, right now, as she utters. Even though she lacks perfect familiarity with the language, she puts her person, as well as her voice, into the texts and into the notes, and the result is a recording that holds up strongly alongside the others, which are more allies than competitors. Also remarkable is Pogossian's contribution, which is always beautiful, across a great range of colours and gestures, and always seems on the edge of speaking—or beyond.

More and more the twentieth fragment, the sustained slow movement of this fractured sonata, comes across as the heart of the piece. So is it here. ❧

Tamás Koltai

Bartók's *Duke Bluebeard's Castle*—Twice

Hungarian State Opera House, 11 October 2009

Opera buffs don't often get the chance to see an opera performed twice on the same night. Armed with different recordings of the same work, record buffs may listen to one after the other if the mood takes them. But that's not the same as sitting on a firm seat in the theatre watching the same cast and conductor perform two different renditions, a task that conductor Ádám Fischer has bravely assigned to Budapest audiences with *Duke Bluebeard's Castle* redux. You could argue that Bartók's one-act opera, lasting an hour with only two singers, lends itself perfectly to its own double bill. At its premiere in the same opera house in 1918, Bluebeard was coupled with Bartók's ballet *The Wooden Prince,* and it has been performed alongside another work ever since—often (though not in Budapest) with Schoenberg's *Erwartung,* also a one-act musical drama lasting an hour which was written and premiered at around the same time as *Bluebeard.* Two works of such searing intensity are not easy to digest at a single sitting—the gastronomic equivalent of, say, steak Rossini followed by stuffed roast pheasant. But does it make sense to have a second helping of the steak?

"Where is the stage? Out there, or within?" the speaker of the *Bluebeard* prologue asks gnomically, adumbrating the tormented psychological journey ahead. Bartók's first masterpiece and only opera is arguably for the stage within, so you'd be forgiven for doing the double bill in the comfort of your own home with a pair of headphones. *Bluebeard* is sometimes performed in the concert hall, an inadequate halfway house between the headphones and theatre. Yet the stage out there—the trappings of the theatre—if not carefully calibrated can detract from Bartók's dark and intricate score and the inner psychological drama: to stage *Bluebeard* in the theatre risks misfortune; to do so twice looks perilously close to carelessness. It would be hard to deny that Fischer and director Hartmut Schörghofer had their work doubly cut out.

Performance repetitions are not unheard of. The encore gives a musician a great chance to play it again, and often better second time round (the improvement often comes along with the

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audience's heightened familiarity). Schoenberg, for one, was acutely aware that audiences found his music hard-going and helpfully performed a work twice, sometimes under horrid duress. (A Prague performance of *Pierrot lunaire* in 1914 was not untypical: the audience hissed and disrupted the performance. "Schoenberg went pale and immediately rapped on the stand. One could see that he was in a trembling state of excitement. There was a painful pause, during which even the hissers were quiet. Then Schoenberg had the whole poem repeated."*)

Early audiences found Bartók's works challenging, too. *The Miraculous Mandarin*, for example, was banned after its first performance on the ground of obscenity. *Bluebeard* has by now happily taken its place among the canons of twentieth-century opera: Sir George Solti conducted a film version and Fischer's recent film version made for the BBC has won great acclaim; many great recordings of *Bluebeard* are included in current catalogues. With so many great interpretations on offer, staging a work twice in a row must therefore have its own particular raison d'être. The Budapest Opera House, in its programme note, explains:

> It was Arnold Schoenberg and his colleagues who initiated a practice in concerts in which, by performing the pieces twice [...t]he first performance would give a general impression of the piece, mainly setting its contours and the main directions of the dramaturgy. During the second performance, however, we notice the details and the unique characteristics the whole composition is instilled with. This concept, originating from Bartók's time, also contributed to our decision to perform our most important opera in an unusual way.

Fine as far as it goes. But new details are easily gleaned every time you listen to a work on your hi-fi. Fischer grapples with his own justification in notes for the programme booklet:

> I don't believe a work has just one ideal way of being realised. Bartók's own performances, and, in places, his scores as well, indicate as much. As a pianist, it was not uncommon for Bartók to perform his own pieces in wildly different ways, and there are some places where he wrote contradictory instructions into the score.

Fine again, but this also applies to any number of non-serial works. So let's inquire further.

> This is a matter of the most significant work in Hungarian operatic history. It is a duty of operatic art in this country to engage with it over and over again; to bring to the stage this superb masterpiece, an allegorical tale that can be interpreted in many different ways, in ever newer interpretations.

