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# The Hungarian Quarterly

Volume 52 • Summer

\$18.00

**DOUBLE  
ISSUE**

2011 AUG. 30

## LISZT YEAR 2011

- Franz Liszt (1811–1886) by Mária Eckhardt
- A Biographer's Journey by Alan Walker
- Klára Hamburger on the Letters to Marie de Sayn-Wittgenstein
- Peter Laki on New Books
- István P. Korody on the Year in Geneva

## THE PLIGHT OF HUNGARY'S ROMA

- Gophers – A Reportage
- Romany in Prison

A Letter by Ted Hughes  
U.S. Envoy Herbert C. Pell and Hungary in 1941  
The Early Films of Paul Fejős



# The Hungarian Quarterly

*First published 1936*

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formerly *The New Hungarian Quarterly*

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Published by The Society of the Hungarian Quarterly

Printed in Hungary by AduPRINT, Budapest,  
on recycled paper

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HU ISSN 1217-2545 Index: 2684

Cover & Design: Péter Nagy

Annual subscriptions:

\$70/€50 (\$100/€75 for institutions).

Add €15 postage per year for Europe,

US\$23 for USA and Canada,

\$27 to other destinations and \$47 by air

to anywhere in the world.

Sample copies or individual copies of back numbers \$30/€20,  
postage included.

Payment in \$ or €.

Annual subscriptions in Hungary HUF 5,500

Single copy HUF 1500

Send orders to The Hungarian Quarterly

P.O. Box 3, Budapest H-1426, Hungary

**All export orders should be addressed to**

***The Hungarian Quarterly***

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

Articles appearing in this journal are indexed by  
HISTORICAL ABSTRACTS ■ INTERNATIONAL POLITICAL SCIENCE ABSTRACTS ■  
AMERICA, HISTORY & LIFE ■ THE MUSIC INDEX ■ ARTS & HUMANITIES  
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**Back Cover:** Franz Liszt, 1869, an oil painting by G. P. A. Healy. Courtesy National Park Service, Longfellow House—Washington's Headquarters National Historic Site



Mária Eckhardt  
Franz Liszt  
1811–1886

**G**énie oblige—this was the motto chosen by Franz Liszt, the only Hungarian musician in the 19th century to be universally recognised as one of the greatest in the world. He certainly lived up to it, developing his mercurial talents as one of the outstanding pianists of his time, as a bold innovator in composition, as a conductor, an influential teacher and writer on music. A loyal son of Hungary, he was open to the world and absorbed all he valued in various European countries in an eventful life, making a generous and effective contribution to music wherever he went.

He was born 200 years ago to German-speaking parents in a small village in Sopron county in Hungary that is now part of the Austrian Burgenland. His father, Adam Liszt, was an intendant of the Prince Esterházy estates and a gifted musician who did everything to facilitate the child prodigy's progress. By the age of nine, the boy had appeared in Sopron and Pozsony (Pressburg/ Bratislava). For a year and a half, he studied in Vienna under Carl Czerny, a former student of Beethoven's, and Antonio Salieri, Mozart's one-time rival. When he was twelve, his father decided to take him to Paris, taking great financial risks to ensure his son's further education. With his concerts in Pest in May 1823, Franz Liszt took his leave from his compatriots for many years. The Paris years had a lasting effect on him: it was here that the boy, constantly active as a composer and pianist, traversed the emotional crises of adolescence and matured into a young man. French remained the language in which he preferred to express himself all his life.

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*Mária Eckhardt*

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*When not otherwise indicated the illustrations in the supplement were made available by the Liszt Academy of Music: Liszt Ferenc Memorial Museum and Research Centre, Budapest.*



His transformation into a mature artist came by dint of a great deal of hard practice and extensive reading. His horizon was broadened by his contacts with the intellectual currents of the time (the utopian social philosophy of Saint-Simon and the liberal Catholicism of Lamennais), as well as by his friendships with major artists and writers such as Hugo, Lamartine, Dumas, Sand, Balzac, Heine and Delacroix. He was inspired to perfect his piano technique by the virtuosity of Paganini's playing of the violin; his explorations of programme music were encouraged by Berlioz's *Symphonie fantastique*. His friendship with Chopin was also a major influence: he considered Chopin, along with Schumann, whom he came to know later, as the most important composers for the piano of his day.

Liszt, who enjoyed great popularity in aristocratic salons and public concert halls alike, met Countess Marie d'Agoult, née Flavigny (1805–76) in 1833. She became his great love and the mother of his three children. Between 1835 and 1839, they lived mostly in Switzerland and Italy, which led to a further expansion of Liszt's intellectual horizons. Their children—Blandine (1835–62), Cosima (1837–1930) and Daniel (1839–59)—were born during their years of wandering, in Geneva, Como and Rome, respectively. His "travel reports" of great literary merit (*Lettres d'un Bachelier ès Musique*), published in the Paris press, belong to this period, as do many sketches and early versions of several important compositions completed later. His Hungarian national identity, nearly forgotten, was reawakened in 1838, when he received the news of the great flood in Pest. He gave a highly successful concert series in Vienna to benefit the flood victims; this event launched a near decade of concert tours, during which time he conquered almost every country in Europe. More than any virtuoso of his time, he was able to combine his extraordinary technique and his gifts as an improviser with a unique and fascinating personality. One could truly speak of an outbreak of "Lisztomania" among his admirers. He satisfied audience demand by offering virtuoso fantasies and paraphrases on popular operatic melodies and folk tunes and made transcriptions of songs; yet he also played works by predecessors and contemporaries whom he esteemed, such as Beethoven, Schubert or Weber. In 1839, he became the first to give a full solo recital, as against the mixed programmes that used to be the norm (*"le concert, c'est moi"*). He was able to convey the sound of an entire orchestra on the piano, as in his "piano scores" of the symphonies of Beethoven and Berlioz.

When Liszt first returned to Hungary as a mature artist in 1839–40, he made his debut as a conductor in Pest and Pozsony/Pressburg. With the income of his enthusiastically received concerts, he supported the cause of the Hungarian national theatre and a music conservatory to be established in Pest. He was received as a symbol of the highest strivings of the Hungarian nation. One of the leading Hungarian poets of the time, Mihály Vörösmarty wrote an ode to Liszt.



Liszt himself felt the special atmosphere in Hungary: "Everywhere else I perform for an *audience*, in Hungary, however I address the nation!" His extended visit in 1846 took him to many towns and cities in Hungary and Transylvania, further strengthening his sense of belonging to the country. These two visits resulted in several lifelong friendships, and provided him with an opportunity to acquaint himself with *verbunkos* and *csárdás* music, Hungarian popular art song and, occasionally, folk song as well—all performed, mostly, by Gypsy bands. In the 1840s, he played his arrangements of these Hungarian tunes all over Europe (they became the basis of the *Hungarian Rhapsodies*).

**I**n 1844, Marie d'Agoult broke with Liszt; the children were entrusted to Liszt's mother and to various governesses while the composer continued his concert tours, providing his family with financial security. While in Kiev in February 1847, he met Princess Carolyne von Sayn-Wittgenstein, née Iwanowska (1819–87). At this point in his life, Liszt was yearning for peace and stability in order to devote himself to composing. This finally became possible thanks to an offer from Weimar, the residence of a small German Grand Duchy with an important cultural and artistic tradition. Liszt had held the title of Kapellmeister in Extraordinary there since 1842, and finally settled in the city in 1848, giving up the life of an itinerant virtuoso for good. The extremely wealthy, highly educated and independent Carolyne was separated from her husband whom she had been forced to marry at the age of seventeen. She sincerely believed in Liszt's talent as a composer, and did everything to help him in his work. With her ten-year-old daughter, she followed Liszt to Weimar in 1848 and became his second life companion. A deeply religious woman, she fought persistently for many years to have her marriage annulled so she could marry Liszt. In the meantime she made a home for him in the villa Altenburg, which, despite its name (Altenburg = Old Castle), soon became a meeting place for innovative artists fighting against philistinism. In this "New Weimar," talented disciples like Hans von Bülow (later Liszt's son-in-law), Hans von Bronsart, William Mason, Alexander Winterberger, Carl Klindworth, Carl Tausig, Antal Siposs and others received generous help from Liszt in launching their careers.

In Weimar, Liszt strove to turn the city of Goethe and Schiller into a centre of high art once again, after decades of decline, and into a musical centre in particular. As the music director of the court orchestra, he cultivated the classical repertoire, and Beethoven's music in particular; yet he also provided a forum for deserving contemporary works both in the concert hall and on the operatic stage. He performed operas and symphonic works by Schumann, Berlioz, Wagner, Meyerbeer, Verdi, Flotow, Raff, Rubinstein and Cornelius. Of special importance was his moral and financial support of Richard Wagner, who had been exiled from Germany because of his revolutionary activities



in 1848. Liszt recognised Wagner for the epoch-making genius he was; after a successful performance of *Tannhäuser* in 1849, he mounted the world premiere of *Lohengrin* the following year. He also programmed *The Flying Dutchman* and *Rienzi*, and published several essays in an effort to prepare the ground for Weimar as a possible site of the grandiose project of *The Ring of the Nibelung*.

The Weimar years also saw great progress in Liszt's own development as a composer. This was the time when he was able to finalise and publish several piano cycles that had long been in the making (some of them had already been printed in preliminary versions). These include the *Transcendental Etudes*, the *Harmonies poétiques et religieuses*, the *Consolations*, 15 of the *Hungarian Rhapsodies*, and the first two volumes of *Années de pèlerinage* (Switzerland and Italy, the latter including the grandiose "Dante" Sonata). In addition to a number of significant solo works for piano or organ (such as *Scherzo and March* or *Ad nos, ad salutarem undam*), he composed, during this period, his Sonata in B minor, a work entirely novel in both form and content and one of the towering masterpieces in the 19th-century piano repertoire.

Liszt had written for orchestra before (for instance, the 1845 Cantata for the unveiling of Beethoven's statue in Bonn), and it is not true that his assistants August Conradi and Joachim Raff had to teach him to orchestrate early in the Weimar period. There is no doubt, however, that he concentrated on symphonic music for the first time during those years. Thanks to regular work with his orchestra, his instrumentation became more refined; he was now able to take the next step in orchestral music, moving on from Beethoven. With his programmatic works in one movement, the twelve symphonic poems (including *Tasso*, *Mazeppa*, *Les Préludes*, *Orpheus*, *Prometheus*), he created a new genre. In addition to the titles, he often wrote prefaces to his scores to clarify the literary or artistic programmes underlying the works. Following Berlioz's example, he also composed two large-scale, multi-movement programme symphonies ("Faust" and "Dante" Symphonies); both introduce a chorus at the conclusion. His two best-known piano concertos, No. 1 in E-flat major and No. 2 in A major, received their final forms in Weimar as well.

In the field of sacred music, he created an outstanding masterpiece with the *Missa solennis* ("Gran" Mass), a festive Mass with large orchestra written for the consecration of the Esztergom (Gran) Basilica on 31 August 1856. Liszt spent five weeks in Hungary to rehearse the "Gran" Mass, conducting several performances of the work. During the same period, his Mass for male voices with organ accompaniment was performed at the inauguration of the Hermina Chapel in Pest. At an orchestral concert, Liszt conducted his symphonic poems *Hungaria* and *Les Préludes* which were received enthusiastically by the Hungarian audience. Having had a close relationship with the Franciscans of



Pest since his childhood, he now requested admission to their tertiary order. During his next visit home two years later for repeat performances of the "Gran Mass", he received the official document attesting that he had been made a confrater of the Franciscans.

It was not only in Hungary that Liszt appeared as a guest conductor. He gave concerts of his own works in many cities and he received invitations to music festivals in Ballenstedt, Karlsruhe and Aachen. At these events, he often programmed less frequently played works by the classics, in addition to deserving new compositions. Due to his economical conducting ("We are helmsmen, not oarsmen!"), his unconventional programmes, his support of Wagner and Berlioz, his own innovative compositions and the militant young representatives of the New German School who rallied around him, he became the target of uncomprehending attacks by more conservative musicians. In a press declaration published in 1860, Brahms, Joachim and some other renowned musicians mockingly referred to the music of Liszt and his circle as *Zukunftsmusik* and would have none of it.

**B**y the late 1850s, Liszt saw that his ambitious plans to bring about a new golden age in Weimar, with himself and Wagner as the leading spirits, were being "thwarted by the pettyness of certain local aspects as well as local and outside jealousy." He gave up his work as an opera conductor and gradually withdrew from public musical life in Weimar. His interest increasingly turned towards sacred music; he started working on his oratorio *The Legend of St. Elizabeth*. Taking stock of his past work, he arranged many earlier songs and men's choruses into cycles, and prepared them for publication. In 1861, he appeared at the music festival in Weimar that marked the creation of the General German Music Association (Allgemeiner Deutscher Musikverein), an organization he had helped found. (He was to remain supportive of the work of this Association to the end of his life, and appeared frequently at their festivals arranged in a different city each year). Soon afterwards, he followed Princess Carolyne von Sayn-Wittgenstein, who had earlier left for Rome. Their wedding, already scheduled, was prevented by vile intrigues. They both remained in Rome, but they gave up the idea of marriage and no longer lived together.

During this new, quieter phase of his life, when he frequently stayed in simple monastic quarters, Liszt was able to complete his *St. Elizabeth* oratorio, his two *St. Francis* legends (in versions for piano as well as orchestra), and started work on *The Canticle of the Sun* and the *Christus* oratorio. Of instrumental works, he composed his two Concert Etudes ("Forest Murmurs" and "Dance of the Gnomes") and his *Mephisto Waltz* No. 1 (which is the piano version of the second movement from *Two Episodes from Lenau's "Faust"*). The *Totentanz* (*Danse macabre*), composed earlier for piano and orchestra—a paraphrase of the Gregorian *Dies irae*—was also premiered and published at



this time. Liszt had long been interested in the reform of Catholic church music; this now became a primary preoccupation, and he would have liked to play a major role in the implementation of that reform. He was encouraged by Pope Pius IX, who paid him a visit at his lodgings, listened to his piano playing and called him "my dear Palestrina." Liszt made a thorough study of Gregorian chant and the sacred polyphony of the 16th century to which the reformers wished to return. He strove to deepen his knowledge of religion and, after a period of serious preparation, took the four Minor Orders of the Catholic Church which carried some religious duties and qualified him to perform certain smaller liturgical services. He would have liked to become a choirmaster in the Vatican, but he did not wish to become ordained as a priest, although he always wore a cassock and was addressed as "Abbé Liszt."

"Abbé Liszt" made his first public appearance in Hungary in August 1865, at the 25-year jubilee festivities of the National Conservatory. He had been instrumental in launching this institution making major monetary donations in 1840 and again in 1846; now he offered his new oratorio, *The Legend of St. Elizabeth*, as a gift. The work, written on a German text, had originally been intended for performance at the Wartburg (in the Grand Duchy of Weimar) where the Saint, a Hungarian king's daughter, had lived. In the event, however, the first performance took place at the Redouté in Pest on 15 August 1865, sung in Kornél Ábrányi's Hungarian translation. Due to the great success, Liszt conducted a second performance and regaled his compatriots with his piano playing at a benefit concert where he was joined on stage by Hans von Bülow and Ede Reményi. (After abandoning his virtuoso career, he only played the piano in public at benefit concerts. He was known for being always ready to help those in need and for supporting worthy artistic causes.)

Following the 1867 Compromise between Austria and Hungary, Liszt composed a festive Mass. Yet it took concerted action on the part of Hungarian musicians and public figures, as well as the personal intervention of the Empress Elizabeth, to have his "Hungarian Coronation" Mass performed, (instead of a work by a Viennese court composer), at the coronation of the Austrian Emperor Franz Joseph and Empress Elizabeth as King and Queen of Hungary, at the Church of Our Lady (Matthias Church) in Buda on 8 June 1867. The performers were from Vienna, and Liszt was only present as a member of the audience in the gallery. It was only two years later that Liszt was able to conduct his Mass in Pest with Hungarian musicians and Ede Reményi was finally able to play the violin solos that had been intended for him from the start.

Liszt had suffered several major family tragedies by this time. His son Daniel died in 1859, his daughter Blandine in 1862, his mother in 1866. In 1868, his daughter Cosima left Bülow for Wagner. Having failed to secure the ecclesiastical position he had hoped for in Rome, he accepted the invitation of



## The Child Prodigy

The light streaks of a comet appeared in the skies when Franz Liszt was born on 22 October 1811 in a village in western Hungary. His parents saw this as a divine signal, and indeed he set out early to conquer the world with his phenomenal piano playing.



Franz Liszt at the age of 12. A picture dating from 1823 when Adam Liszt arranged farewell concerts for his son in Pest before leaving for western Europe.



The house in which Liszt was born in the small village of Doborján (Raiding), Sopron county.



Liszt first performed at a public concert at the age of nine in Sopron/Pressburg (Bratislava). The scene is depicted on a commemorative sheet issued by István Halász on Liszt's 50<sup>th</sup> artistic jubilee.



Courtesy of the Hungarian National Museum, Budapest

Adam Liszt (1776–1827), Franz Liszt's musically talented father, an intendant on the Esterházy estate. The picture from 1819 also shows the instrument he used to teach his son.



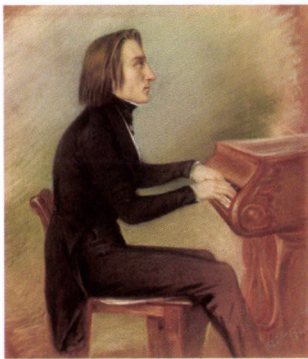
## “The concert, it is me”

By 1835 Liszt had become part of the Paris musical scene, but he left the city to live with Countess Marie d'Agoult. Their years in Switzerland and Italy inspired two of Liszt's important sets of piano pieces, which were published – after several early versions – in their final form *Années de Pèlerinage* in 1855 and 1858. During his concert tours Liszt visited almost every country in Europe. The climax were the twenty-one concerts he gave in Berlin between the end of December 1841 and early March 1842, generating the “Lisztomania” frenzy.



Countess Marie d'Agoult in early 1833. A lithograph based on a painting by Henry Lehmann (1839). The Countess was Liszt's companion for ten years and the mother of his three children, Blandine (1835–1862), Cosima (1837–1931) and Daniel (1839–1859), born during their years of travel in Switzerland and Italy.

Liszt in 1839. A lithograph by Jean Coraboeuf based on a drawing by Dominique Ingres, made for Marie d'Agoult in Rome.



Liszt at the piano. Pastel by Seckert, Berlin 1842.



A matinée at Liszt's. Coloured lithograph by Josef Kriehuber, 1842. Standing behind the piano are Berlioz and Czerny, sitting on the left is Kriehuber, on his right the violinist Heinrich Wilhelm Ernst.



*Everywhere else I perform for an audience,  
however in Hungary I address the nation!"*

Liszt first returned to Hungary at the turn of 1839/40. His concerts in Pressburg, Pest-Buda, Győr and Sopron were greeted with enthusiasm.



Liszt flooded Theatre Square in Pest on 13–18 March, 1838. When Liszt learned about the great flood in Pest he hastened to Vienna where he gave eight benefit concerts and raised 28,000 golden florins for the victims.



The sword of honour was presented to Liszt by six Hungarian noblemen on behalf of the Hungarian nation at his concert on 14 January 1840. Liszt considered it as one of his dearest treasures. After celebrating his 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary as an artist (1873) in Budapest, he donated it to the Hungarian National Museum.



Liszt's portrait in a Hungarian jacket with his name written in Hungarian. Lithograph by Josef Kriehuber, Vienna, 1839.



During his busy schedule of concert tours involving much travel, Liszt kept up his technique by practising on a dummy keyboard in the stage coach.



# The Weimar Composer and Kapellmeister

Liszt abandoned his career as a virtuoso pianist in 1848 to settle down in Weimar and devote his life to composing. Symphonic music came to the forefront. Often it was literature and art that provided the “programme” for his symphonic poems and symphonies. His new companion was Carolyne von Sayn-Wittgenstein, a fervent believer in his genius, who followed him to Weimar in 1848.



Already in 1842 Liszt conducted as a guest conductor. Appointed Kappellmeister in Extraordinary by the Grand Duke of Weimar with an opera house and an orchestra at his disposal, from 1848 onwards he directed the town’s musical life for more than a decade.

Carolyne and her daughter Marie around 1840. Engraving by Fischer. Liszt met the Polish-born Princess Carolyne von Sayn-Wittgenstein (née Iwanowska) in 1847 in Kiev, during a concert tour.



A first edition of the “Faust” Symphony in Liszt’s Budapest music library, and the transcription of the “Dante” Symphony for two pianos. The two symphonies were the climax of Liszt’s orchestral venture, both first performed in 1857.

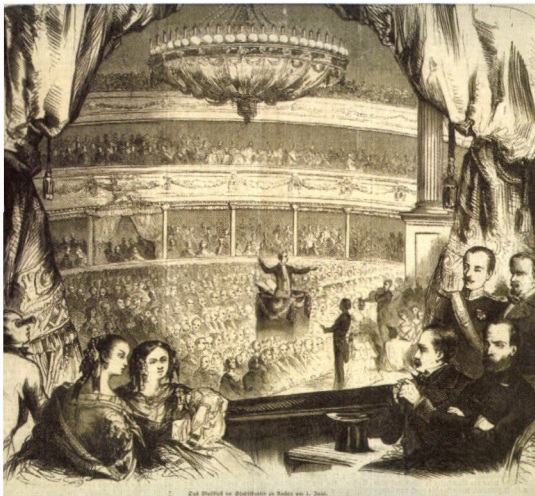


Esztergom (Gran), a lithograph by Sandman based on a drawing by Rudolf Alt. The basilica was consecrated on 31 August 1856 when the “Gran” Mass, Liszt’s first church composition for orchestra, was first performed. Liszt spent a month in Hungary.



# Musician of the Future

Liszt wanted to place Weimar in the vanguard of modern music. Young musicians attracted by Liszt's magnetic presence came to the town where Liszt presented among others works by Berlioz and Schumann and conducted the premiere of *Lohengrin* in 1850. A great many musicians, including some of the best, attended his "masterclasses".



Liszt conducting at the Lower Rhine Music Festival at Aachen, one of his many out-of-town engagements, on 1 June 1857. Contemporary engraving.



Manuscript page of Carl Tausig's transcription of the "Faust" symphony, with Liszt's corrections. Tausig was one of Liszt's most brilliant pupils in Weimar in the 50s.



Liszt in 1857. An oil painting by Wilhelm von Kaulbach.

Courtesy of the Hungarian National Museum, Budapest



## In the Service of Church Music

Liszt was a pious man all his life. In July 1865, he received the four minor orders of the Roman Catholic Church in the Vatican. As he increasingly turned towards church music, a growing number of his religious works united ancient tradition with novel musical forms and harmony in a profoundly individual and personal manner.



Abbé Liszt wearing a cassock, 1865.  
Atelier Canzi & Heller, Pest.



Liszt was closely attached to the Franciscan Order, he joined its secular branch in Pest in 1858. He started composing his cantata on the *Canticle of the Sun* by Saint Francis of Assisi in his Roman years.



Excerpt from the manuscript of the four-hand piano transcription of *Christus*, first performed in Budapest on 9 November 1873, at Liszt's 50<sup>th</sup> artistic jubilee.

Liszt conducting the premiere of the opera *The Legend of Saint Elizabeth* on 15<sup>th</sup> Aug 1865 in the Vigadó in Pest.

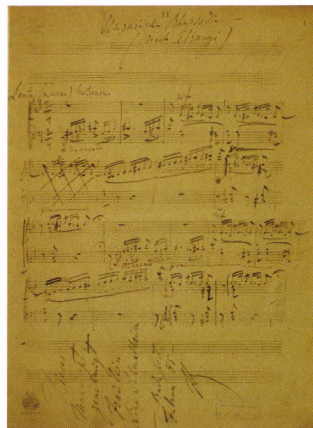


## “Threefold Life”: Weimar, Rome, Budapest

From 1869 onwards Liszt travelled a lot, but spent several months of each year in Rome, Weimar and Budapest. In this busy and wonderfully productive period he was surrounded by pupils, planned music festivals, occasionally conducted orchestras, and played the piano for charitable causes. These years saw the composition of some of his most powerful works, including the oratorio *Christus*. Nostalgia, defiance and bitterness, resignation and mystical faith are equally present in the late works.



This is the Weimar home of the old Liszt, the Hofgärtnerei (the court gardener's house), which the Grand Duke offered Liszt from 1869 on. He is at the right-hand window, surrounded by pupils in front of the house. Photograph by Louis Held, Weimar, 1883



Courtesy of National Széchényi Library, Budapest

The last four Hungarian rhapsodies by Liszt were far removed from the sparkling virtuosity of the rhapsodies published in the 1850s. Hungarian Rhapsody No. 19 based on melodies by Kornél Ábrányi in 1885 is a sparing transcription in which the old Liszt placed the impressive features of his earlier successes as if they were in quotation marks.

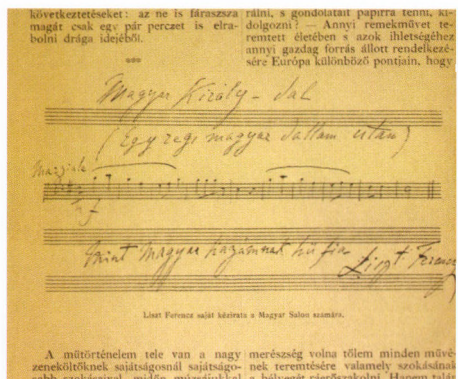
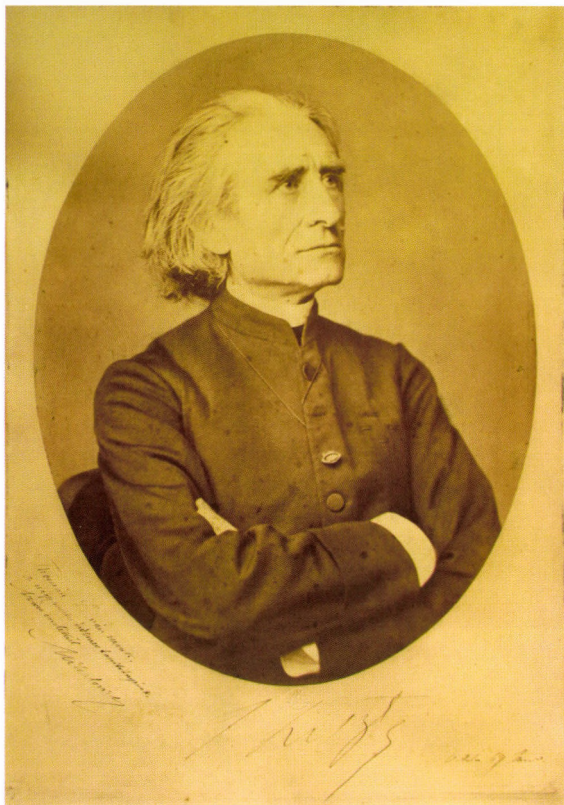


Liszt in the salon opening into the music room where he gave his classes. Photograph by Louis Held, Weimar, 1884



## "A faithful son of my Hungarian homeland"

His mother tongue was German, he preferred to write and speak in French, but he repeatedly declared that he considered himself to be Hungarian. The Academy of Music opened in Budapest in 1875. Liszt became its President and taught the most outstanding students.



"A faithful son of my Hungarian homeland Ferenc Liszt." An autographed page in Hungarian in the March 1886 issue of the journal *Magyar Szalon*.

Liszt's portrait with his autograph signature and date, Munich, October 1876. The picture belonged to Ödön Mihalovich, who passed it on "As a souvenir to István Thomán, the worthy student of the great Maestro". Mihalovich was the director of the Academy of Music from 1887; at the piano faculty he engaged as teachers the Liszt disciples István Thomán and Árpád Szendy.



The entrance of the Liszt Ferenc Academy of Music with the statue of Liszt.

The salon of the last Budapest apartment Liszt at the Old Academy of Music featuring several of his instruments, two pianos among them (Chickering 1880, Bösendorfer 1873). Today the apartment is a museum.

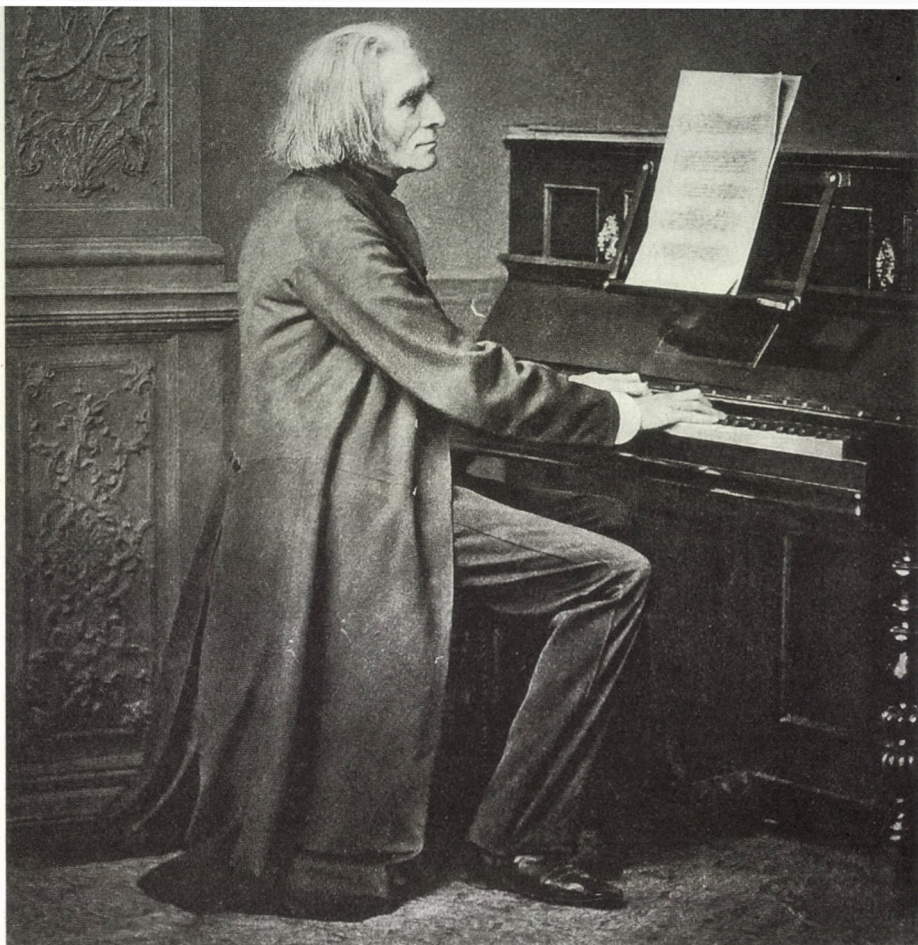


Grand Duke Carl Alexander of Weimar in 1869 to spend a few months of each year in the Grand Duchy without any obligations whatsoever. In the Hofgärtnerei—the court gardener's house, a small two-storey villa placed at his disposal—he was once again at the centre of a vibrant musical life, surrounded by faithful disciples. It was the beginning of what he called his “trifurcated life,” divided between Weimar, Rome and Pest (Budapest after 1873). During his Roman sojourns, he was a frequent guest of Cardinal Gustav Hohenlohe at the Villa d'Este in Tivoli, outside the city. He continued to undertake smaller trips to attend musical events, and sometimes accepted personal invitations as well. His native land came to play an increasingly important role in his wanderings. In 1870, he spent a total of almost nine months in Hungary, some of them at the Szekszárd estate of his closest Hungarian friend, Baron Antal Augusz, whom he had visited earlier too. He conducted at the festive concert commemorating the centennial of Beethoven's birth and organized a series of matinées at the Inner City Presbitery at Pest, where he also lodged until he rented his own apartment in Nádor Street in 1871. The Hungarian press made noises about his permanent relocation to Pest, and his name was linked to the plans for a new national Academy of Music, which was meant to make musical education at the highest level available in Hungary—under the master's spiritual guidance.

In 1871, he was appointed a Royal Councillor with an annual stipend of 4000 Florins, and while this appointment carried no official obligations, Liszt became even more active on behalf of the new Academy. As he wrote to Augusz on 7 May, 1873: “Please allow me that, apart from my regrettable ignorance of the Hungarian language, I remain *Hungarian* in my heart and soul from birth to the grave; consequently, I earnestly wish to further the cause of Hungarian music culture.” His ties to Hungary were further strengthened by the great love shown him at the celebration of his 50-year artistic jubilee in Budapest, in November 1873. On this occasion, his sacred *magnum opus*, the oratorio *Christus*, was conducted (for the first time without cuts) by Hans Richter, the Hungarian-born conductor who would soon achieve world fame. Henrik Gobbi composed a festive Liszt cantata, and the city of Budapest instituted a fellowship in Liszt's honour. In token of his gratitude, Liszt donated some of the most beautiful mementoes of his artistic career to the Hungarian National Museum.

After much adversity, the Royal Hungarian Academy of Music opened its doors on 14 November 1875 on a much more modest scale than originally envisaged. Liszt was named President, Ferenc Erkel served as Director, Kornél Ábrányi as General Secretary; Robert Volkmann and Sándor Nikolits were on the faculty. Erkel's selfless and indefatigable work combined with Liszt's international standing helped the new institution overcome its initial difficulties. The number of students and departments grew steadily. In 1879, the Academy moved from its initial rented premises on Hal (Fish) Square to a





Franz Hanfstaengl: *Liszt at the Piano*, 1869. Photogravure.

Courtesy Liszt Academy of Music: Liszt Ferenc Memorial Museum, Budapest

much larger building on Sugár (Radial) Avenue (the present "Old Academy of Music" at the corner of Andrásy Avenue and Vörösmarty Street). Liszt taught his Hungarian and foreign students free of charge in his service apartment as he did in Weimar, offering group sessions, similarly to today's "masterclasses". His last Budapest apartment is now the Liszt Ferenc Memorial Museum and Research Centre, which houses his collection of instruments, bequeathed to the Academy, as well as his library of books and scores.

**D**uring the period of his "trifurcated life," the style of Liszt's piano music became spare in its simplicity pointing at the same time to the future to an increasing degree. The journey in Volume 3 of *Années de pèlerinage*, which has no subtitle, was an inner, spiritual one. This cycle, written mostly in the 1870s though not published until 1883, contains laments (*The Cypresses of the Villa d'Este I-II*, *Sunt lacrymae rerum*—in the Hungarian mode) as well as a piece of "water music" anticipating musical impressionism (*The Fountains of the Villa*



*d'Este*). The latter piece, because of the epigraph taken from the Gospels, also connects to the religious pieces opening and closing the cycle (*Angelus, Sursum corda*). With its unusual modern sonorities and an almost minimalistic sparseness of means, his sacred music evolved in a direction that the reformers of church music within the Cecilian movement felt unable to follow. Thus several of his sacred works, including *Via crucis*, a meditation on the Passion, remained unperformed and unpublished in his lifetime.

His piano and chamber works from this period are often austere, mournful, intentionally fragmentary, giving the impression of incompleteness (*Nuages gris, Unstern!*, *La lugubre gondola I–II*, *R.W.—Venezia, Am Grabe Richard Wagners*). Others show disillusionment or a sense of irony and wit (*Mephisto Polka, Mephisto Waltzes 2–4*), or indulge in nostalgic retrospection (*Elegies 1–2, Romance oubliée, 4 Valses oubliées, Weihnachtsbaum*). His late pieces in a Hungarian style (*Hungarian Rhapsodies 16–19, 2 Csárdás, Csárdás macabre, Csárdás obstiné, Hungarian Historical Portraits*) present musical Hungarianisms that, formerly treated in full-blooded, pianistically effective ways, now appear in stylised form, pared down, and embedded in novel tonal and harmonic structures. “Is one allowed to write, or listen to, such things?”—he wrote on the margins of the *Csárdás macabre*, which remained unpublished until 1951. His last symphonic poem, *From the Cradle to the Grave* inspired by a drawing by Mihály Zichy, likewise “sublates” (in the Hegelian sense) the legacy of the great symphonic poems and programme symphonies from the Weimar period. Orchestrated with unusual economy, this piece grew from one movement to three in the course of a lengthy compositional process, and shows, through a web of thematic-motivic interrelationships, that the grave is in fact the cradle of eternal life.

For all the praises and accolades he received, Liszt had to put up with some undeserved attacks, suffer neglect as well as face unpleasant situations in his personal life. Many interpreted his late innovations as symptoms of artistic decline. We know from Cosima’s diary that even Wagner, whom Liszt helped at that time as much as he could to realize his Bayreuth vision, failed to comprehend the oratorio *Christus*. Critical voices made themselves heard in Hungary as well. His book *The Gypsies and Their Music in Hungary* (published in French in 1859 and in Hungarian in 1861), written with good intentions and great poetic sense, although lacking sound scholarship, had been vehemently attacked from the start. The second edition, published in 1881, contained crudely anti-Semitic passages inserted by Princess Carolyne von Sayn-Wittgenstein which were diametrically opposed to Liszt’s thinking. They turned a significant part of the Hungarian press against the composer. His *Royal Hungarian Song*, written for the opening of the Royal Opera House in 1884, was not performed on that occasion; the management was concerned that the use of the Rákóczi melody would be offensive to the royal couple, pace the loyal sentiments of the text. It is significant that Liszt chose to write this same



score when his friend and colleague, Kornél Ábrányi, asked him for an autograph manuscript as an illustration of an article he was writing on Liszt. "As a faithful son of my Hungarian homeland, Liszt Ferencz"—the composer wrote underneath the music, in Hungarian.

Liszt, now ailing and with deteriorating sight, undertook one final journey to western Europe in response to persistent invitations. His *Legend of St. Elizabeth* and "Gran" Mass were performed with great success in Paris and London. Mihály Munkácsy painted his portrait in Paris, and invited him to rest at his château in Colpach, Luxembourg. From there, Liszt travelled to Bayreuth, where his daughter Cosima, a widow since 1883, directed the Wagner festival by herself for the first time. Liszt arrived on 21 July 1886, already suffering from a severe cold; he developed pneumonia that claimed his life ten days later. Having left behind several contradictory directions as to where he wished to be buried, his daughter finally had him laid to rest in Bayreuth.

During his difficult final years, Liszt had received much support from loving students and friends, from all parts of Europe and even the United States. Several of them (the pianists August Göllerich, Carl Lachmund, Amy Fay, August Stradal, the organist Alexander Wilhelm Gottschalg, the biographer Lina Ramann and others) left valuable descriptions of Liszt's lessons, his teaching, his views on specific pieces of music. Several Liszt students, both from the Weimar period and from later years, had illustrious careers, including Sophie Menter, Eugen d'Albert, Emil Sauer, Alexander Siloti, Arthur Friedheim, Moritz Rosenthal and Frederick Lamond, and several of them, unlike Liszt himself, lived to make phonograph recordings. The majority carried on the Lisztian tradition as teachers in their own right. His legacy is most alive, perhaps, at the Budapest Academy of Music (now called the Liszt Academy of Music), where Liszt taught from the school's inception until his death. Two of his most outstanding Hungarian students, István Thomán and Árpád Szendy, became professors of piano there. Ernő Dohnányi and Béla Bartók were both Thomán students, and both became professors at the Academy, too. Together with other students of Thomán and Szendy, they transmitted Liszt's legacy which demonstrably lives on to the present day. Liszt's influence on younger composers was equally important. His encouragement and practical support helped the early careers of Smetana, Saint-Saëns, Grieg and the Russian "Five." As Bartók wrote, "Liszt's works had a more fertilizing influence on the following generations than Wagner's... [He] touched upon so many new possibilities in his works, without being able to exhaust them utterly, that he provided an incomparably greater stimulus than Wagner."\* May this bicentennial year contribute to making the diverse aspects of his artistic profile and his rich compositional output known even better than before. 🎹

\* ■ Béla Bartók, "Liszt Problems" (1936). *Essays*, selected and edited by Benjamin Suchoff. Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1976, p. 505.



Alan Walker

# Franz Liszt: A Biographer's Journey\*

Part 2

XIV

**T**here were many reasons for me to go to Rome, quite apart from the pursuit of Daniel Liszt's baptismal records. Liszt had lived there for eight consecutive years (1861–1869), and for the last seventeen years of his life (1869–86) he had with one or two exceptions established his winter quarters there. His various residences had included the Santa Francesca Romana; an apartment on the Via della Purificazione near the Piazza di Spagna; and a monastic cell in the Madonna del Rosario on the Monte Mario. It was an essential part of what I earlier called 'the geography of biography' to visit such places. I also wanted to become acquainted with the Church of San Carlo al Corso, where Liszt and Princess Carolyne von Sayn-Wittgenstein had planned to marry on 22 October 1861, his fiftieth birthday, only to have their hopes dashed by a dramatic, last-minute intervention by the Vatican. Every student of the composer's life knows this story, but the main outlines are worth repeating because they are connected at a hundred different points to Rome and its clerics, both past and present, as I was about to discover.

Liszt and Carolyne had first met in Kiev, in the early spring of 1847. The 28-year-old princess, a devout Catholic, was married with a 10-year-old daughter.

\* ■ Part 1 of this memoir ended with the discovery of Daniel Liszt's privately printed obituary notice in the Goethe-Schiller archive there. The paper-trail now leads Alan Walker to Rome and the Vatican.

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At the time of her encounter with Liszt, however, she was separated from her Protestant husband, Prince Nicholas von Sayn-Wittgenstein. Liszt's earlier biographers have not been kind to Carolyne, and have seen in her an easy target for caricature. Emile Haraszti depicted her as a Baba Yaga, a witch, a spider even, spinning the intricate web that was to hold Liszt a prisoner for life. Ernest Newman called her a 'half-cracked blue-stocking' and 'a religious bigot'. Other writers have been still less complimentary. All were saying (with a certainty not unusual among Liszt biographers) that they knew better than Liszt himself what was good for him. They conveniently overlooked the fact that Liszt declared many times that he loved her, and wanted to call her his wife. Within months of getting to know Liszt and falling in love with him, the princess had already determined to join him in Weimar. Before setting out for Germany she travelled to St. Petersburg to register some necessary legal papers with the Catholic Consistory there, and entered a formal plea for the annulment of her marriage. Her case rested on *vis et metu*—force and violence—her complaint being that she was only 17 years old at the time of her marriage, and that her father had forced her into matrimony. These were serious charges which, if true, would have violated the sanctity of the marriage bond, and provided grounds for its dissolution. Witnesses were called to testify to the fact that on the eve of the marriage they had seen Carolyne weeping, coerced by her father to make her submit to the wedding. Both Carolyne and Liszt believed that it was only a matter of months before the annulment would be granted and they would be free to marry. Alas for Carolyne, her vast wealth (she had inherited extensive areas of land in Polish Ukraine, and employed 30,000 serfs to help her run her estates) had turned her into a prisoner of the Wittgensteins. This titled but impoverished family was not about to give up such treasure without a fight, and they resisted every attempt on Carolyne's part to secure her freedom. The case dragged on for twelve years, was heard by four Consistories in Russia and Ukraine, and finally ended up at the Vatican where it was reviewed on appeal by a specially convened Holy Congregation of Cardinals. Carolyne actually left Weimar and moved to Rome in May 1859 in order to pursue her case in person through the corridors of the Vatican.

Every Liszt biographer provides the broad outlines of this unusual story, but without knowing any of the interior details they are obliged to leave it tantalizingly incomplete. Where were the documents? Were the charges of *vis et metu* ever proven? Was the annulment ever granted? If so, why did the wedding not take place? Until recently no one knew the answers to any of these questions, because (as was about to emerge in the course of my research) the documents in Carolyne's annulment file lay buried in the Secret Archives of the Vatican. And until 1985, when I first turned up there and asked to see them, the Vatican had denied all knowledge of their existence.

On my first morning in Rome, I set off in search of the church of San Luigi de' Francesi and Daniel's baptismal certificate, but on impulse I decided first to



visit the church of San Carlo al Corso. It was a fateful decision that was to change the entire course of my research. When I entered San Carlo the parish priest was hearing confession; so I took the chance to explore the venerable building, walked towards the altar, and tried to re-construct in my imagination the drama that had unfolded there on the evening of 21 October 1861, when word had finally reached Father Francesco Morelli, the parish priest at that time, that Carolyne's wedding to Liszt would have to be postponed. The reasons given to Morelli by Cardinal Caterini, the Prefect of the Holy Congregation, were indeed serious. The Wittgenstein family, in a last-ditch attempt to prevent Carolyne from marrying Liszt, had charged her with obtain-

ing her annulment through perjured evidence. Her case would have to be re-considered. My musings were interrupted by Morelli's present-day successor, who emerged from the confessional and now came forward to introduce himself. He was a slightly-built, elderly man, with graying hair, not tall, but with perpetually smiling eyes. I had no idea in what language he might address me, so I was pleasantly surprised when he shook my hand and said in a light Irish accent, 'I am Father John Hayes, and I am the parish priest of San Carlo al Corso. How can I help you?' We had a very long conversation that morning, the first of several about Liszt and Carolyne and the important role of the Catholic Church in their lives. Father Hayes then turned to me and said, 'You ought to meet my colleague Monsignor John Hanly, Head of the Irish Seminary. He will be able to put you in touch with the people you need to consult. I will telephone him, tell him that you are in Rome, and would like to see him.' That was some of the best advice I ever received.

Later that day I found myself at the church of San Luigi de' Francesi, inquiring after Daniel's birth certificate. The information I received there was a major setback. All the parish records across the city, containing details of births, deaths and marriages, had long since been transferred to the Vicariato di Roma, near San Giovanni in Laterano, as part of a process of centralization begun in the nineteenth century. It was there that I would have to continue my search.