Moral imperative sits oddly with makeup and wigs, but Fischer is right: if a work is great and unusual it is worth exploring its depths over and again. You can make a case for two successive interpretations. And in *Bluebeard*'s case it comes down to the primal male-female conflict depicted in the opera and the value in looking at events from both points of view.

Judit leaves her betrothed, her family and her old way of life in its entirety to follow the Duke to his castle. She is

* ■ A concert report by Felix Adler in *Bohemia*, quoted by Hans Stuckenschmidt, *Arnold Schoenberg. His Life, World and Work*. New York: Schirmer, 1978, p. 209.

irresistibly drawn by the castle's secrets and becomes fascinated by what lies behind the locked doors. The Duke hands over the keys one by one, at first willingly, then in response to loving pleas; and at other times only after strenuous opposition. Judit opens the doors wide until finally, behind the seventh and last door, she finds the Duke's former wives, among whom she too is now shut in for ever.

The libretto by Béla Balázs, blending the tone of a mystery play with a folk ballad, does not match the quality of Bartók's music, the text being an abstract story laden with symbolism rather than a psychologically realist plot suitable for the stage. It's telling that Bartók unsuccessfully entered the work for competitions twice, in 1911 and 1912. It is unlikely the music was to blame, but rather the work's unsuitability for the stage. Audiences were at a loss what to make of its interiorised events, the fact that Bluebeard's castle is indeed not the site of any external action but, as Balázs underlined, "the innermost nature of man". The work, about Woman's attempt to force an entry into Man's sanctum, came into being in a very male-centred world. It is no accident that comparisons are made with Wagner's *Lohengrin,* because in both operas Woman's insatiable curiosity offends the love idyll. Asking questions, wishing to know Man's secrets, leads to her downfall.

We've come a long way from that sort of attitude. None the less, as Fischer observes:

> It would be hypocritical to suggest to someone that they can ask anything at all; there comes a point where a line must be drawn. Anyone who has a secret should keep secret that he has a secret! In this sense, Duke Bluebeard's secret isn't a secret.

The conflict cannot be viewed in simple black and white and it is virtually impossible to perform the opera from two opposing points of view. Wernicke also came to the same conclusion in his own productions. "Bartók's work is far too many-layered for the question to be simplified in such a way," Fischer comments, citing German divorce legislation of the 1970s which holds that it does not matter which party is to blame for the marriage breakdown. That comment might be the key to interpreting the performance (*Scenes from a Marriage,* to steal from Ingmar Bergman).

"*Why did you join me, Judit?*" Bluebeard asks in the opening. In Hungarian the double meaning is clear, even though it is likely that Balázs was not aware of this at the time of writing: in the official first English translation of the score *("Why have you come with me, Judith?")* only one sense, Balázs's conscious first sense, comes across. The second Hungarian sense of *"Why did you marry me, Judit?"*—the sort of reproachful or sarcastic question that a husband will often put to his wife when the gilt has worn off a marriage—is lost in English. Then again, the question carries quite a different connotation if it is being asked of a young woman who is entering her husband's home for the first time, or if it is fired out in the middle of a blazing row. Bálint Szabó, the Bluebeard of both productions, likewise asks it in two different ways: first with all the superiority of a macho male, the second time with the desperation of a broken husband. The woman-slaying archetype of "Bluebeard as knight" is turned into a participant in a profane conflict.

Ádám Fischer and Schörghofer striveto square the quotidian with the mytho-

logical, the conscious with the unconscious, the waking state with a dream. They had already worked together in Budapest (see Judit Rácz's interview with Fischer in *HQ* 191) on Wagner's *Ring* cycle, which is now being mounted every year in June at Budapest's Palace of Arts as part of the "Wagner Days" festival in a performance which is a distinctive amalgam of elements of semi-staging on a concert platform. For *Bluebeard*, as with the *Ring*, Schörghofer has chosen to work with foliated mirror surfaces onto which various digital images are projected. He makes use of a remote-controlled screen of mirrors at the height of the stage which opens out and folds up in various configurations. Sometimes abstract, at other times figurative compositions are projected onto the rippling surface. Originally a stage designer, in both cases Schörghofer draws on visual associations, which is appropriate, given that musically *Bluebeard* is closer to an oratorio in form than to a traditional opera. The apparitions that are uncovered behind the doors lead into the depths of the mind rather than to realistic locations: an inner vision, or, if you like, a dream.

The version performed first concerns a relationship which is just starting. Here Judit is a young woman who is shedding her wedding veils and making an awed approach to the apparently unapproachable Bluebeard's "domain". The projected images are hazily idyllic, colourfully luxuriant, evoking gilded bodies (in the treasure house) and a verdant park (in the secret garden). Even the glowing red lights of the floor are not so much associated with blood as with vaudeville theatre. Judit takes fright only at the vast expanse of the hilly landscape onto which the "fifth door" opens, as it suggests Bluebeard's acquisitive instinct. From that point on, she wants for herself what remains; but only a huge, tearful eye and later on the former wives, their features charred away, are left to receive her. Bluebeard's hands venture in Judit's direction once only, but there is no connection; the dominant macho male is left to himself.

The second version captures the moment of crisis—"five years later" would be the text writ large in a film. Judit is in the full bloom of womanhood, a mature, hyper-erotic figure, making use of somewhat common resources of seduction, but it seems as though this were nothing more than a somewhat desperate and cynical salvage operation of a tired marriage. What is left of Bluebeard's much-diminished masculine superiority is, at best, the scoffer who keeps digging up the past *("It would be better, Judit, / wouldn't it, in your bridegroom's manor?")* Yet he suffers and loves her. The result, as the poet Endre Ady called the relationship between two people who love each other but constantly rip into each other, in a coining from much the same time that Bartók composed the opera, is a "hawk-wedding". What is now seen on the panel mirrors are wriggling, worm-like, blood-stained copulating bodies. The macho kingdom (the fifth door) opens to Bluebeard's ruddily swollen lips and bloodily smeared clown's face, and the lake of tears is replaced by an enlarged self-image pleading. Judit, on the other hand, is confronted with her old self, the young woman, as each of her old selves rise up multiplied in the mirrors. At the end it is she who is left alone on a red divan, the sole piece of furniture, with Bluebeard swallowed up in the background.

Viktória Vizin is a splendidly feminine, sensual and impulsive figure and vocally

confident, her expressive power well complemented by her stage presence and a wide range of gestures. Bálint Szabó is less intense. His voice is not quite up to fulfilling every register that his role demands and he does not possess sufficient gravity.

To borrow from Theodor Adorno, Fischer and Schörghofer manage to express the "exfoliation of interiorisation" *(Philosophy of New Music)* in both performances with subtle but revealing differences between the two. The castle's doors and the two protagonists' weird conspiracy to open them are the dramatic expression of the exfoliation of what has been darkly interiorised: Bartók knew what he was doing when he wrote *Bluebeard* as an opera rather than an oratorio. As I've noted, there are those that say that the opera lends itself well to the private listening or the concert hall. In this case, if you don't speak Hungarian, you presumably internalise the story (reading the programme booklet and following each line) and project the drama on to your eyelids (thereby exfoliating the exfoliation!). Even if you comprehend the words as they are sung you must still do a certain amount of projecting. However, I'd argue that the exfoliation of *Bluebeard* works best if it is interpreted, dramatised and acted with visual cues and all paraphernalia of the theatre to bring what is inside alive. All this is done convincingly in the Budapest production. The second performance, with its more extreme tempos and more violent collisions not only gives the audience the opportunity to notice new details after introducing the broad landscape, but—more importantly—intensifies the experience. This masterpiece, now very nearly one hundred years old, is therefore more alive than ever. ❧

Erzsébet Bori

Work for Idle Hands

Péter Gárdos: *Tréfa* (Prank)

Not since the work in the Sixties of László Ranódy has such a sensitive adaptation of a story by Dezső Kosztolányi been seen on the cinema screen. Ranódy adapted six works by Kosztolányi, a founding father of modernism in Hungary, and a screen version of *Pacsirta* was nominated for a Golden Globe at Cannes in 1963. (The novel, in Richard Aczél's translation, was published by Chatto & Windus in 1993.)

Péter Gárdos meanwhile already attracted attention and plaudits several years ago with his film *Porcelánbaba* (The Porcelain Doll, 2004), a 93-minute low-budget video based on three pieces taken from a short-story cycle by Ervin Lázár, *Csillagmajor*. The film can be taken as either comprising three quite separate episodes or else a story of a closed community at three different points in time.