*A hitherto unpublished portrait of Carolyne von Sayn-Wittgenstein by the French painter Ernest Hebert (1817-1908). Private Austrian Collection*



The chief archivist of the Vicariato di Roma was Monsignor Gabriele Crognale, a cold, grave-looking man who received me less than kindly. He was a Catholic scholar of the old school, someone who took himself and his position so seriously that he had come to regard the many documents under his control as an extension of his personal library. He left me sitting in his office while he fetched Daniel Liszt's file from the inner recesses of the archive. He knew exactly where to go because I had provided him with Daniel's name, his date of birth, and even the address at which the infant had been born in Rome.<sup>1</sup> During the Monsignor's temporary absence I could not help noticing that the pens on his desk were all lined up neatly, at right angles to the front of the desk, their nibs all pointing in the same direction. The circular rug on the floor had a number of loose tassels, each one equidistant from the others, like the spokes of a wheel describing an exact circumference. There were tomes bound in tooled leather, neatly standing to attention on the bookshelves, like sentries on duty. Nothing appeared to disturb the geometry of this inner sanctum. It was a harbinger of things to come. Monsignor Crognale returned to his desk bearing a look even graver than the one with which he had left me a few moments before. In his hands was a file. 'I cannot show you this file,' he said. 'It is marked "Secret"'. I was stunned. How could a birth certificate bearing the name, the date of birth, and the natal address of the son of a well-known musician be marked 'secret'? 'It is not the birth certificate, that is the problem', murmured the Monsignor. 'There are other documents attached to this file that cannot be inspected'. 'What documents?' I inquired. The Monsignor released an inconsequential murmur. 'Why are they secret?' I persisted. Another inconsequential murmur. The conversation was rapidly sliding to a halt and I realized that I would have to appeal to a higher power. As I left Monsignor Crognale's office, almost empty-handed, he allowed himself an enigmatic smile. I walked away from the Vicariato in the general direction of San Giovanni in Laterano and I, too, allowed myself a smile. I had noted the number of the file on Crognale's desk. It was marked 'N. 4477 L/41'. I was making progress.

Because the Irish Seminary lay but a short distance from the Vicariato, I decided to go there unannounced and enlist the help of its Head, Monsignor John Hanly. By the time I walked into his office, a mere thirty minutes later, he knew all about me and my project. His colleague and fellow Irishman, the aforementioned Father John Hayes of San Carlo al Corso, had proved as good as his word and had alerted him to my impending arrival. Monsignor Hanly was familiar enough with the main outlines of Liszt's life to hold a general

1 ■ On 9 May 1839, in apartments rented by Liszt and Marie d'Agoult on the via della Purificazione, within the parish of San Luigi de' Francesi.



conversation with me about the composer, but it was only when I imparted to him the full story of the mystery surrounding Liszt's thwarted marriage to Carolyne, together with the role of the Catholic church in it, that the detective in him was aroused.

I now pulled out all the stops. I pointed out to Monsignor Hanly over a third cup of coffee that a possible clue to unravelling the mystery lay within half-a-mile of his office, in the Vicariato, under the baleful watch of Monsignor Crognale, who had refused to let me handle the 'secret' file containing Daniel's birth certificate. Monsignor Hanly rose to the occasion, and remarked, 'I think we can resolve this issue. Meet me tomorrow morning at the Vicariato.' This was indeed good news. An Irish cleric had taken up the cause of an English biographer writing the life of a Hungarian composer whose attempts to marry a Polish princess were presently being covered up by an Italian archivist. It was almost too much to contemplate. I went back to my hotel, the 'Piccadilly', a short distance away on the Via Magna Grecia, for a much-needed siesta.

The following morning Monsignor Hanly was waiting for me outside the Vicariato, and together we marched over to Monsignor Crognale's office. Forewarned of our visit, our Chief Archivist had the file marked 'N. 4477 L/41' on his desk, together with a defensive look on his face. The two monsignors now started to address one another in Italian so rapid that I caught only a few fleeting words, '*segreto*', '*prinzipessa*', '*Wittgenstein*', and '*sposolizio*' among them. There were two *crescendos* and at least one *accelerando* along that bumpy way. At one point in the dialogue I saw Crognale's knuckles turn white. There was a pause, and Monsignor Hanly turned to me with a beam, and said, 'We have reached a compromise. The documents can be copied by me, but not by you'. These were Irish code-words, meant to communicate the glad tidings that I could have total access to the file the moment it came into his possession.

Back at the Irish Seminary, with the precious photocopies in my hand, it became clear why the file attached to Daniel's birth certificate was marked 'secret'. Aside from the certificate itself (about which more presently), it contained seven documents relating to the forthcoming nuptials of Carolyne and Liszt. The most important was a copy of the decree of annulment of Carolyne's marriage to Prince Nicholas, issued by the Holy Congregation of Cardinals, and dated 8 January 1861. This was a major discovery. No one in modern times had seen this document. Many Liszt scholars had long since concluded that the absence of a marriage between Liszt and Carolyne proved that an annulment had never been granted. But here it was. There was also an instrument of interrogation (*Interrogatoria Facienda*), indicating that both Liszt and Carolyne had been questioned by the Cardinal Vicar of Rome, on 20 October 1861, to determine whether or not there were legal impediments barring their union. To this were attached affidavits, signed by both Liszt and Carolyne, that they had truthfully answered all questions and were free to marry



# INTERROGATORIA FACIENDA

*pro examine illorum Testium, qui inducuntur pro contrahendis Matrimonis in Curia Etni et Rñi Domini Card. Urbis Vicarii, et in primis monendi erunt Examinandi de gravitate juramenti in hoc praesertim negotio pertimescendi, in quo Divina simul, et humana Majestas laeditur, ob rei de qua tractatur, importantiam, et gravitatem, et quod imminet poena Tritemium, deponenti falsum.*

Die

P.ro

*Franco Liszt  
Carolina Iwanowska*

Coram Rmo Domino Deputato examin

fuit per me in Officio mei

cogniti

cui delato juramento veritatis dicenda

deposuit.

prout testis etc. juravit dixit, ac pro veritate

1. Monit de vi, et importantia juramenti ac de poenis perjurii. Rite recteque respondit.

2. Interrog. de nomine, cognomine, patre, patria, solate, exercitio, et habitatione.

3. An sit Civis, vel Exterus, et quatenus sit Exterus, a quanto tempore est in loco, in quo Testis ipse deponit.

4. An ad examen accesserit sponte vel requisitus. Si dixit accesserit sponte a nemine requisitus dimittitur, quia praesumitur mendax. Si vero dixit accesserit requisitus. Interrogatur a quo vel a quibus, ubi, quando, quomodo, coram quibus, et quatenus fuerit requisitus, et an sciat adesse aliquod impedimentum inter contrahere volentes.

5. An sibi pro hoc testimonio ferendo fuerit aliquid datum, promissum, remissum, vel oblatum a Contrahere volentibus, vel ab alio ipsorum nomine.

6. An cognoscat ipsos contrahere volentes, et a quanto tempore; in quo loco, qua occasione, et cujus qualitate, vel conditione existant.

Si responderit negative Testis dimittitur. Si vero affirmative:

7. An contrahere volentes sint Civis, vel Exteri.

8. Sub quo Parochia hactenus contrahere volentes habitavit, vel habitent de praesenti.

*An instrument of interrogation bearing the names of Liszt and Carolyne, dated 20 October 1861, in which the penalties for bearing false witness are set forth.*

these offspring, daughter and grandchild, to be regarded as illegitimate? Moreover, the ownership of the massive dowry that had passed to Princess Marie at the time of her marriage could have been contested later on by any 'legitimate' child born to Liszt and Carolyne. As we now know, this was part of the devilish argument that the Wittgensteins and the Hohenlohes deployed against Carolyne, making it agonizingly difficult for her to re-marry. 'But what relevance has that today?' I persisted. 'Why should such a case be kept secret?' 'According to Monsignor Crognale,' Monsignor Hanly observed quietly, doubtless wishing to place some distance between himself and the argument he was about to advance, 'there are descendants of the Wittgensteins still alive in Rome today, who might protest if the case were to be re-opened, even

one another. These, too, were major discoveries.<sup>2</sup> But why had the marriage not taken place? And why should such a file be shrouded in secrecy? Monsignor Hanly now summed up for me his animated discussion with Monsignor Crognale, which went far to explain the latter's discomfiture. Annulment cases are never closed. Even after re-marriage, if cause be found that an annulment has been falsely acquired, through perjured testimony for example, the new marriage could be rendered null and void. And children of that annulled marriage could be declared bastards. This last point placed Carolyne's daughter, Princess Marie, in some peril. She had meanwhile married into the powerful Hohenlohe family and had already produced a first grandchild for Carolyne. Were

2 ■ These documents were published in the second volume of my Liszt biography as "Appendix II: The Vatican's Marriage-file on Liszt and Carolyne Iwanowska", pp. 566–80. The interrogation is of more than passing interest. It is the only known occasion when Liszt swore before witnesses that it was his solemn intention to marry Carolyne. Both Carolyne and Liszt were cautioned as to the gravity of the oaths they were taking. The penalties for perjury were severe, and not only included excommunication but a long term in prison as well.



posthumously'. 'But it all happened 120 years ago,' I protested. The Monsignor glanced at me with friendly condescension, and putting on his best Irish brogue observed, 'In the eyes of the Roman Catholic Church, 120 years is but a grain of sand in the hourglass of time.' I retired to my hotel once again, resumed my somnolent posture, and considered what had happened.

What had happened, of course, was that Liszt scholarship had changed direction that morning. The documents in file 'N. 4477 L/41' pointed towards an inescapable conclusion. There were archives in the Vatican itself that recorded in detail Carolyne's long struggle to secure her annulment, the granting of which was no longer in doubt. What neither Monsignor Hanly nor I knew at that moment was that the paper-trail would lead inexorably to some sealed documents containing charges of blackmail, fraud, perjury and bribery. And since the names of prominent cardinals were mentioned in that same file, including Cardinal Prospero Caterini, the President of the Holy Congregation, these clerics, too, would surely have some sensitive archival material in the Vatican pertaining to Carolyne's case, which they would prefer the world not to see. And so it proved.

## XVI

I was now confronted with the daunting prospect of working in the Vatican's Secret Archives, headed by a bureaucracy that had many times denied all knowledge of the existence of Carolyne's annulment. What would I find?

As I approached the gates of the Vatican, I was challenged by a soldier of the Swiss Guard, who was decked out in full medieval regalia. I had hitherto regarded these symbols of Papal authority as mere tourist attractions, and had forgotten that they retained the power to bar one from entering the Vatican, a self-governing rump state which had been carved out of the Eternal City after the church had lost its temporal power, together with all its Italian provinces—Romagna, Umbria, The Marches, Sabina and Emilia—in 1871, territories over which the popes had ruled as sovereign monarchs for centuries. Every schoolboy knows that Garibaldi had unified Italy by force of arms and made it possible for King Victor Emmanuel I to ascend the throne. But the scholar in me recalled something else. Pope Pius IX had remained trapped inside the Vatican, a prisoner for the rest of his life, for refusing to submit to the new Government now in charge beyond his shrunken borders, some of whose members he excommunicated. Liszt, too, had been peripherally affected by this human drama through his close friendship with Pius IX. Such were the thoughts that flashed through my mind as the Swiss Guard approached me for my credentials. These had been provided by the good people at the Canadian Academic Centre, and after a routine inspection and a few questions I was directed towards the building that housed the Vatican's Secret Archives.



Although it was only 9:30 am, a dozen or so scholars were already working in the library when I got there. The atmosphere was hushed. As I took my place at a desk near a side door, I could not help noticing a distinguished looking cleric sitting to my right on a slightly raised dais, which afforded him a clear view of everyone else in the room. It seemed to be his job to keep the rest of us under scrutiny as we handled the precious archival documents brought to us by the staff. I had no idea at that time who he was. It was only later in the day that I learned I was being scrutinized by Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, who, as everyone knows, was later to be elected Pope Benedict XVI. I do not know whether fortune smiled on my work that day because it was being conducted under the gaze of a future pope, but within a couple of hours a file of forty documents had reached my desk from the papers of Cardinal Antonino De Luca, part of the vast Archive of the Nunciature of Vienna. The file bore the tell-tale description, *Special Annex: The Matrimonial Case of Wittgenstein versus Iwanowska*. I had struck gold.

Cardinal De Luca's papers confirmed three things:

(a) It was Liszt's firm resolve to marry Princess Carolyne; he had even attached his signature to a document testifying that no legal impediment stood in the way of his nuptials with Carolyne;

(b) He did not abandon her at the altar—a myth perpetuated by the popular biographies;

(c) The decree of annulment had indeed been issued by the Holy Congregation of Cardinals and upheld on appeal by Pius IX himself.

Any one of these conclusions would have given Liszt's biographers pause for thought. Taken together, they called for nothing less than a major re-writing of the story of Liszt's life, at least that part of it involving his relationship with Carolyne. As I was enjoying my 'Eureka moment', someone tapped me on the shoulder. It was Monsignor Hanly, who had abandoned the Irish College for a couple of hours in order to check on my scholarly progress in the Library. 'You look as if you need a drink', he whispered, doubtless observing the state of discombobulation into which my recent discoveries had thrown me. 'You must be a thought-reader', I whispered back. 'But where do you find a drink in the Vatican Library in the middle of the day?' 'Follow me,' came the confident reply. We left through a side-door close to where I was sitting, and after nodding respectfully in the direction of Cardinal Ratzinger, who still occupied his coign of vantage, we found ourselves in a beautiful walled garden, walking along a path which led to an oak door set within the wall itself.

The door opened onto a completely different world. A number of high-ranking clerics were sitting at tables smoking cigarettes, drinking wine and engaged in loud and animated conversation in a variety of tongues about the affairs of the day. Were these the same people who generated the serene atmosphere I had just experienced in the Library? It seems that they were. We



joined them, and after a couple of powerful libations and some introductions from Monsignor Hanly, a group of us started to chat about the significance of the papers on my desk, and the role of Cardinal De Luca in Carolyne's annulment procedure. I have always been constitutionally incapable of working in a team, and have absolutely no empathy with musicologists who do their research in groups. On this occasion, however, there were some real advantages to being in a crowd. The blue haze that hovered gently above our heads was not tobacco smoke; it consisted of the fumes generated from five minds in overdrive as two monsignors, two parish priests and one biographer applied their brains to the ticklish questions arising from that morning's discovery. All were agreed on two things: (1) Cardinal De Luca's papers pointed to the certain existence of still more documents in the Vatican Archives, probably from Carolyne's own diocese of Zhitomir, in Ukraine; and (2) the Zhitomir papers would almost certainly be uncatalogued. This last point was troubling news which called for a further round of consoling drinks, and led to some disquieting thoughts about where I might have to go from here. Most of the documents were in Latin, all of them handwritten by various scribes attached to the Nunciature in Vienna. I had no knowledge of Latin and would obviously require help in deciphering the texts.

Some solutions simply await their problems. And so it was here. One of my close friends and professorial colleagues in Canada was Dr. Gabriele Erasmi, Professor of Modern Languages at McMaster University, and a classicist by training. He already knew about my Liszt biography-in-progress, and when I approached him for help with 'the Vatican Project', he readily agreed. I showed him the batch of documents from Cardinal De Luca's archive, photocopies of which I had brought back with me, and was bowled over when he proceeded to read them with the same nonchalant fluency as if he were browsing through the local newspapers. The Vatican documents had arrived home. It was clear that Gabriele was better equipped than I to return to the Vatican, and search for whatever uncatalogued documents were still languishing on mile after endless mile of shelving. The plan was simple. If the Zhitomir archives proved to be fruitful, we agreed that he would telegraph me with a single word. That word was 'Bonanza'.

Gabriele set off for Rome and a silence of several days ensued. I then received a cable containing one word: 'Bingo'. What could it mean? Was 'bingo' better than 'bonanza'? I was thrown into a state of disarray by this confused signal, sent in the excitement of the moment. Gabriele returned with more information than either of us could have hoped for. The Zhitomir archives contained 44 further documents pertaining to Carolyne's annulment case. No one had seen them in more than 120 years. They revealed the complete history of her epic 12-year battle with the Church and with the Wittgenstein family, forced on her by her determination to marry Liszt. This was indeed progress.



The result of my frictionless collaboration with Gabriele was the publication of our book, *Liszt, Carolyne, and the Vatican: The Story of a Thwarted Marriage, as It Emerges from the Original Church Documents*. The documents are mostly in Latin, with English translations by Gabriele, and are 'topped and tailed' with a Prologue and an Epilogue by me, presenting the historical context. At the risk of appearing immodest I believe that this book made a difference. Fact is sometimes stranger than fiction. The Vatican documents make even the best of the earlier narratives, however colourful, look threadbare by comparison. One thing these documents do not do is to explain why Carolyne's marriage to Liszt did not take place, the granting of the annulment notwithstanding. For that we have to go to Carolyne's unpublished correspondence in the Weimar and the Burgenland archives in Eisenstadt. There we make the astonishing discovery that Carolyne herself lost heart, unable to face the prospect of endless litigation threatened by the Wittgensteins and the Hohenlohes. And when Prince Nicholas died, rendering the entire question of an annulment null and void, Carolyne actually refused to marry Liszt 'as soon as that refusal became possible for me'.<sup>3</sup> With this assertion she snatched defeat from the jaws of victory. The Grand Duke of Weimar was as puzzled as everyone else by this turn of events, and asked Liszt about it. 'The reason either lies in you or in her', he observed shrewdly. Liszt fell back on philosophy, quoting Pascal. 'The heart has its reasons, of which reason knows nothing.'<sup>4</sup>

## XVII

**A**nd what of Daniel's birth certificate, the pursuit of which had brought me to Rome in the first place? By now, the document had been marginalized when set beside what had meanwhile come to light. But it, too, contained a few surprises, including the fact that the boy had been given no fewer than four names by his parents: Daniel, Henricus, Franciscus, Joseph—the second one after his godfather the painter Henri Lehmann, the third after his father, and the fourth after his parish priest, Joseph Graziani.<sup>5</sup> It is true that it would have been better for me to have inserted this birth certificate at the appropriate juncture in Volume One, like the birth certificates of Liszt's other children, Blandine and Cosima, which were already known to scholars. But we live in an imperfect world. The vagaries of research do not always accommodate the

3 ■ Meanwhile published in *Franz Liszt und sein Kreis in Briefen und Dokumenten aus den Beständen des Burgenländischen Landesmuseums*, p. 68. Ed. by Mária P. Eckhardt and Cornelia Knotik. Eisenstadt, 1983.

4 ■ *Briefwechsel zwischen Franz Liszt und Carl Alexander, Grossherzog von Sachsen*, p. 128. Ed. by La Mara. Leipzig, 1909.

5 ■ The document was first published by me in my article "A Boy Named Daniel", *The New Hungarian Quarterly*, vol. 27, no. 102 (Autumn 1986). Later it was incorporated into the second volume of my Liszt biography, pp. 581–82.



hapless biographer. I was grateful to have had the opportunity to publish Daniel's birth certificate at all.

The story of Daniel is not quite ended. In a further pursuit of the 'geography of biography' I felt it incumbent on me to visit his grave. I knew that he was buried in the Catholic cemetery in what was then East Berlin; but that cemetery is large and I had but scant information on which to base my search. The main piece of evidence in my possession was an old photograph, taken before World War II, showing the large white cross of stone that Liszt had erected for his son, and bearing the simple inscription, 'Daniel Liszt, born in Rome 9 May 1839; died in Berlin, 13 December 1859.' It was surprisingly easy to find the grave, in fact, and after a couple of hours I had absorbed a new reality. The Communists had driven the Berlin Wall right through the cemetery, one side to be used by Catholics from West Berlin and the other by Catholics from East Berlin. In the process, this monument to a mindless bureaucracy had cut across a number of graves, including Daniel's, without regard for the positions of old tombstones. I was perhaps unnecessarily proud of my dramatic observation that, 'Today the Berlin Wall runs through the Catholic cemetery and cuts Daniel's grave in two', a sentence which concludes my chapter on Daniel Liszt in Volume Two (p. 479). Until 1989 that statement was literally true. But then the Wall collapsed, and with it my sentence. The old gravestones were restored to their former positions. I took the earliest opportunity to remove the offending words in a revised paperback edition that appeared six years later. But anyone who possesses the first hardback edition (1989) will find the sentence staring back them, detached from time and place. I like to think that it has turned the volume into a collector's item.

## XVIII

**N**o Liszt biographer can visit Rome without being made aware of the wider significance of the Eternal City and its environs to the composer. After the débâcle of his thwarted marriage, Liszt remained there for eight consecutive years (1861–69), and thereafter returned for most of the winters that remained to him until his death, fifteen years later. Of abiding significance is the monastery of the Madonna del Rosario, where Liszt lived for much of the time in near-isolation, between the years 1863 and 1865, and for a few months in 1867–68. The experience changed his life, and brought him to a new awareness of himself. In order to understand how this happened, we have to go back a few years.

In the late 1850s and early 1860s Liszt had suffered a series of crises, both public and private, that had come close to laying him low. The twelve years he had spent in Weimar were in retrospect regarded by him as a failure. His plans to turn the city into 'The Athens of the North' had crumbled to dust. His music was under constant attack. The critics condemned it as either trivial or



experimental. In December 1858, after he had conducted the premiere performance of Peter Cornelius's opera *The Barber of Baghdad* in the Weimar Theatre, a demonstration was mounted against the work. For Liszt it was the last straw and he tendered his resignation. Personal tragedies followed. In 1859 his son Daniel had died in Berlin, in harrowing circumstances, aged 20, with Liszt at his bedside. The funeral was a bruising experience for Liszt. Just over two years later, in 1862, his daughter Blandine passed away as a result of septicaemia following childbirth, aged 28. Liszt had meanwhile moved to Rome, and he faced the painful task of providing emotional support for Blandine's grieving husband, his son-in-law Emile Ollivier, who was shattered by his wife's premature death. Liszt became old in Rome. He suffered a marked personality change. His sense of boundless optimism temporarily deserted him. He became introspective. His hair turned grey and on his face there appeared the numerous warts with which anyone who has seen photographs of him in later life is familiar. The German historian Gregorovius once caught sight of Liszt in Rome and wrote, 'he is like a burnt out volcano; only the outer walls remain, from which a little ghost-like flame hisses forth.'<sup>6</sup> It is a telling image which captures something of the psychological strain under which he was labouring.

In order to bring some repose into his troubled life Liszt moved into the Madonna del Rosario, which in those days was a near-deserted monastery on the Monte Mario, just outside Rome. Here he lived a life of rustic simplicity, with two or three other clerics. Attached to the monastery was a small church, where Liszt joined the monks for early morning mass. The monastic lifestyle harmonized with his deepest needs. He occupied a small cell on the ground floor at the front of the monastery, with whitewashed walls, whose floor space was a mere fifteen by twelve feet. His only furniture was a wooden bed, a work-table, a bookcase, and a small upright piano with a missing D natural. Liszt called it his 'pianino'<sup>7</sup>. The windows offered a panoramic view of Rome; on one side he could see the dome of St. Peter's shining in the distance, from the other the Albano Hills stretching along the horizon. Here Liszt found the freedom to work without interruption, and also the time in which to meditate. For him these were unheard-of luxuries. He himself expressed it best of all when he wrote, 'My life is simplifying itself, and the Catholic piety of my childhood has become a regular and also a regulating feeling.'<sup>8</sup>

Three weeks after Liszt moved into the Madonna del Rosario, there occurred an event that put this isolated monastery on the map and set the whole of Rome talking. On July 11, 1863, Pope Pius IX visited Liszt in his cell, in the company of his entourage. After chatting briefly to 'my dear Palestrina', the music-loving

6 ■ *Römische Tagebücher*, Stuttgart, 1892. p. 201.

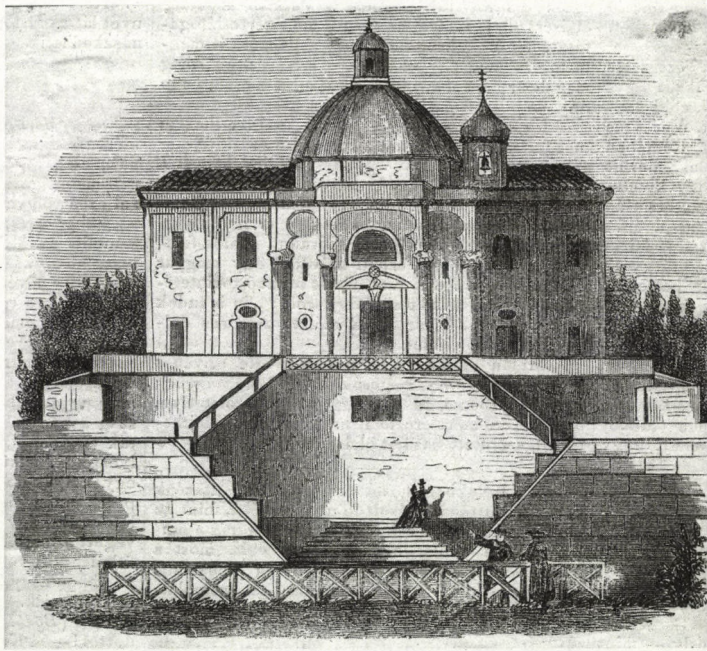
7 ■ It is a chimerical thought that it was on this unlikely instrument that Liszt completed his piano transcriptions of Beethoven's nine symphonies. Imagine a performance of the Ninth Symphony with a missing D natural!

8 ■ *Liszt's Briefe*, vol. 3, p. 161.



pontiff asked Liszt to play something for him. Liszt took his place at the 'pianino' and delivered the first of his two Franciscan Legends, *St. Francis of Assisi Preaching to the Birds*. Then followed a performance of the aria 'Casta diva' from Bellini's opera *Norma*. The pope was so moved by this melody that he sprang to his feet, went to the piano, and in his fine baritone voice sang the aria from memory, with Liszt accompanying. Afterwards he admonished Liszt, 'in the most gracious manner possible' (as Liszt put it), 'to strive after heavenly things in earthly ones, and to use his temporal harmonies as a means of preparing himself for the timeless ones.'<sup>9</sup> Before leaving the monastery he presented Liszt with a ring, and later received him in private audience at the Vatican.

There was much talk in Rome that Liszt was being considered for the job of director of the Sistine Chapel Choir, the most prestigious musical position within the Catholic Church. Liszt was certainly interested in the reform of church music, but there is no evidence that the pope was about to dismiss the present incumbent Salvatore Meluzzi from his post at St. Peter's. Nor is there any reason to suppose that Liszt coveted such a position. He later said, 'I neither expected nor wished for an appointment or title of any kind in Rome.'<sup>10</sup> In fact, Liszt's music was considered by many of Rome's leading clerics to be far too advanced for the taste of the church. Nor could Liszt have been appointed to such a position unless he himself had become a cleric. At that time, in 1863, he had absolutely no intention of joining the clergy. A careful review of his life indicates that when Liszt took up residence at the Madonna del Rosario, he had no other wish than to find a temporary retreat from the sorrows of this world, and re-emerge refreshed. Within two years,



*The monastery of the Madonna del Rosario, one of Liszt's dwellings in Rome. Newspaper engraving.*

*Courtesy Liszt Academy of Music: Liszt Ferenc Memorial Museum, Budapest*

9 ■ Ibid., vol. 2, p. 46.

10 ■ Ibid., vol. 7, p. 73.



however, all that had changed, and Liszt took the step that would define him for the remainder of his life. On April 25, 1865, he received the tonsure and in July of that year he took the four Minor Orders of the Roman Catholic Church—Doorkeeper, Acolyte, Reader, and Exorcist. Henceforth he was known as 'Abbé Liszt'. Liszt himself tells us that his decision to enter the lower clergy 'agreed with all the antecedents of my youth.' He also put the matter rather well when he declared, 'When the monk is already formed within, why not appropriate the outer garment of one?'<sup>11</sup>

## XIX

**A**ll this I knew from my earlier reading. But because the Madonna del Rosario played such a vital role in Liszt's re-emergence into the world, I knew that it would be necessary for me to visit the place in order to experience whatever remained of the atmosphere of those faraway times.

In Liszt's day the monastery was almost derelict, with only two or three monks to keep the place going; but any passing pilgrim could be assured of a bed for the night. Today the monastery is as difficult to breach as a fortress. It is run by an order of Dominican nuns who, much to the general despair, have taken both vows of silence and seclusion. This makes it particularly difficult for scholarship to proceed, because anyone who wishes to visit the Madonna del Rosario will find that there is absolutely no one with whom he can communicate. A closed order that actually refuses to allow itself to be penetrated by the Holy See has little difficulty in remaining impervious to the pleas of itinerant Liszt scholars, however elegant the language. More than one visitor has made the trek from the centre of Rome only to be confronted by locked doors, and has had to content himself with a glance at the marble plaque set into the front wall commemorating Liszt's sojourn there, before catching the next means of transport back to the city.

When I first visited the monastery, in February 1984, I could not help noticing that the caretaker who lived in the adjoining premises possessed permanently damaged vocal cords and could not speak above a whisper. I have often wondered whether the fact that he *could* not speak was regarded as a prerequisite for his job by those who *would* not speak. While that first visit was fruitless, persistence brings its own rewards. The following year I managed to breach the monastery's defences, thanks in large measure to help received from officials at the British Embassy, and I spent several hours exploring this venerable building (during which period the nuns remained cloistered), admiring the view of St. Peter's distant dome just as Liszt himself had done from the window of his cell, a hundred and twenty years earlier. Such

11 ■ *Briefe*, vol. 2, p. 81.



background is irreplaceable. It forever changes the way one hears works like the two Franciscan Legends, to say nothing of the oratorio *Christus*, which was composed in that same cell. The experience taught me afresh the old lesson of all biographical work: unless and until you have seen for yourself where things happen, how and why they happen are likely to remain obscure.

## XX

**W**hen Liszt caught his first glimpse of the Villa d'Este in November 1867, he knew that he had found an artistic haven to which he would frequently want to return. He had been invited there for a brief sojourn by Cardinal Gustav Hohenlohe, who rented the Villa from the Duke of Modena. It lay about fifteen miles from the Eternal City, and commanded impressive views of the surrounding countryside. Its gardens were spectacular, with huge cypress trees and hundreds of splashing fountains. These were the work of the Italian architect Pirro Ligorio, who had been brought in by the Villa's original owner Cardinal Ippolite d'Este, the sixteenth-century governor of Tivoli, for whom the Villa is named. The fountains represented a major feat of hydraulic engineering, because Ligorio managed to divert the river Aniene for his purpose, and through a series of specially created aqueducts and graded waterfalls he created whatever force was necessary to 'drive' the fountains. Although there is no record of the fact, Liszt, like many visitors, surely sat inside the marble chamber of Ligorio's masterpiece, the Fontana dell' Ovato, and contemplated the wall of water rushing over him. During the 1870s, after Liszt had begun to suffer from bouts of insomnia, he would sit in the gardens at night, contemplating the great cypress trees swaying above him and listening to the play of the hundreds of splashing fountains. It was in these surroundings that he was inspired to compose some of the best piano music of his later years, including *Les jeux d'eaux à la Villa d'Este*, and the two Threnodies titled *Aux cyprès de la Villa d'Este*.

Cardinal Hohenlohe occupied the spacious and lavishly furnished ground floor, which also contained an excellent grand piano. Liszt was given a small wing of the Villa for his exclusive use, approached by means of a narrow spiral staircase. An upright piano was somehow hauled up the stairwell and placed in a room with a tiny window that offered a view of the Italian campagna. It was here that Liszt did much of his composing and sometimes his teaching, because his students were happy to make the journey from Rome to Tivoli in order to continue their lessons with him. Both Moriz Rosenthal and Arthur Friedheim left vivid descriptions of their sojourns in Tivoli.

I visited the Villa d'Este a number of times and always marvelled afresh at the beauty of the place. At the same time I lamented the fact that no one had thought to place a permanent memorial to Liszt's tenure there. In the 1990s



the Budapest Liszt Society made good that omission and sent a small contingent of its members from Hungary in order to unveil a marble plaque in honour of the composer's memory. It was secured to the exterior wall, near the main entrance to the Villa. The last time I was there the area had been turned into a market place. About a dozen vendors had erected their stalls along the entire length of the wall, and Liszt's memorial plaque had been totally obscured from view by a booth displaying cheap jewelry. Since the market functioned throughout the entire season, the chief purpose for erecting the plaque was defeated. No one could see it.

After vacating the Madonna del Rosario, Liszt stayed at Tivoli on all his subsequent visits to Rome, until the summer of 1881. In July of that year he fell down the stairs of the Hofgärtnerei in Weimar and sustained several injuries, including one to his right foot which made walking difficult. After that it was no longer so easy for him to negotiate the steep terrain around the Villa d'Este, so he stayed at the Aliberti Hotel whenever he came to Italy, in the heart of the Eternal City.

## XXI

**O**n the other side of Rome, about twenty-five miles to the southeast, lies the ancient city of Albano, nestling on a hillside overlooking Lake Albano. This, too, is a place of pilgrimage for the Liszt biographer, though admittedly an esoteric one. In 1879 Cardinal Hohenlohe had made Liszt an honorary canon of Albano. This distinction lay within Hohenlohe's gift by virtue of the fact that he himself was the Bishop of Albano. The responsibilities attached to the position of honorary canon were minimal, and they involved Liszt in little more than sporadic visits to the Cathedral, in return for which he received a small stipend. In Liszt's time the journey took two-and-a-half hours by horse-drawn coach. I had always wanted to visit Albano in order to inspect for myself certain features of the great basilica of San Pancrazio di Albano where Liszt's induction ceremony had taken place. It was an episode, the details about which Liszt's earlier biographers remained mute. Not until the mid-1980s did I find an opportunity to travel there from Rome by train. My journey took even longer than Liszt's, notwithstanding the century of mechanical progress that was meanwhile supposed to have elapsed. Italian trains never leave on time, and the 'Albano express' not only departed its platform thirty minutes late, but proceeded to stop at every village on its leisurely journey through the rolling countryside, to enable the driver to get out of his cab at certain stations to chat with the locals. But once in Albano, my efforts were rewarded when, during a search through the Cathedral archives, I came across a rare copy of Giuseppe del Pinto's pamphlet 'Francesco Liszt ad Albano', containing eyewitness accounts by Canon Francesco Giorni, historian of Albano, who was present at



Liszt's induction ceremony. For the biographer it rarely gets better than that, and I happily incorporated Giorni's authentic account into the narrative of Volume Three of my biography.

## XXII

I have never been a collector of Lisztiana. The idea of acquiring memorabilia—photographs, letters, manuscripts—was one I always resisted. I took the lofty view that the proper place for such articles is a museum or an archive, where other scholars and even the general public might have ready access to them. Once such materials have passed into private hands they are often lost beyond recall, and scholarship comes to a standstill. Of course, they may re-emerge at an auction house, or show up in a dealer's catalogue at vastly inflated prices, but by then the harm is done. Many archives will no longer be able to afford to buy them, and market forces will henceforth govern their fate. Just how many Liszt manuscripts and letters are out there, floating from one private owner to another, is impossible to verify. To regard such material as a simple source of lucre, like stocks and shares, has always been incomprehensible to me. Most of the people with the money to invest in Lisztiana have no real knowledge of the importance of what they are about to own. They are among those who know the price of everything and the value of nothing. Since 'time turns everything into treasure', there are few pieces of bric-a-brac, be they ever so humble, that will fail to earn a profit for him who is prepared to wait.<sup>12</sup>

Shortly after the final volume of my Liszt biography had appeared, I started to receive communications from a variety of people, offering me everything from Liszt letters and manuscripts to an oil painting of the master. I was even tormented with requests to purchase such items as his cigar stubs and shirt buttons. Quite aside from the question of provenance (how do you prove that a 'Liszt cigar' was ever smoked by Liszt? Or that a stray button was the one that actually fell from his shirt?) I remained steadfast in my earlier resolve not to engage in such traffic.

All that was soon to change. An old musician friend of mine approached me with a Liszt letter for sale. Before I could come out with my standard refusal, he said that I could keep the document for a few weeks before finally making up my mind. He had caught me at a weak moment. A biography that had taken me twenty-five years to write was now finished. I was suffering from the literary

12 ■ In the case of Liszt's letters, the wait need not be all that long. Today the average price of such material is one thousand dollars (U.S.) per page, and rising. Five years ago it was half that amount. That is an excellent return on one's investment. And such letters need not contain much information beyond the confirmation of a dinner engagement or the time of arrival of Liszt's train. For musical compositions in manuscript the price is astronomical; the merest sketch commanding a price of five thousand dollars a page or more, depending on the significance of the work to which it belongs.



equivalent of *post partum* depression. I was, however vile the pun, Liszt-less. In a fatal moment I agreed to become the temporary guardian of that letter. Once it was in my possession I was unable to part with it. For one thing, it had never been published so it had a special aura about it. For another, a holograph has a fascination that has nothing to do with the words or the notes on the page. The pleasure we take in viewing a composer's manuscripts is irreplaceable. It is an infinitely more subtle experience than gazing at the typeset page—which purports to communicate the same information more readily. The holograph reveals character. An entire world lurks beneath the surface of what a more leisurely age used to call 'penmanship'. (How much more seductive is that word than the cold, forbidding term 'rastrology' with which the field of musicology has lately been encumbered.) It is a world that discloses an infinite variety of qualities—hope, joy, haste, languor, suffering, even ecstasy—all of which flow through the pen, jostle for expression on the written page, and quietly await their interpreter. A manuscript, in brief, is a companionable thing. When we confront it, we confront a portion of biography itself. Who wrote it? When and where? Under what circumstances? For whom was it intended? The questions draw one forward on a voyage of perpetual discovery.

I bought the letter. Altogether I was offered, and purchased, about twenty more. I had become the guilty proprietor of a Liszt archive, despite my earlier professed disdain for such a role. It gives me pleasure to report that my conscience eventually came to my rescue, and I donated them all to McMaster University in Canada, where they may now be consulted as part of my personal archives.<sup>13</sup>

## XXIII

**T**here is a general assumption among biographers that once their work is published, and has passed critical scrutiny, the job is finished. It is like sealing the door to the past. Everything has been tidied away, each fact nestles comfortably with the other facts, in its proper compartment. The book awaits its visitor from the future, so to say, secure in the knowledge that this is the way it was. A fine illusion. History marches forward, and history itself can quickly disentangle the fabric of biographical narrative so painfully woven together, rendering it naive, ill-informed, or merely amusing. One example can serve for the others.

I am thinking of the concordance table of towns and cities that I had drawn up in Volume One. Because the map of Europe had been re-drawn at the Treaty of Versailles, I reasoned that the modern reader might have some difficulty in recognizing towns and even entire countries that were known by different names in the nineteenth century. Pressburg, formerly in the Austro-Hungarian

13 ■ Alan Walker Collection, Box 30.



Empire, was now Bratislava in the newly-created state of Czechoslovakia. Chemnitz, formerly in Saxony, was now Karl Marx Stadt in the newly-created German Democratic Republic. Danzig, formerly in Prussia, was now Gdansk in a resurrected Poland. Prussia itself had long since ceased to exist. I set to work, little knowing that world events were about to dismantle much of what I had constructed. In the 1990s the borders of Europe changed yet again, and some of the place names as well. Czechoslovakia broke apart and became two states, the Czech Republic and the Republic of Slovakia respectively. The two Germanys were re-united and the name Karl Marx Stadt was confined to the scrap-heap of history, the city reverting to its traditional name of Chemnitz. Yugoslavia exploded. The USSR disintegrated.

I was glad that the damage to my work was not greater. I even smiled when someone told me that books such as mine should only appear in a second edition. The experience taught me that the past is affected by the future in ways we cannot foresee. The past is a foreign country: they do things differently there.

## XXIV

**M**y Liszt biography did exceptionally well in terms of the reviews it garnered. Sixty reviews in five languages is an excellent tally by any standards. Some of them were so laudatory that my friends, tongue-in-cheek, inquired if I had written them myself, or perhaps even purchased them. It might therefore seem churlish to complain of the 'clinkers' that occasionally turned up to spoil my day. I have never met an author who is indifferent to reviews, although I have met many who claim to be. Some authors are so bruised by negative criticism, in fact, that they go to bed for a week, unable to function. Others, hardier souls, fight fire with fire. Their incendiary replies are there for all to see, week after week, in the 'Letters to the Editor' columns in the *New York Times Book Review*, the *London Review of Books*, and suchlike. A good review, on the other hand, can produce euphoria. The author, carried away on a tide of joy, may even have it enlarged, laminated and framed. Both conditions are unrealistic because a review is simply the expression of a personal opinion, however expressed. Where is the author who shreds his good reviews and laminates his bad ones? Such reactions stem from what I call the 'Mirror, mirror, on the wall' syndrome, an inability to separate the self-love woven into the piece from the piece itself. The answer to the question in the next line of that same stanza, 'Who is the fairest of us all?' is too obvious and stares us in the face. It is the worm that eats at the heart of the most seemingly objective of scientific debates.

This opens up a vast topic about which much could be written. It has always perplexed me that there are so many 'experts' out there, people who wait until publication and then emerge from the woodwork in order to tell you how you might have improved your book. Where were they when you needed them?



Goethe once declared that 'every word a man utters provokes the opposite opinion.' Perhaps he was thinking of *his* reviews. No one can possibly object to being taken to task over factual matters, of course, although it is disconcerting to be reprimanded for not knowing the proper range of the 'needle gun' that the Germans used to bombard the French during the Franco-Prussian War of 1870; or for not knowing that Breitkopf & Härtel had mistakenly engraved bar 169 twice in the first movement of Liszt's transcription of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony; or for not knowing that Liszt may have suffered from Marfan's Syndrome. I had, after all, in dogged pursuit of 'the holiness of the minute particular', provided the name of Liszt's cat (Esmeralda); the brand of Princess Carolyne's cigars (Minghetti, but double the length and strengthened with iron filings); and the precise dimensions of the tiny schoolroom in which the eight-year-old Liszt was educated in his natal village of Raiding (20 feet x 14 feet). But for some reviewers such bounty is never enough. There are people in this world who carry their wrangles with them. Even before they have read your book they are primed to disagree with it. They may not like Liszt, they may not like his music, they certainly do not like you. The axe, in brief, is already poised, waiting to fall. To abandon the poetry of it all and put the matter plainly, anyone could write their reviews for them since their pre-formed opinions have determined the outcome before pen is ever applied to paper.

There is one review that I want to mention here, not because it was critical (it was in fact complimentary), but because it unwittingly raised a question of fundamental importance to all biographers, and even to the art of biography itself. It was written by Harold Schonberg of the *New York Times* who, many years later, was to become a good musical friend. Schonberg told his readers that I had fallen in love with my subject. The loss of objectivity brought about by too close an involvement with my topic, Schonberg implied, rendered my conclusions suspect. "Walker can see nothing but good in his subject," he wrote. In brief, my work lacked balance.

Where Schonberg went wrong, like many another intelligent reviewer before him, was to confuse 'lack of balance' with '*point* of balance'. The difference is profound, and it is worth dwelling on. When a biographer is informed that his narrative lacks balance, he is being told that he has emphasized the positive things at the expense of the negative ones; or that he has emphasized the negative things at the expense of the positive ones. Is he supposed to draw up a list, and find a good thing for every bad thing he says about his subject, in order to achieve that desired 'rounded picture' and convince the reader of his impartiality? Such criticism overlooks a larger issue.

If I were to write a life of St. Francis of Assisi, and had to find a negative thing to say for every positive one that I wished to record, the narrative might be internally 'balanced' but it would not reflect reality. The sources themselves would direct me towards the 'saintly' end of the moral spectrum. By the same



token, if I were to write a life of Adolf Hitler, and had to find a positive thing to say for every negative one that I wrote, the narrative once more might be 'balanced', but it would be untruthful to the historical record. The sources would drive me this time towards the 'evil' end of that same moral spectrum. The only question that really matters in biographical work is how closely the narrative reflects reality. Paradoxically, the question of 'balance' cannot reasonably be discussed until the 'point of balance' has been found. For the rest, the wise biographer is neither judge nor jury. At his best he plays counsel for the defence, he is an advocate. Some biographers play counsel for the prosecution, but it is uphill work. There is a psychological truth involved here that cannot be denied. Advocacy opens doors, prosecution closes them. The subject soon knows that you wish him harm, even though he may have been dead for two centuries, and you may bang on his door till Kingdom Come, but it will not be opened onto you.

## XXV

**B**y 1996 my Liszt biography was essentially finished, but my Liszt Odyssey went on. Aside from publishing two further books on Liszt<sup>14</sup>, which probe rather more deeply than the biography itself into some specific areas of the composer's life and work, I had already founded the Great Romantics Festival in 1994, an annual celebration of the music of Liszt and his contemporaries which I still direct for the City of Hamilton (Ontario) and the American Liszt Society. A number of prominent Hungarian scholars and artists have graced our platform across the years, including Klára Hamburger, Mária Eckhardt, Dezső Legány, Tamás Klenjánszky, János Kárpáti, and István Lantos. The festival of 1996 was particularly noteworthy. A motion was passed by the City Council to re-name one of Hamilton's downtown streets 'Franz Liszt Avenue'. The Hungarian ambassador to Canada, His Excellency Sándor Papp, came down from Ottawa for the unveiling ceremony, which was attended by many Hungarians from the Diaspora who have settled in Southern Ontario. I believe that it is the only thoroughfare in the whole of North America to bear Liszt's name.

As I reflect on the 25 years I spent toiling over my Liszt biography, I am often reminded of a poem by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, who met Liszt in Rome on New Year's Eve, 1868. It was dusk when Longfellow arrived at the door of the monastery of Santa Francesca Romana, in the company of the American painter George Healy. They pulled on the bell-rope and waited in the vestibule. Eventually Liszt appeared in the garb of an Abbé, his face illuminated against the darkness by a lighted candlestick he held aloft. Longfellow was temporarily transfixed by the image, turned to Healy and let out an involuntary whisper:

14 ■ *The Death of Franz Liszt* (2002) and *Reflections on Liszt* (2005).



'Mr. Healy, you must paint that for me!' And Healy did. His painting today hangs in the Longfellow House in Cambridge, Massachusetts (see illustration on the back cover). I do not know if the following verses from Longfellow's poem 'A Psalm of Life' were directly connected to this memory of Liszt, but they are wonderfully apposite.