Prank started out as an even more modest one-hour video film for television. Its basis is a rather slight early story of the same title that Kosztolányi published in one of several collections just before and during the First World War—stories in which the faceless participants do not even have names. Anonymous characters work less easily on film, however, so that any screenwriter making the adaptation faces a challenge straight away. This particular story was written in 1912, and it seems to take place around then, in a church-run boarding school for boys in a small town in what was then Hungary's Southlands, just a few years later in 1919 to become the province of Vojvodina in Serbia. The author and his characters cannot have known that a world war was imminent, however we can hardly help projecting that into the story as a sort of retrospective "premonition".

All the same, the Balkans were already a powder keg, and this town was located in the outer reaches of the Austro-Hungarian empire. The school janitor was a Serb and the ringleader of the prank in question was also a "Rácz" (which is a Hungarian synonym for "Serb", only in the film it is simply used as his surname). The location must have been in the general neighbourhood of a Serbian village on which reprisals were unleashed due to the murder there of an Austrian soldier, the subject of a marvellous film *Büntető-*

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expedíció (Punitive Expedition) released by director Dezső Magyar in 1970.

Another ominous event occurred several thousand miles away, at around that time: on the night of 14 April 1912, the liner *Titanic* struck a large iceberg and sank, about 1,500 out of 2,200 passengers and crew drowning. This incident is woven skilfully into the film to give some historical background to modern viewers.

Zsuzsa Bíró, who produced the screenplay, had to find a good way to expand a compact, taut Kosztolányi short story into the stuff of a feature film without diluting it or losing its "Kosztolányiness", that is, without sacrificing its vigour and precision. In order to achieve this, some of the new material was lifted from other works by Kosztolányi. Other references are chosen to create an archetypal setting in the world of boys' schools. These range from Robert Musil's *The Confusions of Young Törless* of 1906 through William Golding's *Lord of the Flies* (1954) to Géza Ottlik's 1959 *Iskola a határon* (published in Kathleen Szász's 1966 English translation as *School at the Frontier*).

In its film version *Prank* is elliptical, mosaic-like and needs its viewers to fill in the gaps with material from their own experience. Gárdos and his writers perhaps thought that today's audiences have less perseverance with extended stories but are more able to cope with a string of episodic incidents.

What passes for a plot is of no great interest. The two ringleaders' adventure in town, which might have been the most potent source of outside excitement (escape, brothel, picture-house), is the lamest episode in the film. In the opening scene, where Father Zoltán, with a whistle to rival a skylark in full song, lures us into the monastery and closes the gate, we start to become curious about the world inside and lose our urge to set foot outside its walls. A leaner story line, with bolder omissions, might have brought the filmmaker closer to Kosztolányi and to viewers as well.

That said, one of the film's greatest virtues is the vividness of its figures: all the priests who teach at the school are wonderfully idiosyncratic, each displaying their individual character in brief but memorable scenes. Gárdos also puts to good use an approach—casting professional and amateur actors together—that yielded such admirable results in *The Porcelain Doll*. The amateur performers include a number of professional teachers, including Ferenc Takács who lectures in the English Department at the Eötvös Loránd University of Budapest, and among other unexpected but inspired castings is the choice of Mihály Kovács, the Latin teacher, a real-life butcher whom the director found in a hypermarket. The leading roles of Father Zoltán and Father Weigl were entrusted by Gárdos to professional actors, but he goes against type in having angel-faced Tamás Lengyel as stone-hearted Father Weigl and flinty-faced, ascetic Loránd Váta as genial Father Zoltán. Father Weigl, the gym teacher, brings the mood of the approaching world war into the school (in one sports lesson he teaches the children how to crawl on their bellies), with his aggressive teaching methods he arouses fear in the students. Meanwhile Father Zoltán, the class teacher, represents liberal values. The film shows us a struggle fought every day between the two priests and the two worldviews in which the children are the unfortunate victims. In fact there is no final resolving clash between the two, in

Loránd Váta as Father Zoltán (in front)

conflict for the minds of the boys, because Father Zoltán's faith is shattered by a family tragedy and he is obliged to leave the institution. In this subplot, Father Zoltán talks his younger brother, made deaf by a punch in a boxing match, into crossing the Atlantic for surgery to save his hearing. However, his ticket puts him on the maiden voyage of the Titanic, and he is lost when it goes down.

Consequently it is left to viewers to make up their own mind as to whether by using Father Weigl's methods the "prank" would have been nipped in the bud or, on the contrary, under the genial guidance of Father Zoltán the boy's games would never have degenerated the way they do. "The devil is toying with you," the head of the school tells the boys, and secretly the mischievous adolescents agree. But can one really ascribe to the devil the power of hormones, the sense of feeling locked up, rebellion against discipline?