*Lives of great men all remind us  
We can make our lives sublime.  
And, departing, leave behind us  
Footprints on the sands of time.*

*Footprints, that perhaps another,  
Sailing o'er life's solemn main,  
A forlorn and shipwrecked brother,  
Seeing, shall take heart again.*

'Footprints on the sands of time'. There can be no finer epitaph for Liszt whose footprints have been observed by generations of composers, including Ravel, Richard Strauss, Bartók, Messiaen and Arnold Schoenberg as they followed him into the future. And there can be no finer epitaph for us scholars, who, while we may leave footprints of a different kind, have tried to point the way to a better sort of Liszt biography than the ones our forefathers knew. ♫



*Franz Liszt  
Avenue  
in downtown  
Hamilton,  
Canada*



Klára Hamburger

# Letters to Magnolet

*Lettres de Franz Liszt à la Princesse Marie de Hohenlohe-Schillingsfürst, née de Sayn-Wittgenstein.* Présentées et annotées par Pauline Pocknell, Malou Haine et Nicolas Dufetel. (Musicologies, collection dirigée par Malou Haine et Michel Duchesneau) J. Vrin, Librairie Philosophique, 2010, impr. en Belgique, 433 pp.

**P**rincess Marie de Sayn-Wittgenstein (1837–1920) was the daughter of Princess Carolyne von Sayn-Wittgenstein (1819–1887), Liszt's companion from 1847 to 1861. Liszt's letters to Princess Marie (like those written to Baroness Olga von Meyendorff) have so far been available only in English translation.<sup>1</sup> The French originals of both sets of letters, previously part of the Mildred Bliss Collection at Dumbarton Oaks, are presently housed at Harvard University's Houghton Library in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Some years ago, English-born Pauline Pocknell, Professor of French at McMaster University in Hamilton, Ontario (Canada), initiated the important project of publishing Liszt's letters to Marie Wittgenstein in the original language, based on the manuscripts. Pocknell was highly respected for her essential contributions to Professor Alan Walker's three-volume Liszt biography<sup>2</sup>; she is also the author of numerous Liszt studies of her own and edited an exemplary bilingual volume of letters of correspondence between Liszt and Agnes Street Klindworth<sup>3</sup>. We were eagerly looking forward to the completion

1 ■ Edward E. Hugo, ed., *The Letters of Franz Liszt to Marie zu Sayn-Wittgenstein*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1953; Edward N. Waters, ed. *The Letters of Franz Liszt to Olga von Meyendorff 1871–1886 in the Mildred Bliss Collection at Dumbarton Oaks*. Distributed by Harvard University Press, Dumbarton Oaks, 1979.

2 ■ Alan Walker, Franz Liszt. 1. *The Virtuoso Years 1811–1847*. New York: Knopf and London: Faber & Faber, 1983; 2. *The Weimar Years 1848–1861*. New York: Knopf, 1989; 3. *The Final Years*. New York: Knopf, 1996.

3 ■ Pauline Pocknell, ed., *Franz Liszt and Agnes Street-Klindworth. A Correspondence 1854–1886*. Hillsdale, NY: Pendragon Press, 2000. (Franz Liszt Studies Series No. 8). [See also Pauline Pocknell, "Liszt, the Klindworths, and Austro-Hungarian Affairs: A Hidden Hand in Liszt's Correspondence," *The Hungarian Quarterly*, No. 143 (Autumn 1996), pp. 132–146.—Ed.'s note]

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## Klára Hamburger

was Secretary General of the Hungarian Liszt Society (1991–2004). Her many publications on Liszt include a biography in English, published by Corvina Books (1987) and, most recently, its revised edition *Franz Liszt: Leben und Werk and Liszt Ferenc zenéje (The Music of Franz Liszt)*, both published in 2010 and reviewed by Péter Laki on pp. 50–53 of this issue.



of the Wittgenstein project. Alas, Pocknell was unable to finish her work. Early in 2006 she came down with an incurable illness that claimed her life a few months later. Her children asked Professor Malou Haine of Liège, a close friend with decades of experience in editing books and letters, and Nicolas Dufetel, a gifted young French musicologist, to bring Pocknell's work to fruition in the spirit of their late colleague. In this Liszt bicentennial year, we are finally able to welcome, with great joy tinged with sadness, this important volume that fills a long-standing gap. The book contains 236 documents in writing and numerous previously unknown illustrations. Exhaustively annotated with copious references to other letter collections and memoirs, it is dedicated to Pauline Pocknell's memory.

The opening chapter is Haine's personal account of her friendship with Pocknell. The present reviewer, who was responsible for their first meeting in Liège in 1994, must add that Pauline, extremely likeable and always ready to offer collegial help, was very popular in the field and many of us considered her a friend. The first thing one wanted to do, upon arriving at a Liszt conference in Hamilton, Stockholm or Angers, was to have a nice chat with Pauline—only to find that she was already "booked," surrounded by friends of both sexes. She had a busy social calendar when in Budapest as well. I remember an intimate conversation over lunch near the church of St Sulpice in Paris, in December 2005: neither of us knew at the time that she was already suffering from her fatal illness. In the following months, we were in exceptionally intense e-mail contact. I was happy still to be able to decipher for her a letter from Liszt's mother Anna to the composer, written in old German script, and to provide her with a makeshift English translation. (The letter may be found on pp. 170–71 of the present book.) Then our correspondence was suddenly interrupted—and a few months later, I received the news of her illness and death. Many of us have since dedicated works to her *in memoriam*.

The two editors complement each other perfectly. Professor Haine has extensive knowledge and experience in the field and is an extremely thorough scholar who speaks excellent English. The peripatetic and multilingual Dufetel is the recipient of several grants that allowed him to study the original manuscripts in the United States; he has also conducted research in the Liszt archives of both Weimar and Budapest. Pauline Pocknell would certainly be pleased with their work.

**T**he first 50 pages of the book cover, in great detail, the lives of Princess Marie and her mother Carolyne, their relationship to one another and to Liszt, the artistic scene in their shared home, the Villa Altenburg in Weimar, as well as Marie's life after her 1857 marriage to Prince Constantin von Hohenlohe-Schillingsfürst, at the time aide-de-camp of Emperor Franz Joseph I; she was the hostess of an important literary salon in their Vienna palace. Furthermore, the editors tell the checkered history of the letters themselves. One scholar, a German, had died in the late 1930s while at work on this collection. A few letters had been published in French before





*Ary Scheffer: Princess Marie de Sayn-Wittgenstein, 1855.  
Oil on canvas, 840 x 580 mm.*

*Courtesy University of Notre Dame, Indiana, Snite Museum of Art*

the entire volume was printed, in a faulty English translation with error-ridden annotations, as Edward E. Hugo's Harvard dissertation. Haine and Dufetel devote a special chapter to their editorial practices. Each letter is accompanied by a description of the manuscript and information on previous publication.

The authors have included a beautiful portrait of Princess Marie, unknown at least to me, made by Ary Scheffer and now in the Snite Museum of Art at Notre Dame University in South Bend, Indiana. Based on this portrait and the copiously quoted recollections of her contemporaries, the Princess comes across as beautiful, kind, peace-loving, well-meaning and highly intelligent. Her first language was Polish, but she spoke and wrote several other languages fluently, and translated several plays. Richard Wagner, whose only published writing about Liszt is an open letter to Marie<sup>4</sup>, describes her in

4 ■ Richard Wagner, "Über Franz Liszt's Symphonische Dichtungen. Brief an Marie Wittgenstein," 1857. Wagner, *Gesammelte Schriften und Dichtungen*, vol. 5, p. 235 ff.



his 1853 autobiography as a ravishing 15-year-old on the verge of becoming a young woman<sup>5</sup>. Even though he found her a little faded three years later<sup>6</sup>, in the book she appears as beautiful even in later portraits.

In other words, the beloved "Tantine Marie" was in every respect the exact opposite of her mother Carolyne, who was devoid of all charm, hyper-active, impetuous, selfish, capable of cruelty and hatred. One can read as much in the German-language memoirs of a younger relative, Princess Marie von Thurn und Taxis née Hohenlohe (1855–1934), who said of Carolyne: "I never understood how Liszt could put up with her."<sup>7</sup>

Malou Haine deserves credit for introducing this important document. As an adolescent girl, Princess Marie of Thurn und Taxis had met Liszt in her mother's chateau at Duino, near Trieste and, to her chagrin, even had to play the piano fourhanded with him. Later, herself the owner of Duino, she was Rainer Maria Rilke's host there in 1911–12 and became the dedicatee of the *Duino Elegies*.

Poor Marie Wittgenstein could not have had an easy life at the side of her mother. She was only 11 and barely spoke German when her mother tore her away from her home environment on the enormous Woronince estate in the Ukraine (Russia) and took her to Weimar to be with Liszt. Granted, she gave her daughter an excellent education. Marie (or Magne, Magnolet, as she was known at home) spoke perfect French, had an English (actually, Scottish) governess, and had piano lessons with Liszt no less. Carolyne took her on educational journeys to visit museums and famous people. In their shared home in Weimar, the Villa Altenburg, Marie grew up in Liszt's proximity, among disciples and distinguished visitors, in an exceptional cultural and artistic ambience. Yet she always had to contend with her mother's nervous tension and anxiety attacks. In his autobiography, Wagner tells the story of a horrible night they spent in St Gallen, Switzerland, just before Wagner's first joint concert with Liszt, when they had to move to a different room at two o'clock in the morning:

We stayed together at the Hecht inn, and the Princess entertained us as if she had been in her own house. She gave me and my wife a room next to her own private apartment. Unfortunately a most trying night was in store for us. Princess Caroline had one of her severe nervous attacks, and in order to preclude the approach of the painful hallucination by which she was tormented at such times, her daughter Marie was obliged to read to her all through the night in a voice deliberately raised a good deal above its natural pitch. I got fearfully excited, especially at what appeared to be an inexplicable disregard for the peace of one's neighbour implied by such conduct.

5 ■ Richard Wagner, *Mein Leben. Volks-Ausgabe*. Munich: Bruckmann, 2/1915. vol. 3, p. 70.

6 ■ *ibid.* p. 124.

7 ■ Princess Marie von Thurn und Taxis-Hohenlohe, *Memoirs of a Princess*. Translated and compiled by Nora Wydenbruck. London: Hogarth, 1939, pp. 75–82. It is not clear in what language the memoir was originally written; the German version found on the internet (Marie Thurn und Taxis-Hohenlohe, *Jugenderinnerungen*) indicates that the text had been "translated into German."



At two o'clock in the morning I leapt out of bed, rang the bell continuously until the waiter awoke, and asked him to take me to a bedroom in one of the remotest parts of the inn. We moved there and then, not without attracting the attention of our neighbours, upon whom, however, the circumstance made no impression. The next morning I was much astonished to see Marie appear as usual, quite unembarrassed, and without showing the least trace of anything exceptional having occurred. I now learned that everybody connected with the Princess was thoroughly accustomed to such disturbances.<sup>8</sup>

In their preface, Haine and Dufetel relate that at the age of 16, Marie became engaged to Baron Charles-Angélique de Talleyrand-Périgord, a French diplomat in Weimar sixteen years her senior (1821–1896). Whether they loved each other is not known. What is certain is that Carolyne and her estranged husband, Prince Nicolas de Sayn-Wittgenstein both considered this match to be disadvantageous and forbade the marriage. (Carolyne's vast Russian fortune was confiscated by the Tsar after her flight, but Marie might have got it back upon reaching majority.) In order to protect this fabulous fortune, Marie had to marry a distant relative, Prince Constantin von Hohenlohe-Schillingsfürst (1828–1896). She did not love him, but she bowed to her parents' will. Carolyne pushed for this marriage for another, entirely selfish, reason: Constantin's brother Gustav was a titular archbishop embarked on a brilliant career in the Vatican (he would eventually become a cardinal), and she was hoping that he could help her obtain the annulment of her own marriage so she could, finally, become Liszt's wife. Yet in the end, the exact opposite happened: it was precisely Gustav von Hohenlohe who, in order to protect the Wittgenstein fortune, started an intrigue in the Vatican to block the marriage between Carolyne and Liszt, which had been prepared to take place in Rome, at the church of San Carlo al Corso.

Marie's real suffering, however, had only just begun. Carolyne had retained a Polish agent by the name of Okraszewski to promote the cause of her marriage in Rome. Although the agent failed, he demanded enormous amounts of money from Carolyne. Carolyne, however, had no money, and Marie's inheritance was, by law, in the hands of her husband, who categorically refused to pay. Carolyne heaped bitter reproaches on her daughter and severed all contact with her for years, even ignoring the birth of her grandchildren. Marie was torn between her duties as a daughter and as a wife.<sup>9</sup>

8 ■ Richard Wagner, *My Life*, vol. III, Echo Books, p. 441.

9 ■ In addition to Alan Walker and Gabriele Erasm's *Liszt, Carolyne and the Vatican: The Story of a Thwarted Marriage* (Hillside, NY: Pendragon Press, 1991), the editors quote an earlier article by Donna M. Di Grazia, "Liszt and Carolyne Sayn-Wittgenstein: New Documents on the Wedding that Was Not." *19th-century Music* XII/2 (Autumn 1988), pp. 148–162.



Liszt's relationship with Marie Wittgenstein was always perfectly harmonious. I remember copying out, back in 1971 in Weimar, her moving letter to him dated Brühl, 16 July 1860 (No. 75M in the present volume, p. 196), in which the young woman implores "Grand", (it was the nickname given to Liszt by both Carolyne and Marie) her "sweet, and very dear impartial judge" to help her pacify her mother. This took many years to accomplish as Liszt very tactfully prepared the ground for a meeting between mother and daughter. Even later, Liszt and Marie conspired behind the scenes: Liszt persuaded their Weimar friend Adelheid von Schorn to go to Rome, ostensibly as a tourist but in reality to be a companion and nurse (at Marie's expense) to Carolyne, who was in poor health, constantly at loggerheads with her servants, and hardly ever left her well-curtained room where she was working on a multi-volume treatise criticising the Church.<sup>10</sup> Another secret cause Liszt and Marie had in common involved the Polish oratorio *The Legend of St. Stanislaus*, which Carolyne was urging him to write though Liszt felt little inclination to do so. He could never discuss this matter with Carolyne because of her nervous state. It was Marie who tried to help and find a competent person to correct the libretto, unbeknownst to her mother.

Carolyne outlived Liszt only by a year; she died in 1887. Liszt's estate now went to Princess Marie, who established a Liszt Foundation in Weimar with 70,000 marks, and donated several personal objects to the new Liszt Museum there. She and Grand Duke Carl Alexander sponsored the first critical edition of Liszt's works, which is the most complete one to this day.

Before dealing in detail with Liszt's letters to Marie Wittgenstein, it should be mentioned that Liszt had three children of his own, born of his liaison with Countess Marie d'Agoult, who were close in age to Marie: Blandine (1835–1862), Cosima (1837–1930), and Daniel (1839–1859). In her letters to Liszt, Anna, the composer's mother, tells a great deal about how the children felt not seeing their beloved father for years on end; in spite of his promises, Liszt even missed such crucial events in the children's lives as their First Communion.<sup>11</sup> And Cosima, the only Liszt child to have had a long life, revealed in a letter to her own daughter, Daniela von Bülow, dated Bayreuth, 26 October 1881, how it felt to see another girl enjoy the privilege of being close to Liszt, a privilege his own children were denied. (Daniela was staying with her grandfather in Rome at the time.)

My dearest, don't take small things like having to stay at home... too much to heart.  
My whole youth was nothing but a staying at home! For instance, we would see

10 ■ *Des causes extérieures de la faiblesse intérieure de l'Église*. The Vatican placed the voluminous work on the Index.

11 ■ Klára Hamburger, ed., *Franz Liszt's Briefwechsel mit seiner Mutter*. Eisenstadt, 2000: letters A17, A27, A28. [On this see also Klára Hamburger, "Madame Liszt," *The Hungarian Quarterly*, no. 158 (Summer 2000), pp. 151–59.—Ed.'s note]



Father for eight days after eight years; he didn't take us anywhere and we found it entirely natural that he would go out with Carolyne and Marie.<sup>12</sup>

A few days later, Cosima continued, speaking of Princess Carolyne:

How very sad what you are telling me, but I know it all so well! Carolyne Wittgenstein is simply infuriating: he is only there for her—Marie Hohenlohe is right! No feelings at all....Just think: because of this relationship, we children, who adored him, were constantly and harshly rebuffed by him!<sup>13</sup>

It is common knowledge that Liszt, under Carolyne's influence, turned into a strict and authoritarian father to his own children, who could even be cruel on occasion. He forced Carolyne's old governess on them, and later resorted to a ruse to bring them to Berlin. Cosima also blamed her father for insisting that Daniel attend university in Vienna, a city whose climate was detrimental to his health. Daniel contracted tuberculosis and died at the age of 20. Yet, certain comments of Cosima's in the letter quoted above, as well as the correspondence between the Liszt children and Marie Wittgenstein<sup>14</sup>, seem to indicate that the "step-siblings" had developed a cordial relationship with one another.

In any case, the tone of Liszt's 76 letters to Marie Wittgenstein from the years between 1847 and 1860—tender, playful, humorous, even humble—is the total opposite of the voice emerging from his correspondence with his own children, especially after meeting Carolyne. He wooed Marie as he did her mother, using baby talk at first, as if he had been in love with both of them. "Pray to the good *Bozé* [referring to God in Polish is another intimate gesture] for the three of us—we are one heart and one soul"<sup>15</sup> (p. 98) "...I live only for the two of you..."<sup>16</sup> (p. 155) "Very infinitely dear and very singularly loved, in plural..."<sup>17</sup> (p. 161). Some of his signature formulas are also worth quoting. Liszt often gave himself mocking monikers. Yet while he used to call himself *crétin* when writing to Marie d'Agoult, now he became a *fainéant* (lazybones, p. 60) or *esclave* (slave, p. 104), *un chien de garde* (watchdog, p. 115), or *Votre Haus- und Reise Pudel ce qui est ma gloire et mon bonheur* (your house and travel poodle, which it is my glory and my joy to be, p. 166). He found it necessary to let even the girl know that he was behaving himself and had not been drinking too much, nor had he looked at any women (pp. 122, 136, 129).

There are no surviving letters from the years between 1860 and 1869. By the time the correspondence resumes, Liszt addresses Marie von Hohenlohe-

12 ■ Max Freiherr von Waldberg, ed., *Cosima Wagners Briefe an ihre Tochter Daniela von Bülow 1866–1885*. Stuttgart-Berlin: Cotta'sche Buchhandlung Nachf., 1933, No. 127, p. 232.

13 ■ *ibid.*, No. 128, p. 235.

14 ■ Robert Bory, *Liszt et ses enfants. Blandine, Cosima et Daniel, d'après une correspondance inédite avec la Princesse Marie Sayn-Wittgenstein*. Paris: Corrèa, 5/1936.

15 ■ *Priez Bon Bozé pour nous trois – nous sommes un cœur et une âme*.

16 ■ *...qui ne vit que par et pour vous...*

17 ■ *Très infiniment chères et très singulièrement aimées à pluriel...*



Schillingsfürst as *Votre très gracieuse Altesse* (Your most gracious Highness), and signs *Votre tout obéissant serviteur* (Your most obedient servant). He visited her several times in Vienna and kept her informed about his life and his acquaintances, which sometimes makes his letters sound like the *Almanach de Gotha*. (In their notes, Haine and Dufetel do an admirable job of documenting the various aristocratic family trees in meticulous detail.) Yet one can always feel sincere love in these letters. There is true feeling when he writes about the deaths of his children, fervor in his readiness to help repair the relationship between mother and daughter, and anguish over the lamentable state of Carolyne's health. The last letter was sent from Paris, at the time of Liszt's last great success there, on 3 April 1886.

The most important passage in the correspondence, Liszt's artistic credo, is in the letter dated 4 June 1860 (No. 74, pp. 194–95). The young princess, already married, lived in Vienna; Carolyne had moved to Rome. Liszt was alone in Weimar, his future totally uncertain, his fate dependent on others. He writes:

The dissent, what's more: the injustice, to which my work gives rise, far from setting me back, gives me even greater inspiration and strengthens me in the conviction I have had since my youth, namely that I have something to say in music, and that no one else can say it for me. Certainly this is a very small thing and I take no great pride in it; but come what may, I shall fulfill my task by the grace of God, to whom I pray with sincere and resigned humility for whatever good or bad fortune I may encounter.<sup>18</sup>

The spelling of Hungarian names is much better than is usually the case in foreign publications; credit for this is probably due to Nicolas Dufetel. Even so, there are a few errors: "Szerdahélyi" instead of Szerdahelyi (p. 79, fn. 109), "Kolozvár" instead of Kolozsvár (p. 110), "Jozéfa" instead of Jozefa (p. 125, fn. 110). Count Guido Karátsonyi's last name is distorted each time as "Karátsony" (pp. 141, 214). The German language is not the editors' strong suit; German words are often misspelled. The scholarly apparatus is extremely thorough: the book includes a list of illustrations, a bibliography, an index of Liszt's works and a general index. In the index of geographical names, cities in Central and Eastern Europe that have different names in different languages are listed under all of them.

The literature on Liszt has been considerably enriched by this important volume, created as an act of commemoration, well edited and handsomely produced in paperback. *Un grand merci* to Malou Haine and Nicolas Dufetel. It is to be hoped that Liszt's letters to Olga von Meyendorff will also become available in the original language soon, in an edition prepared with similar care and scholarly expertise. ■

18 ■ *Les contradictions et je dirai même les injustices que mon œuvre provoque, loin de me ralentir m'exitent d'avantage et me confirment pleinement dans l'idée que j'ai eu dès ma jeunesse: c'est qu'en fait de musique j'ai mon mot à dire—et que personne d'autre ne peut dire pour moi. — C'est fort peu de chose assurément, et je n'en tire guère vanité; mais telle quelle, j'accomplirai ma tâche, avec la grâce de Dieu que j'implore avec humilité sincèrement résignée sur les bonnes ou mauvaises chances que je rencontrerai.*



István P. Korody

## In the Footsteps of Liszt in Geneva

I followed a three-stage plan on my journey to Geneva. First of all, I wanted to visit the conservatory where the young Liszt had taught a piano class for a semester.<sup>1</sup> Secondly, I wanted to find the apartment where he lived and thirdly, to track down a little-known artist who made a portrait of the composer.

Liszt could not have taught in the present conservatory building. It was not built until 1857–58<sup>2</sup>, whereas the great pianist had assumed his teaching duties back in 1835. At that time the conservatory was housed in the St. Pierre Casino building.<sup>3</sup>

On entering the present building, I immediately noticed a large painting on the wall in the reception area: The young Liszt resting on one elbow, painted by Ary Scheffer<sup>4</sup> in 1835. This painting called to mind another portrait from 1835: the one in the Liszt house in Weimar, painted by the same artist. Its reproduction provided the cover for a one-time East German publication.<sup>5</sup>

In the library I then came across the complete list of Liszt pupils, including the comments of their teacher. These comments were probably jotted down after or during examinations. With the kind permission of the library which owns the manuscript, I am publishing these Liszt notes in facsimile below.<sup>6</sup>

Of the twelve female piano students, Marthe Veillard left the class after a month. In the transcription I left the original text completely untouched, and in doing so, left small corrections on it which are of no particular importance. Alan Walker's biography contains four Liszt comments (Demelleyer, Gambini, Raffard und Milliquet) and I follow his translations in my work. Bory mentions another five students (Brand, Calame, Darier, Turretini-Neckar und Wallner).

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Brand Marie

Excellent travail. Bon toucher;  
quoiqu'un peu ~~lourd~~ - progrès remarquables  
depuis le commencement du cours -

M<sup>me</sup>

Calame Amélie

Jolis doigts. travail assidu et  
très soigné; presque trop  
progrès sensible depuis 3 mois.  
Capable d'enseigner -

M<sup>me</sup>

Counis Sestis Lucile

2<sup>e</sup> Classe -

assez peu avancée mais zélée  
Bonnes dispositions

M<sup>me</sup>

Daries Louise

Etude parfaite; - très bonnes  
dispositions. Jeu net. bonne qualité  
de son - excellente tenue.  
Capable d'enseigner

### Brand Marie

Excellent travail. Bon toucher;  
quoiqu'un peu lourd - progrès remarquables  
depuis le commencement du cours -  
(Excellent work. Good touch;  
though a little hard - remarkable  
progress since the beginning of the  
course -)

### Calame Amélie

Jolis doigts, travail assidu et  
très soigné; presque trop  
progrès sensible depuis 3 mois.  
Capable d'enseigner.  
(Pretty fingers, diligent and  
very careful work; almost too much  
progress felt in the last 3 months.  
Capable of teaching.)

### Counis Sestis Lucile

2<sup>e</sup> Classe -  
assez peu avancée mais zélée.  
Bonnes dispositions  
(2nd class - made very little progress  
but zealous.  
Talented)

### Daries Louise

Etude parfaite; - très bonnes  
dispositions. Jeu net. Bonne qualité  
de son - excellente tenue.  
Capable d'enseigner  
(Perfect study; - very talented.  
Clean playing. Good tone quality -  
excellent posture.  
Capable of teaching)



### Demelleyer Marie

Methode vicieuse - (si Methode il y a)  
zèle extrême. Dispositions mediocres.  
Grimaces et contorsions.

Gloire à Dieu Dans le ciel et paix aux  
hommes de bonne volonté.

(Vicious technique - [if technique there  
be] extreme zeal but little talent.

Grimaces and contortions.

Glory to God in the Highest and Peace  
to all Men of Good Will.)

M<sup>me</sup> Demelleyer Marie

Methode vicieuse - (si Methode il y a)  
zèle extrême. Dispositions mediocres  
grimaces et contorsions.

Gloire à Dieu Dans le ciel et paix aux  
hommes de bonne volonté.  
M<sup>me</sup>

Gambini Jenny

### Gambini Jenny

Beaux yeux !

(Beautiful eyes !)

Beaux yeux !

M<sup>me</sup>

Moyne Susanne.

### Moyne Susanne

2de Class; -

Arriérée; mais fort zélé -

Cette jeune personne a été mal  
enseignée jusqu'ici - elle aurait  
besoin (ainsi que Mesdames Counis  
Gambini, Wallner) d'un travail  
preparatoire d'Exercices. Ce même  
travail devra aussi être fait par  
la Classe de M. Wolff -

(2nd class - Behind; but very zealous -

This young person was badly taught -  
she needs [like Miss Counis Gambini,  
Wallner] a preparatory work of  
exercises. The same work will be  
required in the class  
of Mr. Wolff -)

2<sup>de</sup> Classe -

Arriérée; mais fort zélé -  
Cette jeune personne a été mal  
enseignée jusqu'ici - elle aurait  
besoin (ainsi que Mesdames Counis, ~~Gambini~~  
Gambini, Wallner) d'un travail  
preparatoire d'Exercices. Ce travail  
devra aussi être fait par la Classe  
de M<sup>r</sup> Wolff -

### Raffard Julie

Sentiment musical très remarquable.

Très Petites mains. Execution brillante.

Aptitude peu ordinaire -

(Remarkable musical feeling.

Very small hands. Brilliant execution.

Very talented -)

Raffard Julie

Sentiment musical très remarquable.  
très Petites mains. Execution brillante.  
Aptitude peu ordinaire -



M<sup>mes</sup>

Turretini Necker, Albertine

Sentiment musical –  
travail très satisfaisant.  
etc etc etc —

M<sup>mes</sup>

Veillard Marthe.

partie pour Milan, dans le mois de Décembre.

M<sup>mes</sup>

Wallner, Joséphine

molle, flasque et paresseuse  
facilité pour déchiffrer –  
nul soin ~~pour~~ d'étude  
peu d'avenir – a moins  
d'un travail forcé.

M<sup>lle</sup>

Milliquet Ida

Sur numéraire auditeur de la classe  
de M. Liszt

Artiste genevois –  
flasque et médiocre –  
assez bons doigts; assez bonne tenue  
au piano; assez d'assez qui  
ne valent pas grand chose  
au total.

**Turretini Necker, Albertine**

Sentiment musical –  
travail très satisfaisant,  
etc etc etc. –

(Musical feeling –  
very satisfactory work.  
etc etc etc. –)

**Veillard Marthe**

partie pour Milan, dans le mois de  
Décembre. [not in Liszt's hand]  
(Left for Milano in the month of  
December.)

**Wallner, Joséphine**

molle, flasque et paresseuse  
facilité pour déchiffrer –  
nul soin dans l'étude  
peu d'avenir – a moins  
d'un travail forcé.  
(soft, languid and lazy  
facility in sightreading –  
careless in her studies little future –  
unless hard working.)

**Milliquet Ida**

Sur numéraire auditeur de la classe  
de M. Liszt [not in Liszt's hand]

Artiste genevois –  
flasque et médiocre –  
assez bons doigts; assez bonne tenue  
au piano; assez d'assez qui  
ne valent pas grand chose au total.

(She is on the student list in  
Mr. Liszt's class

An artist from Geneva – languid and  
mediocre – quite good fingers; posture  
at the piano good enough; enough  
'enoughs' which do not amount to  
much in total. )



Liszt began teaching on Monday, 9th November 1835 and finished the semester with public examinations around 20th April 1836.<sup>7</sup> The local daily newspaper, *Le Fédéral*, carried an article about the piano exams on the 22nd of the month.<sup>8</sup> Besides teaching and concertising Liszt also worked on a book about piano method, making progress with his work but never publishing it.

From the educational point of view it is important to note that Liszt the teacher<sup>9</sup> considered it essential to sit correctly at the piano. Most piano instructors care about the student's touch on the piano, their proper musical development, but only few of them pay attention to good posture at the instrument. High regard was granted to a student in Liszt's class with the composer's mark: "Capable of teaching". In spite of some sarcastic notes, his comments are mild and well-intended. By now, the importance of a conservatory's preparatory department has been recognized everywhere, especially at the Liszt Academy of Music in Budapest where the maestro served his country as the first president of this institution.

Franz Liszt and Countess Marie d'Agoult spent just over a year in a comfortable apartment in 1 rue Tabazan. It was easy to find their home in Geneva: the steeply rising street at the Reformation monument led to it. The building, situated on the corner of rue Tabazan and rue Etienne Dumont, is on a small square named after Liszt. (As is the bus stop of the no. 36 bus here.) On the wall of the house there is a memorial tablet: "*Le maître hongrois François Liszt a séjourné dans cette maison de 1835 à 1836.*"

Liszt was pleased with his new home.<sup>10</sup> Marie d'Agoult gave a more detailed description of it:

My new home pleased me. The house, where we rented a floor, was situated near a public promenade at a high point of the city. From my window I had a splendid panorama: the dark masses of the Jura, ...the vast plain, the villas and gardens, the blue waves of the Rhône flowing rapidly like an arrowshot: '*The blue rushing of the arrowy Rhône*' [orig. English]. The room where I stayed most of the time had a balcony from where I watched with never diminishing admiration this grandiose spectacle. Often, for long times when the evenings were beautiful I used to listen to the sober and penetrating biblical psalms of a nearby chapel. An Érard piano, some books on a shelf, a basket full of beautiful alpine flowers...<sup>11</sup>

The rue Tabazan was named after a family in the city, the Tabazans, who lived there for a long time but they were not real Geneva people. Following a fine Geneva custom, the street signs show not only the name but give some additional information: "*Savoy family originating from Chilly; carried out the duties of executioner*".<sup>12</sup> After this information I was, of course, not at all surprised to see the huge executioner's sword on the signboard over the Tabazan house (no. 9). Since the 1600's, from father to son, they had been the executioners of the city of Geneva.<sup>13</sup>





*Nancy Mérienne: Liszt, 1836. Crayon, chalk on paper, 186 x 127 mm.*

**T**he Liszt picture at the conservatory appears as a reproduction in Robert Bory's book on Liszt in Switzerland.<sup>14</sup> It is a small crayon drawing in black (186 x 127 mm). The artist softened up the sharp contours using additional white chalk and signed it: 'Nancy Mérienne 1836'. Valérie Louzier-Gentaz wrote a book on her.<sup>15</sup> This little-known painter was born in July 1793 in Geneva. We know only that she was baptized on the 24th of that month in the church of St. Gervais. She studied in the local drawing class of Firmin Massot<sup>16</sup> and also elsewhere in Switzerland, France and England. She made a portrait of her teacher in 1846 when he was already 80 years old.<sup>17</sup> Perhaps she thought it to be an exchange gift, because Massot painted her earlier (at about 1815–20) as his young pupil, too.<sup>18</sup> According to the catalogues of the Salon in Paris, she regularly took part in the annual exhibitions between 1820 and 1849.

Her portrait of Liszt the young composer is not in profile, and a frontal portrayal is pretty rare in the Liszt iconography. Liszt's right hand is placed in



his frock coat and the left hand, sketched very roughly, is positioned horizontally. A ring is on his index finger. This ring is described in her journal by the cousin of the aforementioned Liszt student, Turretini-Necker: "...Liszt is handsome. He has beautiful hands. He wears a ring on his index finger, on it there is a silver death's head on a golden base..."<sup>19</sup>

At the time Liszt appeared in concert in Lyon, April 1836, he was visited by Mérierne<sup>20</sup> who asked him to sit for a portrait. The sittings took place between 25th April and 1st May. By the latter date the drawing was completed. Liszt was delighted with the result.<sup>21</sup>

This small picture was owned for a long time by the aforementioned Liszt student, Julie Raffard.<sup>22</sup> After her death the Geneva Conservatory became the owner of the drawing. 🐼

## NOTES

- 1 ■ For Liszt's year in Geneva : Alan Walker, *Franz Liszt I. The Virtuoso Years 1811–1847*, London: Faber and Faber, 1983, pp. 209–231.; Serge Gut, *Franz Liszt*, Sinzig: Studiopunkt, 2009, pp. 49–53.; Robert Bory, *Une retraite romantique en Suisse. Liszt et la Comtesse d'Agoult*, 2nd ed, Lausanne: Spes, 1930, pp. 23–81. Jean-Jacques Eigeldinger, *Présence et descendance de Liszt au Conservatoire de Genève (1835–1914)*, Budapest: *Studia Musicologica*, Tomus XLII, Fasciculi 1–2, Akadémiai Kiadó, 2001, pp. 25–46.
- 2 ■ Knaurs Kulturführer, *Schweiz*, Zürich: Ex libris, 1982, p. 197.
- 3 ■ Robert Bory, op.cit., p. 45.
- 4 ■ About the painter:  
[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ary\\_Scheffer](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ary_Scheffer) and about the painting: Walker, op.cit., ii.
- 5 ■ Hedwig Weilguny-Willy Handrick, *Franz Liszt*, 6th ed, Leipzig: VEB Deutscher Verlag für Musik, 1980, p. 53 (and cover).
- 6 ■ Classe de Piano, Dames, 9 Novembre 1835, RMG 331 (formerly R 128), Conservatoire de musique, Genève. With the cover there are 26 pages of A3 papers with huge empty sections which are left out here.
- 7 ■ Bory, op.cit., p. 45
- 8 ■ Bory, op.cit., p. 48.
- 9 ■ He became honorary professor, see his letter expressing thanks for the title to the president of the Geneva Conservatory, Mr. Bartholoni, Geneva, August 18, 1836. Bory, op.cit., p. 107 and Walker, op.cit., p. 216.
- 10 ■ Walker, op.cit., p. 212.
- 11 ■ F. Dupéchez, *Mémoires, souvenirs et journaux de la Comtesse d'Agoult I*. Paris: Mercure de France, 1990, pp. 328–329.
- 12 ■ "famille Savoyarde originaire de Chilly, exerça les fonctions de bourreau."
- 13 ■ About the family and the executioners : <http://archives.tdg.ch/TG/TG/-/article-1998-07-329/les-tabazan-bo...>
- 14 ■ Bory, op.cit. p. 10/II.
- 15 ■ Valérie Louzier-Gentaz, *Nancy Mérierne (1793–1860), élève de Firmin Massot, portraitiste de George Sand et Franz Liszt*, Milano: Biblioteca d'arte, Silvana, 2007.
- 16 ■ <http://translate.google.com/translate?hl=en&sl=fr&u=http%3Afr.wikipedia...>
- 17 ■ Louzier-Gentaz, op. cit., p. 299.
- 18 ■ Louzier-Gentaz, op. cit., p. 301.
- 19 ■ Albertine de la Rive-Necker, *Journal*: "Cognoy [not Cologne !], August 9. 1836, ... Liszt est bien mis. Il a des mains charmantes. A l'index il porte une bague, sur laquelle est représentée une tête de mort en argent sur fond d'or. ..." cit. by Bory, op. cit., p. 36.
- 20 ■ Liszt on Marie d'Agoult, "Lyon, April 23. 1836, ... Mme Mérierne m'a encore fait demander de faire mon portrait ; je vous le rapporterai en guise de surprise. Elle a fait celui de Mme Montgolfier d'une manière remarquable. ..." cit. by Louzier-Gentaz, op. cit., p. 300.
- 21 ■ Liszt to Lydie Pavy, "Saint Gervais [Geneva] August 22. 1836, ... Mademoiselle Mérierne! Au diable mademoiselle Mérierne! ... qu'elle est une personne délicieuse, ravissante, qu'elle fait d'admirables portraits et que le mien, entre autres, a merveilleusement réussi. ..."
  - 22 ■ Bory, op. cit. p. 69.



Péter Laki

## A Different Liszt

Klára Hamburger, *Franz Liszt: Leben und Werk*. Cologne: Böhlau Verlag, 2010, 279 pp. • Klára Hamburger, *Liszt Ferenc zenéje*. (The Music of Franz Liszt.) Budapest: Balassi Kiadó, 2010, 526 pp.

**W**hen it comes to Franz Liszt, one has to think outside all possible boxes. There is no single conceptual framework, whether national, philosophical or aesthetic, that could do justice to this larger-than-life figure; the more we learn about him, the more enigmatic he seems to become. The categories with which historiography (in this case, musical historiography) normally operates just don't work when applied to someone like him. By birth, upbringing and education, he was part Hungarian, part German and part French, but his relationship to each of those nations was highly problematic, in an era when belonging to one nation, and only one, was higher on the European agenda than it had ever been before. He was an incorrigible ladies' man who chose to take minor orders in the Roman Catholic Church, and an admirer of both Emperor Napoleon III and the poet Victor Hugo (the latter was Napoleon's sworn enemy who spent the years of the Second Empire in exile). If by "understanding" we mean finding a formula that conveniently explains everything, we must clearly give up when confronted with the author of *Liebestraum* and *Via crucis*, the Hungarian Rhapsodies and the "Faust" Symphony. All we can hope to do is take stock of what we know and interpret it for ourselves as best we can.

That, however, is a tall order, given the enormous amount of information that has come down to us on Liszt. We have a very rich and diverse musical oeuvre to deal with (often transmitted in multiple versions posing particularly thorny philological and interpretive questions), in addition to an extensive body of prose writings that presents its own challenges regarding authenticity, as well as thousands of surviving letters to and from the composer. Furthermore, students and friends left extensive recollections about the time

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they spent with the Master. It seems that a researcher's lifetime is hardly enough to sort out the documents of Liszt's lifetime.

Klára Hamburger is one indefatigable researcher who has devoted most of her professional life to Liszt. There are few people alive today who know him more intimately than she does. The Hungarian musicologist has published not one but two new books on Liszt for the bicentenary of his birth, both reworkings of earlier efforts that provide new insights and updates while also summarizing and reinterpreting many well-known facts. Hamburger, a frequent presence on the pages of this journal, has the rare gift of communicating original scholarship (results of her own research as well as those of her colleagues) in a jargon-free, reader-friendly language. (It is significant that she dedicated the German monograph to her granddaughter.)

The German book is a classic life-and-works that proceeds chronologically, intermingling biography and work exegesis. It is the newest incarnation of Hamburger's Liszt monograph, first published in Hungarian in 1966. Many passages from that early work survive intact, or almost intact, in the new volume, yet the material has been thoroughly reworked and expanded, taking into consideration many important new discoveries made over the years such as, to cite one example among many, Liszt's aborted plan to compose a German volume for his piano cycle *Années de pèlerinage*. Crucially, the tone of the narrative has shifted in an important way. Hamburger delves deeper into the personality of her subject and the historical context than she has done before. The work discussions are also more extensive, especially in the case of the late works which are particularly close to the author's heart. Also, the author allows herself to voice criticism in a way one rarely encounters in the work of "card-carrying" Lisztians: she admits that some passages in the music may sound bombastic, or that Liszt was not a good melodist. Nor does she hide the extent to which Liszt neglected his three children; she is more outspoken on his alcoholism or his numerous love affairs than most earlier books on the subject. Yet these critical moments never obscure her undying love for her hero; they only make the portrait more nuanced and more realistic. The discussion of Liszt's ill-fated book on the Gypsies and their music is particularly revealing: the author tells the truly mind-boggling story of Princess Carolyne Sayn-Wittgenstein's nefarious meddling with the text, Liszt's almost incredible complacency in putting up with his companion's interference, and the social and political reasons that explain why the book had such a lasting negative impact in Hungary. The last chapter of the book incorporates Hamburger's recent discovery of an important new document regarding the circumstances of Liszt's death.\*

\* ■ See Klára Hamburger "Death in Bayreuth. An Unknown Document about the Death of Franz Liszt." *The Hungarian Quarterly*, Vol. 46, no. 180 (Winter 2005), pp. 150–56.



The Hungarian volume under review is an expanded new version of Hamburger's 1986 guide to Liszt's works. If there are many Liszt biographies in existence, there are not many books that deal with individual compositions in such depth and detail. This publication fulfills a particularly important mission since so many important Liszt works are still not well known and hardly ever performed. Without neglecting the popular Liszt, Hamburger pays special attention to the composer's still-underappreciated sacred music, his songs, and many lesser-known piano works. Even at more than 500 pages, the book is far from covering Liszt's entire catalogue: a major work category missing is that of the transcriptions and paraphrases. Even so, the book fills a major lacuna in the literature on Liszt.

The information provided falls into three broad categories. First, the "statistics": dates of composition, scoring, first performances, etc. It is particularly important to find all this data conveniently gathered in one place as a comprehensive catalogue, along the lines of the *Köchel-Verzeichnis* of Mozart's works, still does not exist for Liszt. In view of the fact that Liszt revised and re-revised so many of his compositions, this information is by no means trivial or easy to establish; in many cases, recent scholarship has been able to correct earlier datings. In one word, this "book-keeping" part of the volume, found at the beginning of each individual work entry, is extremely helpful.

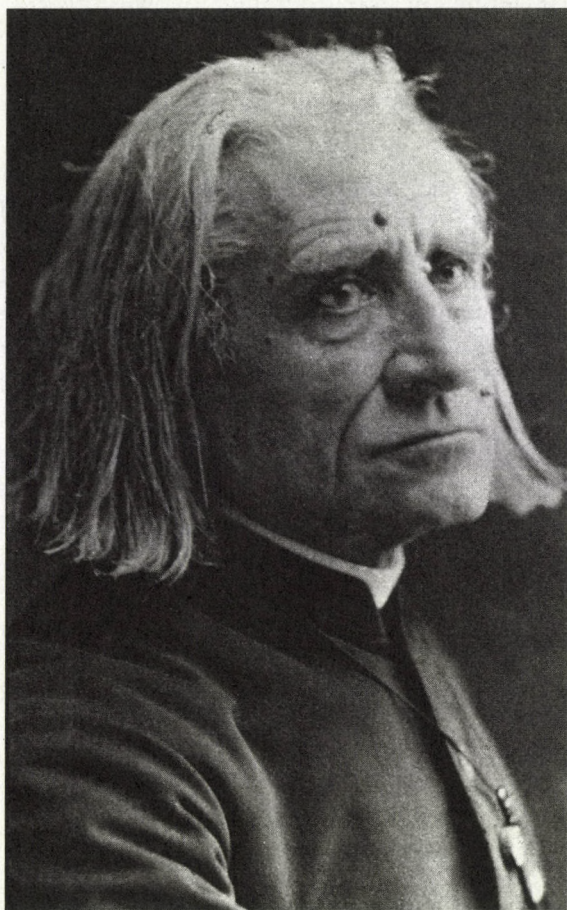
Second, Hamburger expertly guides us through the maze of literary, philosophical and artistic sources that informed Liszt's works. The importance of these inspirations goes without saying; after all, Liszt was a champion of programme music, in which close and explicit connections exist between the music and the books the composer had read, or images he had seen. Fully explaining those connections, however, is, once again, far from a simple matter. One is dealing with interpretations of interpretations, as in the case of *Tasso*, where the 16th-century poet is seen through the eyes of Goethe and Byron, as well as sung by the *gondolieri* on the canals of Venice—all of which Liszt referenced in his symphonic poem. Some of the authors who influenced Liszt are little known today and required extensive research. One of Hamburger's more felicitous decisions was to include a selection of poems and other literary texts that inspired Liszt, in Hungarian translation. Since the translators are often among the great classics of Hungarian poetry, these inserts amount to a small anthology valuable in its own right—a Lisztian anthology since it brings together texts that were dear to the composer and that have not previously been gathered together in one place.

Finally, Hamburger offers extensive analyses of all the works she discusses. Explaining the succession and transformation of themes and calling attention to significant harmonic and formal events, these analyses, generously illustrated by musical examples, help the music student understand the structure of the music and better appreciate its innovative aspects.



Such an in-depth look at Liszt's music has long been overdue, especially in the case of certain major yet little-known works, such as the oratorios and Masses that occupy almost 100 pages in the book. The entries are organized by genre (sacred music, orchestral music, concertos, solo piano music, songs) and each genre is headed by a brief introductory essay. By way of preface, Hamburger surveys the use of a recurrent motif (the so-called "cross" motif) in many works by Liszt; the motif in question (*so-la-do*), derived from Gregorian chant, accompanied the composer throughout his long career. It appears not only in sacred works but, for instance, at the climactic moment of the great B-minor Sonata as well.

These two books, by one of our most eminent Lisztians, allow us to take a fresh look at the life and works of this extraordinary composer and extraordinary human being. Whether we are revisiting him or discovering him for the first time, we could not hope for a better guide than Klára Hamburger. 🍷



*Franz Liszt, a photograph taken in Hungary, 1876.*



Krisztián Grecsó

# There's Room for You Beside Me

Excerpt from the novel

It's the summer of nineteen sixty-four; an East German circus is here. A foreign circus, and East German at that, from the most westerly country in Eastern Europe: different kinds of caravans, posters, big top, foreign faces, words—everything strange and unknown. Ivy geraniums in the freshly painted, white windows of the caravans as if they were real homes. The big top was so big they had to hire ten locals to put it up on the site, and there were times when even they seemed too few. It's such a huge sensation there's no need even to advertise their appearance. All the tickets for all the performances were sold out in less than four days, with people coming to the colony not just from the village, but from Szentes as well. The fence around it was exact, completely encircling it, so there was no way of sneaking in, but on the colony there was talk of organised visits and the stroking of animals. It was possible to do it in the afternoon and look at the cheetah, because there was one of those too, not just llamas and lions but a live cheetah as well. *The fastest animal in the world.* Ignác spits the blade of grass from between his lips and repeats: *the fastest.* He looks at his older brother because he still seems not to be suitably impressed. *Do you get it?* Ignác wants to sneak in even if it's impossible. They were lying with the younger Márton on the well-tended turf of the sports ground. Momma Juszti would call out every now and then from the laundry to keep an eye on their little sisters and to keep off the lawn. The boys would answer: OK. In their opinion Mariann and Katalin were just fine left to themselves and didn't need an eye being kept on them. Momma Juszti was the caretaker of the sports ground, the older Márton was not willing to teach Russian in the village in the absence of a qualified teacher, now there was one,

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but they still would not give him another job. Because of that Momma Juszti with five children to bring up had no choice but to get a job, Pa Márton meanwhile was a basket weaver, kept animals—sheep, pigs and geese—stewed the plums, scythed the grass beside the factory. Ignác looks up, his sisters are running towards the outflow and the catfish tiddlers. Pa Márton is setting off for the stagnant waters with the sheep. Everything is just fine and as it should be.

Except not everything with the circus. Cheetahs should not be gawped at like the famous ancient God statue in the museum—that was not the way. The load of dozy colony kids show no reverence for cheetahs, and if he were genuinely to admire it, they would laugh at him, and he couldn't stand being laughed at. He would have to sneak in by himself to get a proper look at the fastest animal in the world and prove to the cheetah that he was nuts about it. He did not dare tell even his brother, but he was quite sure that the cheetah would sense that he had done everything for it, he wasn't one of those sheepish peasant lads from the colony. He gets to his feet and sets off from the sports ground. Younger Márton looks up and is about to say something but decides not to: he wouldn't answer him anyway. He had a screw loose and didn't answer at times like this, but he was not going to give him the pleasure of not answering, let him play at being a big boy, behave in his secretive ways like always. He might be the big brother but let him pant on after him like a snotty-nosed younger bro. So what if he was going off: he was going off, and he would come back later on. Márton does not even enter Ignác's head, that he should say a few words to him, or to Momma Juszti, to excuse himself for a few hours; the way he was thinking, he was not going far. He would saunter up from the sports ground, stop at the windmill, get his breath back on the mound with the crucifix carved out of a single stone, then take a gander at the circus.

What a life! Such a hustle and bustle: tamers, people to pitch the tent, drums all around, trampolines, stands, jacks, what an intricate machinery, what a mysterious and powerful world. Ignác's stomach knots. That's it. He'll take a look around, at the hemp fields and over by the cemetery, all over the place there are children from the village, people standing around, not a thing happens in the circus without them looking on in amazement. Ignác's heart leaps. There is after all a life that he longs for, where people will pay him attention and marvel, where he will not be laughed at but idolised! He is standing on tiptoes on the highest possible point, looking at the workers, they are lugging boards of some kind into the tent—the ring perhaps. My God! Maybe it's the ring! The workmen are being ordered around by the ringmaster in the chequered jacket—and sternly at that, *lass' uns gehen!*, *Let's go!*, he's yelling and not letting up for a second. The workmen drop the ring, whereupon the ringmaster throws a fit, roaring so loud that Ladányi, the old butcher, who is cycling over by the hemp fields jumps off his bike and throws himself to the ground. The people standing nearby laugh and Ladányi looks up, gets to his feet with head hung low, dusts himself down. His



breaks are wet. Ignác does not grasp what happened, but back at home, when he relates lightheartedly what he saw, that old Ladányi took fright on hearing German spoken and pissed his pants, Pa Márton gets up from the table and leaves his food. Nothing like that has ever happened before, one just doesn't leave food one has been served, if any bread should fall off the table we bless it with a kiss. Ignác is made to apologise for what he said. He is mortally offended and is almost in tears as he apologises, he had done nothing wrong, only told what had happened, and that was what had happened, there was not getting away from it. Papa Márton shakes his head but says nothing about what he reckons the truth is.

Ignác also goes to the circus the next day and the day after that; the first performance would be that evening. He is very worked up, he has no ticket and he was not going to get one either, he was not going to be able to see the programme. By the cages there are workmen shifting the dung, using a wheelbarrow to take away the droppings. They are lined up in a queue—that's something Ignác has never seen before—one of them has the job of cleaning the cage, another to trundle the wheelbarrow to the fence before setting off back with an empty barrow, a third man comes out through the fence and empties out the manure. By the time it reaches the last time round he has had enough, he barely pushes and empties the barrow and does not properly close the fence. Ignác is on tenterhooks, his heart pounding so hard he has to sit down for a moment: this is his chance! He would never be able to forgive himself if he botched this never-to-be repeated chance. He might still be young but he knows that is going to hurt him a lot more than any jeers about the village saying he is not right in the head. If he thinks he is able to do something yet is unable to do it, that drives him crazy. But there's no denying that his legs just won't move; he can't even do something as simple as get up on his feet and set off towards the fence. Time was growing short, the seconds were ticking by, sooner or later someone was bound to notice that the workman had not chained the iron bar on the fence. Ignác was almost crippled to see what a coward, a loud-mouthed braggart he was, when younger Márton turned up. Mocks him for being so continually green with envy, *what's up, Peeping Tom!*, and he snorts with derision, *you haven't any binoculars anyway*. Ignác beams and gets to his feet. *Now where are you off to?* His elder brother shouted after him, and was just about ready to add: *Again!* But he swallows that back. Ignác takes a look back at Márton, feels the strength coming back, makes a V-sign with his index and middle fingers to show him that he was on a winning streak. That's when Márton realises that Ignác will sneak in and is about to do so just when he, Márton, had got there. He would rather like to go himself but doesn't dare. He watches his younger brother, and his stomach tightens.

Ignác's courage deserts him at the fence. He thinks about Márton and what a scaredy-cat his big brother is, and from that he regains his nerve. He lifts the iron bar on the fence and ducks in as if he has always belonged to the circus. Once he is inside he is again in a panic. Now there was nobody to show off to if



he was caught, who knows what the position is, a foreign circus from a foreign country, not Hungarians, they would not understand what he was saying, he might be fed to the cheetah. He makes for the caravans and hears growls coming from the cages so he would steer clear of that direction at all costs. Somewhere very deep down among his thoughts is lurking the idea that he has really come on account of the cheetah, but the growling was so petrifying that it was quite out of the question to go near the cages. Some of the caravans are like railways carriages but there are dormobiles too, and the sort of trailers that are hitched to a motor car. The doors are wide open, with underpants and sheets stretched out to dry everywhere, and a smell of fat fried food coming from somewhere. On hearing a sound of movements Ignác moves on, the vehicles give a little bit of space and his mind is set at rest at first until it occurs to him this is where he could be seen from all possible angles. He therefore creeps further on towards the big top. The door to one of the carriages is opened and Ignác's heart misses a beat, men are talking and they sound as if they were angry, the man who has opened the door responds as he walks down the steps, Ignác tries to hold his breath. The man grumbles some more before turning back. Ignác scurries off behind another car, but he still does not feel secure enough and so he sets off again, and that is when he sees her.

She is in a sequinned, ruffled white frock, has flaxen hair and sky-blue eyes.

She is holding Indian clubs, big coloured skittles, and has a number of ribbons on her hair, her thin legs are stockinged, and on her feet are white silk ballet shoes. Noone has ever seen such a beauty in the colony, or in the village at that, a girl as slender and smiling as her had never before trodden the earth of Szentes riding or the whole county of Csongrád. Just about the same size as Ignác, the little girl may have been about ten years of age. She is smiling as she tucks the clubs under her arms to extend a hand and say, *Bah-ha-ha*. Her skin is like milk, like gently washed cotton, her nails are scarlet, her eyelashes black; she is the same height as him, but he on the other hand does not answer, not understanding what *bah-ha-ha* might mean or even suspecting that it might be a name, deeming it to be more in the way of some kind of magic spell because this divine creature could only have uttered something magical, no doubt the Earth was spinning in a different way or was stopped for a moment, Our Father which art in heaven was smiling. Barbara was no longer smiling, for a second the awe-struck boy amused her, but then she pointed at herself: *Bah-ha-ha*, before poking a finger at Ignác and raising her shoulders in a shrug. *Bah-ha-ha?* he repeated, saying it with such fervour that the girl chuckled, her tinkling laughter dancing on her teeth just like in a poem Ignác was to recite so often a few years later. Finally it dawned on him what she was after: *Ignác*.

No further information about the encounter survives, although not only my Dad will tell this story, but my uncle Márton too, and Mamma Juszti, but it's no use my asking, they do not answer my question about how Ignác got out—



whether he was caught, or was there any punishment. Even Dad doesn't waste any time on those things, what happened afterwards will be more important. Somehow fate arranged for him to find everyone there when he gets back home, and even though it is still only afternoon the whole family bump into each other. Pa Márton has driven his sheep back to the house, Momma Juszti is cooking supper, Böbe—a big girl who in the autumn will be starting her last of her eight years at primary school and has been preparing to go on to the grammar school at Szentes—is sewing, Márton—his irritable and jealous older brother, unaware that it was only due to him that Ignác sneaked into the circus, wanting to show him, and perhaps even if he had been aware he wouldn't have believed it, or at least understood—was teasing his younger sisters. Mariann and Katalin paid him no attention, they understood nothing anyway and would only remember the endless storytelling but not what was being remembered, just a vague memory of there having been some sort of family feast when, at the festive meal, they told the story as if they remembered it.

Ignác reaches home, he steps into a room that is both kitchen and living room, everyone is there, potato stew is bubbling on the fuel stove; Ignác looks at his father who is tossing his fur cap onto one of the chairs, Dad, he says, not that he wishes to report anything but somehow it comes out too loud and everyone looks his way. Daddy Márton says nothing in response, just waits to hear what his younger son wants. Ignác feels that he can't stop now, he has to finish his sentence whatever the consequences. *I'm not going to be a priest, after all.*

Ignác is standing in the doorway, his knees quaking with excitement, he is so tired that he cannot take a step further but there is a gleam in his eye like never before. There is no need to explain to the parents or Böbe what light that is, Momma Juszti smiles wryly as she stirs the potatoes, the bottom has slightly caught. The boy goes across to his mother and hugs her from behind, gripping her so tightly as if he were frightened of something. Momma Juszti can feel he is trembling and she almost bursts into tears, but she does her best not to make the situation more difficult than it is already and calls out, *dinner is ready*. The little girls set about one another, the rumpus starts, but Ignác is unable to let go of his mother. Younger Márton gets fed up and trails after his sisters, leaving Böbe, who stays, and Daddy Márton, who takes out a Bible. Momma Juszti takes it out of his hands, turns round and wants to say something, though even she does not know what, at which point Ignác poses the question, *what will happen if she does not love me?* Momma Juszti is again about to utter something, first almost laughing it off then wanting to give orders, but she ends up just stroking the boy's cheek, *she will*. Throughout the supper Ignác can talk about nothing else than Bah-ha-ha, with the others making fun of him, there is no such name as Bah-ha-ha. *Barbaby, Beebaby, boobebey*. Ignác's ears are beginning to burn and he gets up, steps over to his elder brother, pushes his face right up to his face and seethes, *I'll feed you to the cheetah, you shat yourself!* He will have to do penance for dirty talk, but making the move is



worth it as however strange the girl's name Ignác is somehow privileged by it, he now belongs to the circus so he is in a position to feed Márton to the cheetah. Mariann and Katalin chant in chorus, *the cheetah's going to eat him! the cheetah's going to eat him!* Ignác grins but in spite of his triumph does not feel happy, it still bugs him that he was ridiculed, that people don't understand what he is feeling.

Of course he does not know himself, but he can't sleep, spends the whole night tossing and turning, he feels sick he is missing Bah-ha-ha so much. If he dozes off he sees her, her white dress girdled by a halo, veritably glittering. That wakes him up again. By daybreak he is wishing he had never clapped eyes on her, never met her. That makes the suffering awful; he hates being so afraid. His father hears his restlessness, that he is turning about in bed, because he is unable to sleep either. It had been broadcast right round the whole colony that both his sons were to become priests: it's no wonder because they are the most religious family there—just take Benedek, the Commies may have packed him off home but then he was a monk at Pannonhalma or wherever. Both his sons had received Communion and were now serving at mass, both were going to be priests. *If every colony were as bountiful*, Old Ladányi the butcher had said to Pa Márton the very day that Old Ladányi had taken fright at hearing German, *there would be no shortage of priests*. If every colony were as bountiful. That was a turn of phrase used for crops like paprika and tomato, and in recent years the cooperative farms were generating set phrases like "how bountifully it produces". Half the harvest was now rotting, so quickly, before the boys had even reached adolescence, ridiculously early, after all if he were to leave the seminary on account of falling in love that would be understood more readily than a ten-year-old falling so head over heels in love.

Momma Juszti tries to hush him, but Old Márton rankles. He senses that even his elder son is not going to become a priest, he does not have enough determination and will, the fervour and oratorical skills were with Ignác. Old Márton has often dreamed that his son Ignác really would become a priest, not like his brother Benedek, but a genuine seminarian, and would then return home to the village. A colony man becoming top man in the village! Juszti reckoned that the circus would be moving on in a few days' time but was only saying that so as not to keep quiet. She too knew full well that the problem was not with the little German girl but with the ardour, the merciless determination, the destructive passion that they glimpsed in their son's eyes. Neither Juszti nor Márton had ever felt like that, they both envied and felt anxious about the boy. They had grown to love each other over the years, and their love had not been destructive but constructive. Pa Márton does not even attempt to talk to Ignác, whereas Juszti steers with a few hesitant words back to the topic the next day. So careful is she that her son does not even understand what she is driving at. At another time he might have understood her but now he cannot pay attention, he is deaf and blind, wouldn't even eat as if he were fed by desire. Old Márton drives the sheep out next to the factory, to the backwater,



and asks them what he doesn't understand. Being crazily in love like that is something only a devil or the body brings upon a man, but what kind of bewitchment was its mental counterpart? What could the good Lord be wanting from a ten-year-old boy by getting him involved in this kind of thing? What's the good? The sheep adored the sound of Old Márton's voice, it soothed them, so they gather round, and any time he falls silent they bleat, demanding that he go on talking. As if they were talking back to him.

The next morning Ignác stood at the fence but was not admitted, Bah-ha-ha however was nowhere to be seen. He looked out for her for a whole hour in vain. Around ten o'clock she came out of the caravan and laughed when she spotted him as if she were relieved that he had come. That, at any rate, is how Ignác saw it; the girl waved at him, but a man irately shepherded her towards the circus tent, and when she pointed in Ignác's direction the man made a dismissive gesture. Ignác broke out in tears, he was so angry. He should not be dismissed like that. Nobody should do that to him! Who was that man to dare do that? He pictured several different tortures and how he would apply them. He became so engrossed in his thoughts that by chance he found himself at the sports ground. He had wanted to go to the hemp fields, to the donkey railway, but his legs had carried him here. His older brother was waiting vengefully, *so, what gives cheetahwisely?* Ignác was annoyed with himself for being so careless as to come this way, now he was going to be mocked and even that was going to hurt horribly. Everything was set against him, everybody was gunning for him! He set off hastily towards the target mound, almost broke into a run, but Younger Márton capered after him, *chee-tah-wise-ly, chee-tah-wise-ly!* They were clear of the sports ground by now, Ignác was turning beetroot red in the face, after the discus circle came the skittle alley so he picked up a skittle with the intention of smashing it on Márton's head, but he thought better of it.

He unhooked the skittles from their chain and started to practice. He was not going to stand for being dismissed so lightly. Márton went on baiting him for a while longer, but when he saw that his younger brother was not going to let himself be upset he went away. Ignác thought of himself as much better at it than that. At fairs and in the circus it looked so simple to keep three balls or skittles or flaming torches up in the air. He had tried, tried, and tried again, but it just did not work for him. He hit his hand or struck himself on the head, and all to no avail—the skittles never returned at the right moment. The discus throwers arrived for training, looked at what he was doing and just laughed at him. One of the bigger boys went over to him, pulled out three skittles and also had a go. It didn't work for him either. Difficult. Ignác nodded. The big lad was even clumsier than him, Ignác watched him and said as if he had known it all along, it's the order that has to be worked out. The big lad shrugged his shoulders, maybe, but he had lost interest by then. He waited, watching Ignác for a short while. *You have to do a handstand while you're at it*, said Ignác. The



boy humphed and was ready to leave when Ignác hurled up the first skittle with his right hand and then the second, by which time the first was arriving in his left hand, and at that very moment he threw the third skittle up with the right and passed the first skittle with his left hand to his right. He was only a fraction of a second out. If he was quick as a flash he would be able to catch the second skittle with his left hand. That brought silence. Nearly right, everyone could see that it was a close-run thing, Ignác perked up and gave it another go. It didn't go this time either. And so it went on for hours more and there were times when it seemed that the single 'Almost' had never been. But then, no knowing why—as far as he was concerned he was not doing anything differently—he got the hang of it. He had realised that he mustn't think about it, because if he paid conscious attention rather than throwing by instinct it immediately went wrong. He tossed up the skittles self-obliviously and now he could even do tricks like changing the rhythm by throwing them higher, or turning round while juggling.

By the afternoon he was famished but he didn't go home and instead ran with the three skittles to the circus, and he tossed the skittles around as if it were one of the duties of the colony folk to put together a programme for the circus people. He was nervous, and they were always clattering down, but even when he made mistakes, it showed that it had worked once. That was some sort of reassurance, but he was apprehensive that he was going to ruin it precisely when the girl noticed him. It never even entered his head that Bah-ha-ha simply would not see him. He tossed up the first skittle, a second, then the third—reversed direction, changed rhythm, threw one of the skittles up nice and high and span round his axis before catching it. He had a lot of luck on his side, and he was able to make use of even that. His production was seen by Bah-ha-ha as she stepped out of the big top, and also by the man, who behaved as if he were the girl's tamer and wanted to shove her on except that Bah-ha-ha was leaping as she clapped and laughing. The whole act was for her benefit, and she was grateful for it. The man was visibly astonished by this determined boy, he was used to young boys buzzing around the girl, but he had never seen anything like this. He gestured to the young lad. He had a curious accent but he could speak Hungarian, it was possible to understand him. *Come over here!* Ignác ran over to the cages, the men who took care of the animal dung had again left the fence open. *Your name?* Ignác introduced himself. The man pointed at the girl and said, *Bárbára. Barbara?* Ignác queried. He was a trifle disappointed, but then he was also pleased that the little girl had a proper name. *I thought it was Bah-ha-ha.* The girl and her father were surprised, thinking at first that he was imitating the German pronunciation, and for a moment there was an embarrassed silence, but then they laughed out loud. *What's the difference,* said the man and set off for the living quarters, mumbling all the way *Bah-ha-ha, Bah-ha-ha*, the way Ignác said it. 🐼

*Translated by Tim Wilkinson*



György Rába

## Poems

Translated by Clare Pollard

### *Ice Saints*

*Elkésett fagyosszentek*

*What am I doing in early summer?  
A month's passed and still I shiver  
steadily, with such vitality  
the borders of my brain are empty.  
The tariff war? Crisis of the economy?*

*This is nothing, I say mockingly.  
I don't care about free will or identity  
but stubbornly shiver though it's sunny,  
which, of course, is unnoticed,  
so I could be a truth-teller, honest.  
I shake with cold—there's only this word  
and only this is true, not being or worth.  
Others, in their parties, didn't find this.  
I've found fellow sufferers among shiverers  
though long ago behind barbed wire  
I lived through ice's fire  
in minus 30 with nothing to eat  
in Old Moldova's heart, in a thin jacket  
whilst, when they counted us, yesterday's mate  
fell slant, like wax's melt.  
He who looks back now sees double:  
playing one part, watching another.  
I peep through the bars of my fingers.  
I remember, which means I'm a liar.*

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#### **György Rába (1924–2011)**

*was a poet and literary historian. His first poems were published in the legendary periodical Nyugat (West), and he was among the founding members of the important post-war periodical Újhold (New Moon). He was one of the last members of a great generation of learned, elegant and highly disciplined poets now considered classics.*



# *The Buried River*

*A föld alatti folyó*

*The river's always in my ears,  
I hear its fleet, grim sound.  
Whatever roads I travel there's  
a roar beneath the ground.*

*I follow tracks, I lose my way,  
but under restless steps  
the water keeps on pounding  
like a neighbour who objects*

*and beats the ceiling as I spread  
up here, ardent and crass;  
whilst all the time I listen to  
the water's ceaseless blast.*

## *Human*

*Emberi*

*Every step is a question,  
so I believed and still believe,  
everything I witness is an answer,  
everything I say says:  
give me a sign.  
I wonder if you've seen  
the panoramas I've seen.  
I wonder if you heard  
my rattling march.  
Are you with me?  
You should at least  
breathe into air,  
make breath's haze  
proof that you're near.*



Gábor T. Szántó

# The First Lecture

Excerpt from a novel

**B**ring the folder with the photocopies, will you please? The transparencies I put in my bag. Where *is* my bag? The lecture outline's in it. I cannot leave without my bag."

"It's on your shoulder, Reb Shloime. Under your coat. I'll help you take it off, okay?"

"We'll be late, Miklós." And he headed for the door.

"We will not be late, calm down. I called a cab; it will wait for us. And the students will, too. They can't round up somebody else on such short notice. Which proves you are irreplaceable. And that's why you should take care of yourself."

"Don't get smart with me. Lock the door instead."

I held the folders in one hand and with the other was trying to pull his coat off.

"Wait, this isn't working. You do it, by yourself."

He stopped, stretched out his arms like a child, and I had to keep pulling on his tan, lined raincoat until the black shoulder bag came into view.

"Put it down," I said, taking the bag from him, "otherwise I can't help you put your coat back on."

"I ought to go to the bank too," he said anxiously, while his hand kept slipping into the lining of his coat.

"Now you have to?"

"I've no money on me. I haven't been out for a week."

"We have no time for that, you'll go afterward. We'd better get going or we'll really be late."

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**Gábor T. Szántó,**

*a novelist, poet and essayist, is the editor of the Hungarian-Jewish cultural and political monthly Szombat founded in 1989. His publications include a novel, also published in a German translation, a collection of short stories, also translated into Russian, and a volume of poetry. In 2003 he took part in the Iowa International Writing Program.*

*The story published here is an excerpt from a novel in progress.*



"How will I pay the cabby?"

"Not to worry, I'll take care of it. You'll pay me back later. Where is your key?"

"In the keyhole; where I left it when I let you in. Use it to lock all three locks. Plus the iron bar."

With the bag now slung over my shoulder and the folders stuck under my arm, I bolted the door and locked up with considerable difficulty. Luckily, he didn't double check; he trusted me, I guess, and waited for me in the elevator. I opened the elevator door and handed him the key.

"Wait, where is your bag now?"

"It was in your hand; you took it off my shoulder."

"So I could help you with your coat. Oh God, we *will* be late. Let me have that key again."

"Make sure you lock all three. And the bar too."

The cab stood on the corner in a no standing zone. Before we got in, he turned to me:

"It would have made more sense if I got the cab; I have my regular guy. Now it's too late of course. Let me do the talking, anyway."

As soon as we climbed into the car, he leaned forward between the two front seats. He also lowered his voice, as if anybody besides the three of us could have possibly heard what he was saying.

"We'd like to go to Pesti Barnabás Street. But you don't have to run the meter. I'll give you a thousand forints."

"I can't tell off the top of my head how much the fare will be. Depends on traffic, too." The driver didn't turn around; he looked at us in the rearview mirror.

"You really don't have to start the meter," he said, giving it another try.

"I can't just turn it off; I answered a call."

"I told you that you should have let me take care of this," grumbled the old man, leaning over to me. "I have my own people... Couldn't you ask a fellow driver, one who usually works for me, to come here?" The cabby heard the question but hadn't the foggiest what the old man was driving at.

"Will you be needing me now or not?"

This was too much, even for me.

"I ordered the cab, I'll pay the fare. Let's just go, okay?"

He sensed my anger, and was probably offended by it, but kept quiet. I knew I would have to apologize for this, too, though it was he who was being impossible. I was nervous about being late and angry that I was so quick to promise that we would be there on time. We had another fifteen minutes, but I didn't think we'd make it. We crawled along the Danube embankment in heavy, stop-and-go traffic. I rolled down the window and looked at the river, but the little white tour boats swaying in the water by the dock turned me off, and so did the tourists in their colourful windbreakers,



crowding around umbrella-wielding tour guides and laughing loudly as they waited for embarkation.

In the meantime the old man struck up a conversation with the cab driver. He asked him where he was from, and when the guy told him, he began rattling off the names of neighbouring villages, as if wanting to prove that his memory was still working, or that he was still more at home in this country than the driver. I didn't want to listen; these chats of his annoyed me to no end. I was getting all worked up. Why carry on a conversation with a cab driver? Why pretend that they had something in common? The cabby only wanted his money; and if he found out what sort he was, he probably wouldn't give him the time of the day. Let him take us where we want to go, and then it's good-bye and good riddance. "Aknaszlatina, Beregszász, Büdszentmihály, Csenger, Demecser, Dombrád, Döge, Fényeslitke, Huszt, Kaszony, Mándok, Nagykálló, Nagyszöllös, Nyirtass, Nyírmada, Szaplonca, Tiszalök, Újfehértó, and of course Újhely." I heard him reel off in alphabetical order the names of towns and villages, which he mentioned to me often enough, as though it behooved me to know all of them, only because there were yeshivas there and large Jewish communities; and if I didn't know the names, I was supposed to feel terrible about it. "Altmann, Berger, Czitrom, Danciger, Dick, Ehrlich, Friedmann, Glück, Gottlieb, Herskovits, Holländer, Itzkovics, Katz, Krebs, Lefkovics, Marmorstein, Messinger, Nussbaum, Polnauer, Rosenbaum, Schaechter, Weisz and Zeller." He was quizzing the driver now: did he remember any of those names, was anyone in his village called by those names, or something similar, for wasn't it enough that they were all killed, they each had names, and he knew them all, or at least the names of the villages... I, too, should make it my business to know them; I am bad in topography of course, in that too, but then why don't I buy a map, as a writer I should at least know which village comes after which small station, as long as I live here and write in this language, instead of writing, as I should, in English or Hebrew, because nobody is interested in Jews here, not even the Jews themselves, in fact, they are particularly uninterested, because anyone who is more Jewish than they makes them extremely uncomfortable; why don't I at least go abroad for a few years, to study, or just bum around...? Because I have family here, Reb Shloime, I told you a hundred times, my anxiety-ridden mother and my oh-so-sad father, neither of whom knew *their* father, I am all they have, and a hope for a grandchild some day, which would also be a sort of restitution, showing death a new life so it could have something fresh to devour, justifying all the previous generations' self-deception that it makes sense to continue the race of rampant cells plagued with acute consciousness... but for that I must want to start not just a family, but a *Jewish* family; and for my life to have meaning I need God, too, and a community of Jews; I would want to recreate something, as I don't see much sense in simply bringing something into being. So far I haven't been successful



starting a family, perhaps because I can't deceive my own instincts... I am surprised that this peaceable taxi driver hasn't yet thrown us out of his cab here on the bank of the Danube, if shooting us unto the river is no longer an option; but to put up with this torrent of words, the names of dozens and dozens of settlements and people, is, for me at least, just too much. If I only knew why I am still sitting here, why do I stick to him and visit him and listen to him pestering me; what the hell am I waiting for? What do I want from this manic-depressive old codger who, when he is up, dashes about the city, and I with him, helping him run his errands in banks and photocopy shops and hospitals and Jewish community centres, and listening to him bitching about my pessimism which, he says, is such a drag. But when he tumbles into the pit of depression, he won't pick up the phone, and I could bang on his door till the cows come home. What do I hope to gain from him or understand through him, if not myself? To understand at last *what* I want from him and *why* I put up with him. What on earth connects the two of us? The very thought of him comparing me to himself frightens me... Why then do I go with him even now to that lecture, his first at the university, which he's been working on setting up for ages? Why do I keep seeing him when I know it's always the same story; nothing comes of it except this chaos. Yet I go, like someone who is in search of something but is barely able to make out its outline in the dark, or perhaps it's the temptation of an even deeper darkness; he ought to be afraid of it but is drawn in, the attraction is that strong, and come what may, he must follow it and look at it, into it, into its very core.

I tried to take a deep breath, so I could concentrate better. Focusing on things isn't easy for me. As long as I can remember, things of the real world reach me through a fog, a blur; due to some unknown defense mechanism my perceptions slip through the sieve of my senses and remain useless phantoms. I always believed that I mustn't fool away my life; I wanted desperately to concentrate on essentials, with the result that I had no time for anything else—life, for instance. Reb Shloime's distracted, scattered self irritated me. Though I didn't know exactly what I wanted from him, I was furious when I felt that he paid too much attention to pointless trifles.

"Right here is fine, thank you," I said to the driver as soon as the Elizabeth Bridge was within sight.

"I can't stop here, only there by the arcades," the driver said.

I hated these petty tricks of theirs: squeezing another hundred forints out of the fare by stopping at a long red light or taking a little detour. I looked suspiciously at anyone who I thought was out to gyp me.

"Fine. Stop wherever you can. We're late."

I paid him, and then helped the old man out of the car.

"Come on already, we still have to find the room." I knew that sounded harsh, but I couldn't contain my emotions any more.



After the cab took off, I was ready to go, but Reb Shloime just stood there motionless. I turned back. He was looking at me with reproach in his eyes.

"You cannot talk to me like that, Miklós. I am old, I am senile, but you still can't talk to me like that. You have to grant people their dignity."

"But why would you want to start haggling with a taxi driver? They have fixed rates."

"Don't lecture me; I know what I am doing. And if I make a fool of myself, you still shouldn't talk to me that way, you hear?" He was shouting by now.

"We have to get going, it's late."

In the department office they were waiting for him. He had asked specifically for an overhead projector. The machine was all set up, and I could see through the slightly ajar classroom door that the students were there too, eight, maybe ten in all, sitting around a long table. He threw his shoulder bag on a chair in the secretary's office, and I proceeded to peel off his raincoat. He was still puffing away from having climbed the stairs. I reached out to fix his jacket collar, but the gesture embarrassed me.

"Everything okay?" I asked. I needed a little time, after my own anger had subsided, to be able to relate to his.

He didn't answer and began walking toward the room. I followed him, carrying his bag. With his hand already on the door handle, he turned around. "You have one job now. Let's agree on a signal. You will look at me and shake your head if I digress a little too much. Don't say anything, just shake your head. A deal?"

"A deal."

We both entered what was a seminar room. He strode to the head of the table, and I sat down in the first chair on his left and placed his bag on the table. He sank his hand into it, felt about, took out a piece of paper, searched some more, then looked up and around, his eyes ranging over his audience.

"Sholom Aleichem," he finally said, and while still rummaging in his bag, he began his talk: "You most probably study Yiddish as well as Hebrew here. Yiddish was my mother tongue, but here I will speak in Hungarian. My name is Shlomo Eliezer Löw ben Doved Maisel. I will write it on the board. The last two were my father's names. Löw in German means lion, so my friends used to call me Leo. My official Hungarian name is Jenő, but to some people I was Janó; in America I was Eugene, but my students, with whom I learned Talmud, called me Reb Shloime. Or would have... but that's a whole other story. Rav is a more distinguished title than reb, rabbanan is more prominent than rav, but the greatest honour of all is to be called by your name, the Talmud teaches. Everybody knows what the Talmud is?" he asked, looking around the room. When he reached me, I nodded eagerly.

"The town I come from, Sátoraljaújhely, had a large Jewish population. The Hungarian name was too complicated, so in Yiddish they called it Shadarada.



Certain words you have to understand. My name you already know, I will also tell you where I studied, and from whom, because I am proud of my masters, and the Talmud says that when someone is teaching or quoting another scholar, he has to say who his teacher was and who it is he's quoting. For if he doesn't, it's as though he was stealing from them. And the person who taught him but one thing, he must also respect as his rabbi." And with that he gave me a long, meaningful look. I stared him down in return.

"The rabbis express similar views in connection with blessings recited at mealtimes. Whoever eats his meal without saying the appropriate blessing is guilty of stealing from the Almighty, since He created the world and the fruits of the earth and all the animals in it. This comes up in a different context in relation to Bereshit, or Genesis, in the story of Creation: 'At first, God created the heavens and the earth.' The most renowned commentator, Rashi, in this connection quotes Rabbi Yitzchak, who says that God should have begun this way: This month shall be for you the beginning of all the months, since this is the first commandment in the Torah. Then why doesn't He start with this sentence? Rashi says it's because God wants people to understand why He could give the land of Canaan to the Jews, which in earlier times had been inhabited by other people. This way, when other nations accuse Israel of occupying land that had belonged to seven different people of Canaan, they can answer: The whole earth belongs to the Almighty, blessed be His name. He created it and gave it to those He felt were right for that land. He gave it to them, then took it back and gave it to us."

He rattled this off so quickly, he could hardly catch his breath. I didn't quite get the relevance of what he was saying.

"I assume you have all received copies of the syllabus," he said after pulling out a sheet of paper from his bag and waving it in the air. "We'll cover various topics on the basis of this plan." He pushed his glasses up his forehead and began reading: "I will offer six lectures in all, just as I have done at American universities. I will present an overview of the legacy of Hungarian Jewry as reflected in their burial customs, in their cemeteries and gravestone inscriptions. In this connection I intend to speak about patterns of Jewish settlement in Hungary between 1795 and 1944, deal with social, political and institutional structures, and discuss demographic changes over the years. In the second lecture I will talk about Ashkenazi and ultra-orthodox chasidic communities and institutions in northeastern Hungary, specifically in Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén county. In our third session we will consider—from the standpoint of *halakha*, that is, Jewish law—religious practices and customs as important elements of community life, with emphasis on Szabolcs-Szatmár and Hajdú-Bihar counties. In the fourth lecture we will examine the workings of the Chevra Kadisha, the Jewish burial societies (literally holy societies), on the bases of several such institutions in Transylvania, which were established



well before any other community organization. These holy societies were not only concerned with burial; they helped the needy as well as the families of the deceased, and they organized community functions, dinners, etc. For according to the Jewish religion, the deceased *is* holy, and his or her standing is higher than that of the living, because a dead person can't watch over himself, only the living can watch over the dead. And the dead can't wait, only the living can. That is why the burial has to take place on the day the death occurs, if at all possible, or the following day. The fifth lecture will be devoted to cemeteries, gravestones and inscriptions, and we will refer to examples from northern Hungary. In the final session I would like to analyze the headstones and inscriptions of the Újhely cemetery. In this case I plan to use no resource other than the inscriptions themselves. Does that sound all right to you?"

I wasn't sure if he was posing the question to me, but I quickly nodded anyway, and he went on. He spoke at such a furious pace, his great hurry had an effect on me; I also became agitated.

"I will only speak about prewar Hungary. My world ended with the Holocaust. My father was a teacher, and after *cheder*, Jewish elementary school, that is, he enrolled me in the yeshiva of Sátoraljaújhely, where Reb Eizik was my master teacher. This man in all his life never hurt anyone, but he ended up in Auschwitz just the same, blessed be his memory. The year I was in that yeshiva had to be 1939. I spent two semesters there and then one year at the Szatmár yeshiva, where I was a student of Joel Teitelbaum, the famous Reb Yaylish. Does this name mean anything you?"

I looked around the room very deliberately and then nodded, hoping this will prompt others to nod too, but except for a sad-faced, heavy-set boy, no one did.

"Do you happen to know what kind of religious affiliation he represented? There were orthodox, progressive and in-between Jews, and besides the orthodox there were the ultra-religious chasidim; the Jews of Szatmár belonged to this group. You might say they were the *crème de la crème*. Can anyone tell me what was the difference between these various groups? Well? One day we'll take the minibus to Ferihegy Airport, and when a plane arrives from America or Israel, I'll point them out to you. That would be the simplest way. Each rebbe had his grand household, and some still do. Incidentally, I learned in a third yeshiva, in Csenger. There I didn't understand a word the rabbi was saying, that's how fast he read from the Talmud. Already then I was a wandering Jew. My father was also a teacher, a *melamed*; he would wake me up at the crack of dawn, around four thirty, and have me memorize passages from the Gemara. Sometimes he'd hit me, too, if I misbehaved or went against my mother. Then he really let me have it, there was no running away from him. I was a pretty bright kid, but somehow I couldn't stay put, I'd get the urge to move on. My father saw this, and saw also that I liked to read. Literature. So



he would take me to yet another school. Finally I ended up in Debrecen, in the Jewish high school, though that's a story for another day... First I tucked my *payess* behind my ears, so the other boys who didn't have sidelocks shouldn't see it, but then I cut them off. My classmates, children of "progressive" Jews, caught me one day, dragged me to an unlit doorway and tried to force a bacon sandwich down my throat. I couldn't spit it out fast enough."

He looked at me as though he wanted to ask me something, and I quickly nodded, urging him to continue. I had no idea where he was going with all this.

"I'd like to show you pictures of various communities, famous rabbis and their gravestones. He again reached into his bag.

"They are in the folder," I said quietly.

"What's that?"

"In the folder."

He took out the photocopies and passed around the first sheet.

"This is a painting of the Chasam Sofer, the father of Hungarian Ashkenazi Jewry. He was born in Frankfurt and his master was Nathan Adler, who had to leave the city, so Sofer went with him and settled in Pressburg. He became the spiritual leader of a community of eight thousand souls, and he commanded as much respect as the pope. Hungarian Jewish orthodoxy came out of his overcoat. His son was the likewise famous Ksav Sofer. And Maharam Asch was their descendant, too, and I am a descendant of Maharam Asch... What else did I want to say? Oh yes, the grave of this ancestor of mine became a much visited site in Pressburg, that is, Pozsony or Bratislava. Because for Jews cemeteries—mark my words—are more important than synagogues. You can pray anywhere if a Torah is present, but as soon as it is removed, the sacredness is gone. The synagogue is not a holy place, even if here they believe it is, and restore synagogues where no one will ever pray. A cemetery is holy. We call it *bet olam* or with Ashkenazi pronunciation, *bais oilom*: the house of eternal life. We buy a cemetery plot not for twenty-five or fifty or a hundred years, but for all eternity, like Abraham, who would not accept Sarah's gravesite as a gift in Hebron in the Cave of Machpelah, but wanted to pay Ephron, son of Zohar, so there should be no misunderstanding later. Because according to our belief, at the end of time the Messiah will come and resurrect the dead. That's why we have to build fences around every cemetery, because they are holy places." He stopped and looked around. "In this country it wasn't only the Nazis that wreaked havoc. In the past decades people let cemeteries fall into ruin. They carted away the stones to construction sites and sold the land, which was then used for farming. There are at least five hundred cemeteries, out of fifteen hundred, that met this fate. If anyone among you would be interested, I would gladly organize trips to the countryside, and we could clean up some of these cemeteries. I'd get the local authorities and Jews from abroad to chip in so that at least fences could be put up around these cemeteries."



I tried to signal to him that he was digressing, I kept craning my neck and shaking my head, but instead of getting the message, he scolded me. "Stay out of this, you don't have to come. Mr. Writer here doesn't like to visit small villages." I could feel myself turning red in the face.

"But not everyone is so picky, right?" he said, turning to the students who were clearly confused and embarrassed—after all, they came here to learn, not to go off as volunteers in some sort of work camp. "After class, I will take the names of those of you who are interested." I tried to get his attention and let him know that he shouldn't push this thing. I pointed to my watch.

"Excuse me for a second," he said to the class. "I'll be right back. Can I see you for a minute, Miklós? Outside?"

Then, in the secretary's office, he lit into me:

"Why do you have to disturb my class?"

"Me? You asked me to signal if you're digressing."

"How long have I been talking?"

"About a half hour."

"And I haven't even begun. What should I do?"

"Go on with your lecture."

"Don't rush me. Did I say stupid things?"

"No, but you keep rambling."

"I told you to warn me."

"Don't tell me I didn't signal. But when I did, you gave me hell. Don't try to recruit helpers; don't start campaigning. Teach them."

"Be more patient with me. You can't talk like this to an old man. Because then you understood nothing of what I tried to teach you."

"And you must try to listen to me."

"Let's go back to the room."

Inside he motioned with his hand.

"Turn on the overhead projector, please."

I couldn't help making a face and didn't care if he saw it. He was really being impossible. I was sitting next to the projector, the request was clearly addressed to me, yet his wounded pride made him dig into me one more time by pretending that he was no longer speaking to me. I turned on the machine and he began rummaging in his bag and continued pawing through it ever more feverishly. Finally, he turned to me in despair.

"I can't find the transparencies."

I flung out my arms. I wasn't in charge of them. It was the one thing that was his responsibility: to select the appropriate transparencies, because in America he learned that you cannot lecture at a university without using an overhead projector.

In his irritation he tossed aside his bag.

"It doesn't matter, we'll do that next time. Actually, it would be simpler just



to go there, in person. Although *somebody* told me—and he cast a sharp glance at me and then a benign one at the others—that I shouldn't start campaigning here. I will still tell you what I learned from the *Pirkei Avos*, the wise maxims of the Fathers: *Lo hamidrash ikkar ella hama'aseh*. It is action, not theory, that is important. The cemeteries have to be put in order because the dead cannot wait. *A zoy dik dort'n di kedishe az mem ken es shnaden mit a messer*. Holiness is so thick there, you can cut it with a knife. This is Yiddish. That's what somebody once told me in Israel, somebody who knew a thing or two about what Hungarian Jewry was like once upon a time. Anyway, the department secretary has my phone number, so if you're interested, give me a call and we could arrange a trip to these cemeteries and do some work there. While we are at it, we could read the inscriptions; it would be better anyway to see the real things rather than look at photographs. And I would explain everything to you. For starters, I'll tell you a story that will make even those realize what kind of people lived here, who otherwise totally lack humility." By now he ignored me completely, and was talking only to the others.

"The town I come from is where the rabbi of Tiszaszalka lived. Before the war he may have had at most fifteen congregants. We were on the same train when we were liberated in 1945. During the American bombing raids, the train had rolled through the Tyrolean mountains, shuttling between Wahlheim and Munich, at least thirty cars going back and forth, with our captors waiting for the right moment to finish us off. Now and then the train stopped, the doors opened, dead bodies were thrown off, and people trying to escape were either shot or brought back. The rabbi of Tiszaszalka was on this train lying half dead on the floor. He had diarrhea, dysentery, typhoid fever; the end was near. The rabbi of Szanz was sitting next to him, the son of Divrai Chaim, and with his handkerchief he was wiping the dying man's behind. A young man asked him: 'Who is this man that you are serving him *shamesh be kodesh*, with a sacred sense of duty?' And the one from Szanz replied: 'I want you to know that this man knows both Talmuds by heart.'"

The old man choked up, flopped down in his chair, and though his tears flowed, he looked up and I could see he was struggling, anxious to go on and make it to the finish line, on all fours if need be. He was talking in a whisper by now, I could hardly hear him.

"Can you imagine? He knew both Talmuds by heart. I had seen this man sitting in his backyard, smoking a pipe. He was a tall, quiet man, with two lovely daughters and a modest wife. And no one knew what a great scholar he was, only in the *lager* did we gather, from chance remarks, while he studied with us." The students in the seminar room were shaken and perplexed as they looked at one another. They tried to act as if they hadn't noticed that he was crying.

"We are finished for today; you can go home," the old man said with a groan, realizing he cannot continue, and then he looked at me. I had no idea



what he wanted now or what I was supposed to do. The others were gathering their things in silence, but in a hurry, too. I also made as though I was getting ready to leave, but I knew I wasn't going anywhere. I waited until they were all gone and the two of us were alone.

"We better get going," I said after a while rather nervously.

"I can't."

"Why not? What's the matter?"

He didn't answer right away, just looked at me, leaning against the table, blinking noticeably.

"I peed in my pants, Miklós. From the excitement I couldn't pay attention to it, I couldn't control it, so I peed in my pants. It's an old thing, I've had it since the *lager*. Luckily I'm wearing a diaper."

"Well, then it's not so bad. That's why you put one on, right?" I asked firmly. And tried hard to make his condition appear normal.

"Even so I can't go out on the street like this. I have to go to the toilet and change it. You can't really understand this. Call a taxi. Take me home." ☹

*Translated by Ivan Sanders*

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Zsigmond Falusy  
**Gophers**

1.

**O**n that day Albert Zákány, the ranger, took the dirt road from Tiszalúc to Bőcs. He always took the dirt road when the weather was dry. On the paved road he would have to drive almost twenty kilometres, over the fields a mere nine, so from spring to the late autumn rains he preferred the shortcut. Sometimes, however, he had to take the dirt road even through mud and snow. If they warned him that poachers were in the area or possibly people have been spotted stealing timber, then there's no nonsense, he gets in the Ford Ranger and sets off for the fields.