The debate about education has raged since Jean-Jacques Rousseau (or even Plato) without a satisfactory resolution, and it is likely to continue until people manage to crack the riddle of human nature itself. Are we all born inherently good, and is it only the "world" or society that ruins us? Or does our innately savage and violent nature get out of hand without firm moral guidance?

Péter Gárdos refrains from giving a direct answer, but the depiction of the boys given by the first 90 minutes of *Prank* shows them as sometimes nasty, but still likeable. On the other hand it is glaringly obvious what sort of insolence is growing inside them. The boy characters are acted magnificently. Especially well done are the three children we see most of: the shy top-of-the-class student, the dissolute card sharp and the sentimental adventurer. Gárdos would be unable to deny his affection for them and his knack for working with them. The opening shots of the first day of the school year—displays of well-scrubbed knees, socks already slipping down legs, trousers held up with string, freckles, games of stone-paper-scissors, feverish anticipation—show that

Gárdos is on the boys' side, against the teaching staff. And there is no straight path that leads from the shining eyes and enthusiasm on the faces of the good teachers (which does not hold the boys back from wishing clouts around the ears for the same teachers), from brave manifestations of solidarity and a sense of justice, even from the customary japes and leg-pulling stunts (shoelaces tied together, hidden spectacles, a bucket of cold water balanced on the door) to sadistic torture and bloody violence. One simply has to accept that we do not have answers for everything; we cannot understand everything, particularly about ourselves.

In 1900 a Swedish educational reformer prophesied that "a century of the child" would come. Within a couple of years, a Viennese psychiatrist had ripped away the veil of innocence adults hid children behind until then. Soon after the initial outrage unleashed by Freud's theories, his ideas found their way into literature and public discourse, and from that time onwards we have had to deal with two opposed views of childhood. In Kosztolányi's oeuvre there are examples which are the complete antithesis of the nervous anxiety of "The Prank", while Géza Csáth's stories abound with murderers in short trousers. Just as in *The Witman Boys* of 1997, a film directed by János Szász and based on a story by Csáth of two brothers who murder their mother, here too Gárdos seeks to provide a psychological motive for a criminal act that the schoolboys commit. Szebeni, the top-of-the-class boy in *Prank,* who is murdered in the end, is hardly what one might call a smarmy toad. He does not try to curry favours with the grown-ups, he is not a swot, and when he turns informer, it is involuntarily, and not out of conviction, cowardice or for personal favours. But even if they were aware of his excuses, his fellow-pupils would have no interest in them; after all, any community takes a dim view of betrayal. The disciplinarian priest-teachers wield the cane with great expertise, but that is not the reason why the boys are up in arms; from their point of view beatings, punishment exercises or threats of eternal damnation are laws of nature and it is senseless to fight against them.

For an outsider, it is always intriguing to observe the life that goes on in a closed "institution", the experiments that are carried out both *in vitro* and *in vivo.* There are other reasons, too, for not wishing to leave the monastery. The Zichy Castle in Zsámbék, a village close to Budapest, where *Prank* was filmed, is a marvellous location. In this film the castle has a role almost as important as the characters. Credit for making it so memorable is due to the camera work of László Seregi the younger. Some of his shots make us feel cocooned, other camera angles underpin the relations of superiority or subordination; the brilliant interaction of light and shade capture transient moods. The atmosphere of the early years of the twentieth century is wonderfully evoked. A recurrent device in the film is the image of the zoetrope, an ancestor of the animated or motion picture, a spinning drum where a strip of drawings becomes one moving image when viewed through a slit. A potent symbol, it is also a structural element in the film. Like the poignantly dated drawings which the zoetrope can briefly bring alive to move and yet stay in one place, *Prank* lets Kosztolányi's short story come alive and yet stay in one time. The mood of the film's period, like the bittersweet portrayal of the boys' cloistered childhood, forever hovers, fixed at that moment in the last fateful years before the Great War. ❧

BOTTICELLI TO TITIAN

TWO CENTURIES OF ITALIAN MASTERPIECES

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Four bouncers working in Debrecen clubs decided to take matters into their own hands. They first fired shots at and broke some windows of Roma homes on the outskirts of villages; later they hurled petrol bombs into the houses. During the period of over 12 months until their arrest they killed six people and injured three at nine different locations. The attack in Tatárszentgyörgy was the seventh in a row.

From: **Guns, Fire and Ditches: A Report from Tatárszentgyörgy on the Roma Killings** *by Zoltán Tábori, pp. 97–109.*

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