We're sitting in that Ford right now, crossing through the middle of Tiszalúc to see the spot where József Kiss was caught in the act trapping gophers. The sun is baking hot, hardly anyone on the street. The concrete walls and iron fences alternate on either side of the street, behind them well-tended gardens stretch to the characterless grey houses. A cyclist turns out of one of the gates. When he sees the ranger he seems to say something.

"Stinking prick." Albert translates.

"Can you lip-read?"

"I learned. And people always say that when they see me anyway. I've caught that guy poaching twice, for instance."

"Do they just swear at you, or do they threaten you too?"

"They threaten me. Sometimes they attack me. One of the women who gather mushrooms tried to stab me for instance. These people don't care about anything. The other day I was crossing the neighbouring village by bike, not long after they'd handed out the welfare payments. Everyone was drunk, and I was a little

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*Zsigmond Falusy*  
*is a freelance journalist.*



scared to think what would happen if they came at me. I remember counting to myself to see if I would have enough rounds in the two magazines I had."

József Kiss, however, did not resist when the ranger appeared in the field in March. He just stood, stooping a little, the gophers lying dead on the ground beside him. Basically it was a repeat of a scene that had happened once before. In July of last year Kiss had been caught on the same spot, next to the Sarkad farmstead, trying to catch gophers with snares. He gave the same explanation now that he had made then: he has thirteen kids, he has to feed his family. What kind of a Hungarian are you that you would do such a thing, Zákány had asked, at which Kiss just shrugged and said he wasn't Hungarian, he was a Gypsy. Then he dictated his personal data, but when Zákány told him to pick up the snares he suddenly turned stubborn. Zákány slapped him with the back of his hand. Kiss fell to the ground, and for a moment hatred flared in his eyes, but just as suddenly it flickered out. "O.K. chief, just don't hit me", he said, and he began to gather the snares.

## 2

József Kiss lives with his family in an abandoned building. They had lived on the Gypsy row of the village, but the spring flood had knocked down their mud brick hovel, so they had had to leave. Kiss had saved what he could from the rubble, a kitchen range and a television, he had spat on the rest. The devil take it.

When we see the house, for a moment we look at it in disbelief, for the walls have been painted purple, like in a picture book. The yard, however, quickly jerks you back to reality. Everything is sitting in mud, not a blade of grass anywhere, trash covers the backyard, where, if there's no wind, the stench collects. Though it's really nothing but the stench of neglect and rust, the family tends to nature's calls some two-hundred metres further down, in the corn patch.

"We have no water, no gas, nothing," says Anikó Lakatos at the door. You can see into the bathroom behind her, the tub almost completely covered in household odds and ends. The woman's been living with József Kiss since she was a teenager. She was five months pregnant when he took her in, though the kid wasn't even his. A tattoo on Anikó's forearm is a reminder of her one-time love: another Jóska.

"Where is your husband now?"

"Cleaning a cesspool somewhere. May not come home until lunch."

"What is for lunch?"

"Fish soup. It's a good gentleman's dish. I've got paprika and onion to put in it too."

"And fish?"

Anikó Lakatos points at the oil drum beside the entrance. Kiss keeps the fish that he catches from the Hernád river or the neighbouring lake in it. He uses



neither hook nor net, goes into the water with nothing more than an iron hoop, then, where there's a bubble in the mud, he quickly pushes down the hoop, for there must be a fish there too.

"What else do you usually eat?"

"Whatever we have. I'll boil some chicken bones, sometimes I go to the market in Miskolc and gather up the scraps the stall-keepers have thrown away."

"You go through the rubbish bins?"

"I told you, I gather up scraps. Tomatoes, peppers, onions, cauliflower. Or I buy some sowbelly and fry it for the lard."

"How do you cook the gophers?"

"That's easy. I just singe their fur off, boil them, then skin them. I take out their innards, wash the meat, add some vegetables, cook them, and done."

"But you know it is illegal to trap gophers, because they are a protected species?"

"What do you want me to say? Legal, illegal, it's all the same."

Anikó Lakatos is standing in the middle of the room, next to the stove, which is sticky with dirt. She is short, has black hair, her front teeth are missing, which makes her face shrivel when she speaks. She is forty-four years old. She has completed six grades of school, five more than József Kiss. Though he went to school too, he did first grade eight times in the maximum security prison in Szeged, just he never passed. When he speaks of this, Anikó Lakatos laughs out loud, then scared, she clasps her hand to her mouth.

"And you are going to write about this all?" she later asks.

"Of course."

"The gopher stew part too?"

"That too."

"But why?"

### 3

It is in fact child's play to catch a gopher using a snare. You just bend a bit of wire into a circle, put it at the entrance to the gopher hole, and tie a long stick to the end. When the gopher goes into the hole, the wire tightens around its neck, and he struggles in vain to escape into the ground, the stick gets caught at the mouth of the hole and the animal slowly strangles itself.

"It's an ugly thing," says István Hevele, the commanding officer. "Nastier than pouring water into the hole, then they just hit the animal once with a shovel and it doesn't suffer."

The commanding officer is a young man, wasn't even alive back when gopher stew was an everyday meal in these parts. In the 60s and 70s poor people often ate gopher. They hadn't yet ploughed everything up, there was



still plenty of open country, for gophers love fields, plains with low-lying grass, where they can rear up on their hind legs and survey the terrain. Then everything changed. Bigger and bigger tracts of land were cultivated, and on top of that the white-tailed eagle became a protected species, so the gopher, on which it feeds, was made a protected species too.

Hevele opens a file: "Proceedings are underway against József Kiss for fifty counts of cruelty to animals and two counts of damaging the environment." This is the legal way of referring to what we would usually just think of as gopher trapping. "Then there are eighty-two counts of attempting to damage the environment, since they found that many snares on him."

"Do you have many such cases?"

"So far this is the only one. People usually steal wood or iron, or they glean corn that the combine leaves behind. But that's stealing too."

The telephone rings, Hevele answers. He speaks quietly into the receiver, yes, no, it's not possible now, we hear. The district is not that large, but the commanding officer has plenty of work. And winter is here, they're starting to steal wood.

"What will become of Kiss?" we ask, when he hangs up.

"As I said, proceedings are underway. The fine for one gopher is ten-thousand forint, and they found nine gophers on him, and one of them was pregnant, so with the babies it would come to more than the limit of one-hundred-thousand forint."

"And what does that mean?"

"That his actions constitute a criminal offense. In other words Kiss could even end up in prison."

Hevele falls silent for a moment. He pokes at the edge of the table, then lifts the filer.

"That's what these people are like," he says.

#### 4

In his fifty-two years of life József Kiss has done time for homicide, theft, assault and battery, but not once for gopher trapping. In the Szeged prison he was nicknamed the Wild Man, and in Sándorház they called him Carrion because once on the hog farm he had pulled the carcass of a dead pig out of the sty. When we meet with him in the afternoon at 3:00, he has just come home from work. He has taken off his rubber boots, now he is wearing a dirty white pair of women's slippers the heels of which dangle loose.

"Do you really have thirteen children?"

"And two grandchildren."

"And do you know all their names?"

"Of course. There's Renáta, little Anikó, little Zsanett. Then there's little József, Natasa, Paula, and Petra."



"And Klaudia," Anikó Lakatos helps. "Did you mention Márton?"

"Not yet."

"Then Márton. And Julika."

"And little Ágnes," said Kiss. "How many is that?"

"Eleven."

"Then I'll think about it a little."

József Kiss himself had fifteen siblings. The family had lived in Miskolc, supporting themselves with basket weaving and house cleaning. Then they had moved to Hernádnémeti. Kiss was only barely seventeen when he was found guilty of homicide.

"Two families got into a fight outside the inn," he recounts. "But I wasn't the one who stabbed him, I just took the blame."

He had ended up in prison along with his father and his older brother. In prison he had welded, worked at the press brake, even been a cook. He had cooked peppery squash stew for several hundred inmates. After five months they had caught him selling meat for cigarettes, so they had put him back at the machines. When he was freed he worked as a trash man, in a cement brick works, and in a plant that made screws. Sometimes he wound up in prison again, was released, then sentenced to do time again for something, and he viewed this continuous back and forth as an unpleasant but almost natural part of his life.

"What do I have to lose?" he asks. "They cannot do me any harm."

He has spent a total of twenty-two years behind bars, and when he mentions this we resent him a little bit for it. As if he had ruined our game. We had wanted to meet a man in despair, who in his utter despair traps gophers for his family. We wanted drama, the grotty faces of children who cry as they ask for food. Instead we find this man, who has spent almost half of his life in prison. But surely someone who has done time may despair?

"We are poor," Kiss says, apropos of nothing, as if this were an explanation for anything.

Then he lifts his hand, gestures towards the cupboard in which there are a few kilogrammes of flour and a pan with the lard which will be turned into candles, too far gone to be eaten. He opens the working refrigerator and the stench of fish soup hits your nose. The man turns around in the only room that's heated, shuffles, tells us to look at this, and look at that. Can you live like this, he asks, four of us sleep in this bed, he says, but Anikó Lakatos protests, what rot, only you and I sleep in that bed, and sometimes one of the kids.

"Alright, alright," he says, and keeps speaking. We watch this gesticulating man, the absurd slippers on his feet, the electrical wiring sticking out from the ceiling, the windows that won't close properly, and slowly we realize that perhaps he is right: poverty explains a great deal. Perhaps not everything, but certainly a few gophers.



**O**f course in these parts things more dramatic than gopher trapping take place. Two years ago they used dogs to chase a deer into a gully, where they then beat it to death with sticks, skinned it, and ate it. In the area around Miskolc they regularly strip the weekend gardens. Sometimes they cut down a cherry tree because they are too lazy to climb it to get the cherries. Today in the area around Harang, which is known for its wines, almost no one cultivates grapevines, because what's the point, they'll just steal them. No need to speak of this to Zsolt Orosz, the mayor of Hernádnémeti, he knows plenty such stories.

"Just go towards the Hernád river," he says. "There is an area called Szilvás, or 'Plummy,' because it used to be full of plum trees. Now you won't find a single one."

He has been the head of the village for twelve years now. He qualified as a geography and physical education teacher, then took correspondence courses and completed studies in law. He speaks slowly, his head slightly tilted to the side.

"I have no idea what to do. We hand out welfare payments, we have a public works programme, but it's not enough."

"You need permanent employment."

Orosz looks up, as if we were joking.

"Things are very bad," he says. "We have come to a point where people don't even bother mentioning when something disappears from the village. In the summer after the floods the suggestion was made that the local government build housing to be rented by those in need. The representatives rejected the proposal, arguing that it would not turn out well: first they wouldn't pay rent, then they would dismantle everything that could be moved, in other words they would ruin the property. I could not even say they were wrong."

We are sitting in his office. The mayor speaks reluctantly, it's apparent that he is not overjoyed that we are there. You want to write about something bad again, he sighed a few days ago on the telephone, and we felt a little sorry for him. And really, does anything good ever happen in these parts? Hardly. On one occasion they chase a deer into a gully, on another someone lies down under a train in despair, usury is rampant, they steal wood, fruit and vegetables, and the fact that József Kiss has caught a gopher barely even registers.

Zsolt Orosz leans forward in his chair.

"Sometimes I think these people no longer care. They have crossed every limit."

"What do you mean?"



"It's hard to explain. Society has written them off, and they have written off society. They feel that they don't belong anywhere and they cannot be made to answer for anything."

"So what will happen now?"


"I don't know."

6

**W**e ask József Kiss to tell us of the happiest day in his life.

"It was winter, everything was covered in snow," he begins. "I remember the date, December 13th, 1985. I was released that day, along with my father. They let us out of prison in the early morning. It was still dark, but across the way the stallkeepers were already bustling around the market. My father had a short drink, I had coffee. Then we travelled to Hajdúhadház, because I had a woman there. I had started writing letters to her in prison. So we went to see her, her mother was there too. My father cooked *sztrapacska* for them, potato and flour dumplings with cheese and bacon. The women had never had it, they couldn't get over how delicious it was. We ate and drank and had a good time. I was happy to finally be out, to have gotten out of those four walls. That was the most beautiful day of my life."

We leave the house through the kitchen. There is a pan of fat on the table and a knife, but no chairs anywhere. Nothing to sit on. It only occurs to us now that we did not see any chairs in the house at all. At the door we shake hands with József Kiss. He looks away, we follow his glance, then we see something above his shoulder. Our task is not difficult, the place is almost disturbingly bare. There are no pictures, no newspaper clippings on the wall, not even a calendar anywhere, just this one thing.

A saw. 



Titanilla Fiáth

# Romany in Prison

**I**t was in the summer of 2009, not long before taking my exam in the Romany language, that I first called János S. into my office for the psychological tests compulsory for those starting a prison sentence. He quietly knocked on the already open door and cautiously inquired if he could come in. I swallowed hard and answered in the Gypsy language: "Yes. Good morning. Sit down." Thinking back on it, I find it hard to decide which of us was more embarrassed. János inclined his head for a moment, then looked at me and asked if he should close the door. He asked in Hungarian.

Several months later, by which time he was coming to me regularly for therapy sessions—conducted strictly in Hungarian—he brought up unprompted the subject of Romany. Would I show him one of my textbooks, because he had heard that Gypsy writing differed somewhat from Hungarian. I explained the alphabet, he took careful notes, and then turned the conversation to his family problems. His mother suffered from cancer and the doctors had for some time given up all hope. One day soon afterwards he phoned his sisters, then sat down opposite me and simply said: "I rang Tündi. Végo-j lake\*. You'll understand that." It was about his mother's death that he spoke to me in Gypsy for the first time.

More than a year has passed since I learned to speak reasonably good Romany, believing that from then on there would be no difficulty in achieving a much closer therapeutic relationship with the Roma prisoners. I thought that the shared language would make the Gypsy/not Gypsy, woman/man, and member of the prison staff/prisoner barriers simply disappear. Hearing the

\* ■ She's finished.

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*Titanilla Fiáth*

*is a prison psychologist who studied psychology and anthropology.  
She was also a rapper and a song writer for the Luddites group.*



Romany greeting, "*lasho-j tyo dyes!*"\*\* the Romas would suddenly feel they could trust the psychologist, even though otherwise she represented the majority society and authority. As if speaking the others' mother tongue was enough to make the fact that I was a stranger become irrelevant and disappear without trace. As if knocking alone were enough to get through the door.

I tried to begin building a relationship by speaking Romany with several others besides János S., but the inmates arriving in the prison, instead of swooning at the extra service provided by the institution's psychologist and giving her the trust due to "one of us", blushed, became dumb, or began to laugh. "Do I speak terribly badly? Am I making mistakes?" I asked one of the long-standing prisoners, who had heard me utter a few Romany sentences at a group therapy session. "No, you speak very clearly," he said. "It's just funny when you speak. It's not what we expect."

The only one with whom I had a longer conversation in Romany during the next six months was Zoltán K., a twenty-year old young man from the provinces. He found no relatives in the prison, and on top of that his slight mental handicap made it difficult for him to fit in with his fellows. Zoltán was delighted to be able to tell his tales to someone in his own mother-tongue. He asked more than once whether I was a Gypsy, or if not, whether my "husband" was a Gypsy. At this time some interesting pieces of gossip began to circulate about me among the prisoners. These stories generally featured a man—partner, fiancé or husband—for whose sake I had undertaken to learn Romany. The best story was of a strict Roma family, who forbade their son to choose me for his wife. In order to get them to accept me and agree to the marriage, I spared no effort to learn the language. In some versions of the story we did get married eventually, in other versions all the hard work was in vain, they continued to make me feel that I was no Roma.

**T**he gossip that assumed professional rather than private motives was more unpleasant. In these tales I was a police spy who used her position as a psychologist to gain the confidence of unsuspecting inmates, so as to learn the expressions which the prisoners used to conduct their illegal business deals. According to the purveyors of the "spy versions", because I was able to translate the words, "*parno*" (white) or "*drabo*" (medicine), they were more liable to be detected when, shouting to each other through the windows, they dealt in tranquilizers, or when they touched on such matters in letters written to relatives in the belief that the staff member checking them could not decode the messages.

Both the content of such gossip and the guardedness/rejection clearly show that what is involved in these cases is not simply "the use of a foreign tongue". The symbolic content and the effect on the relationship are quite different when I speak to an American detainee in English from when I try Romany

\*\* ■ You have a good day.



among Gypsies. Unless I am already on good terms with an inmate, speaking Romany immediately creates suspicion. What justification is there for using Romany when both of us quite obviously manage perfectly well in Hungarian? How will our roles take shape in a world such as the prison, strictly organized along hierarchical lines, when Romany has no formal forms of address? Once we move into a linguistic terrain that implies a deeper intimacy, will we find our way back to the prescribed relationship of greater distance, which is also reflected in Hungarian formal grammar?

Though I do not wish to refer to how Roma identity is demonstrated and subjectively experienced in prison, the following story shows the key significance of language both as regards belonging and as regards being identified and accepted by others.

Gusztáv L. told me the following story about Ottó S.: "Here in the prison, but in other prisons as well, many Romungro try to stick close to the Vlach Gypsies. I am not sure whether it is to appear flash, or just for the merchandise. This kid, this Ottó, comes over to me and starts telling me about his relatives. All Vlach Gypsies. So I talk to him in Romany, and he doesn't understand a word of it. So how is he a Gypsy if he doesn't know a word of the language?" Irrespective of the fact that the topic, "who is/who is not a Gypsy in prison" is both far more complex and complicated than this example, it shows that speaking Romany in part serves to manifest and emphasize the Roma identity. When the psychologist uses Romany to greet a prison inmate and invite him to sit down, the other elements—prisoner, middle aged, from County Borsod, etc.—of the latter's identity immediately take second place beside the fact that he is appreciated as "Roma". In other words, in these situations my choice of language immediately indicates that I noticed that the person I am talking to is a Gypsy—irrespective of whether it was this that he wanted to bring out in the conversation or, for example, that he was a "family man".

**A**ddressing them in Romany thus frequently became—despite all my good intentions—tantamount to calling them Gypsy in a pejorative way. As a psychologist, over the years I have seen Roma men who screamed and scratched their faces bloody so as to make "the cause of all their troubles", the "fucking brown colour", disappear forever. I cannot but feel shame every time one of my patients swallows and pauses before saying: "You know, with us, umm, so to speak, Gypsies..." I have heard many outbursts of self-hate and bitter auto-stereotypes from the mouths of Gypsies. It would be too simple to overcome all this with a "*Taves baxtalo!*"\*\*\*

The Roma greeting—and the subsequent interview in Romany—addresses the "Gypsy I" hidden from the "*gadzsó*" world. It is an invasion of the sphere

\*\*\* ■ May you be lucky!



reserved for "insiders", without asking for permission. The embarrassed replies, given in Hungarian, always demonstrated that my patients, while willing to have a conversation, were unwilling to react to the appearance of the "Roma topic". They never asked: "Fantastic, how come you can speak Gypsy?" and by insisting on speaking Hungarian, signaled their preference as regards the future mode of the conversation. The "gossip" also indicated that my command of the language tended to strengthen the prisoners' tendency to "hide", instead of enhancing their trust in me. Thus, by calling me police collaborator or, or by not allowing their weaker cellmates to attend interviews, they signalled that however hard I try, I cannot worm my way in among them—till they decide to let me in. On the other hand, some of the legends regarding my "husband" can be interpreted as the initial steps of goodwill towards me: the process of my symbolic acceptance began by their inventing a Roma family for me. The assumption that in my "civilian life" I had a Gypsy family made my command of Romany explicable, and my "more or less belonging to the group" made the occasional conversations with patients conducted in Romany appear less and less an intrusion.

More than a year has passed since I uttered my first words in Romany in the prison. Nowadays I can rarely go round the prisoners' areas without being greeted in Romany and having them stop to exchange a few sentences in Romany. As with the passing of time they found no evidence whatever of my being a police plant—though the devil never rests!—gradually different types of interpretation have emerged. Some of the prisoners regard me as some sort of "*pujarica*", a "rogue woman", who is "cunning, can read what's inside people's head", but at the same time is trustworthy and does not babble. To a large extent I have gained my "rogue image"—which resembles the widespread stereotype of the Vlach Gypsy—because I "come up to scratch", not taking offence when during group sessions they jest in Romany, or when, wide-eyed and with baited breath, they watch me speak, only to laugh at me uproariously. Naturally, this involves a narrowing of the prison staff/prisoner boundary—but in exchange the wall which separates us because of the ethnic differences also appears to diminish.

By the time János S. was released, he had translated several poems into Romany, and I also received from him some tales and stories in Romany to accompany his drawings. Through the deepening of our relationship—the strengthening of the so-called therapeutic alliance—he became more and more capable of manifesting and accepting his Gypsy identity. In the use of Romany there appeared the possibility of reciprocal help: for example, the lady psychologist assists me in sorting out my problems, and I help her to speak better Romany. It would be a distortion of the truth, however, were I to claim that "deploying" Romany is successful in every case. My prison experiences have made it increasingly clear that manifesting their Gypsy identity is their privilege—irrespective of what I think of that or what could make my work easier. ♫



# The Plight of Hungary's Roma

In an essay published with the figures of the 1893 Gypsy census, the first in Hungary, the ethnographer Antal Herrmann argued that Gypsies tended to accommodate to the people amongst whom they lived. According to him the figures relating to religion, language and declared ethnic affiliation bore this out. At the time of the census more than half of the Gypsies no longer spoke any Romany.

The census showed that Gypsies in Hungary dwelt, first and foremost, in rural areas. Their role in the division of labour placed them with agriculture and the peasant community. 243,000 were permanently settled, over 20,000 stayed in the same locality for extended periods of time, under 9,000 were nomads. That vast majority—more than 168,000—lived in houses: about 91,000 in shanties or shacks and around 4,500 in dug caves, leaving close to 9,000 in tents (for purposes of the census any undivided structure was considered to be a shanty, and any edifice consisting of two or more rooms a house).

Settled Gypsies generally lived on the outskirts of a village, or in colonies at some distance from the village. The area in which they settled was designated by the village, and earlier by the landowners on their own land. Some of the colonies were just outside of villages, the housing sites being carved out of the common, or else mud brick houses were built next to the clay pits which provided the raw materials while landowners would designate a territory deemed suitable for Gypsies to settle on wasteland or a forested area. Only exceptionally were Gypsies allowed to locate (invariably in an isolated enclave) within a central or otherwise closely settled area of a village. That isolation

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Péter Szuhay

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perpetuated the backwardness and limited scope of Gypsies. It was rare indeed for a Roma to own land and/or a garden plot, which meant that the means of integration into the peasant community were highly restricted.

In the socialist Hungary of the sixties and seventies housing projects were launched also for the Roma. Meant as "modernisation" they were erected either on the sites of bulldozed old colonies or in a new segregated colony. These so called "Cs" dwellings in blocks of flats, ("Cs" for "csökkentett", i.e. diminished-standard housing) in actual fact perpetuated segregation. In the course of the early 1990s a new programme for "fully fitted" social housing was launched by local authorities, but as regards the Roma these continued the practice of not offering plots among Magyars (that is non-Gypsy peasants) to even the better off Roma, keeping them in their ethnic enclaves.

The localisation within the country as a whole both of people deemed to be "Roma" and of those whose self-identity was "Roma" or "Gypsy" has remained extraordinarily uneven down to the present day. A number of grave consequences resulted. In most of western Hungary Roma make up a mere 1-2 per cent of the total population, in northern and north-eastern parts it is not uncommon for their ratio to exceed 10 per cent.

A similar trend applies to unemployment. It is also from these latter parts of the country that the most numerous waves of emigration to the USA took place in the last decade of the 19th century (as well as from areas awarded to the successor states in 1920), just as these parts showed the highest birthrates (live births per woman) regardless of ethnic background or financial status. In other words, that region has remained persistently on the fringe: on the one hand there is no land or employment, and on the other, overpopulation. Added together they make for profound poverty and deprivation as well as hopelessness. Charismatic sects and "congregations of the faithful", which successfully proselytized among Hungarian peasants in the thirties, have done so since the sixties among the Roma since they offer a way out of an otherwise hopeless situation.

### A fraudulent promise: industrial employment

**F**ollowing the collectivisation of agriculture in the 1950s the Roma were increasingly forced to abandon a lifestyle based on agriculture, certain handicrafts and services, which they had traditionally engaged in for some centuries. In the campaign of forced and widespread industrialisation, especially starting with the 1960s, regular wage labour became the rule for them, frequently as auxiliaries for skilled workers. It was work where, at the time, a serious shortage of labour was the rule in Hungary. This was particularly true of construction, road-making, and mining, industries which recruited their unskilled auxiliaries largely among the Roma.

The location of these industrial areas and areas of Roma settlement did not



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## Ethnolinguistic groups

**T**he 1971 survey of Hungary's Gypsies headed by István Kemény estimated their total number at 320,000; by the time of the second survey, in 1993–84, that number had risen to 450,000–500,000, a third in 2003, put the number of those whom the majority society and various institutions regarded as Gypsies at around 600,000. Those figures take no account, however, of the actual numbers of people who declare themselves to be, or think of themselves as being, Gypsies: on this basis a 1990 assessment concluded there were approximately 142,000 and a second look, in 2001, reckoned there were some 194,000.

The 1971 survey differentiated three major ethnolinguistic groups. Around 71 per cent spoke Hungarian as their native language and professed to be 'musician Gypsies' (i.e. Romungro); around 21 per cent were Vlach Gypsies and spoke Romany as their native language and described themselves as Rom or Roma; and around 8 per cent spoke Romanian as their mother tongue and called themselves Beashi, who had traditionally been makers of wooden implements ('Trough Scoopers' as they are referred to). The remainder of less than 1 per cent were Sinti, who had migrated from Germany. At that time the ethnic and linguistic affiliations coincided, and although over the intervening 40 years the ratios of intergroup ethnic affiliations have barely altered, the numbers of Vlach Gypsies with Romany as a mother tongue and of Romanian-speaking Beashi have declined, which, however, has not affected the assertion of their ethnic identity.

Strict rules of endogamy prohibiting marriage outside their ethnic group are obeyed (particularly in rural areas), and within the three main groups this may even extend to various subgroups, meaning that you are expected to marry within your own group

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coincide, and the result was mass commuting. The great majority of the Roma of working age who lived in Eastern Hungary spent a large part of their life in hostels far from their families and homes. By the seventies a large proportion of able-bodied working-age men had found a job and the rate of employment was close to 100 per cent. The process brought about a mobility of location, people moving closer to areas earmarked for industrial development. The Roma in continuous employment and those who had been living in hostels for considerable periods of time chose to move their families to be near especially to districts where they had access to cheap housing or managed to obtain favourable terms to finance the construction of their own dwelling. Colonies of coal miners in Borsod County, to give an example, helped many to establish a basis securing a livelihood and a stable home.

Stable employment meant a much bigger change in the life of a Roma than that of an average unskilled worker. This apparently idyllic state of full employment however began to fall apart from the mid-1980s. Hungary's



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and/or subgroup. Such keeping of tabs on lines of descent is of lesser significance among the Romungro, where ties of locality and social status are more in evidence. Although the Romungro tend to call themselves 'musician Gypsies' that does not necessarily mean that they and their ancestors are or were musicians by profession. Those who indeed follow this high-status profession do, however, hold aloof from poorer Romungros of other occupations, even if they call themselves 'musicians'.

The Vlach Gypsies can be subdivided into innumerable tribes and clans, with tribal names indicating the original predominant occupation, the hierarchical relationships among the occupations having carried over into the hierarchy of tribes. In recent decades a process of integration of certain of the subgroups has been observable, with the economic strategy of the Lovari tribe (i.e. those Vlach Gypsies who in the past earned their living as horse copers and who are arguably those of highest status) being seen by other tribes and their subgroups as highly attractive; with the result that individuals who originally belonged to other tribes are increasingly disposed to define themselves as Lovari.

A variety of tribal dialects are still in use, and an integrated Romany literary language is currently emerging. For the time being, the dialect to be used as the basis for this literary language, and the spelling to be adopted, are subject to an ongoing debate by 'language reformers' who use Romany in their writings. Leaving aside a few Roma-only schools, the teaching of Romany has not been institutionalized so far.

According to past research the Romanian-speaking Beashi can also be classified into various subgroups, with those belonging to certain subgroups themselves classifying others as belonging to this or that *fratria* or clan, in other words ancestry matters to them. Dialects are not as divergent among them so that a unified common language is fairly advanced, largely thanks to the use of Beashi in their schools. ♪

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irrational industrial structure, overmanning, and the country's huge foreign debt made rationalisation urgent at various points of the economy. The Roma figured prominently amongst the unskilled and semi-skilled who were made redundant particularly among the commuters housed in workers' hostels and literally found themselves on the street, not only jobless but also evicted. The chickens hatched by the earlier labour-market strategy interested in a large pool of cheap unskilled labour not bothering to train this workforce in skills which predictably would be required, had come home to roost.

A real demand for labour had motivated the move from villages to industrial towns, but when many of these works closed down the result was predictably long-term unemployment and crisis. Entire populations of workers' colonies lost their new status and ended up in segregation. The problem was somewhat more complex when it involved moving to Budapest, with the consequent ghettoification of certain areas of the city. A high proportion of the Roma who had moved to Budapest had done so, for the most part, from the mid-1970s on



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## The "Gypsy question" and the authorities

**T**he Gypsy image of the powers-that-be has ever been monolithic and barely nuanced. Even the above-noted groupings have not been held to be distinct ethnic entities, the classification and 'handling' of Roma communities being determined, for the most part, by lifestyle, degree of social integration, and the current policy of the authorities. From the very start Gypsies have been treated as an issue and a problem.

Even that very first 1893 census was motivated by an intention to regulate them, inducing nomad Gypsies to settle. The very way the Gypsies were classified was inspired primarily by such notions as 'migrant' or 'periodically migrant', as opposed to 'periodically settled' and 'settled', with the 'migrants' being the real problem as they were associated with deviance and criminality (itinerant occupations were considered to be a cover for preparing the ground to break and enter premises). The drafting process coordinated by Antal Herrmann eventually led to Ministry of the Interior Decree No. 15000/1916 mandating that Gypsies settle. This was followed by bylaws covering Gypsies at county level, as a result of which by the 1920s itinerancy had essentially ceased to exist inside Hungary's borders though this did not stop a number of counties bringing in local regulations aimed at limiting the movements of Gypsies (and affecting primarily Vlach Gypsies) over the succeeding two decades, the 1930s and 1940s.

Following the outbreak of the Second World War, and using the so-called 'Jewish' (i.e. anti-Jewish) Acts, Gypsies were conscripted for work, and, in September 1941, military labour brigades (like the Jewish forced-labour brigades) were established. After 15 October several thousand Gypsies, predominantly from Western Hungary, were taken to German annihilation camps, most dying either en route or at their destination. Before the change in régime of 1989-90 barely a word was spoken about the death toll of this Roma Holocaust and it is really only in the last couple of decades that any kind of official cognisance has been taken of traumas that the Roma had to keep to themselves.

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as an instinctive defensive tactic against total despair and impoverishment they faced in a particular region of the country. The families who made the move had been unable to obtain a home to replace a deteriorated or condemned building in a rural or outer-suburban ambience and shifted towards the run-down, low-status and low-value areas in the capital city, in other words, places where no one else wished to live.

In the early 1990s these segregated areas in a number of Hungarian cities, as well as in inner-city Budapest, were under threat of developing into ethnic ghettos, and in cases where the municipal authority did not act to counter the spectre, that is indeed what happened.



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The restructuring of property relations in Hungary during the fifties, with the widespread liquidation of the country's traditional peasantry and the socialist reorganisation of agriculture, set in train devastating cutbacks in opportunities for their traditional livelihood. The unprecedented poverty which ensued put into question the régime's declared values, forcing various ministries and then the Central Committee of the ruling Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party to take note. The Roma were considered to be an impoverished ethnic stratum of singular status, with their social integration being the overriding goal. This betterment was hoped for from the provision of employment and schooling, and an improvement in their living conditions (this was at a time when delousing and other decontamination drives were still everyday occurrences in colonies and in schools attended by Gypsy children).

A resolution passed on 20 June 1961 by the Politburo of the Party's Central Committee set out the "Tasks Relating to Improving the Position of the Gypsies." This speaks of—to use the official parlance of the day—"integrating Gypsies", then of 'Gypsies who had embarked on the road to integration,' and finally of 'non-integrating Gypsies', and categorising them on that basis. That latter group in practice comprised mainly Vlach Gypsies even though, in accordance with the political correctness of the era, files on Gypsies were not kept on an ethnic basis. In other words, both at the level of the central administration and local government, the "Gypsy issue" blurred into undeclared issues of poverty and deviance. (It may be noted that in the early 1950s there had been a brief swing in attitudes when an attempt was made to adopt the Soviet pattern and treat the Gypsies as an ethnic group.)

During the 1980s it became abundantly clear that social integration was not going to solve the 'Gypsy question'. Now, twenty years after the change of regime, the bulk of Hungarian society is still simply unwilling, notwithstanding the social integration of large numbers of the Roma, to accept them as members of society of identical standing. To this day most local authorities do their level best to ensure that the Roma continue to live in isolated, segregated blocks. 20.

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### On the village fringe

**F**or those in rural areas there was at least some hope of becoming part of the agricultural economy and of living as peasants. The determining factor of how intensely this process could take place was location and status in any given village. In villages where the Magyar peasantry were operating a continually growing and expanding economy the Gypsies were largely confined to locations on the village fringe. By the late 1980s segregated colonies had arisen as a result of this new process, and some areas, following the demolition of older Roma colonies, saw the establishment of "Cs" areas essentially consisting of room and kitchen dwellings on narrow plots, with infertile courtyards not suitable for gardening.





*Tólápa, north-eastern Hungary, 1982. Photograph by György Stalter*



Primarily in north-eastern Hungary, and particularly where tiny villages were the prevailing mode, depopulation started in the fifties and sixties, partly as a result of collectivisation and partly with the elimination of the traditional peasantry. The price of houses and the associated farm buildings plummeted, giving the Roma a chance to move into abandoned and relatively easily acquired buildings. The local authorities displayed less opposition to the new inhabitants than did the authorities of more prosperous villages. A continuous population exchange was able to take place in e.g. Csenyété, Köröm, Megyaszó or Rakaca in Borsod County, or in Alsószentmárton in Baranya County.

In villages where the attached cooperative farms experienced manpower shortages and were unable to recruit the manual workers needed amongst the local peasants, be as members of the cooperative or as employed staff, later as wage labourers, the gaps were quickly filled by the Roma, who thereby became familiar with the needed skills. In villages where the Roma were allowed to take over empty peasant farm buildings they had a better chance of joining the agricultural economy and establishing mixed farms, albeit only within pretty narrow limits.

The working methods of these post-peasant Roma tended to be linked to well-proven approaches and economic contacts that the local majority population had already utilized for decades. It was rarely the case that families who grew into 'peasants', turned out to be either innovators or genuine producers for the market. Family or household plot farms were basically restricted to mixed farming, or in other words they tried to supply their own needs as regards poultry, pigs, potatoes and other vegetables, thus avoiding the role of buyers in the marketplace as regards a large proportion of the family's needs.

Those living in colonies missed the advantages of mixed farming, raising a limited number of animals being the most they could aspire to, they nevertheless had numerous ties linking them to agriculture. Their womenfolk, the elderly and children left behind in the village, appeared on the labour market as wage labourers or day labourers. Depending on the region's traditions, this might mean temporary work e.g. in the tobacco fields, plucking geese, picking fruit, hoeing, or doing other work in vineyards, repeating as it were the life of the agrarian proletariat of inter-war Hungary. Stratification within the rural Roma thus became fundamentally bipolar. The post-peasants becoming increasingly mobile towards the middle stratum and increasingly disinclined to define themselves as Roma lived in the village proper in contrast with the agrarian proletariats of ghettos or the village fringe.

Over the past decade or so, with the presence of unemployment, many unemployed and largely unskilled Roma have been trying somehow to conjure up means of clawing back at least a part of the shortfall in income from the slim agricultural pickings of the region in which they live. In the vanguard of the process are families who up until recently had made their livelihood principally from working in industry. For them renting farmland might sporadically present



an option; they would even try to produce for the market. Thus agriculture offers an income of sorts for some families displaced from industry. Indeed, in quite a few places, with the aim of contributing to social order, local governments and agricultural cooperatives have made loans available to Roma who seek to farm but own no land charging symbolic rents and covering the initial costs of agricultural production.

### The underdogs

**R**ecent years saw the poorest of the Roma resorting to devices discarded long ago, such as collecting scrap metal, rags or empty bottles; generally foraging for usable articles, including scouring through household waste and refuse tips for food; odd-jobbing, fishing, trapping gophers. As in earlier times, occasional collecting and selling of snails, mushrooms, wild fruit, and medicinal herbs make a sizable contribution to family incomes. The able-bodied working-age members of such households are again obliged to do day-labour and to accept payment in kind in order to put any food at all on the family table.

An even larger proportion of incomes derives from public works, and more specifically public assets and utilities. Act III of 1993 on social aid and assistance obliges local authorities to guarantee work to persons who are in receipt of regular social assistance. Three months spent on such work and three months receiving unemployment benefits could alternate, but the unemployed are generally at the mercy of arbitrary decisions by local government officials. A 1991 legislation had made provision for employers to be granted state support for participating in such programs, having been however subject to constant changes down to the present day, a systematic survey is virtually impossible.

It should be mentioned, however, that this arrangement has constantly been under attack by one political force or another, with their ever-renewed attempts at reform turning most Hungarians against the most adversely affected yet negatively perceived Roma. One of the ways for undermining the minimum assistance that was payable—one that has been resorted to in more than a few places—was the practice of work in exchange for assistance, another was not to pay cash but stamps which could not be used to buy alcoholic drinks or tobacco.

Unprecedented indebtedness has become widespread amongst the poorest of the poor, who are very numerous. They first borrow from banks and other credit institutions, when these have been exhausted, they resort to loan sharks who charge usurious rates of interest which charge compound interest, that is interest not just on the original loan, but also the interest on unpaid interests added to that loan. What beckons is total ruin.



Since preferential housing loans are no longer available unauthorised constructions of 'dwellings' have proliferated leading to a comeback of long-outdated methods used by the poorest. The offspring of large families with children of their own have resorted to archaic technologies to put up shacks as the grandparents of their grandparents did, or else they use empty oil drums, cardboard boxes, rolls of aluminium foil and any other material salvaged from refuse tips to construct shelters of some sort.

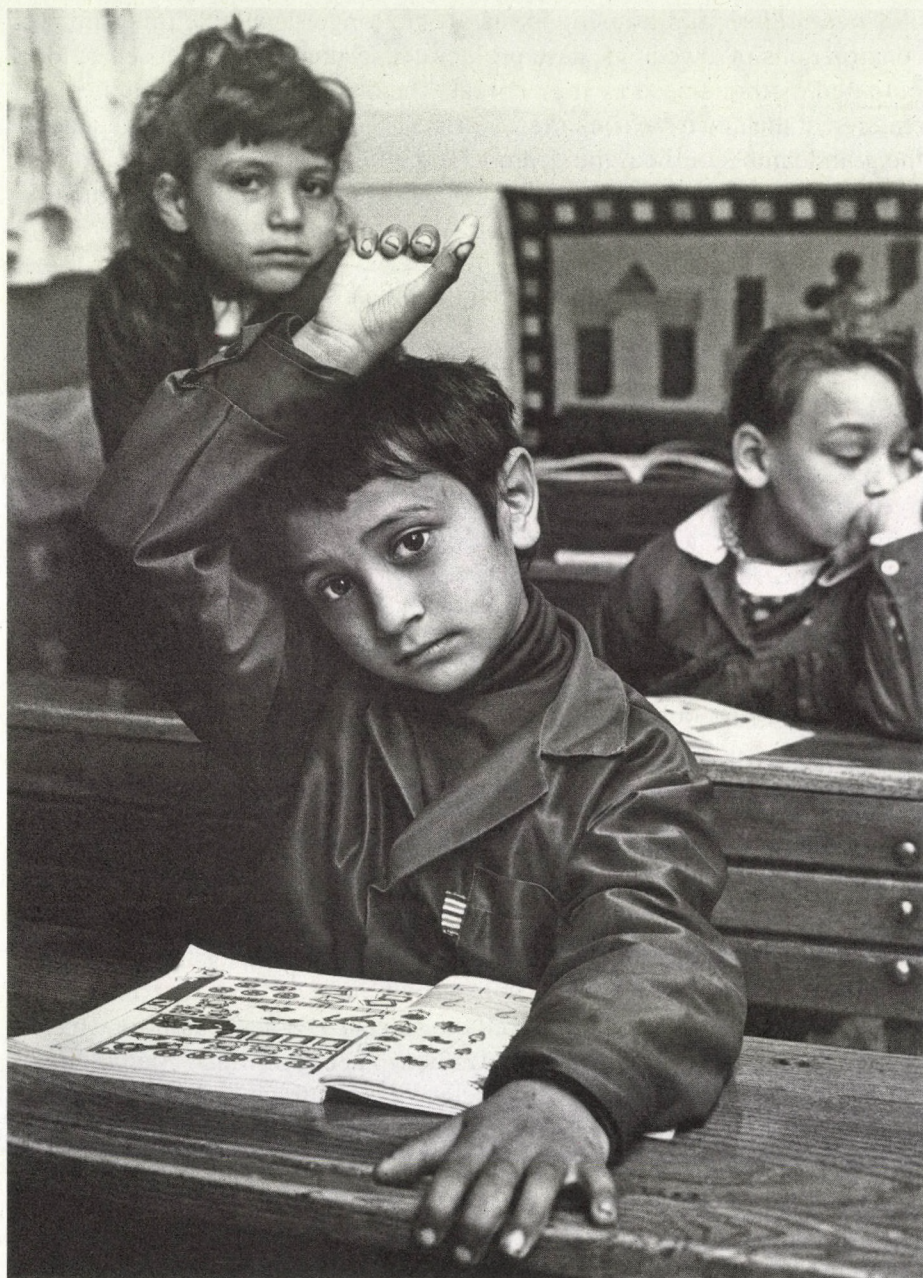
### Social stratification

**B**y the late eighties one became aware of social differentiation that had not previously been experienced within the ranks of the Roma. A growing gap sprang up between the unemployed and newly re-peripheralised Roma of village colonies and those in urban ghettos and the wealthier Roma who lived like 'aristocrats' primarily on an income drawn from commerce. Between the two lie what one might define as a social middle class layer, which achieved a post-peasant or a stable working-class life (i.e. one based on skill qualifications). To put it another way, the social hierarchy consists of a broad underclass of the unemployed and those who scratch an existence from casual work, above whom sits a much thinner band of the de facto middle class (the Roma who have already 'assimilated' in the eyes of the Hungarians majority), and at the peak the thinnest of all bands who, since they make their living in commerce, are mistrusted and suspected by the majority of non-Gypsies.

Gypsies who had engaged in trade and commerce from way back have dominated the markets for second-hand goods, feathers, and rags and even antiques since the seventies, and as they acquired the necessary capital, also the vegetable and flower markets. They were in fact among the first to plug into Eastern Europe's second-hand 'Polish' or 'Comecon' markets and also in setting up—when Hungary introduced the so-called 'global' passport, which in point of fact was only valid within Warsaw Pact countries—illegal 'black' markets in coffee and Western currencies. Many of them invested the money so accumulated in two further and rather safer enterprises: first of all in catering and in some industrial enterprises.

It is one of the distressing contradictions of the present era that even as the process of cultural integration among the various ethnic groups has accelerated the broad masses of Roma have become unemployed, impoverished and marginalised in a manner which inhibits all else of value since it is the culture of poverty as a class culture which has become their most striking feature.





*Bátonyterenye, north-eastern Hungary, 1992. Photograph by Judit M. Horváth*



## Education

**A**t the time of the 1893 census 214,000 Gypsies of 6 years of age or older were totally illiterate, no more than 16,000 were literate, could read and write, or at least read.

The musicians knew how to make music and the craftsmen knew the skills of their craft, but they did not go to school. At the beginning of the 21st century, four out of five young Roma complete primary education (grades 1–8) but they often take much longer than eight years, nor do they always achieve the prescribed standard. [...] In the 1970s, 1.5 per cent of young Roma completed secondary education, and this ratio rose to 2 per cent in the 1980s, 3 per cent in the 1990s, and 5 per cent in the 2000s. Owing to a lack of infrastructure and proper funding, most Roma children of kindergarden age do not attend a kindergarden. Roughly one fifth of Roma children of school age attend special school or remedial classes; more than half of the students in such schools and classes are Roma. An additional one-third of Roma children are in classes where the majority of children are not Gypsies but where funding and staffing conditions are below average. Little more than one per cent of Roma are studying in higher education—and we do not know how many of them will actually get a college or university degree.<sup>1</sup>

Today schooling is the key to the integration of the Roma inasmuch as only those with qualifications have any chance in the job market. However, only Roma families above the poverty line are able to raise the necessary funds. Twenty per cent of Roma parents are in a position to send their children to secondary school whereas in the population as a whole the ratio is 70–80 per cent. The situation in the labour market mirrors these data: one in five young Roma face unemployment. If Roma youngsters are squeezed out of the more favourable positions in the distribution of labour, then they will continue to be employable only in unskilled jobs or else they will only be able to make a living by gravitating to non-institutionalised and even frankly illegal gaps in the economy.

## Roma culture

**T**wo different things are meant by the term 'Roma culture' in scholarly writing down to the present day. One school of thought sees it as being no more than a culture of poverty, with poverty as experienced by the Roma being ethnicised. An opposed position maintained mostly by anthropologists and successful Roma argues that the essence of Roma culture is a visible expression of an individual's value and his or her rising social status, or in other words they seek to attain social equality with non-Gypsies specifically by overcoming the culture of poverty. In the course of doing so various high days and holidays are celebrated, or existing ones

1 ■ István Kemény, ed., *Roma in Hungary*. Social Science Monographs. Highland Lakes, New Jersey: Atlantic Research and Publication, Inc., p. 166.



are given an emphasis, highlighting wealth and success. A wedding feast, christening or a school-leaving ceremony, even a birthday, create opportunities for the kinship group as a whole to be invited. An appearance at festivals celebrating Mary as a name day (i.e. a Lady's Day), which are held in various places around the dates of 4–11 September is an occasion that, in the first place, is considered a Gypsy custom and, secondly, it underscores the importance of honouring one another at a celebration. A wake or vigil for the dead, as well as observing certain forms of mourning and laying-out for burial, which are all likewise identified as specifically Roma customs, has also emerged more fully in recent decades.

These novel cultural aspirations are also fed by older traditions, but one can consider them to be essentially new constructions in which Roma culture is being either created or reformulated. Undeniably this is a cultural pattern which is becoming accepted also by poorer Roma; even those lacking financial resources are making efforts to satisfy this system of cultural expectations.

Various artistic activities that are becoming institutionalised—literary, in the visual arts, music and dance, too, act as powerful integrating factors overcoming differences among Roma. Most Roma cultural institutions (e.g. Amaliphe, Amaro Drom, Kalyi Jag) operate schools of painters or bands of musicians, who put on exhibitions or appear in concerts. The Hungarian folklore movement of the 1970s did much to speed up the emergence of autonomous Roma cultural groups.

The 1st National Meeting of Traditional Folklore Ensembles was held in 1981 in Tata in western Hungary. Soon a number of ensembles emerged, some of them outstandingly successful and widely known throughout the country. The bands combine cutting edge pop music styles in state-of-the-art recording facilities with authentic ethnic music and instruments, especially the music of Vlach Gypsies, creating a genre with characteristics all of its own. The texts are mostly in Romany although that is no longer the native language of either the majority of the audience or the performers. The bizarre situation arose that the Romungro who did all they could to stand apart from the Vlach Gypsies, followed the lead of the latter in music of all things which played such a central role in their self-definition. There are numerous such Vlach Gypsy bands, Kalyi Jag and Ando Drom being the best known, with CD albums to their name. Ando Drom, which means "on the road" in the Romany language, craft their sound from a mixture of Hungarian Gypsy instruments, including milk cans, and Western instrumentation such as guitar and mandolin. Percussive accompaniment is performed on spoons, jugs, and kettles, while bass sounds are re-created by a unique range of mouth sounds.

For a time it looked that the coffee-house music, mistakenly known the world over as Hungarian Gypsy music, would be banished from the common Roma cultural idiom. It was primarily ethnomusical purists who objected to the conventional instrumental 'Gypsy music' of cafés and restaurants. Thus, it took an exceedingly long time to accept the Rajkó ensemble of Gypsy boy musicians, in



operation since the 1950s, or the Budapest Gypsy Symphonic Orchestra formed in the 1990s, which enjoys world-wide publicity. In the meantime, more and more outstanding Roma talents attend the Liszt Ferenc Academy of Music to continue as performers of classical music. Nor should the Gypsy or Roma contribution to well-publicised commercialised entertainment be forgotten, including jazz and rap.

### Political and civic activity since the 1989–90 change of régime

**W**hen the 1st National Exhibition of Hungary's Self-taught Roma Visual Artists was held in 1979 the political leadership of the day described it as a nationalist manifestation. Within a couple of years however it began to strive for a consensus with the emerging Roma intellectual movement and a supportive democratic opposition consisting mainly of social scientists. As the leadership wished to present themselves as problem solvers, by the mid-eighties "Roma politics" switched strategy with the formation of the first pressure groups promoting political and cultural interests. The Cultural Alliance of Gypsies in Hungary (MaoCKSz) was established in 1985 as a response to which the radicals set up Phralipe as the first independent body serving overtly political goals. The Roma Parliament followed and Lungo Drom was formed during the period of Hungary's change of régime which, since 1994, has won successive elections to the National Roma Self-government. Lungo Drom has been most influential with both Roma and Gypsy constituents and mainstream administrative authorities. The conflicts between different Roma organisations have been a reflection of the struggle for power of political bodies, their different objectives, and differences concerning the methods of reaching what they advocated. In June 2011 the Government and the National Roma Self-Government signed a framework agreement prescribing concrete, quantifiable measures for the next five years, which will serve improvements in employment, education and living conditions.

Concomitant with these changes the Roma have sought to define themselves as an ethnic group (or nationality), with an articulate and numerically growing intelligentsia in the vanguard taking on the task of producing a synthesis of Gypsy culture. The dilemma of whether to define the Roma as an ethnic group or a nationality became evident during the drafting process of the nationalities bill in the 1990s. Since legislation was meant to assure nationalities significantly more rights and government subsidies than the more restricted ethnic groups, Roma cultural and political organisations found it hard to reach a consensus on which status they should opt for. A self-definition meant for one's own use is difficult to reconcile with a self-definition addressed to the outside world. Basically however it exposes the problem of integration versus segregation.

The various cultural bodies play a major role in Roma self-organisation. At the turn of the 1980s into the 90s the Hungarian-language Roma weekly newspaper published by MaoCKSz under the flag *Romano Nyepipe* was of major importance.



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## The EU strategy of Roma inclusion

**T**ogether with its trio partners Spain and Belgium, Hungary committed itself in both the trio presidency programme and its own presidency program to keep the question of Roma inclusion high on the political agenda and wished to work towards the elaboration of a common framework for Roma inclusion at European level.

On 5th April 2011, the European Commission adopted a Communication "An EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies up to 2020", whereas the European Parliament adopted on 9th March 2011 its resolution calling for an EU strategy on Roma inclusion. Based on the Communication of the Commission, the Hungarian Presidency tabled council conclusions on the EU Framework for national Roma integration strategies up to 2020 that were adopted by the ministers responsible for employment and social policy at their meeting of 19 May 2011, dedicated solely to the question of Roma inclusion.

The Council adopted a social-economic approach to inclusion, at the same time underlining the necessity of protecting fundamental rights, by combating discrimination and segregation and by taking specific measures to prevent or to compensate for disadvantages linked to ethnic origin, and to better guarantee the rights of Roma victims of human trafficking by making full use of instruments available at EU level. While recognising the primary competence of the Member States as regards effective inclusion policies, the conclusions of the Council stress that cooperation at EU level brings significant added value improving competitiveness, productivity and economic growth, as well as social cohesion.

Roma inclusion goals can complement the targets of the Europe 2020 Strategy, as successful inclusion contributes to reaching the headline targets on employment;

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The magazine *Phralipe* published by Phralipe has appeared since 1990. *Amaro Drom*, published by the Roma Parliament, was launched a year later as a fortnightly. It now appears monthly. *Kethano Drom*, launched in 1993, appears six times a year, *Lungo Drom* is another significant publication. *Cigányfűró* (Gypsy Drill), first published in 1994, a minority-minded Hungarian-language journal, has maintained high editorial standards similarly to the cultural magazine *Rom Som* launched in 1995. Roma national self-government's news has appeared in the Hungarian-language monthly *Világunk* (Our World) since 1999.

Hungarian Radio's daily *Cigányfélóra* (Gypsy Half-hour) broadcast, since 1988, later acquired an expanded time-slot and has mutated into a half-hour current affairs and cultural programme under the title *Jelenlét* (Presence). *Patrin*, a Roma weekly magazine, was launched in 1992 on Hungarian TV. The general public and local Roma movements have probably been best served with genuine news by the independent Roma Press Centre established in 1995.



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education and social inclusion. Member States are thus invited to adopt an integrated approach in the fields of education, employment, housing and healthcare. More effective use of national and EU funding, the territorial concentration of marginalised and disadvantaged groups including the Roma, the specific situation of Roma women and girls, and the involvement of Roma civil society were also highlighted by the Council. With regard to the possible synergies between Roma inclusion and the Europe 2020 Strategy, Member States can consider the social and economic aspects when designing, implementing and monitoring their National Reform Programmes.

With a view to closing the gaps between marginalised Roma communities and the general population, Member States are invited to prepare, update or develop their national Roma inclusion strategies, or integrated sets of policy measures within their broader social inclusion policies for improving the situation of Roma, by the end of 2011. This commitment has also been endorsed by the European Council that called on the Member States for the rapid implementation of the Council conclusions. The Framework is set for the timeline of 2020, ensuring appropriate monitoring and evaluation both at national and at European level, first in spring 2012, by the European Commission.

During the Hungarian Presidency aspects of Roma inclusion policies were also debated by the Justice and Home Affairs Council (barriers to access to justice and legal tools of combating discrimination), the Education, Youth, Culture and Sport Council (prevention policies to combat early school leaving aimed at children with socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds, including Roma) and the General Affairs Council ensuring that Roma inclusion policy is taken into account horizontally. The presidency report summarising the outcome of the above exchanges of views and containing the conclusions of the Council were endorsed by the European Council on 24 June 2011. 20

**Source:** Hungarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs

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Other organisations which have had notable integrating functions are *Romano Kher* and the Roma Social, Cultural and Methodological Centre, which operates alongside the Budapest Municipal Self-Government. Its successor, established in 2010, now operates under the name of Municipal Roma Education and Cultural Centre (FROKK is the Hungarian acronym).

Of a string of Roma cultural foundations three are particularly concerned with education. The Beashi Secondary School run by the Gandhi Foundation in the southern Hungarian city of Pécs; a trades school in Budapest run by the Kalyi Jag Foundation; and a trades school in Szolnok in the Great Hungarian Plain, which is run by the Roma Opportunity Alternative Foundation. The Romaversitas Invisible College has come into being as a result of an independent initiative to provide college and university students all over the country with scholarships, scholastic assistance, identity handholds, and not least a community; an intellectual team for the present and immediate future.



Perhaps the most striking cultural and political position (also deemed the most extreme by a fair few) is that the Roma community as a whole is part of the political nation, a factor in nation-building, and as such fully entitled to teach and maintain its own culture in its own independence as a part of the culture of the nation.

### Social conflicts

**A**fter centuries of relative peace the 1989–90 change of regime ushered in a new chapter in the coexistence of majority and minority. It is painful merely to list the more important events that affected the Roma, one of the first being the 1992 “ethnic war” in Kétegyháza, near the Romanian border and recent events in Gyöngyöspata, a village just west of Gyöngyös, where paramilitary organisations terrorized the local Roma. Objective assessments of social prejudice now have a history going back half a century, and little difference is demonstrable between what people thought of the Roma at the very beginning of that period and what they think now, or how they verbalised their beliefs, their antipathies, and everything they acquired in the course of their education in the widest sense of the term. Differences show up, however, in the tendency for options and prejudices to turn into action, in the manifestation of overt and brutish racism.

The first incident to engage national public opinion intensely occurred in the eastern Hungarian city of Miskolc in 1989–90 when the city council wished to resettle the Roma in rundown council housing in a new estate to be built on the banks of the River Sajó on the outskirts of the city (this was to facilitate the rehabilitation of the city district in question). An Anti-Ghetto Committee was formed which managed to mobilise public opinion to obstruct the plan, and as part of the process this was the true start of a Roma civil rights movement even though it was not until 1995 that this was formalised in the shape of a Roma Civil Rights Foundation.

A series of cases where peasants took the law into their own hands to “protect their property” heralded a worsening of conflicts, some used a shotgun and shot at would-be thieves of their pears or geese, others just knocked them down, an old man connected his fencing wire with the electricity mains to protect his cucumbers, and still others drove supposedly deviant families out of the village. Collective action to prevent Roma families moving into a village where none of them had lived previously are other chapters of the story.

It is the ideology, such as it is, of extremists of the right under the influence of intensifying conflicts which prompted serial murders. Four men have been charged with the murder between July 2008 and August 2009 of six people in four places. The attacks began with “merely” firing guns and throwing petrol bombs but this later spiralled into incidents every one of which claimed a life or lives.<sup>2</sup> ☛

2 ■ Zoltán Tábori, “Guns, Fire and Ditches: A Report from Tatárszentgyörgy on the Roma Killings”. *The Hungarian Quarterly*, no. 196 (Winter 2009), pp. 97–109.



Orsolya Hessky

# Landscape and Mythology

The Art of Károly Markó the Elder (1793–1860)

*Károly Markó the Elder and His Circle. From Myth to Image,*  
6 May 2011–2 October 2011. Exhibition at the Hungarian National  
Gallery, Budapest. Curated by Gábor Bellák, Orsolya Hessky  
(Hungarian National Gallery), Zoltán Dragon (Ludwig Museum,  
Museum of Contemporary Art).

ART

In the first half of the 19th century Neoclassicism, that is a new look at the art of Antiquity with an evocation of its Golden Age as its focus, was present together with Romanticism, which strove to reveal the inner depths of man in his eternal search for truth. A common feature of the period and thus of both movements was a remarkably intense exchange of ideas, one of the causes and results of which was an international, cosmopolitan atmosphere in Europe rarely attained at other times. Various factors prompted artists from almost all the countries of Europe to travel to Italy to study important sites of the art of Antiquity and of the Renaissance and imbibe the Mediterranean atmosphere. Italy and Rome became a common meeting ground, not only for artists, but also for men of ideas, who contributed to the creation of the ideological background of Neoclassicism and Romanticism. At times artists worked in competition with one another and at times in concord, as they incorporated aspects and tendencies of earlier centuries in their work. Alongside admiration for the art of Antiquity and the general infatuation with Italy, numerous other influences, brought from their home country or picked up along the way, left their mark on them, often giving their works a distinctive, unique flavour. Artists active in Italy, or those going back to their home country, contributed to the spread of a fairly uniform style across Europe. At one end of this spectrum lay Neoclassicism, at the other Romanticism, both relatively clearly defined styles, and between the two extremes a large variety of works that show the influence of both.

It was in several decades during which these two styles coexisted that the art of Károly Markó the Elder evolved. His oeuvre belongs to the history of

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Orsolya Hessky

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landscape painting, which itself was emerging as an independent genre. Landscape painters in the sense of landscape being the artist's overriding concern had existed before just as there had been artists in whose oeuvre landscape painting had found a place alongside other subjects. Artists working in Italy at the turn of the 18th and 19th centuries had done a great deal to further the acceptance of landscape painting, still, in the hierarchy of art forms in the European academies of the 1700s and 1800s, landscape painting was far from the most distinguished. Károly Markó the Elder is an artist of this transitional period, of these years of searching. He shared his contemporaries' interest in how art should depict nature. A passionate admirer of nature he strove to conjure its details and moods in the most faithful manner possible. He did that with a precision which, however, was more in accord with the formal expectations of the academies.

Hungarian art scholarship has always considered Markó a figure of pivotal importance. A number of biographies published in the 19th century<sup>1</sup> are still the most important basis for a study of his life and work. These were followed, after 1898, by monographs<sup>2</sup> and before long a catalogue of his oeuvre<sup>3</sup> was compiled. Following the creation in 1870 of the Markó Room in the Hungarian National Museum there were exhibitions of his works and/or those of his children, but none of them strove to offer any kind of overview. The exhibition held at the Hungarian National Gallery was intended not only to present a thematic interpretation of Markó's works, but also, by including works by his children, students and followers, to delineate the role he played in the early decades of the fine arts in Hungary. It became increasingly evident during the preparatory work that new details might shed light even on the best-known works, and that with the emergence of previously unknown pictures the career of the artist and thereby the entire history of the initial years of Hungarian art might well be reconsidered. Even concerning his life, with which art historians considered themselves to be familiar on the basis of previous research, new

1 ■ Gábor Mátray, *Pyrker János László egri patriarcha-érsek képtára a Magyar Nemzeti Múzeum képcsarnokában*. (The Patriarch Archbishop János László Pyrker's Collection of Paintings in the Hungarian National Museum) Pest, 1851; August Wilhelm Wagner, *Markó Károly (Carl Marko)*. Eine österreichische Künstlerbiographie der Neuzeit. Manuscript, Wien Bibliothek Handschriften-sammlung, inv. no., 18.879; Károly Kertbeny, *Ungarns Männer der Zeit*. Leipzig, Prague, 1862; Pál Harsányi, "Markó Károly életrajza" (The Life of Károly Markó) In: *A Magyar Képzőművészeti Társulat Évkönyve*, 1861 and 1862. Pest, 1863; Constantin von Wurzbach, *Biographisches Lexikon des Kaiserthums Oesterreich*. Wien 1867, pp. 459–468; Gusztáv Keleti, *Idősebb Markó Károly*. (Károly Markó the Elder) Budapest, 1898.

2 ■ Tamás Szana, *Markó Károly és a tájfestészet*. (Károly Markó and Landscape Painting) Budapest, 1898; Edit Pogány (née Balás), *Id. Markó Károly*. Budapest, 1954; Éva Bodnár Markó, *Id. Markó Károly (1791–1860)*. Budapest, 1980; Gabriella Szvoboda Dománszky, *Markó*. Budapest, 2004; Orsolya Hessky, *Id. Markó Károly*. Budapest, 2009.

3 ■ Edit Pogány (née Balás), "Id. Markó Károly művei" (The Works of Károly Markó the Elder) In: *Művészettörténeti tanulmányok. Művészettörténeti Dokumentációs Központ Évkönyve 1954–1955*. Budapest, 1957, pp. 355–453.





Buda Castle Hill, around 1820, oil on canvas, 585 × 830 mm  
Hungarian National Gallery, Budapest





*The Carpathians Seen from Lomnic*, after 1820, gouache on paper, 410 × 550 mm  
Hungarian National Gallery, Budapest



*The Crypt*. From the series on the stalactite caves of Aggtelek, 1821,  
gouache on paper, 461 × 647 mm  
Hungarian National Gallery, Budapest





*Aeon Philip Baptizes the Treasurer of the Ethiopian Queen, 1827,*  
on canvas, 740 × 940 mm  
ivate property





*Portrait of Baron Johann  
Jakob von Geymüller,  
1834, oil on wood,  
260 × 210 mm  
Private property*



*Margita, around 1820, tempera on paper, 307 × 415 mm  
Hungarian National Gallery, Budapest*





*nset*, 1847, oil on canvas, 155 × 244 mm  
sterreichische Galerie Belvedere, Vienna





*Italian Landscape with Harvesters*, 1848–1855, oil on canvas, 660 × 940 mm  
Hungarian National Gallery, Budapest



*Landscape near Tivoli*, 1839, oil on canvas, 630 × 845 mm  
Hungarian National Gallery, Budapest





*Selena and Endymion under the Moon*, 1855, oil on canvas, 710 × 946 mm  
Hungarian National Gallery, Budapest





*The Rape of Europa*, 1856–1857, oil on wood, 590 × 850 mm  
Private property



information has surfaced. The year of his birth, thought to be 1791 previously, for instance, has been revised,<sup>4</sup> as have the exact dates of his final sojourn in Italy.<sup>5</sup> The oeuvre itself was in need of re-examination, thus it was arranged thematically and not chronologically, offering greater insight into what preoccupied the artist.

**K**ároly Markó the Elder was born in 1793 in the town of Lőcse (Levoča, Slovakia) in what was then Upper Hungary. As a municipal engineer, his father, György Markó, assumed his son would pursue a similar career. The boy, however, showed a strong inclination towards drawing. At the time there were several painters active in Lőcse. It is possible that Markó received some instruction in drawing from the artist József Czauczig (1781–1857), who himself had attended the Academy in Vienna. His father, however, had no desire to support his son's artistic ambitions and sent him to Kolozsvár (Cluj) and Pest to be trained as an engineer. At the time there was no institution in Pest offering instruction in the fine arts. Fortunately for Markó, draughtsmanship for engineers was the highest standard of training in the skill in Hungary. Following the completion of his studies he was employed first in Lublő (Lubovna, Slovakia), then by Bishop Count László Esterházy in Rozsnyó (Rožňava, Slovakia). As part of his job he often wandered in the surrounding area, and clearly in more distant destinations as well. His first landscapes, which depicted romantic mountain scenes, were in gouache. Markó at this point was still untrained, and while his skilled hands produced somewhat stiff landscapes, this was mostly a result of the gouache technique itself. His landscapes reveal an effort to depict a certain minuteness of detail, though the interplay of light and shade and the subtleties of perspective are not yet convincing. The scenes depicted suggest a rigid reproduction of nature itself, as if the young engineer, most probably simply because of the demands of his occupation, strove to create a topographic copy. It is still uncertain which of Markó's works of this period were based on an existing work and which were his own original compositions. In some cases we know the specific prototype for one of his works such as the gouache *The Carpathians Seen from Lomnic* (after 1820), which is a copy of a work by the landscape artist János Jakab Müller (1780–1828) on the same subject. Like Czauczig, Müller was a contemporary Lőcse artist who may also have influenced Markó. Likewise, the series *Hungarian Castles along the Vág River* was also based on existing

4 ■ See Katarina Benova, "Id. Markó Károly és a Felvidék. Az alkotópálya kezdetei" (Károly Markó the Elder and Former Upper Hungary. The Beginnings of His Artistic Activities) In: *Markó Károly és köre. Mítosztól a képig.* (Károly Markó and His Circle: From Myth to Image) Exhibition Catalogue, Hungarian National Gallery, 2011, pp. 9–24.

5 ■ See: Sabine Grabner, "Id. Markó Károly bécsi kapcsolatai" (Viennese Connections of Károly Markó the Elder) In: *Markó Károly és köre. Mítosztól a képig.* pp. 25–42.



compositions. In this case the prototypes were engravings by the Viennese painter Joseph Fischer (1769–1822). It was about this time that Markó decided to quit his work job and turn towards painting once and for all. He arrived in Pest in 1818, after having made the bold decision to trade the security of the provinces and steady employment for the uncertain future that lay ahead of him as an artist.

The leading figures of literary circles played a crucial part in the budding art world of Pest. They happened to convene in the “salon” of Markó’s uncle, the postmaster Ferenc Schedel (father of the writer Ferenc Toldy) all deeply concerned with the future of Hungarian culture. The young man became acquainted with major figures of literary life and with aristocrats whose financial support he enjoyed. Among the latter was Gábor Fejérváry (1780–1851), one of the prominent art collectors of the time, whose particular favourite he was. He was the uncle of politician, archaeologist and art collector Ferenc Pulszky (1814–97), who was to become director of the National Museum for 25 years.

Even following his arrival in Pest Markó repeatedly returned to Rozsnyó, and it was most likely at this time that one of his most interesting works, his gouache series depicting the various formations of the stalactite caves of Aggtelek, was done. The drawings made in the caves of Aggtelek were purchased by Baron József Brudern on the recommendation of Gábor Fejérváry; not long after their completion the baron, who operated opal mines as well, became one of Markó’s most important patrons. Markó began experimenting with oil painting as well, though his enterprising spirit at that time could not quite compensate for his lack of training. In the meantime, he continued to use gouache for work he wanted to sell. At this time he painted landscapes primarily in the surroundings of Pest and Buda. One of his best known works, *Visegrád* (around 1820), may well date from this period, though the available sources yield very little precise information concerning its genesis.<sup>6</sup> From the perspective of the gradual emergence of Hungarian landscape painting as an independent art form, art historians have considered this canvas to be of particular importance, for with it the so-called “historical landscape,” which had been given a place in the academic canon, came to replace topographic, descriptive landscape. The precise date of its composition and the assessment of its role in 19th century landscape painting in Hungary remain topics for further research.

**M**arkó travelled to Vienna in the spring of 1822, where he enrolled in the Academy of Fine Arts, an institution he attended from April to December of the following year. We have scant data with regards to his time in Vienna, and even less knowledge of works from the period, which in effect constitutes the launch of his career. By the end of 1834 his patrons had withdrawn their

6 ■ See Gábor Bellák, “Visegrád”, in *Markó Károly és köre. Mítosztól a képig*, pp. 105–106.



financial support and he was therefore no longer able to pay his tuition fees. He tried to stand on his own feet and accepted commissions which he had little interest in doing. According to his biographers, in order to earn his daily bread, in addition to becoming better known as a portraitist, he ornamented bracelets, necklaces, brooches and similar Biedermeier knick-knacks with miniature compositions. In 1826 he married Katalin Nikászy Stempel, whom he had met already in Rozsnyó. The girl had followed him to Vienna, and by the time they were wed they most probably already had three children together.

In 1826 Markó moved from Vienna to Kismarton (Eisenstadt, Austria), and it is at this point where we can presume that nature became his primary inspiration. Here he formed his own independent notions about the nature of art, which centred on the faithful depiction of nature. On the basis of works that have come to light in recent years, such as *Saint Paul's Shipwreck in Malta* (1824–1828) or *Deacon Philip Baptises the Treasurer of the Ethiopian Queen* (1827), in the 1820s, in other words well before he ever travelled south, he had already developed the approach characteristic of his later work in Italy.

Sources of mythological and biblical subjects should not necessarily be sought in Rome or Florence. The tradition of depicting such scenes was by this time widespread in Europe, part of both Neoclassicism and Romanticism, and the depiction of certain scenes from Greek and Roman mythology was almost obligatory for artists of the period. Markó had been exposed to the stories in his years at school in Lőcse, and his interest in them was further strengthened by the influence of Neohumanism, which in Vienna at the turn of the century turned towards authors of Antiquity with renewed energy. It was also in Vienna that he came into contact with the Catholic Revival movement. Indeed Markó had the opportunity to meet one of its leading figures, Klemens Maria Hofbauer, in the Vienna circle of Count Ferenc Széchenyi.<sup>7</sup> The extremely influential movement undoubtedly exerted no small influence on Markó's art, and for the rest of his life his choice of biblical scenes was expressive of a sort of "missionary" sense. The use of a landscape as a background for these scenes on the one hand reflects the promptings of his experience in Kismarton and its environs, while on the other he must also have been influenced by the work of artists in Vienna who had already travelled to Italy, such as Joseph Rebell (1787–1828).<sup>8</sup> Thus by the second half of the 1820s he had made a name for himself among the aristocratic circles of Vienna as a mature artist with clear ideas of his own. By this time he once more enjoyed the support of a devoted patron, Baron Johann Jakob von Geymüller, who later provided considerable help when Markó moved to Italy. Two portraits, of the baron and his wife, give us an idea of the portrait painting he undertook in the 1820s for a living.

7 ■ Katalin Gillemot, *Gróf Széchenyi Ferenc és bécsi köre*. (Count Ferenc Széchenyi and his Viennese Circle) Budapest, 1933.

8 ■ See: Grabner, *ibid* (footnote no. 6)



The likely date of his study tour to Italy is 1832.<sup>9</sup> He had for some time longed to visit this Mediterranean country, which was the destination—sometimes the chosen final destination—of almost every European artist of the time. From an artistic point of view Italy had a great deal to offer: relics of past times, buildings, sculptures and paintings of Antiquity and the Renaissance provided a wealth of archetypes not to be found in any other part of Europe. Those arriving from East-Central Europe generally followed a specific route which began in Venice and went by way of Florence and Rome to Naples; the more enterprising even travelled as far as Sicily.

In Rome Markó must soon have found his place in the international community of artists, and no doubt due in part to his successes in Vienna and in part to the maturity of his art, his learning, and his craftsmanship he was soon looked on as an accomplished painter. He enjoyed the esteem of his fellow artists and an ever increasing number of commissions. He worked continuously, most of his time in natural surroundings, where he sketched and collected motifs. In general he would begin by noting the demands of the commissioner, which usually concerned the staffage figures and the story, in other words whether the eventual work would depict an episode from mythology, the Bible, or an everyday scene of life in Italy. This aspect of the composition was in effect secondary for Markó, it was the landscape that concerned him and captured his interest. It is worth noting that in his extensive correspondence he never identified his works on the basis of the scenes they depicted as became the practice among succeeding generations. He rather referred to them merely as "landscapes," although in some cases he gave a detailed description of the characters and the composition of the mythological or biblical scenes. He was a landscape painter to the core. Anna Zádor, an influential historian of 19th-century art,<sup>10</sup> suggests that in all of his works he depicted an actual landscape, a view shared by the art critic Ödön Gerő<sup>11</sup>, according to whom Markó's meticulousness was not a tool in the service of the idealization of the landscape, but on the contrary, a means of depicting reality as faithfully as possible. And since the narrative aspect is merely secondary in comparison with the landscape, it is thus of little consequence where it is situated, Tivoli, next to Lake Nemi, or some other place with Roman associations. In the encounter between reality and mythology it was the latter, however, which proved stronger, and thus the landscape also becomes the offspring of the imagination. In the case of landscapes with scenes of daily life in the foreground the opposite occurs, for the figure of a woman balancing a basket on her head or the man leading

9 ■ Ferenc Pulszky, *Életem és korom*. (My Life and My Times) Budapest, 1880. vol. I. 83.

10 ■ Anna Zádor, "Erdőábrázolás a magyar festészetben" (Forests in Hungarian Painting) *Magyar Művészet* 1928 (4), p. 610.

11 ■ Ödön Gerő, *Művészetről – művészekről*. (On Art – On Artists) Budapest, 1949.



an ox cart only accentuates the natural surroundings, making them seem more lifelike.

Towards the end of the 1830s Markó's health began to decline and he was forced to leave Rome and its marshy surroundings. In 1838 he travelled to San Giuliano, where he soon recovered in the local baths. He then settled in the nearby city of Pisa. The period he spent in Pisa can in effect be considered the height of his career. He worked a great deal, striving to complete numerous commissions. Rulers from across Europe requested paintings by him, including the King of the Netherlands, the Duke of Parma, and Louis I, King of Bavaria. Compared with his later years we know of relatively few works from this period, presumably precisely because the majority of them were sold. In addition to painting, he had innumerable other tasks to attend to. By this time he had a fair number of students, both Italians and Hungarians, and even some of other nationalities. He also taught his children. He did not allow his students to sit in the studio copying, but sent them outside to sketch. From the beginning of the 1840s, with the establishment of the Art Society of Pest, he exhibited paintings in Pest on a regular basis, in addition to participating in various exhibitions in Italy. His works composed in Pisa are veritable gems. In his *Landscape near Tivoli* (1839) the almost Baroque animation of the figures and the meticulous details of the landscape (an aspect of his work which reached its height at this time) are striking.

Alas his sight began to deteriorate rapidly, and his main cause of concern was that there was not a single eye surgeon in Pisa. In 1843 he left Pisa for Florence, the same year in which he was elected professor of the Academy in Florence, which is proof in itself that he was known not just in his own circle, but also held the esteem and respect of his Italian contemporaries. An increasing number of artists enrolled in his classes: Mihály Kovács (1818–1892), Antal Ligeti (1823–1890) and József Molnár (1821–1899) were among his students in the 1840s. Of the Italian artists who were in contact with him, Eugenio Landesio (c. 1810–1879), Domenico Bresolino (1820–1899) and Serafino de Tivoli (1826–1892) are worthy of mention. De Tivoli was a member of the group known as the Macchiaioli, which consisted of Italian landscapists and included Károly Markó the Younger and András Markó as well. In the following year Markó was elected member of the Academies of Venice and Arezzo.

Markó did not remain in Florence. In 1848, together with his family, he moved to the village of Antella, roughly an hour and a half by carriage, the Villa l'Appoggi is in the vicinity. His Florence and Appoggi periods cannot in effect be separated, except that in comparison with the lively years of devoted work spent in Florence, in Appoggi Markó began to slow down. He still worked continuously when his eyesight permitted, and he still showed little interest in anything other than his art, that is the painting of landscapes. He composed outstanding pictures in these years, including *Italian Landscape with Harvesters*



(1848/1855), *Diana and Endymion Under the Moon* (1855), *Ariadne on the Island of Naxos* (1855), *Ruth and Boaz* (1857), *The Rape of Europa* (1857/1858), each of which is a more mature version of an earlier work, both in technique and composition. In these paintings he continues to vary the same mythological, religious and genre scenes which had captivated him in the past. Drawings in the Department of Prints and Drawings of the Hungarian National Gallery, as well as those in the Christian Museum of Esztergom, bear witness to the painstaking and thorough preparation that preceded individual works. Markó first produced a large number of preliminary drawings before undertaking a larger composition. This highly complex process began with naturalist nature studies and ended with mature compositions resting on academic principles. The style he had developed by the second half of the 1820s and the beginning of the 1830s essentially remained unchanged, and his artistic career progressed evenly up to his death in 1860 with no dramatic decline nor progress.

The current exhibition at the Hungarian National Gallery is significant because it offers a new interpretation of his oeuvre and presents works by his children and disciples. Moreover, numerous works by Károly Markó the Elder which have never before been shown in Hungary are now on display. The most recent research<sup>12</sup> has brought to light works which arrived from Mexico City and Barcelona which were not previously known in Hungary. The same is true of paintings from the Thorvaldsen Museum in Copenhagen. (Markó and Thorvaldsen, the most outstanding Neoclassical sculptor, were good friends.) Works which came from public and private collections in Vienna also call attention to aspects of the oeuvre scholars had not been aware of earlier. Similarly, the exhibition catalogue raises innumerable issues of detail and questions pertaining to individual works which have not been fully studied so far in conjunction with the Italian material. ■

12 ■ Zoltán Dragon, "Markó Károly mexikói festményei". (Károly Markó's Paintings in Mexico) *Művészettörténet Értesítő* 2004 (53), pp. 109–125; Idem, "Las 15 pinturas de Károly Markó en México". *Anales del Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas*, 2007 (29) No. 90. pp. 189–226.



Béla Somssich-Szőgyény  
Terra Nullius

Part 2

In the year following our move to Hunters Hill Australia went into recession. Quite a few companies went broke or laid off some of their workforce. Mr Rockefeller's company dismissed me too on the "last in, first out" principle, with Jóska Kalmár following suit and becoming a warden in Parramatta Prison; prisons evidently were not affected by the downturn in the economy. At the employment office I mentioned my work contract. "That binds *you*, but not us," a cheery-faced official enlightened me. Obviously he had no reason to fear losing his job. It was almost with relief that I stepped out of the office, and I resolved then and there that from now on I was going to be my own boss. For want of anything better, I became a sales agent for Watkins, an American company, which marketed toiletry and household goods. Their salespeople lugged around cases full of samples, calling at houses in the city's dreary suburbs, every one in a designated area. Housewives in dressing gowns, brooms in their hand or a child on their arms, would open the front door to find a door-to-door salesman speaking in a foreign accent who would pressure them to buy American articles like face cream, rouge, detergents, hair curlers and such like. If no one was buying or it rained for days on end, we would go hungry, so I took another job as well, looking after the garden of a prosperous Swiss stockbroker. His house was midway between ours and my old job. At the beginning he sent my afternoon snack out to me in the garden, and I ate in the shade of a big tree, but later on he would invite me into the house, where

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**Béla Somssich-Szőgyény**

*was born in Budapest in 1918. He was educated at home in the parental château at Kivadar in County Somogy and at Pius College in Pécs. While studying at the Academy of Music in Budapest he also attended university courses. During the War, he served as an Anti-Aircraft Gunner. After it, until 1949 when he left Hungary, he worked in music publishing and for the Education Department of Hungarian Radio. We wish to thank Anna Major for help in editing the English version of his memoir.*



his wife would serve tea. On one occasion I asked him what the best shares were. "In the long run those of the mining companies," he said, "in particular of those that dig for coal, iron ore and uranium. There is untold wealth lying hidden in the interior of the Australian continent," he said, his eyes sparkling. It was at that time that a canny farmer had hit upon the world's largest deposit of iron ore in the mountains of the vast Pilbara region in Western Australia.

Through a common friend we got to know the Káldors. András Káldor used to be a textile engineer with Goldberger's in Budapest. He imported and distributed the products of a former colleague now settled in Britain and the proprietor of a factory. In the course of an after-dinner chat, during which we had mentioned that we were now obliged to leave our lodging in Hunters Hill, he suggested that I should call on Cardinal Gilroy, the archbishop of Sydney, taking a crucifix that I should present to him as being a gift from Cardinal Mindszenty, and that I should later mention that I wanted to buy a house. We chuckled over the idea, which was no more absurd than many other visions of an immigrant's fancy, but nonetheless the next day I mentioned it to our neighbours, the nuns, though I kept quiet about the crucifix. The plan appealed to the sisters. They reassured me that their prelate was a good-natured man. They rang the bishop's secretary and fixed an appointment. On that day we went to the archi-episcopal residence, next to the sandstone St Mary's Cathedral in the heart of the City. It was a more modest building than the palaces of the bishops of Veszprém or Pécs in Hungary. The Cardinal received us in a simply furnished room. At that time he was fighting the government for state support for Roman Catholic schools, and once we were past the "small talk" he mentioned that my family name was not unknown to him. He had studied in Rome, where he was ordained a priest. Through Jusztnián Serédi,<sup>1</sup> an older fellow priest doing research in the Vatican Library, he had met Count József Somssich, the Hungarian Minister to the Holy See. Were we perhaps related? After I had confirmed that he was my paternal uncle, the mood became much more relaxed, and the Cardinal strongly approved of the idea of buying a place of our own. "House ownership is central to the Australian way of life," he said, writing down the name of a lawyer who would be able to offer guidance. I had no wish to trouble waters by mentioning that we hadn't a penny to our name, but perhaps there was no need to anyway: Cardinal Gilroy was the son of Irish working-class parents (his father had been a tailor's cutter), so he was fully aware of what poverty meant, but he also knew that nothing was impossible. His smile suggested as much, and by way of encouragement he offered to give us a parting blessing. But before doing so he

1 ■ Jusztnián Serédi (1884–1945) was the legation's canon law counsellor. From 1928 Prince Primate of Hungary



wanted to show us something, he said mysteriously, and he went into the adjoining room. He returned with a crucifix. "It belonged to Cardinal Mindszenty," he said. "and was given to me by a fellow countryman of yours." And he blessed us with it.

**M**r Beswick's law office in the City occupied the whole floor of a building. He received me behind an enormous desk in a corner room, with the window offering a view of Sydney Harbour and the Harbour Bridge. He would be able to help. But we should not count on a palace. We would be able to get a low-interest mortgage from a building society of which he was one of the directors.<sup>2</sup> He had several building contractors as clients and would let me know if a suitable house was put on the market. While he spoke the telephone was constantly ringing and talk of deadlines, interest rates and thousands of dollars was casually tossed about. Mr Beswick managed his own company's matters. He was a jovial fellow, a pillar of the New South Wales "Catholic Irish maffia". We parted under the impression that he was not going to forget about us, and indeed a week had not yet gone by when he rang and gave us an address. We took the train and bus to South Granville. The house stood at the end of a long street. It was a soundly built "fibro" house with a tile roof. The builder had built it for himself, but moved out for family reasons. Two horses were grazing on an adjacent vacant lot, and beyond that were new factory buildings, including a cigarette works. Behind the house, at the foot of vacant lots, a creek trickled. Before we signed the 25-year mortgage Mr Beswick asked us if we were quite sure about the area in which we would be living. What he clearly had in mind had become obvious in the course of the nearly one-hour trip by train and bus: we would be moving from a well-heeled, patrician neighbourhood into a bleak working-class outer suburb, and on the edge of newly built housing or houses still under construction where even the weather was different from that of sea-breezy Hunters Hill. We turned a deaf ear to his word of warning. The fact that by paying a minimal deposit (part of which was lent by Mr Beswick's finance company) and signing a low-interest, long-term mortgage, we would be able to live in our own house outweighed any other consideration. We signed the mortgage, and as soon as we were handed the keys we packed our belongings on the back of a truck and drove to South Granville.

Panni and the two children sat next to the driver, I sat on top of the load with our dog Jimmy. We drove through West Sydney along Parramatta Road, the main road to Granville, and from there to the very end of Clyde Street and into South Granville. It was reassuring to see that the two horses were still grazing in the vacant lot, but the floor of the dining room and kitchen in our house had been stripped bare: instead of leaving behind the linoleum as he had promised, the

2 ■ Everybody was given the opportunity of buying a house as long as he had work (income) and cash for the deposit.



owner had pulled it up and taken it away. That afternoon the furniture that we had bought on hire-purchase was delivered, so at least we were able to sleep in our own bed in our own house that night. A neighbour, Mrs Edwards, turned up with a platter of freshly baked scones. Her husband was an electrician who worked on construction sites. We could not have asked for better neighbours: Mrs Edwards—Anne—told us why the previous owner had sold the house. Because of the sloping land, he had built steps leading to the back door, but he had left making a handrail until later. His mother-in-law had slipped in the dark and fallen, and shortly afterwards she had died. His wife accused him of negligence and was unwilling to stay in the house. I hurriedly saw to putting a railing in place lest an accident happen to one of us. My mother-in-law, who had lived with us for awhile in Hunters Hill, had taken a job in the country at a boarding school run by a quirky American, but she did not like the job, so we had invited her to move back in with us.

Later on my father-in-law also came to Australia and moved in. Their presence was a great assistance to us. Panni's mother, Terry, grew up in America and spoke English more or less as a native. She became a teacher at a correspondence school teaching English as a foreign language to immigrants and in addition also worked as a secretary of a professor at the University of Sydney. My father-in-law, by contrast, was by then in his sixties and found it hard to cope with learning a new language. His attempts to engage in business ventures with fellow emigrants of his age were, by and large, unsuccessful, but the formerly thriving businessman and factory manager did not complain. He took on casual jobs, helped Panni out with the housework. Panni planned to make toy animals and her father helped with that, too. Drawing on the experience she had gained in the lampshade business in Rome, Panni cut out and stitched together coloured plastic sheets and scraps of material and stuffed them with cotton (using the handle of a ladle) to make teddy bears, rabbits and kittens, painting faces on them by hand. She performed the painstakingly detailed work in the sunroom: in the evenings we would lend a hand with the stuffing. The animals were a great success, not least because they were all unique. When she had managed to sell the first batch she bought a small car and drove around to baby shops. By that time I was working in a department store in the City, and before Easter I showed samples to the buyer in the Baby section, who put in a written order for twelve dozen bunny rabbits.

I worked in the department store as a sales assistant in the electrical goods section. The work was easy, but the pay was poor, I lost two or three hours a day commuting. So when I heard that an electrical store in Blacktown on the outskirts was looking for a travelling salesman I applied for the job. The owners, Paul Doff and George Skidelsky, were Russian Jews, who left the city of Harbin in north-east China (Manchuria) after the Communists had taken over. László Zólyomi, a Hungarian travelling salesman (a guards officer in his previous life), wanted to move on and they were looking for a replacement. A robust and vivacious man,



and a successful salesman, he had resigned having undertaken something more challenging. He became an estate agent running his own business. His exceptional power of persuasion had already been evident in Hungary when the Germans had occupied the country in March 1944. They had sought to capture the prime minister, Miklós Kállay. Zólyomi happened to be on duty in the Sándor Palace, the prime minister's office and also residence on Castle Hill, when the Germans came. On seeing them, Zólyomi immediately signalled to Kállay that he should flee. When the officer leading the German detachment said that he wished to "speak" to the Prime Minister, he claimed that Kállay was still "getting dressed", and to pass the time he explained and demonstrated a new Hungarian invention that would improve the fuse on hand grenades. The officer was so absorbed by the presentation that Kállay had been able to escape via an underground passage built by the Turks in the seventeenth century which led to the Royal Palace. From there the Turkish Minister drove Kállay to the Turkish Legation where he found refuge for awhile. Having duped a German officer, it must have seemed child's play to Zólyomi to persuade immigrants who had settled in Blacktown and the surrounding chicken farms that life was not worth living without a refrigerator, washing machine or radiogram. Business had been booming, and Paul Doff clearly hoped that because I too was Hungarian, I would do just as well, if not better. He had great plans; he wanted to expand. The Snowy Mountains Scheme, a huge hydroelectricity and irrigation complex, was then in its fourth year, with a workforce of 7,000 to 8,000 (the majority of them immigrants from Europe) who lived in huts or, if they had a family, in cottages. They were Paul Doff's target. His business partner George Skidelsky and I had the task of making their lives more pleasant.

Cooma was the headquarters of the Snowy Mountains Scheme<sup>3</sup>. It was our job once a fortnight to drive there. From dawn to dusk we were there to wheedle money out of the pockets of workers, technicians and engineers, who were earning multiples of European wages at that time. Amidst the beauty of the wild landscape one barely noticed the jolting caused by the unmetalled, potholed, weather-worn dust road leading from Canberra to Cooma, dusty in summer and slippery in winter. The spectacle of the rocky, scrubby countryside, overgrown with eucalyptus trees, the flashy parakeets and the bobbing heads of inquisitive kangaroos could not have changed much from what had greeted the pioneers

3 ■ The construction of the Snowy Mountains Hydro-Electric Scheme remains one of the greatest engineering feats in the world today. It interlocks seven power stations and 16 major dams through 145 kilometres of trans-mountain tunnels and 80 kilometres of aqueducts. It provides electricity for three major towns and water for irrigating the inland's arid soil. An estimated 100,000 people worked on the Scheme between 1949 and 1974, the year of its completion. Two-thirds of them were newly arrived immigrants from Europe. The joint efforts of former wartime enemies and squabbling nationalities symbolized the maturation of Australia and the birth of multiculturalism.



when they first clambered up the mountains towering around them, snow-covered in winter, to the source of the Snowy River. The river would periodically be swollen by melt snow, and it was no easy job to tame it.

George and I would take turns driving the firm's van. When I drove he would light up his short-stemmed pipe, filled with English cured tobacco, and amuse me with idle chatter during the long journey, which we often made at night. He was almost 20 years older and lived with his young wife fairly close to us in a more middle-class outer suburb. On holidays, celebrated according to the Russian Orthodox calendar, they would throw big shindigs to which we would be invited. At tables creaking under the weight of Russian fare we got to know the members of the Harbin Russian colony who had made it to Sydney.

George Skidelsky's grandfather Leon had owned a county-sized stretch of land comprising timber concessions, logging mills and property in Siberia, and he had headed the construction of the stretch of the Trans-Siberian railway that connected Manchuria to Vladivostok. The family fled to Harbin when the Bolsheviks came to power. By then the grandfather was no longer alive, but his sons, George's father included, had carried on the business in Manchuria, exporting agricultural produce and timber, acquiring a mining lease, and supplying coal to the railway. That was up until the Japanese and then the brief Soviet occupation of Manchuria, after which it fell into the hands of Communist China for good, obliging the Skidelskys to make tracks yet again, albeit not empty-handed. Part of the family moved to England, George to Australia. He spoke excellent English, and he spoke a lot, his parents had had him schooled in England. He found it easy to chat with the engineers and workers, whether Norwegians, Ukrainians or Poles, whereas I busied myself more with the German, Hungarian and Italian customers.

George went to bed early while I would continue to walk the streets of the small town. The restaurants that offered home (i.e. European) cooking were packed on weekends. I would go into a bar in which music was being played; they would serve Serbian dishes and all sorts of other things could also be ordered: Wiener Schnitzel, spaghetti, dumplings. In fact I would find it hard to list all the nationalities seated at the tables, eating and drinking, playing cards, throwing dice, or even dancing with the few women who dared to mingle with the crowd of overwhelmingly unmarried, work-hardened men. As I tucked into *cevapcici* with finely diced onions, it flashed through my mind that the work of constructing a gigantic hydroelectric power station and irrigation system amid these hills and valleys would not only transform the face of this part of the world, but also the lives of Australians across the country. Those sitting around me and talking in their own languages, eating their own ethnic foods (as were their fellow countrymen across Australia), would inevitably be woven into the English warp of the Australian fabric. I mentioned this to George the next day. "Yes, that's how it will be, something like that," he said. "This *metamorphosis*



*Australiae* will be the price that has to be paid for the Australians to inhabit this sparsely populated island.<sup>4</sup> The process of knitting-together however will not move ahead without hitches. Don't think that we can escape what we left behind—we will always have to lug that around with us. And us includes the Australians: they are also immigrants."

We talked about all this at the house of Tibor Bisits, a Hungarian engineer. Bisits was a friend of George's, and George would invariably pay a call on him each time we went to Cooma. His name was one I recalled from my days in Hungary back in the 1930s. With co-pilot pioneer aviator Antal Bánhidi he had flown a two-seater biplane named Gerle ("Turtle Dove") all the way around the coast of the Mediterranean. We read about their exploits in the boys' magazines. "Peaceful and even enthusiastic cooperation," said Bisits, "is due to William Hudson, the chief engineer. He realised early on that the project was not going to be attainable unless the multinational workforce were forged into a unit, so he made it his personal business to see that his workers, putting aside the war and the enmities of the Old World, work both with each other and with the Old Australians as equals. He prevents any form of discrimination. In that way he is also moulding Australia's new society."

It was around this time we noticed that Bert's right leg was thinner and shorter than his left one. We couldn't believe our eyes; we kept looking at it, measuring it. It was a fact. The specialist we took him to, Dr Wherrett, suspected polio. We could recall only one occasion—in Hunters Hill—when he had been sick. He ran a temperature, he was crying and slept fitfully in his little cot. We thought he had simply caught a cold, and indeed, his symptoms disappeared within a few days. His grandmother—Panni's mother—who had recently arrived and lived with us, slapped his bottom when he wouldn't stop crying. At the time I was pretty upset with my mother-in-law. Dr. Wherrett's diagnosis came to us like a bolt out of the blue; it completely upset our inner equilibrium and like the roots of a poisoned plant penetrated every corner of our lives. The use of the Salk vaccine became common only the following year. Bert paid no heed to his disability; although he walked with a limp in his orthopaedic shoes, he didn't lag behind his schoolmates, whether cycling, climbing trees, or swimming.

Paul Doff's local business began to slow down and to fill the time between our visits to Cooma I worked as a taxi driver. Among the people queuing at the taxi rank at Granville Station the drivers chose those heading the same way and would not start until their cars were full. This was called multiple hiring: having paid the customary 10 per cent of the fare to the taxi firm (which could not run a check

4 ■ Arthur Calwell, a minister in the wartime cabinet was the chief architect of Australia's postwar immigration scheme. He overcame the resistance of trade unions and voters, convincing them of the necessity of mass immigration with the argument of „populate or perish“. However, he remained a staunch advocate of the White Australia Policy.



anyway), the driver pocketed any extra profit. Any fool could see that this was good business and was worth getting into. Apart from the two miles or so of Blaxell Street in Granville known as the Golden Mile, the four-mile ride from Granville to Fairfield still further out west of Sydney was the most profitable route.

In these outer suburbs, where Italian, Yugoslav and Polish immigrants lived, new shopping centres including department stores were springing up. The minister of the Presbyterian congregation was Attila Sóos, a Hungarian, who had studied theology in Rome and subsequently in Sydney. To support his family, he too had become a Watkins salesman at much the same time, which was how I came to know him. On one occasion he opened the door of my cab. He told me that he had been appointed minister in Fairfield and had been given a place to live by the church. A shopping arcade was being built behind the church, he told me. "It's a great place to open a café. There would be somewhere to go after the service." He had not drunk a decent cup of coffee since his time in Rome; if I were to take the plunge, I would be the first to open a café in Fairfield. I took a look at the building site: all it consisted of was a bare shell with yawning gaps where the door and windows of the shops would be put in. I measured up the spaces as I stumbled around amid the cement sacks and wheelbarrows. A walkway separated the row of shops from the small chapel which had been built by Scottish immigrants; one could use it as a place to put tables and chairs. After a hurried discussion Panni and I decided to go ahead. It would only have been worthwhile to continue making children's toys if we had been willing to mechanise production, and Panni did not care to do that. The fact that neither of us had relevant business, let alone catering experience, did not even enter our minds.

Thanks to my excursions to Cooma and work as a taxi driver, as well as to the teddy bears, we had managed to put aside a bit of money. The rest was lent by the shopfitting firm and the equipment makers. By the time we opened for business we were up to our ears in debt. The café was named Capri, perhaps after a trip there from the camp in Bagnoli, the memory of which was somehow blurred by memories of evenings spent in a Capri bar in Pest, somewhere near the Western Railway Station. In addition to us a newsagent, a women's hairdresser, a solicitor and a radiologist had premises in the arcade. It took awhile before customers found their way there, given that the shop fronts were not on the main road. Business was slow and we had trouble meeting the interest payments on our loans. So we introduced Friday and Saturday nights dances. The music was provided by the harmonica-guitar duo of Don and Simon. Don was an Italian lad, who for his day job delivered Coca Cola, and Simon, a Croat, was a carpenter, and the two were fabulous musicians. Pubs in Australia had to close at ten o'clock at the time, and the customers, mostly European migrants who drifted over to our place after closing time, were thirsty. There were some who would ask for an "Irish coffee", coffee and whiskey topped up



with whipped cream, but instead we offered our own concoction (we called it the "Special" or "Pepsi"), brandy with black coffee or Coca Cola, bootleg, of course, as we had no liquor licence. It was not long before news of our "Capri Specials" spread. Taxi drivers kept bringing the clientele and on weekends, the place was packed to the rafters. I was smiling all the way to the bank as was the manager.

Where drink is at work, there are arguments. We needed a bouncer, and I asked László if he would take on the job. If he could handle oil drums, why wouldn't he be able to chuck out a couple of pugnacious drunks? The suggestion appealed to him, as he thought of it as an adventure. The following weekend, with his sleeves rolled up and a confident smile on his face, he saw to maintaining the good reputation of the premises. For some reason, however, our customers did not take to him, perhaps he seemed haughty to them, and when he intervened in a brawl they ganged up on him. I went to his aid and then sneaked him out through the churchyard to the station, where he hopped on an incoming train. By the time I got back the rowdies had patched up their differences.

László was succeeded by Eddie Maas, an even-tempered Dutch giant of a fellow whom our guests nicknamed "Big Eddie". He could ensure order simply by his presence. We also took on Eddie's wife, and our neighbour Anne was active in the kitchen. I kept the bottles of brandy in the backyard as it was easier to get rid of them if there was a raid.

The local police did not bother us because we did not cause any trouble, but when the liquor licencing inspectors got word of what taxi drivers all over the city knew, they swooped. Disguised as football supporters, two of their detectives ordered and were served "Specials". When they asked who the owner was, Panni stepped forward. I should stay in the café, she reckoned, and she would talk to the police. Eddie's wife had served the coffees, so she was also taken in for questioning and fingerprinted. Panni could not refrain from dressing down the police. Recollections of the Korean war were still fresh in the minds of Australians. China's intervention carried the threat of further conflict and had shaken the Australians' sense of security which had already been shaken during the war by the spectre of a Japanese invasion.<sup>5</sup> These fears fed the policy of "White Australia". "The Yellow Peril is at our gates, and all you can do is worry about such piddling matters," she rebuked the policemen, who were fiddling around with written statements. But they just smiled at this New Australian woman.

The case came to court, and our lawyer's argument that the customers had themselves put spirits in their drinks was in vain. We were fined. Our place was not suitable for a liquor licence, so we had no choice but to continue with what we had been doing, but being more cautious. We were on good terms with the local cops, and they continued to turn a blind eye, but we did not realize that

5 ■ In the Second World War, the Japanese bombed Darwin, occupied New Guinea and destroyed several Australian cargo ships. Three of their midget submarines penetrated Sydney Harbour and launched torpedoes at the USS Chicago and other shipping. All three mini-sub were sunk.



we had aroused the suspicions of the Customs and Excise Office. One day when we were away one of their sleuths had a sniff around our house and noticed that I had built a partition wall in the garage out of crates of empty bottles of brandy. I used to do my morning yoga exercises behind it. This discovery prompted him to take a look at the Capri in order to satisfy his curiosity. He reassured us that he only wanted to know where all the liquor had come from that I kept in the many bottles. He was sceptical, to say the least, about my response, which was that I just emptied the bottles and did not refill them, and that I bought the liquor from a firm named "Hungaria" (the owners of the firm, an elderly married couple, concocted a drink using a distillate imported from Hungary; it was cheaper than Australian brandy).

The excise man suspected an illicit still. Many of the New Australians who owned a farm in the green belt would distil their own liquor, be it grappa, slivovitz or Hungarian pálinka. There was a flourishing black market in such hooch, with clubs and restaurants buying it and avoiding tax.

**J**ust as the Capri changed from a quiet café into a rowdy night club, so the kitchen staff turned over. My father-in-law would still lend a hand, but Anne was replaced by Juliska, a shapely lady from the Voivodina,<sup>6</sup> a superb cook, who baked homemade cakes to order. They were delivered by her boyfriend Jóska Vighogyl, also Hungarian, and when we took Juliska on, he too became a frequent guest. Vighogyl left Hungary before the 1956 Revolution, getting a head start, as it were, on the Hungarians who came to Australia after the Revolution was crushed. He had been a tractor driver, and he had schemed until he got a job on a state farm directly along the border. He fitted bullet-proof iron sheets to his best tractor and behind this shield he swooped down on the gate at the frontier crossing. By the time the Hungarian border guards got over their surprise he had reached Austria; the story even made the papers. He was a burly, pockmarked fellow whose very eyes radiated humour and audacity. He made friends with an Australian small farmer who let him use his shed as a workshop where he set up living quarters for himself in one corner. The other farmers in the district soon found out about him and they brought him tools, machines and chicken coops that needed mending. They let him keep whatever was beyond repair, and he collected unwanted odds-and-ends from them. The area around the shed became a junkyard where spare part hunters and scrap dealers would pick up parts among discarded sewing machines, car engines, lawnmowers, chaff cutters and sheets of iron. Jóska had no time left for cake deliveries. Juliska, too, had given up baking and had given us notice, because she was planning to open her own restaurant with a new partner, who back in Budapest had been a chef at the Dunapalota-Ritz Hotel. This was in Kings Cross, the bohemian district of Sydney, and their cooking drew in Hungarians and other

6 ■ The Serbian region called Voivodina was part of Hungary until 1918.



European customers from far and wide. Vighogyl himself was not averse to driving the twelve miles or more to get a bit of his old girlfriend's grub. Their relationship blossomed anew. They bought a house and moved in together.

The Keményvári twins were the first of the '56 refugees to cross the doorstep of the Capri. They and their younger sister, along with a few companions, had left Hungary in an old bomb of a truck. They were tall, self-confident young men and their manner betrayed an old gentry middle-class background, which even a decade of Communism had been unable to obliterate. The two lads had taken jobs as truck drivers on the Sydney-Adelaide route, the uncrowned king of which was my *landsman* and neighbour, Jóska Balatincz, from Szigetvár. The twins were followed by many fellow '56-ers and the Capri became a sort of information centre and meeting place for the '56 refugees who had ended up in that part of the world. There were many who helped, from the bank manager to the editor of a Polish paper, and Attila Sóos, who mobilised his flock to provide support to the Hungarian refugees.

The tailor Ferenc Zsidró received his customers at a table in the Capri, showing them samples. That was the time when zip flies and slacks for women came into fashion—he had plenty of work. A sharp young woman who had worked in the meat industry back home noticed that abbatoirs would throw sheep's and pigs' intestines in the rubbish since no one wanted them. On an outlying farm she set up a plant where these were washed and sold to European butchers and meat processors. Initially she made the necessary telephone calls from the Capri. Her engaging manner and well-groomed appearance belied the image her occupation evoked. Kapui, a painter and decorator, got on first-name terms with Prince Pál Esterházy in the lock-up of the dreaded secret police headquarters of ÁVÓ on Andrassy Avenue. His off-sider, the gnome-like epileptic Lajos, spent his weekend nights at the Capri, as he had no family. As we knew about his condition, he got his coffees plain, but even plain coffee got him high and he would start dancing on his own. With his awkward, yet somehow graceful movements and unexpected little hops he managed to express what he was unable to put into words.

★

**W**e sold the business at the end of the 1950s and then our house as well, moving to Chatswood, on the North Shore. We found ourselves in a very different world compared with our first dwelling, in a neighbourhood for Sydney's well-to-do middle class, the leafy garden suburbs on the North Shore. It was like moving from a Pest suburb to verdant Buda. Panni became the manager of the coffee shop of a newly built department store, and I became an agent for Carinia, who imported and distributed European gramophone records. We bought a solid brick home close to Bert's school on account of his leg. Ancsi enrolled at university and I started my own business, which I registered as Omnisound. I imported gramophone needles and records from Japan and Europe. The rapid



spread of stereo and hi-fi equipment ensured a growing market and my firm flourished. I had extensions built to our house, and an office and storeroom on the lower level. I worked from home; others wasted hours in ever-denser traffic jams. Recollecting the advice I had been given by the Swiss stockbroker, I started to buy stocks and shares. Panni had trouble with her eyes, then because of macular degeneration she gradually lost her eyesight, but she did not stop working. She would box up Omnisound goods and take on other manual jobs. As she had learned to touch-type when she was young, she was able to write letters and sketches in English on a "talking" typewriter and later a computer doing her correspondence and writing short stories. Her memory and manual dexterity helped her overcome all obstacles, and she never complained.

Jóska Aczél started his first repair shop in one of Sydney's outer suburbs, but later he moved closer to the city. At first he refused to handle German cars, but as time went by he saw that the wartime generation was being replaced by a new one, so he took on a dealership for Volkswagen spare parts.

Kornél got married and also moved to the other side of the Harbour, to North Sydney. He enrolled at university and got a degree in librarianship, landing a job in the library of the University of New South Wales. His wife Rita was a journalist and Australian by birth; she valued her husband's complex personality, which Kornél was able to develop freely with her at his side. He was a night owl. On weekends he could be found in Sydney's bohemian quarter, pistol in pocket, in the company of artists, Zen philosophers, and other odd fish. Legends began to circulate about him, most of which he authored. Later he became chief librarian at the Bendigo Technical College (later University). He bought a spacious house in Bendigo where there was plenty of room for his library, which until then had crowded his small dwelling.

László studied accountancy and then went into partnership with an Englishman. The floor of our house in Chatswood was fitted with parquetry sheets they manufactured (unfortunately we had to have them removed a few years later as the parquet warped). For a while he had a Hungarian girlfriend, but then, after a torrid courtship, he married a good-looking Australian woman who bore him two children. Following the collapse of his business he handled the finances of a medium-sized company. His marriage broke up, and after his retirement he moved to the country, renting a flat above a butcher's shop and writing mythologically inspired poetry in English.

James Murdoch toured Europe with a Spanish dance troupe. His life was changed for good by an unfortunate accident; he cut the nerves in his hand on a sharp dagger and was unable to play the piano afterwards. He moved to England and became the assistant of Peter Maxwell Davies, the avant-garde composer, organising concerts of his music in many places, including Hungary.

On my way home from a late night visit I caught sight of a swaying figure in the drizzling mist on Pacific Highway. I recognised James; he had returned to



Australia. At first he worked for a newly established record company. Then, under the aegis of ABC, he introduced contemporary Australian composers on radio and TV and also wrote a book about them. Later, as director of the Australian Music Centre, he coordinated performances and lectures connected with the Bartók centenary in 1981, drawing me into his work as well. He carried on his activities as a maker and writer of documentaries after moving to Bali, and I visited him on several occasions in a villa built on a riverside hill.

We made many new friends in our new surroundings, and we witnessed and participated in Australia's renewal and continued progress. With the granting of equal rights to indigenous Australians and the acceptance of refugees in the wake of the Vietnam war the White Australia policy became a thing of the past. It was replaced by multiculturalism, which furthered the immigration of Asians, Africans and Pacific Islanders. They came in droves, political and economic refugees alike, and Australia's Eurocentric society underwent yet another transformation. The lure of commerce banished the spectre of the Yellow Peril, as Japan and China became Australia's largest trading partners. Then—in 1992—the High Court of Australia delivered its landmark Mabo decision on Aboriginal land rights thereby nullifying the legal fiction of *terra nullius*. What had once been no man's land became everyone's land. ♣

*Chatswood, NSW Australia, 2009*

*Translated by Tim Wilkinson*

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Zoltán Peterecz

# "A Certain Amount of Tactful Undermining"

Herbert C. Pell and Hungary in 1941

**D**irect diplomatic relations between the United States and a truly, although mutilated in the wake of the Trianon Treaty, independent Hungary were established in 1922, when Ulysses Grant-Smith was appointed as first chargé d'affaires ad interim. He was followed by ministers Theodore Brentano, J. Butler Wright, Nicholas Roosevelt, John Flournoy Montgomery and Herbert C. Pell. Diplomatic relations were broken off by Hungary in December 1941, and Hungary declared war on the United States. Except for J. Butler Wright, a career diplomat, these men were political appointees. They all shared much the same picture of Hungary and Hungarian society of the time, believing that the Hungarian political class was characterized by a feudal mentality, and also that Hungary was fervently nationalist and hungry for a revision of the Trianon Peace Treaty. As the 1930s progressed the country gained more importance in the light of brewing instability in Europe. Although Nicholas Roosevelt's and John Flournoy Montgomery's work and ideas are fairly well known, this however does not go for Herbert C. Pell. Since he occupied the post of minister in the biggest part of the crucial year 1941, it is all the more important to obtain information about what he did, and his opinions while in Hungary.<sup>1</sup>

1 ■ For the major works on the American ministers in Hungary in the 1930s, see Tibor Frank, "Diplomatic Images of Admiral Horthy: The American Perception of Interwar Hungary, 1919–1941," In: *Ethnicity, Propaganda, Myth-Making*. Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1999, pp. 233–251; Tibor Frank, *Discussing Hitler*. Budapest: Central University Press, 2003; Nicholas Roosevelt, *A Front Row Seat*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1953; John Flournoy Montgomery, *Hungary: The Unwilling Satellite*. New York: The Devin-Adair Company, 1947.

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Herbert Claiborne Pell was born in 1884 into a prominent and wealthy American family. As a child, he enjoyed all the privileges of the Gilded Age, but he was certainly not spoiled. He was encouraged at an early age to think for himself, which stood him in good stead. He was good at history and modern languages. He spoke fluent French and good German and Italian, largely thanks to frequent and extended European tours, the first in 1895. He spent one third of his first thirty years in Europe. He was conservative, but also sensitive to social injustice and therefore wished to see certain changes. One of his biographers called him "the last genuine American aristocrat."<sup>2</sup> He was perhaps more of a real Progressive. He hated big business for its greed. Due to what was interpreted as a betrayal of his own class, he was often labelled a radical. Still, in many ways he remained upper class in his ways, which took form most conspicuously in his fondness for exclusive clubs, in this way he could avoid meeting people who were not members.

Pell's political career began as a Progressive, but in 1918 he was elected to the House of Representatives as a Democrat, where he served one term. His political views can be labelled both as conservative and internationalist. On the one hand, he declared, "There is no use dodging the issue. Bolshevism is a serious danger," but he was also a firm believer in some sort of international organization to keep order and peace in the world, and that the United States should take a major role in such a world.<sup>3</sup> He thought that the real alternative for Europe would be a "United States of Europe" after the war. Indeed, he lost his race for re-election in 1920 because of the League of Nations issue.<sup>4</sup> In 1921 he became a more active Democrat partly thanks to Franklin D. Roosevelt, whom he admired. He wrote articles in support of FDR's election, and later became involved in FDR's re-election campaign in 1936. Pell was appointed as Minister to Portugal, holding that office from May 1937 until February 1941, when he was appointed Minister to Hungary. A few months after returning from Hungary to the United States in the spring of 1942, he submitted his resignation. He was United States representative on the United Nations War Crimes Commission from August 1943 to January 1945. After that date he withdrew from active politics for the remainder of his life.<sup>5</sup>

2 ■ Michael Steward Blayney, *Democracy's Aristocrat. The Life of Herbert C. Pell*. Lanham, New York, London: University Press of America, 1986, p. 14. In Pell's view, a "conscientious member of the aristocracy is as much a public servant as a soldier, and his justification is his capacity to subordinate the motives of private property to his duty to the community:" Pell to Mary Carter, May 1, 1943, quoted in Blayney, *Democracy's Aristocrat*, p. 47.

3 ■ Congressional Record, 66th Congress, 1st Session, July 12, 1919, p. 2508.

4 ■ Pell to Butler, October 31, 1939, Folder: Butler, Nicholas Murray, Container 3, Herbert Claiborne Papers, Franklin D. Roosevelt Library, Hyde Park, New York (hereafter cited as Pell Papers). I would like to express my gratitude to Professor Ken Moody, who made it possible for me to access the Pell Papers used in this article.

5 ■ The background information on Pell's life is from Leonard Baker, *Brahmin in Revolt. A Biography of Herbert C. Pell*. Garden City, N. Y.: Doubleday & Co., 1972, and Blayney, *Democracy's Aristocrat*.



The reason he was appointed to Portugal was that Roosevelt knew Pell as an intelligent man, someone who knew Europe well. He needed such men to inform him about the changing situation in Europe. It was Roosevelt's way of handling foreign policy. He did not wholly trust the State Department and tried to choose reliable people for sensitive posts who reported directly to him. Pell was intelligent and farsighted, and his whole upbringing, the love of history, and his first-hand knowledge of Europe gave him a thorough understanding of the situation that few could compete with. He thus foresaw the Anschluss, the fate of Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, Denmark and Poland, and predicted the showdown between Germany and Great Britain. He also forecast that Franco's Spain would not join the Axis. In addition, he professed his faith in the American potential and the responsibility this entailed.<sup>6</sup> When war broke out, as Pell had predicted, Portugal indeed became one of the most valuable listening posts in Europe, where all the countries, including the belligerents, engaged in intelligence gathering of every sort. Pell and his experience carried much weight with the President. In early 1941, however, Roosevelt had another post for him, Hungary, which in many ways was more intriguing. By that time, it had become evident that nothing inside Europe could stop the German army. Only the British could prevail in the Battle of Britain, but this had no short-time effects on the continent. Consequently, the role of smaller Eastern European countries, such as Hungary, which were still somewhat independent but with close ties to Germany and the Axis, gained prominence in American thinking.

Hungary was in a unique position in more than one respect and relations can be said to have been good and cordial with the United States. First, there was Trianon. The United States, although not officially a part to the punishing peace treaty, bore some responsibility for the outcome by not using its weight for a more just settlement. Inter-war Hungary was defined by irredentism, and it was clear in the light of recent years that in the benevolent shadow of Germany Hungary was doing everything within its possibilities to get back lost territories. The Vienna Awards of 1938 and 1940 foreshadowed Hungary's role in the war, still the United States hoped to see Hungary remain a non-combatant. So, despite Hungary's well-known German orientation and joining the Axis in November 1940, Hungary enjoyed much United States sympathy. Part of it was due to the fact that despite the fervent revisionist and anti-Bolshevik views of the Regent and the country in general, Hungary represented stability in an otherwise volatile region. President Roosevelt expressed his condolences to Regent Horthy on the death of the latter's daughter in 1940, and the State Department did likewise to Hungary upon Prime Minister Count Pál Teleki's death the following year.<sup>7</sup> The prestige in Hungary of

6 ■ Pell to Roosevelt, May 31, 1938, Folder: General Correspondence Br-Ch, Container 3, Pell Papers.

7 ■ Roosevelt to Horthy, June 28, 1940, and Welles to Ghika, April 19, 1941, Decimal File, 1940-1944, from 864.001/39 to 864.01/1-3144, Box 5637, RG 59, NARA. I would like to thank László Borhi for these two sources.



the United States was furthered in the inter-war period by Americans such as General Harry Hill Bandholtz, Jeremiah Smith, Jr., or Royall Tyler, who were household names in Hungary and popular figures at the time.

**A**fter a "difficult but not uncomfortable" journey through wartime Europe, Herbert Pell arrived in Hungary in late April, and he quickly thanked his President "for sending me to such an interesting post in such an attractive city."<sup>8</sup> He had to wait about a month for his Letters of Accreditation to arrive.<sup>9</sup> This was partly due to anxieties in the State Department about Hungary's position vis-à-vis Germany, and personal dislike for Pell in the State Department.<sup>10</sup> He finally presented his credentials to Horthy on 19 May 1941. Horthy and Pell became and remained friends. Pell found in the Regent many positive characteristics and when, during a Hungary-Italy water polo game, Horthy left the Italian minister for Pell, the American was buoyed with joy.<sup>11</sup> Later he characterized Horthy as "universally respected as a good honest man and a patriotic Hungarian who does what he can to preserve the dignity and independence of his country. I think this opinion is justified."<sup>12</sup>

In one of his earliest reports as Minister to Hungary, Pell made two points. One, which remained constant, was the antipathy felt by the majority of Hungarians for Germany and the tangible German rule in the country. He soon sensed the general lack of faith in any real resistance: "[Hungarians do not like] the German domination of the country, but they feel that there is nothing whatsoever that they can do about it."<sup>13</sup> The other point, which changed later, was that from what he had seen the German army was in very good shape and it would take a while before it could be made to break. The Germans' seemingly "absolutely unbeatable" position projected for Pell a sad picture of the future, namely that "their exhaustion will take a very long time, and will imply the exhausting of all Europe and the destruction of civilization."<sup>14</sup>

8 ■ Pell to Roosevelt, May 16, 1941, Folder: Roosevelt, Franklin D., Container 25, Pell Papers. His experience in Germany led to this semiserious observation: "Going through Germany I found everything expensive... Even their beer has gone down in quality and is only about half as good as it used to be, although still about twice as good as any other." Pell to Roosevelt, May 16, 1941, Folder: Roosevelt, Franklin D., Container 25, Pell Papers.

9 ■ Pell to Robert Pell, May 13, 1941, Folder: Addendum 1905-1963, Container 55, Pell Papers.

10 ■ Robert Pell to Pell, May 13, 1941, Folder: Addendum 1905-1963, Pell papers. This dislike may have stemmed from Pell's being a Roosevelt man.

11 ■ Baker, *Brahmin in Revolt*, pp. 227-228. To complete the dismay of the Italian minister, the Hungarians won.

12 ■ Statement to the British Minister in Lisbon (by Pell, without date, but certainly in the early spring of 1942, Folder: Hungary, Container 10, Pell Papers. The Pells helped the Horthys in their exile in Portugal after the war. Baker, *Brahmin in Revolt*, p. 229.

13 ■ Pell to Roosevelt, May 16, 1941, Folder: Roosevelt, Franklin D., Container 25, Pell Papers.

14 ■ Pell to Roosevelt, May 16, 1941, Folder: Roosevelt, Franklin D., Container 25, Pell Papers.



His athletic figure, state-of-the-art Buick, cordial personality, and being an American made him a conspicuous and soon beloved figure in Hungary. His popularity was naturally resented by the Germans and they soon started to spy on him. They paid a maid at the Ritz who cleaned the Pells' suite. She discovered the correspondence between Pell and the President and Pell and the State Department, and let a German agent in to take photographs of the carbon copies of a large number of letters. However, the documents did not prove too interesting for the Germans. As a German memorandum stated, "After careful examination of the Pell material received to date, the Foreign Ministry regrets to conclude that the letters... contain nothing of interest... except a categorical refutation and rejection of the National Socialist and Fascist ideologies, [therefore] it is considered inadvisable to bring them to the attention of the Reich's Foreign Minister."<sup>15</sup>

It is undeniable that Pell liked Hungary and the Hungarians. His sympathy for Hungary partially stemmed from the Hungarian behaviour toward Germany. The sometimes fervent show of sovereignty convinced Pell that the American Legation in Budapest should be kept open, because for many Hungarians it meant hope in dark days. He stated in addition that "of all the posts in German-dominated countries, Budapest is the most independent, and the one from which it is most likely that any serious *ballon d'essai* will be sent up."<sup>16</sup> Thus, he thought there might be a chance for Hungary to turn away from Germany. Pell also soon recognized Hungary's very difficult situation because of its geographical situation given the great power constellation. He informed the President that the country was following a German-dictated foreign policy and not one they would chose of their own will.<sup>17</sup>

In his messages to Washington, Pell kept stating that Hungarians, especially the upper classes, looked to the United States, after the British had left in April, as the possible guarantor of their independence. Such sentences as "these people look to the United States as their only possible source of salvation," or Hungarians "hope that we will be able to assist them in maintaining their independence" reveal more about the naivety of Hungarians than of Pell's realism.<sup>18</sup> Believing that his post was important and his and his nation's role could produce a change for the better, he was of the opinion that Hungarians having such feelings was an advantage to the United States and "they should be encouraged."<sup>19</sup> He did all the "encouraging" he could. He listened to anyone

15 ■ In detail and the quote, see Ladislav Farago, *The Game of the Foxes* (New York: Bantam Books, 1971), pp. 527–536.

16 ■ Pell to Robert Pell, May 23, 1941, Folder: Addendum 1905–1963.

17 ■ Pell to Roosevelt, May 29, 1941, Folder: General Correspondence Br-Ch, Container 3, Pell Papers. Another personal point that made him look at Hungary favorably was the beauty of Hungarian women. Pell to Robert Pell, May 23, 1941, Folder: Addendum 1905–1963, Pell Papers.

18 ■ Pell to Welles, May 27, 1941, Folder: Welles, Sumner, Container 29; Pell to Robert Pell, June 11, 1941. See also, Pell to his mother, June 24, 1941, Folder: Addendum 1905–1963.

19 ■ Pell to Welles, May 27, 1941, Folder: Welles, Sumner, Container 29, Pell Papers.



willing to talk, even if this meant only the anti-German section of the upper class. He passed around books that were otherwise unavailable in Hungary until "they were almost worn out."<sup>20</sup> As he confessed to his mother, his role in Hungary was that of a capable diplomat, doing "a certain amount of tactful undermining."<sup>21</sup>

As for the Legation in Budapest, he had only praise. The efficient work of the Legation was largely due to the efforts of many years by Montgomery, who often had to fight with the State Department in order to be able to provide the required standard of political work. Pell thought the Legation was "very well organized," the staff "competent, polite and intelligent and very cooperative."<sup>22</sup> Since the Legation proved to be "the center of anti-Axis feeling," (a Hungarian also described it "as their last window on civilization") it was little wonder that the people, or at least those who Pell was in contact with, were "extremely anxious to keep us here."<sup>23</sup> Pell thought that the diplomatic post and the staff should do their utmost to encourage those Hungarians who hoped "relief from German oppression" and provide them with news coming from the United States.<sup>24</sup> The main problem regarding such information was, as Pell often complained, that news reached Pell at a very slow speed. It took six weeks for the *New York Times* to arrive and they were the fastest.<sup>25</sup> In addition, in his everyday life as a minister the main problem was the difficulty getting transit visas for Americans who wished to leave Hungary and needed to cross Germany on their way home.

**T**he first problem and thorn between the United States and Hungary came when Hungary declared war on the Soviet Union on 26 June 1941. The somewhat unexpected German attack led to an alliance between the United States and the Soviet Union. Thus, it was a pivotal occasion for Hungary to decide whether to follow Germany and join the war effort against the Soviets, or stay out of it and try to preserve its non-belligerent status, and by doing so maintaining American friendship. Despite Pell's confident reports to Roosevelt, which the President "read with careful attention," that he had been assured by official circles that Hungary would not attack the Soviet Union, the opposite happened.<sup>26</sup> Although Pell noted that "up to the time I left Budapest there was

20 ■ Herbert Pell, Trip to Hungary, Container 20, Pell Papers. This is an undated summary of Pell's experiences in Hungary.

21 ■ Pell to his mother, Mrs. Herbert Pell, September 25, 1941, Addendum 1905-1963, Pell Papers.

22 ■ Herbert Pell, Trip to Hungary, Container 20, Pell Papers.

23 ■ Herbert Pell, Trip to Hungary, Container 20, Pell Papers; Pell to Welles, November 7, 1941, Folder: Welles, Sumner, Container 29, Pell Papers.

24 ■ Herbert Pell, Trip to Hungary, Container 20, Pell Papers.

25 ■ Pell to Roosevelt, June 23, 1941, Folder: Roosevelt, Franklin D., Container 25, Pell Papers.

26 ■ The Minister in Hungary (Pell) to the Secretary of State, June 23, 1941. FRUS, 1941, vol. I. General, the Soviet Union, p. 317; Roosevelt to Pell, September 20, 1941, Folder: General Correspondence Br-Ch, Container 3, Pell Papers.



absolutely no visible enthusiasm for the war against Russia," Hungary had irrevocably jumped on the German bandwagon.<sup>27</sup> It was a belief in the invincibility of the German army, and fervent anti-Bolshevism, Pell found most typical of the upper class.<sup>28</sup> Despite his optimism and sympathy for Hungary, Pell was not chasing phantoms. A week after the Hungarian declaration of war against the Soviet Union he wrote, "Things seem to be getting tighter and tighter. Hungary is right under the German power and cannot do anything."<sup>29</sup>

Deteriorated relations led to the closing of the Hungarian Legation in the United States in the summer of 1941, and the freezing of the Hungarian bank account there. Pell thought that the \$1.5 million should be freed, so that they could buy such American books and magazines that would further American interests.<sup>30</sup> He realized, earlier than the majority of decision makers, the cultural effect that the United States might be able to exert on Europe, and that such a move would be a very useful tool of foreign policy. Pell's other thoughts also showed signs of a farsightedness ahead of his time, which later became a typical feature of American foreign policy. He suggested, "for the sake of the future relations," using the young men of the Hungarian "better class" in the United States or Canada. Actually, what he suggested was a political brain-drain and he was of the opinion that the American lifestyle would positively affect someone coming from (Central) Europe to a large degree. Part of it had to do with his realistic observation that the standard of living was low in the country, human rights were less respected in this part of the world, and "both materially and socially Hungary is somewhat backward."<sup>31</sup> It is also important to note that he could not step out of his conservative mode of thinking, only too often he was able to think only in terms of the upper class.

Pell tried everything to remain the friend of Hungary. When Dietrich von Jagow, the new German minister arrived in Budapest, it gave the American new impetus and possibilities. Since Jagow, who, according to Pell, was "apparently an uncultured man... in many ways a boorish little fellow," and was "apparently arrogant and rough in his dealings with the Hungarians," Pell made "a particular point of being just the opposite," which he thought was effective.<sup>32</sup> György Barcza writes in his memoirs that Pell informed him that it was the American minister's personal achievement that President Roosevelt

27 ■ Statement to the British Ambassador to Portugal (by Pell, without date, but certainly in the early spring of 1942, Folder: Hungary, Container 10, Pell Papers.

28 ■ Herbert Pell, Trip to Hungary, Container 20, Pell Papers.

29 ■ Pell to Robert Pell, July 3, 1941, Folder: Addendum 1905-1963, Pell Papers.

30 ■ Pell to Robert Pell, July 3, 1941, Folder: Addendum 1905-1963, Pell Papers.

31 ■ Statement to the British Minister in Lisbon (by Pell, without date, but certainly in the early spring of 1942, Folder: Hungary, Container 10; Pell to Welles, August 28, 1941, Folder: Welles, Sumner, Container 29; Herbert Pell, Trip to Hungary, Container 20, Pell Papers.

32 ■ Herbert Pell, Trip to Hungary, Container 20; Pell to Welles, August 28, 1941, Folder: Welles, Sumner, Container 29, Pell Papers.



authorized him to transmit a warm message on the occasion of August 20th, the Hungarian national holiday.<sup>33</sup>

The Pells led a highly eventful social life while in Hungary. Always close to the centre of society, it was natural that Pell sought the company of the "top drawer" in Hungary. However, in contrast to his dislike of the Portuguese ruling class, the American minister found that "Budapest society is extremely pleasant and cultivated."<sup>34</sup> He was particularly good friends with the Jeszenszkys, whom he knew from New York and had also met in Portugal. It was through them that Pell got to know the Apponyis, the Batthyánys, and other prominent families. He called on the Esterházys, the Ullmanns, the Sigrays, and the Horthys.<sup>35</sup> The Pells often gave dinners and luncheons to prominent guests and he could be said to be on good terms with the Hungarian Who's Who of the day. He was elected a member of the National Casino as his club in Hungary (the German minister was not), where he often talked openly to Hungarians, another thing that raised his popularity. As he informed the President in one of his letters, "You will be glad to hear that American stock is going up every day in Budapest. The Government here has a gun at its back and can do nothing. The vast mass of the people hate the Germans even more than they do the Russians... More and more the people are flocking around me. The conversation in the Club, and at most dinner parties, is openly anti-Hitler."<sup>36</sup> True, these people represented a very small section of Hungarian society, but these were the people that he could freely talk to in English, French or German, and who showed sympathy toward the United States, as well as anti-Nazi sentiments. Therefore, he drew the conclusion that Hungary was anti-Nazi.

As far as the situation of the Jews in Hungary was concerned, he said that "there is naturally very little anti-Semitism in Hungary, the Jews were well treated and given equal opportunities but German pressure during the summer forced on the Hungarian Government a course of outrageous persecution with which the majority of the Hungarians had very little sympathy."<sup>37</sup> Well, this was a point where he was mistaken, and he was also simply naïve when he added after leaving Hungary that "serious enforcement of the German anti-Semitic rules would be practically impossible."<sup>38</sup> This is a strange and perplexing observation. By the time of his arrival, two anti-Jewish Acts had been passed,

33 ■ György Barcza, *Diplomata emlékeim, 1911–1945* (My Diplomatic Memoir). Vols. 1–2. Budapest: Európa História, 1994, vol. 2, p. 35. On Barcza and his memoir, see also Pál Pritz, *Az objektivitás mítosza?* (The Myth of Objectivity?). Budapest: Magyar Történelmi Társulat, 2011.

34 ■ Blayney, *Democracy's Aristocrat*, p. 85; Herbert Pell, Trip to Hungary, Container 20, Pell Papers.

35 ■ Herbert Pell, Trip to Hungary, Container 20, Pell Papers.

36 ■ Pell to Roosevelt, October 11, 1941, Folder: Roosevelt, Franklin D., Container 25, Pell Papers.

37 ■ Herbert Pell, Trip to Hungary, Container 20, Pell Papers.

38 ■ Statement to the British Minister to Portugal (by Pell, without date, but certainly in the early spring of 1942, Folder: Hungary, Container 10, Pell Papers.



and a third one was passed during his stay. Therefore, it is a mystery why he saw the situation as so rosy. But perhaps it was his failure to assess the situation correctly that made him later a fervent advocate of punishment for those who had committed crimes against the Jews.

**D**espite all his hopes and tactful behaviour, soon the international situation had turned for the worse for Hungary with an inevitable outcome. The involvement in the military campaign against the Soviet Union was the beginning of the end. Then came the British declaration of war on December 5th. The British had severed diplomatic relations with Hungary back in the spring, and since then Pell had represented Great Britain in Hungary. Pell considered the decision of the British Government as his own defeat. The American Legation had tried everything within its power to prevent such a course, but to no avail. Pell sent three messages, one directly to Roosevelt, in which he characterized the British step as "most unwise."<sup>39</sup> Following Pearl Harbor things heated up. After Germany's declaration of war on the United States, it was only a matter of time before Hungary did the same.

Prime Minister László Bárdossy also tried to stall for time. Pell had a mixed opinion about Bárdossy. In his eyes, the Prime Minister was "a very cultivated man with a great deal of diplomatic experience but extremely weak, who had no possible alternative to a policy of wriggling out of the inevitable as long as possible."<sup>40</sup> Bárdossy's tactics were to break off diplomatic relations with the United States. He somewhat naively believed that such a gesture, though clearly supporting the German-Italian-Japanese Axis, would be sufficient to satisfy the Germans and at the same time would not lose the remaining goodwill of the United States. When Bárdossy summoned Pell to his office and broke him the news on 11 December 1941, the Prime Minister "frankly expressed his regret, and was manifestly acting under *force majeure* by the German Legation."<sup>41</sup> When the American asked "Does this mean war?," Bárdossy is reported to have answered "No!"<sup>42</sup> The quick declaration of war on the United States by the other satellite countries did not help Hungary's position. Romania's move was the most troublesome for the Hungarian government. They did not want to lose Hitler's goodwill with regard to Transylvania by falling behind Romania. In the wake of outside pressure, Bárdossy had no choice but take the last step and, acting in the same fashion as the country's allies, declare war on the United States.

39 ■ Carlile Aylmer Macartney, *October Fifteenth. A History of Hungary, 1929-1945*. Vol. 1-2. New York: Frederick A. Praeger, Inc. 1956-57, vol. 2, p. 61.

40 ■ Statement to the British Minister to Portugal (by Pell, without date, but certainly in the early spring of 1942, Folder: Hungary, Container 10, Pell Papers.

41 ■ Herbert Pell, Trip to Hungary, Container 20, Pell Papers.

42 ■ Quoted by Macartney, *October Fifteenth*, Vol. 2, p. 62. Interestingly enough, I found no reference to this sentence in the Pell Papers.



The final act, in Pell's words, happened in the following way:

I was asked to see the Secretary of State, who told me that Hungary was obliged to join Germany in a declaration of war on the United States. I told him that I could not receive such a declaration from him but must get it from the Prime Minister himself. I returned to my office to await the message from the Prime Minister, which came in the course of the late afternoon... I went up to the Foreign Office to receive the declaration of war from the Prime Minister. As I entered the Ministry, the German Minister passed me on his way out. He was evidently in a bad temper and had been giving the unfortunate Bardossy orders which that unlucky man did not dare to disobey. I was taken into his office and found him almost in tears regretting that Axis solidarity obliged him to declare war on the United States. Bardossy is not a strong man but he is a gentleman and accustomed to being treated as such. It was perfectly manifest that Jagow had been rude, overbearing and domineering.<sup>43</sup>

Considering himself a true friend of Hungary, Pell already considered how he could lessen the damage. He wanted to make Bárdossy say that the declaration of war was only due to German pressure and this did not in any way mean "hostility on the part of the Hungarian people towards the people of the U.S.A."<sup>44</sup> The Prime Minister's answer was not tactful and it was not what Pell wished to hear: "Hungary is a sovereign and independent State and makes this intimation as such. Her Government and her people are entirely as one."<sup>45</sup> Pell then answered that an oral declaration would not do, forcing Bárdossy to have the declaration put in an official written form and sent to him. Then, claiming that no diplomatic relation existed anymore between the two countries, Pell sent this back to the Foreign Office unopened.<sup>46</sup> The next day, 13 December 1941, Bárdossy read the declaration of war on the United States in the National Assembly, making it an established fact. Although Horthy told Howard Travers, the American First Secretary at the time, "Remember that this so-called declaration of war is not legal; not approved by Parliament, not signed by me," he did not do anything to prevent it or change it.<sup>47</sup>

Thus Pell's efforts to keep Hungary as a friend came to a sudden end. His eight months of trying to establish the most friendly relations with as many Hungarians as he could, in which he was very successful, bore no fruit. Despite being a popular man and representing a country liked by the majority of Hungarians, he could not prevent war, at least on paper, between the two countries. Naturally, this was not his failure or shortcoming; this was inevitable and almost expected.

43 ■ Herbert Pell, *Trip to Hungary*, Container 20, Pell Papers.

44 ■ Quoted in Macartney, *October Fifteenth*, Vol. 2, p. 63.

45 ■ *Ibid.*, 64.

46 ■ *Diary of Dusa Teleki*, 158-159, Folder: Hungary 1941, Container 55, Pell Papers.

47 ■ Quoted in John Flournoy Montgomery, *Hungary, the Unwilling Satellite*, p. 153.



The White House did not take the Hungarian declaration of war too seriously. Only on 2 June 1942, that is, after six months, and largely due to Soviet insistence, did the President send a message to Congress stating that Romania, Hungary, and Bulgaria had declared war on the United States, but he added: "I realize that those three governments took that action not upon their own initiative or in response to the wishes of their peoples, but as instruments of Hitler."<sup>48</sup> Congress declared war on Hungary only on 18 July 1942, after another strong Soviet request.

**A**fter closing the Legation, Pell stayed in Hungary for some time, a period that he described as "an unbelievable phantasmagoria."<sup>49</sup> The staff of the Legation could move around freely and were not restricted in any way. A friendly demonstration for the Pells was underway in Budapest. Their suite at the Ritz continued to be a place to meet for those who were anti-Nazi and against the declaration of war and the "Pell's apartment was like a tropical garden transformed by the innumerable floral hommages showered on them."<sup>50</sup> Wherever Pell went, people tended to "crowd around and express their regret at the enslavement of their country."<sup>51</sup> This situation was understandably embarrassing for the Hungarian government, now officially at war with the United States. They asked Pell to use a car provided by the Hungarian government, because the Buick was so well known that if it was spotted a large gathering took place. Incidentally, this Buick had become a symbol of America in a way. Not only did it represent the United States and its popular minister in Budapest, but people admired the car itself. People often gathered around it and "pet it as if it were a horse, and the chauffeur gives them lectures on the subject, which I do not understand but which seem to interest the populace."<sup>52</sup> Pell finally sold his Buick to István Horthy,<sup>53</sup> Horthy's son.

Pell was asked to move out of the Ritz when Ribbentrop came to Budapest late in December, and understanding the problems his staying at the best suite at the Ritz would cause, he was willing to go to the Palatinus on Margaret Island. This change in venue did not prevent his friends—including members of the government—to carry on with protestations of friendship. As Pell remembered, "all my friends from the Club, a good many politicians, all of the other Ministers, except one, and a great many other people came to see me almost in a procession which continued until the day we left."<sup>54</sup> Actually, the Germans wanted the Hungarians to "keep the Americans as hostages" for

48 ■ Quoted in Mark Imre Major, *American Hungarian Relations 1918–1944*. Astor, Fl: Danubian Press, 1974, pp. 233–234.

49 ■ Herbert Pell, Trip to Hungary, Container 20, Pell Papers.

50 ■ Diary of Dusa Teleki, pp. 158–159, Folder: Hungary 1941, Container 55, Pell Papers.

51 ■ Herbert Pell, Trip to Hungary, Container 20, Pell Papers

52 ■ Ibid.

53 ■ Diary of Dusa Teleki, pp. 158–159, Folder: Hungary 1941, Container 55, Pell Papers.

54 ■ Herbert Pell, Trip to Hungary, Container 20, Pell Papers.





Herbert Claiborne Pell, Jr., U.S. Minister to Hungary, 1941, and Olive Pell.  
 ("With happy remembrance of dear Hungary—and the American Legation")

Source: Collection of Lovice Mária Ullein-Reviczky. The Antal Ullein-Reviczky Foundation, Kelecsény, Hungary

Hungarian diplomats being retained in the United States, but the Hungarians said to the Germans that the request had arrived too late to keep them in Hungary.<sup>55</sup> On 16 January 1942, Herbert Pell and many members of the Legation left Hungary. The railway station was packed with people bidding farewell to their friend. Horthy sent an aide "who on the platform before everybody saluted us and presented my wife with an enormous bunch of orchids and announced in a loud voice for Her Excellency from His Highness the Regent."<sup>56</sup> For Horthy it was safe to do so, but he remembered later that such "a political demonstration... must have been ascribed to Hungarian unreliability."<sup>57</sup> Still, for the Regent it was also a "political show." He may have wanted to express his independence, but must have realized that the break with the United States could come back to haunt later on. For others, however, being present at the railway station may have been risky. Considering the fact that the two countries were at war with each other and the obvious presence of the German and Hungarian secret police, this demonstration of sympathy was significant.

Perhaps this last sign of protest against the Germans had a positive influence on Pell's thinking. In Lisbon, while waiting to sail back to the United States, he

55 ■ Diary of Dusa Teleki, 162, Folder: Hungary 1941, Container 55, Pell Papers.

56 ■ Herbert Pell, Trip to Hungary, Container 20, Pell Papers.

57 ■ Miklós Horthy, *Memoirs*. Safety Harbor, FL: Simon Publications, 2000, p. 234.



wrote down his thoughts regarding Hungary, Germany and the future of Europe as he saw it. He was convinced, based upon his Hungarian experience "that the Germans have lost all hope of establishing a Nazi order in Europe... The New Order will remain a blueprint."<sup>58</sup> Logically, a different kind of new world order was needed. In the emerging new reality, the United States had to bear the brunt of political leadership, or the "world will revert to anarchy which must result in a final explosion and a working back, not to 'normalcy' but to barbarism."<sup>59</sup> He had understood the basic mechanism in a harsh world and, together with his fellow Americans, had learned the lesson of Munich: "you can't tame tigers with pieces of cake, and you can't get much additional work out of a donkey by explaining to him that more cooperation on his part will result in more money to buy oats with."<sup>60</sup>

**A**fter returning to his home, he tried to remain busy. The work of the past few years, his dedication to Roosevelt, and the fear of what might become of the world made him want to do a lot more. He asked for a meeting with the President, not only to give him a personal report of his time in Hungary, but also because he was "most anxious to get something definite to do for the government, and I hope that my services so far have been good enough to justify some expectation."<sup>61</sup> Roosevelt agreed but the State Department balked and refused to find anything for Pell. The State Department's antipathy for Pell found an outlet in other ways as well. Although he did all he could to help with applications for American visas for Hungarians he knew in Budapest, he was not always successful because the State Department torpedoed such efforts by claiming the security risk these people might entail.<sup>62</sup> Finally he was assigned, in June 1943, to the War Crimes Commission. Due to the efforts of the State Department, he could travel to London only in November, without any directions whatsoever.<sup>63</sup> He was put in charge of the Rules Committee in January when the Commission was at last operational and later also on the committee whose job was to develop a method of trying the prisoners.<sup>64</sup> But the State Department found a way to get rid of him by not asking Congress to provide for his salary, all this in January 1945, when Pell was to become chairman. With this, Pell's political career came to an end.

58 ■ Statement to the British Ambassador to Portugal (by Pell, without date, but certainly in the early spring of 1942, Folder: Hungary, Container 10, Pell Papers.

59 ■ Pell to Welles, April 7, 1942, Folder: Welles, Sumner, Container 29, Pell Papers.

60 ■ Pell to Welles, April 7, 1942, Folder: Welles, Sumner, Container 29, Pell Papers.

61 ■ Pell to Roosevelt, September 12, 1942, Folder: General Correspondence Br-Ch, Container 3, Pell Papers.

62 ■ See the cases of Margit Nagy Juhász or Margit Rusvay. Juhasz, Emile, 1942-1943, Container 11, Howard K. Travers, Container 27, Pell Papers.

63 ■ Baker, *Brahmin in Revolt*, pp. 241-247, 254-261, 268-270. On his role in and experiences about the Commission, see also, Blayney, "Democracy's Aristocrat", pp. 119-129, and Blayney, "Herbert Pell, War Crimes, and the Jews," *American Jewish Historical Quarterly*, 65:4, pp. 335-352, (1976).

64 ■ Baker, *Brahmin in Revolt*, pp. 275-276.



Already during the war, Pell spelled out his core belief about what the United States should represent. In a speech in March 1943, he reiterated his main line about the necessity of American leadership in the world. His thoughts are important given that a few years later the official line of the United States government showed a great similarity. Among other things he said:

We must face the issue. We cannot evade responsibility. If we are to have civilization, peace, comfort and security in the United States, there must be order and a reasonably satisfactory life in Europe.

Discontent, poverty and fear in other countries will inevitably, in the long run, constitute a menace to our own security. Twice, to our tremendous cost, we have disregarded this obvious fact...

Although culturally divided, Europe must be an economic unit.<sup>65</sup>

These thoughts foreshadow the prevailing American thinking after World War II. With the sobering experience of two world wars in relatively quick succession, the inevitable American participation in both, and the feeling that American non-involvement in European affairs led to the second one, all shaped the general opinion, but especially that of those at the helm, which crystallized in the view that Europe must be looked after. Pell, sharing the opinion of many, was confident that Europe "would accept American leadership with some confidence, where Russian or British would be received with suspicion."<sup>66</sup> He thought this might be done under the leadership of Roosevelt. But he could not foresee the President's death and did not predict the Cold War. In early 1944 few thought that in a year's time the President would die, and even fewer would have seriously entertained the idea that there would be a serious stalemate between the allies. Still, much of what he had said before the end of the war became reality afterward: the United States accepted the responsibility, became an "empire by invitation," and worked for a united Europe, even if it came to mean only the western part of the continent for a long time.<sup>67</sup>

In the final analysis, it must be noted that Herbert C. Pell had three main characteristics that shaped his political thinking: sensitiveness shown for social injustice, a clear vision of what America was capable of and the necessity of American political leadership in the world, and his undefeatable optimistic faith in life, in his country and the aforementioned points. Toward the end of his life he said:

I am not and never have been afraid of the future. In that, I am the true American. Whatever else Americanism is, and you're hearing a great deal of talk about it, Americanism is not cowardice. It is not a slavish adherence to precedent. It is not, above all things, looking back to a golden age that is forever gone. This country didn't become what it is because it feared the future.<sup>68</sup>

65 ■ Pell, "An Economic Unit—Culturally Divided," *Vital Speeches of the Day*, Vol. IX, pp. 470–471.

66 ■ Pell to Roosevelt, March 8, 1944, Folder: General Correspondence Br-Ch, Container 3, Pell Papers.

67 ■ The term comes from Geir Lundestad, "Empire by Invitation? The United States and Western Europe, 1945–1952," *Journal of Peace Research* 23:3, pp. 263–277, (1986).

68 ■ Quoted in Baker, *Brahmin in Revolt*, p. 329.



# A Letter by Ted Hughes

Introduced by George Gömöri

**R**ecently a new letter by Ted Hughes came to light which confirms the previously known facts as regards his connections with Hungarian poetry. Hughes wrote the letter when he was awarded the *Pro Cultura Hungarica*, a distinction given among others to successful translators of Hungarian literature.<sup>1</sup> Hughes received the award at the Hungarian Embassy in London in October 1993. His letter of thanks to Tibor Antalpéter, Hungary's Ambassador to the United Kingdom from 29 August 1990 to 15th January 1995, was written from his home in Devon and it bears the date of 8 November 1993.

This letter is of interest on several counts. It shows Ted Hughes's appreciation of an award earned by his translations of the Hungarian poet János Pilinszky.<sup>2</sup> It also indicates his willingness to support other "Hungarian" projects such as a book of translations of Attila József's poems by Lucas Myers. Myers and Hughes became friends in their student days in Cambridge, after which Myers left for the United States with his Hungarian wife Ágnes Vadas; it was from California that Hughes was approached by his friend with a request to write a foreword to a forthcoming selection of József's poems.<sup>3</sup> Having written a 'brief foreword' Hughes attached a typescript of this text to his letter of thanks to Antalpéter.<sup>4</sup>

Hughes's letter shows not only his appreciation of Pilinszky as a poet, but his deep attachment to someone writing in a language not spoken by him, yet accepted as an equal, someone emotionally close to himself. The only other foreign poet with whom Hughes had a similar 'emotional link' was the Israeli Yehuda Amichai whom he also knew personally. Below we print the text of Ted Hughes's hand-written letter to Tibor Antalpéter, whom we owe thanks for his permission to publish this rare document of Anglo-Hungarian friendship. ●

1 ■ I discussed Ted Hughes's Hungarian connections and his interest in Hungarian poetry in *The Hungarian Quarterly*, no.191, Autumn 2008. pp. 166–171

2 ■ János Pilinszky, *Selected Poems*, translated by Ted Hughes and János Csokits, Carcanet New Press, 1976.

3 ■ Although there was a "xerox edition" of a selection of poems by József by Lucas Myers and Vadas in 1968, the selection planned in the 1990s—as far as I know—has never been published.

4 ■ This essay was published in *The Hungarian Quarterly* (No.134, Summer 1994, pp. 3–4), together with two translations by Myers.

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George Gömöri

is a Hungarian poet, translator and essayist who left Hungary in 1956.  
He was a Lecturer at the University of Cambridge and is Emeritus Fellow of Darwin College.



Court Green  
North Tawton

Devon  
8<sup>th</sup> November 1993

Dear Ambassador and Madame Antalfétes —

May I thank you for a most memorable day, for a delightful and delicious lunch for introducing my wife and me to such excellent new acquaintances, and last but not least for the very great honours you bestowed on me.

The occasion was triply precious and moving to me. I value my friendship with Janos Pilinszky as one of the great privileges of my life, and one that has touched me most deeply.

But as I assured you, modern Hungarian poetry in general has a special significance for me. Just for your interest, I enclose the brief foreword that I wrote for a new translation of Attila József.

Once again my thanks, and from my wife and myself our very best wishes sincerely Ted Hughes

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sincerely

Ted Hughes



János Szegő

# Outlines of the Past

Krisztián Grecsó: *Mellettem elférsz* (There's Room for You Beside Me). Budapest: Magvető, 2011, 291 pp. • Gábor T. Szántó: "Az első óra". (The First Lecture).

**R**eading an excerpt from a novel you might ponder whether it is worth it. Does it make sense to start on a part if the essential context remains hidden? At first sight there appears to be a far greater difference than similarity between the excerpts from two novels on the pages of this issue of *The Hungarian Quarterly*. That from Grecsó's *There's Room for You Beside Me* is an anecdotic episode which subtly invokes the plot as such whereas "The First Lecture" by Gábor T. Szántó reads like a short story. It is a self-contained and clearly detached narrative although in fact it is part of a novel—*A córész elmélete és gyakorlata* (The Theory and Practice of Tsouris)—due to appear soon.

The parallels should nevertheless be borne in mind. Both writers are novelists through and through to whom the shorter form is also familiar territory. Grecsó's first published book was a successful volume of longish short stories (*Pletyka-anyu* [Blabbermother], 2001), and Szántó has come to attention with regularly appearing drily ironic feuilletons and short stories that present Jewish life in Eastern Central Europe.

The circus episode of "There's Room for You Beside Me" is set in the summer of 1964. Although the story can stand on its own, it is worth briefly referring to the novel, which has been one of the publishing hits of recent months in Hungary. The book has been a double triumph having been both a critical success and a best seller. Grecsó has clearly learned from the structural and narrative mistakes of his previous novel, *Tánciskola* (Dancing School, 2008), pointed out by his critics. His storytelling has become more confident and he handles his material with assurance picking up stubbornly the two strands where his earlier novels left off. One is the family saga, cheekily accurate in its caricatures, falsifying and inventing stories to look true, the other, consistently following the development of the author's own life, the strand of autobiography. The setting of *Isten hozott* (Welcome!, 2005), the first novel Grecsó published, was about a village while *Tánciskola* captured the mundane realities of a small town. In the new work village and capital city meet as two milieus and life options.

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János Szegő

is a young literary critic. He is currently working on his doctorate.



The protagonist is 35 years of age when, almost by chance, he starts digging in his family's past. He had moved to Budapest from a village in the Great Hungarian Plain a few years earlier. His is a fairly typical story of mobility, both social and spatial. His rise in status inevitably involves the abandonment of what had been his home environment. That however is not enough as he is also obliged to come to terms with the fact that he cannot transcend the past until he has recognised it for what it is. But pull out just a single brick from the rickety edifice of the family's history and they all come tumbling down. The past has to be restored. Hence the novel's title: the past as it were addresses us, and if we manage to see clearly where we stand, the route that we have taken and the distance still to be covered, then past and present can fit alongside each other in such a way that if we so choose we can even stretch and lie back comfortably. Elsewhere plenty of space means freedom of identity:

Behind the courtyards and villas newer housing had gone up in a totally higgledy-piggledy fashion in contravention of the regulations. Space was jealously guarded in this part of the world because it can shrink and wear even from just being looked at. Overcrowding cannot put up with stretching, fitting in somehow, a moving of limbs.

Open to the world and not closed in, amplitude instead of crowding things, flexible and not tense, freedom and independence instead of being tied down and dependent.

In order to achieve that one has to determine the bounds of one's own life. In the course of his own sleuthings our hero is obliged first of all to confront the fact that tales he had taken to be true had been cobbled together more or less from

a tissue of lies and even more suppressions and particularly silences. The second step is the fitting of old lives into a new narrative. Here much assistance is provided by a diary kept by his grandmother (as many other details this too is autobiographical). In the process vibrant links are brought to life between the reconstructed family saga with its growing festoon of ever-newer details and the protagonist's present life and problems. How is it possible to accept that the same problems and the same bad choices should recur with stubborn monotony generation after generation? How can one break the cycle of repetitions? To what degree is it possible and permissible to interfere with lines spelled out by fate? Is it possible at all to diverge from a predetermined course of existence? Grecsó shows a fine sense of proportion in marrying existential focus and the posing of philosophical questions with anecdotes and stories. This gives the book a real drive, with the reader becoming increasingly curious and feeling ever-closer to the characters. There is room for him beside the novel.

What is printed in this issue on pp. 54-61 is set in the summer of 1964 when the wistful monotony and tranquil calm of the sweltering heat is shattered by the arrival of an East German circus. By then those who have read the novel will know how slowly and sluggishly time moves in this part of the world. The coming of something exotic like a circus amounts to a red-letter day in the life of the village as it is narrated by Grecsó the way slow-motion is used by the cinema as if projected square by square. At roughly the halfway point in the book 10-year-old Ignác (the father of the principal character of the novel) meets *Bah-ha-ha* (i.e. Barbara) from the circus, who



pronounces her name that way in German only for that to be heard as even stranger by a peasant boy from the Great Hungarian Plain. With that name in his mind, and breaking away from reality, he starts to live a fantasy life in which *Bah-ha-ha* is a magic word or spell.

At this point the text shows a marked change in viewpoint: exiting the time-space of the plainly 1964-ish period there is a switch to the present day. All of a sudden the story is seen from the outside with the 10-year-old Ignác being joined by a 50 odd-years-old Ignác, by the father. That switch in narrative highlights the crux of the novel: the father is one of the most tragic of all the characters in the book, his life an utter, chilling failure with his mucked-up, inwardly destructive life being projected as a mute shadow onto his son. He who appears as a happy, self-oblivious child in a bitter-sweet incident will later be the father, a humiliated and crushed man. The novel makes these metamorphoses, ontological cytoplasmic movements and (de)gradations visible only for the reader to be returned promptly to Ignác's life as a pubescent boy at the time of his first love before love was even within breathing distance. The life Ignác had led till then is literally rent by *Bah-ha-ha*—a fateful or pivotal meeting. The boy, with the precocious pride typical of pubescent boys, resolves at a stroke to change his fate by deciding not to become a priest. As it turns out his fate is not determined by this; there are other reasons too why he does not become a priest, but in any event *Bah-ha-ha*'s appearance is the first sign of temptation. That leaves the incident with no other possible dénouement. It becomes obvious to Ignác that *Bah-ha-ha* has a proper name, and that makes it easier for him to cope with her loss. The

circus moves on from the story and the village just as it had arrived, becoming a tiny, almost distant point in the drifting sands of an ever-growing past.

A self-contained story fitted into the broader structure of a novel is one of the most distinctive characteristics of Hungarian prose fiction. Its significance is all the greater here because the father of the principal character is the figure about whom we learn least in the novel. He is just a mute shadow in the web of family stories, and arguably it is at this point only that his figure is at its most animated state; perhaps it is in these pages that he fits in best beside his own life—happily and freely.

*There's Room for You Beside Me* covers 70 years. Hungary's twentieth century comes to life with epic credibility, banal biographical elements being used here with a near-masterly deftness of touch to link historical events.

**T**he First Lecture" (pp. 64–74) is a narrative of a very different kind. Just take the opening. We eavesdrop on a lively, almost agitated dialogue. No narrative scene-setting to precede the exchanges between an old Jewish scholar and a friend who, relative to him, one would certainly describe as young. Readers are made to feel as if they chanced into a dwelling they had no business to be in, but if that is where they have landed they might as well wait and see what the outcome will be. This amplitude and dynamism, and also the subject matter and tone, is urbane and ironic—a satirical text in which auto-irony is evident.

The text draws on a number of genres. Due to its vigorous verbalising and conversational tone, it could easily, with a little adaptation, be a scene from a work for the stage. The listing of historical facts and the moral problems raised that inter-



mittently divert the narrative would not be out of place in a novel of ideas which noses around at the survival and remembering of a person who is much closer to death than to his past. A third genre is comedy of humours, tragicomedy rather, with the ridiculous for the most part having tragic undertones (the inverse tends less to be the case).

The dramatic nature of the text is striking, with time being explicitly brought in as a subject in the first few sentences. The wise scholar, and Miklós, his *shames*, or servant are late and the anxious fluster at first only applies to the old man: "We'll be late, Miklós!" And he headed for the door," but soon spreads to Miklós as well: "We'd better get going, or we'll really be late." Miklós would do anything possible to help his master: he has organised the university lectures, he accompanies him there, and sits next to him in the seminar room. Reb Shloime however looks on his disciple as an odd sort of antagonist. Could it be that that mistrust has imbedded itself in his personality in the same way as his concentration-camp number was branded into his forearm? Or that he, the ageing, distinguished teacher, is unable to come to terms with the fact that he has to be accompanied and taken care of everywhere like a senile infant? His behaviour in the taxi is intolerable, and he digresses during his lecture. Miklós, the watching eye, is willing to completely subordinate himself to his master. He however, despite all his knowledge and sagacity, is a shadow of his former self and is really outside his own life: "I will only speak about prewar Hungary. My world ended with the Holocaust." To use Imre Kertész's radical formulation: he is a fateless person whose fate it is to remember; or in other words, to take account of the unfillable and unprocessable

gaps. As Reb Shloime takes the platform to begin his lecture, the drama gives place to an essay-like discussion of ideas.

One man speaks to an audience from a platform. His text needs to be spot-on not just intellectually and in terms of its content but also in the way it is pitched rhetorically; it has to compete for the attention of listeners, but that is a struggle where he can only rely on himself. After all, even the most intriguing of all the world's intellectual problems counts for nothing if the lecturer is inept in raising it. The rhetoric and mythology of Judæo-Christian culture revolves round the story of Moses and Aaron. To Moses belong reason and an authority given him by God, but also his stammer; Aaron's, by contrast, is an art of emotional speech, of the end-effect. Reb Shloime starts off suggestively enough, it being evident that he has put a lot of effort into his preparation. He attempts to narrate the history of Jewry in Hungary ever more emphatically through death and the culture of death (as reflected in cemeteries and the inscriptions on gravestones): "I will present an overview of the legacy of Hungarian Jewry as reflected in their burial customs, in their cemeteries and gravestone inscriptions. In this connection I intend to speak about patterns of Jewish settlement in Hungary between 1795 and 1944, deal with social, political and institutional structures, and discuss demographic changes over the years."

However he can't get properly started, nor can he continue, his introductory words and phrases turn ever longer and ever more involved. At this point the lecture becomes an old man's unhappy struggle as he gazes unblinkingly into the bottomless pit of chaos fully aware that all the accumulated human and cultural values that had been created over the centuries



had been, as a result of the Shoah, dehumanised and turned into something that was no longer a live tradition but, even in the best case, a written tradition which was dead, disjointed and increasingly hard to decipher. Could this be passed on or revived by a man who had been buried under the traumas of the past? One could not even be sure that he was able to distinguish past from present. In the lecture essay meets drama and content meets rhetoric. It is a form of the novel which is not uncommon in English-language literature as in the marvellous 2003 essay-novel *Elizabeth Costello* by the South African Nobel laureate J.M. Coetzee. In this the eponymous character is an ageing Australian writer who travels the world giving lectures, with each chapter representing one of her lectures, or to be more precise a dissected history of that lecture and the philosophical or ethical problem which is that lecture's intellectual pith.

The reader views the old master's struggle through Miklós's eyes, as a result of which the place where the lecturer ultimately founders, losing the thread of what he is trying to say, and possibly realising that he has irremediably lost the thread, is seen in a light that shows no mercy. His quarrelling with Miklós is merely his way of extending his acknowledgement of an inevitable defeat. The *fiasco*, to use the title of Kertész's second, 1988 novel, becomes clear when he relates the darkest of all his topics, the honourable life and brutal annihilation of the rabbi of Tiszaszalka:

Can you imagine? He knew both Talmuds by heart. I had seen this man sitting in his backyard, smoking a pipe. He was a tall, quiet man, with two lovely daughters and a modest wife. And no one knew what a great scholar he was, only in the *lager* did we gather, from chance remarks, while he studied with us.

The history of the rabbi of Tiszaszalka becomes a history of the Jews in Hungary's provinces. Anyone who travels to the extreme north-east of the country and picks at random a village like Tiszaszalka can see for himself what Reb Shloime is referring to. Around half a million provincial Jews disappeared from Hungary, leaving barely a trace. It was not just their lives which were annihilated but their whole world. Their synagogues were either levelled or carried on functioning as stores for furniture. Consecrated graves, which are mentioned in the passage published here, were overgrown with weeds and the cemeteries have no visitors. The present-day inhabitants have no idea where these people lived—people who live on only in the memory of a few, who are left carrying the weight of a whole world on their shoulders. The cathartic moment of the old scholar wetting himself, coming at the close of the extract, is thus brought into connection with the death throes of the rabbi of Tiszaszalka in the goods wagon en route to the death camp. As he chides his young friend at the very end of the text: "You can't really understand this. Call a taxi. Take me home." Miklós may be unable to understand, but the reader knows exactly what he can't understand. (It should be noted that the fact that in the text by GreCsó the old butcher Ladányi leaps from his bicycle and wets his pants in fright on hearing the circus ringmaster's roar is a complete coincidence of motifs.)

Ironic and resigned in its grotesque humour, Szántó's world may be far removed from the one evoked by GreCsó while both writers address the connections between past and present, the very ability to invoke tradition, the expectations of assimilation, and possible modes of survival. ■



Terrence O'Keeffe

# Eating Exercises

Gyula Krúdy, *Life Is a Dream*. Translated from the Hungarian by John Batki. London: Penguin Classics, 2010, 240 pp.

Gyula Krúdy's talents spilled over the conventional boundaries that separate fiction from non-fiction. This was especially so in the realm of daily "colour journalism", which he and many of his Hungarian writer-peers practiced to keep the wolf away from the door (a collection of his feuilletons and longer newspaper pieces covering a variety of topics and celebrated Budapest personalities of the day can be found in *Krúdy's Chronicles*, published in 2000). He lived from 1878 to 1933, writing prolifically and stylishly from his thirteenth year onward. He is a broad, deep, and ironic documenter of life in Budapest during the period running from the mid-1890s through the early 1920s. Life in small towns and the countryside did not escape his pen either, his novel *Sunflower* being a verbal tour-de-force set in the vicinity of his natal region, an area known as "The Birches",

located in northeastern Hungary on the edge of its great plain.

At the moment (2010) the recent translation of *Life Is a Dream* brings the number of English translations of Krúdy's works in print to five: two collections of stories (the Sindbad stories and *Life Is a Dream*), two novels (*Sunflower* and *Ladies Day*), and the above-mentioned collection of newspaper pieces. *Ladies Day* was published by the Corvina Press in 2007, but it is very difficult to find in either the US or UK. It is, however, possible to find used copies of another of Krúdy's novels, *The Crimson Coach* (the Corvina 1967 edition has an entertaining and interesting introduction by its translator, Paul Tabori, whose father was a friend and occasional co-adventurer of Krúdy). Of the first four books mentioned above three involve a combination of efforts by their excellent translator, John Batki, and

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Terrence O'Keeffe

was trained as an anthropologist and worked for many years as a research scientist, observing and recording the social behaviour of monkeys and apes in various naturalistic and biomedical studies. His viewing of Istvan Szabó's film *Colonel Redl* in 1985 led him to deepen his reading of Central and Eastern European history and fiction. This resulted in research culminating in the pending publication in 2011 of a non-fiction work, *The Posthumous Lives of Colonel Redl*.

He travels to the region whenever he can.



their commentator, the Hungarian-American historian, John Lukacs. Lukacs is an unabashed Krúdy enthusiast, and he often argues his case that Krúdy was the master of Magyar prose in a period when it reached a full and spectacular blossoming. In *Budapest 1900, A Historical and Cultural Portrait of a City* Lukacs discusses Krúdy as one of a host of talented contemporaries (in both the arts and sciences) born or active at the turn of the 19th century. His survey and biographical vignettes provide the kind of literary and critical context needed by non-Hungarian readers in order to place and appraise individual authors. George Szirtes, the distinguished British poet, essayist, and literary critic, is another of Krúdy's ambassadors to the English-speaking world. Among his numerous achievements is the translation of the Sindbad stories published in 1998, with a necessary and informative Introduction and notes.

As 20th-century novelists go Krúdy is certainly entitled to a revival, both in his native tongue and in translation. His writing—if translated as skilfully as Batki and Szirtes have done—holds up extremely well (especially in its early use of literary approaches that came to characterize later full-blown modernism and even postmodernism). This judgment is predicated on a condition or two: English and American readers should make an effort to familiarize themselves with both the historical background of Krúdy's era and with his place within Hungarian literature (as evaluated both by historians and by other Hungarian writers and critics who were his contemporaries or successors and whose work is also available in translation—e.g., Kosztolányi, Márai, Móricz). This effort to create a context is rewarding in itself

since it exposes the reader-explorer to diverse writing of a generally high quality.

As with the work of all older writers the question naturally arises: how large is the readership of these works and is there any possibility of maintaining or increasing it? Within Hungary, as elsewhere, the reading of literary fiction is probably on the decline as is any keen interest in history, whether recent or ancient. The limits of readership abroad may be defined by noting the specialized circles that translated works of fiction from Hungary and its neighbours penetrate: some programmes in UK and US university departments of Central or Eastern European history, culture, and literature; similar academic programmes assembled under the rubric "comparative culture studies"; a general readership outside academia that shares some of the same interests the professionals have (this may be quite small—I'm a member of it and seldom bump into fellow members); and Hungarians (or Czechs or Slovaks or Croats) who read their own nation's literary fiction in English. All of the Central European nations have sent out diasporas of potential readers in response to economic and political conditions, with large communities of emigrants and their descendants concentrated in the US and UK and smaller ones in Canada and Australia (just to note English-speaking countries). All told these groups may not supply a large enough number of readers to keep such works alive—i.e., read and enjoyed—in translation for too much longer, although the precincts of academia will continue to make an effort to do just that (whether coupled to protean Theory or treated as course material for general studies in Western Civilization or the art of the novel). We can only hope for the best



outcome without knowing where current trends such as e-books, metastasizing blogs that entertain uninformed and wholly subjective appraisals of literature and a welter of distracting other leisure pursuits will lead our descendants. One hopes that some are led back to Krúdy.

Given its two opening stories on the theme of the interlinked "last days" of their protagonists who are also antagonists, *Life Is a Dream* was appropriately published on the last day of 1931 as a result of Dezső Kosztolányi's efforts to qualify Krúdy for a literary prize (Krúdy, in serious straits, welcomed the cash that came with the prize). The collection contains ten stories from Krúdy's final decade of writing, a period when he was falling out of style and also when he became reclusive and troubled by his ability to make only a marginal living from his pen. He certainly had enough bad habits to complicate his situation—the pub-crawling journalists and the generally live-for-today characters who often feature in his stories are fictional representations, always transformed in the interest of a story's line, of himself and his colleagues during his first three hectic decades as a poet, newspaperman and all-around writer in Budapest. Sándor Márai made the identification between Krúdy and his fictional characters explicit in his *Sindbad Goes Home* (a novelistic depiction of Krúdy's last day which, to my knowledge, has not yet been translated into English). This life took its toll on his fortunes and his energies. By the time of his death at the age of fifty-five he appeared to be a spent man.

As mentioned above, the collection starts off with a pair of stories that illuminate each other.\* Their subject is the prospective final day on earth of each of the participants in a duel. The first is a self-confident retired military man ("the Colonel") who is bluff, indifferent to the death he assumes he will bring about by the end of the day, and worried more about his appetite than anything else. He begins to believe that his extended eating exercise in a tavern-restaurant that is beneath his station in life is a form of empathetic, ritual identification with his victim-to-be (the mealtime attitude of the Colonel can be paraphrased as "now I'm living like the lowly cur I'm about to extinguish, the poor sod, well he's earned his death, there's nothing to be done about that, get me a beer, please"). The victim-to-be is a harassed, poorly paid journalist—one of Krúdy's many fictional alter egos—who has written a column insulting the Casino where the Colonel is a club member. In such cases the Colonel functions as the Casino's legal executioner. What the journalist assumes to be his last day is devoted to spending whatever he can borrow or scavenge on dressing, eating, and generally living at least a cut or two above his normal daily fare (he doesn't have the confidence or the means to aim for the social stratosphere). I won't reveal how the duel ends. Both stories are simultaneously comical, even farcical, and serious, without descending into mean-spirited satire or rising into lofty indifference about the fates of the two men involved. And this is a Krúdy specialty—tragicomic stories wry in their humour and written with a feeling of strong emotional identification with

\* ■ John Batki's translation of the two stories appeared first in No. 190 (Summer 2008) of *The Hungarian Quarterly*, pp. 7–40.



the characters who were living in a society that struck many of its members, including the author, as somewhat dreamlike (a dream that combined elements of the idyllic and the nightmarish). Krúdy's often dream-like prose, fluid in the interpenetration of the mundane and the metaphysical, captures this perspective with relish, and his metaphors go far beyond the normal boundaries of the "pathetic fallacy" into a sort of pantheistic realm where inanimate objects and characters merge (these animistic tropes are ubiquitous and powerful in *Sunflower*): the fecund earth, its creatures, and the objects they make all co-operate to create consciousness. The stories in the present collection are also imbued, like most of Krúdy's work, with nostalgia for a world that has just vanished or is about to vanish, and, in the mind of the writer, what is replacing it is far from either necessary or attractive.

The majority of the stories in *Life Is a Dream* give us what might be called "the gastronomic view of reality": the world as perceived by waiters, cooks, café-owners, diners, drinkers, barmaids, and even one highly-gifted "smeller" of foods and other everyday objects (the exception to this rule is the story *The Undead*, subtitled "A Latter-day Sindbad Tale"). An example of the many narrative detours and loops made in such "eating stories" can be seen in "Betty, Nursemaid of the Editorial Office". Sortiment, a harried and dyspeptic editor of a Budapest weekly paper, is dining at the Seven Owls restaurant (the name bothers him as "unauthorized", since he remembers that during his youth it was the name of a student boarding house). He is also bothered by the quality and amount of food being eaten by a fellow diner who is the chief chimney-sweep of a local crew.

Then, enviously eyeing a neighbourhood shoemaker eating a huge plate of boiled beef, broth and vegetables, the editor decides to compete with him, leading to the following exchange with Mozel, the headwaiter:

"Mozel," he began in a deliberate drawl, when he saw the waiter shaking his head in concern over the half-finished plate, "tell me, Mozel, might there be in your kitchen some bone about the size of a child's fist with a few bits of meat left on it?"

Once the bone arrives Sortiment is already dissatisfied with the selection, but Mozel reassures him:

Mozel gave off a tremendous sigh: "If my father were alive and came to have brunch at the Seven Owls, I couldn't have given him a better portion. But the poor old man cannot be with us. Because he rests in the cemetery in Vác, since a scoundrel named Kupricky persuaded him to use his talents for the production of counterfeit five-forint bills... You see, my father had been assistant photographer to Professor Ellinger..."

"Well, how did the bills turn out?" asked the editor, sucking his teeth.

"They only managed to produce a single five-forint bill before the police apprehended them, and the judge sentenced my father to ten years—for one lousy fiver, such as big spenders who have had one too many sometimes use to light their cigars with. A single fiver!" Mr. Mozel added after a pause and involuntarily reached under the tail of his coat to rattle the change purse concealed there.

This information leads the editor to think of all the wastrel poets and other writers to whom he's advanced fivers without ever having received a completed assignment, further souring him on his



meal. The conversation then breaks away into a new and unexpected direction when Mozel tells Sortiment about the problems he's having with his step-daughter, whom he inherited from his father after the old man died in prison:

"...She's in her twentieth year and already she's worked as a milliner, seamstress, tobacconist... but she just wants to be another Mariska Simli. She's crazy, I tell you, totally crazy."

"Mariska Simli?" snorted the editor.

"You know," Mr. Mozel said in a conciliatory tone, "the poetess who tours the country dressed in a priest's cassock. And a top hat over her hair which is cut as short as a man's. You wouldn't believe how one crazy woman is able to drive another one just as crazy. Betty, ever since she ran across Mariska Simli, spends all day writing poems and is dying to meet Mr. Sortiment..."

Though receiving some eyebrow-raising tidbits (and possible newspaper material) about a George Sand *cum* Sarah Bernhardt imitator, Sortiment is distracted soon enough by the shoe-maker's spectacular oral assault on his own bone of beef. This deepens his despair about ever being able to eat a proper meal (in a Krúdy story eating a meal properly is just as important as the food in the eyes of his characters: implements and condiments must be arranged in a specific logistical array, as if entering battle, and the order of attack is also regimented—when ignored, it imperils an onlooker's peace of mind and offers food for thought). Mundane, trifling matters, but, in Krúdy's presentation of such realities, there is seldom a dull sentence or one that doesn't move the reader's mind into broader meditations. The introduction of Betty takes the story in another unanticipated direction,

sprinting through a bright encounter with a whimsical young woman, and turning sharply into a depressing conclusion, Sortiment's suicide. The moral of the tale might be "no good deed goes unpunished, and sometimes the punishment is self-inflicted for reasons not clear to the world". After re-considering these little epics of nourishment and disgust I'm convinced that Krúdy was capable of writing a story on just about any and all things (e.g., cosmology, theodicy, the history of a toothpick) as viewed through the reflections from the shimmering surface of a bowl of goulash soup or the bottom of a raised glass (and, as a personal disclosure, I can say that the subject of food usually bores me to tears).

The longest story in the collection, *The Green Ace*, takes its name from a tavern where Jolán the barmaid works. The story has thirteen titled parts and is itself subtitled "The Edifying History of How a Soul, Lost in a Jug of Wine, Was Found". Jolán is one apex of a triangle that has her presumed lover Galgóczi and the dissolute old drinker and arranger of romantic affairs Rimaszombati at its other two corners. This is a novella that has as its ostensible subject a love affair going off the rails, though the real subject is the drinking life and its perils (while it reveals that sudden abstinence is equally perilous in its social and psychological consequences). It is fair to say that Krúdy was a participant-observer of this avocation. Here is where Krúdy's prose shines and where we encounter a story permeated with the spirit and using the techniques of what later came to be called "magic realism". The story is set in Tabán, an old hillside village that eventually became a neighbourhood in Buda as the city grew during the 19th century. In Krúdy's day it was crowded with inns, restaurants,



cafes, wine-bars, and brothels and was known as a haunt of drunkards and vagrants. Most of the area was razed in the 1930s, and it was heavily damaged during the Russian assault on the castle complex during the battle of Budapest in 1944–45. Today it is primarily parkland.

The beginning of *The Green Ace* exhibits a characteristic feature that recurs throughout Krúdy's work, what I would call the "catalogue sentence", i.e., a long chain of related items that Krúdy piles up to capture the flavour of a place or season or set of human habits. Readers of contemporary Hungarian fiction will run across an extreme example of this in Péter Esterházy's novel *Celestial Harmonies*, in the chapter devoted to "things his father owned". In Krúdy, however, we have something very different from a mere collection of items. Rather we get an unravelling skein of imagistic associations, very similar in their logic and process to the way dreams work, i.e., in dreams, as one thing leads beyond our conscious control to the next, we get a strange kind of story—for dreams tell stories too—in which neither character, nor intentions, nor goals have any relevance. Instead we experience a linking of unchecked, emotionally charged memories that are never fully saturated but can always be extended further or quickly transformed to take off in new directions (dreams are full of pivots based on the multiple possible meanings of an image; awake we may choose to isolate one of these and pursue it through an effort of memory, asleep we no longer make choices or have the ability to cordon off one aspect of reality from another). And, thank heaven or hell, dreams never end with a moral. In this sense they are the opposite of typical

long, convoluted Jamesian sentences, with their syntax hedged and trimmed to incorporate multiple psychological factors and the subject's ongoing social and moral appraisal of other characters in a story. Such sentences, mazes of inhibitions and hypothetical counter-thoughts, have their author always putting on the brakes, as it were, while in Krúdy's compound sentences the accelerator is pressed to the floor and the driver is staring, astonished yet calm, out a window at the world speeding by as he goes around a bend. The catalogue's descendant, the list, has become a standard device of postmodernism, though in Krúdy's and Esterházy's favour it can be said that the contents of their catalogues are descriptively integral to their stories—given the long and significant role of Esterházy's family in Hungarian history, he could, of course, go on forever with his lists. Not so for many recent examples of "the list" in American writing, which appear to be performances designed to impress readers with an author's treasure trove of trivial knowledge, especially the kind that is gleaned from the debris pile of contemporary or recently expired popular culture. Literary modernism's engagement with this device may derive from a desire to compete with the way collage was taken up as an innovative element of the visual arts. Selectively sampling a sentence made of free-flowing associations that describe Tabán at the story's outset, we read:

Oh Tabán! With your streets winding uphill towards unknowable dead ends, doorsills that only make one stumble, ailing doors that are ready to fall off their hinges at the touch of an unpracticed hand... sofas wasted away to a painful thinness, arthritic armchairs, mirrors that had lost their quicksilver and reflect former faces, teapots



with spouts like dog tails... squatting crones harboring fleas unused to hopping... mynah-birds that had long ago lost their ability to talk... men cursed in childhood and aged into crotchety old freaks... virgins that did not take care of their garters even when they were in convent school... where it once happened that a portion of the populace... made a pledge to stay away from wine... not like those miserable drunkards found dead in Tabán, hanging from a withered tree in the orchard or from a hook in the cellar or else collapsed in the back of house, on the dung heap, or in ditches with gaping mouths that not even stray dogs deign to lick.

Even with my considerable elisions that's quite a sentence, both cumulative and digressive enough to make Thomas Bernhard or David Foster Wallace, were they alive, sit up and pay attention. Like the topography it describes the sentence winds its way up and down a hillside street that mirrors the ups and downs and swift changes from the holy exaltations of inebriation to the depths of the drinker's vacuity, sense of abandonment, and depression, the valleys between the peaks. It also lets us know that Tabán has recently become a battlefield between the wine drinkers and the followers of the petite, attractive and steel-willed Countess Brunszvik, who leads the local Temperance Movement. The district is littered with the casualties of the war: drunkard suicides and the newly hollow men who have gone over to the opposition and who swear off the bottle only to discover that life without booze is every bit as disappointing and insoluble a riddle as it was in between bouts of inebriation. In general it's a hopeless situation. Galgóczi has withdrawn from the drinker's life as a result of experiencing

what seems to be a powerful hallucination, a curse sent his way in the form of the rank breath of an old wizard who accompanies two ladies of the gloomy Tabán night who are bantering beneath his window (the wizard is a neighbourhood denizen rumoured to be a centenarian, and the questionable ladies are a mother and daughter pair). In losing his drinking habit he also loses the capacity to experience the romantic and erotic enthusiasm he once had for Jolán. He's become emaciated, distracted, and convinced that he's losing his mind too. The clear direction of his life seems to be to shrivel up and vanish altogether like Kafka's hunger artist, but that's not what happens, because Krúdy chooses to end the tale with one of his magical-realist touches: at a meeting in a church where Rimaszombati is attempting to reunite the lovers, Galgóczi positions himself between the choir and the nave, and the half farther inside the church undergoes an instantaneous transformation—on that side his hair, beard and moustache are turned snow-white. After this even his nemesis and goad, the wizard, finds him an unsuitable companion. Note the irony of Krúdy's subtitle—Galgóczi's soul, having been extracted from a jug of wine, is now lost to the world, and the world is lost to it. He lives on, but his cleaved appearance keeps him divided within himself and separate from other men (and Jolán as well). Having found sobriety he also finds that he gave up wine for naught. A strange ending, but a very "Krúdyesque" one.

English-language readers interested in the fictional re-creation of the old *Mitteleuropa*, the one tinged by the colours and atmosphere of the nooks and crannies of the Dual Monarchy in its terminal stage, can go to translations of



works by many gifted writers who wrote in many languages—this time and region birthed, among others, Schnitzler, Musil, Kafka, Neruda, Hašek, Singer, Canetti, and Krúdy and the trio of his Hungarian contemporaries and successors mentioned above. Krúdy's work offers as good an entrance portal to this vanished world as any. This was a world that had a fictional afterlife that persisted into the generations of the era's children and grandchildren who lived in the old Empire's successor states—the ethnic hybrid and polyglot Gregor von Rezzori, lamenter of Bucharest, Czernowitz and the drab country districts of Bukovina, was a signal example of this, and he died a mere twelve years ago. Current readers of these

works, mostly old and fading out, may be the last group to be attracted to this world. I hope this isn't so. As the past recedes, fiction (especially in translation) remains the necessary supplement to more academic histories of Europe's nations and peoples. Although such histories, with their emphasis on political life and the multifactorial mechanics of causation, supply the indispensable chronicle of events and complicated relationships among them, it is fiction that lets the imagination know just how it felt to be alive then and there. And I also hope that, as one barmaid might have said to another upon sighting the well-known habitué of Budapest's innumerable taverns, "Mr Krúdy, he's back." 🍷

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Anna Lewis

# Coming Home to a Different Place

George Szirtes, ed., *New Order: Hungarian Poets of the Post 1989 Generation*. Translated by Richard Berengarten, Thomas Cooper, Antony Dunn, George Gömöri, David Hill, Matthew Hollis, Ágnes Lehóczky, Kevin Nolan, Clare Pollard, Owen Sheers, George Szirtes, Christopher Whyte, Clive Wilmer and Peter Zollmann. Todmorden: Arc Publications, 297 pp.

In October 2004 during the Manchester Poetry Festival, I attended a lively reading by a group of young Hungarian and British poets who were taking part in an exchange project called *Converging Lines*, organised by the British Council. The poets had worked together in Hungary to translate each other's poems, and published a pamphlet of the results. Now the project has culminated in the publication of *New Order*, a full-length anthology of Hungarian poetry in translation. A long time in the making, then, this collection is presented as "the first major gathering of the younger poets of Hungary", a showcase to the English-speaking world.

The book's sub-title is "Hungarian poets of the post 1989 generation", a statement that immediately impresses a certain character on the twelve poets whose work is contained inside. We might approach the collection expecting writers who are defined and distinguished by the fall of the Berlin Wall. The reality is more complicated. To begin with, it is arguable

whether these poets are indeed "of the post 1989 generation". All were born considerably before 1989, the oldest in the early 1960s, the youngest in the mid-1970s. Some published books in the 1980s. All have experienced life on both sides of 1989. We can perhaps understand these poets better as those of a transitional generation, who spent enough of their youth under Soviet rule to be aware of the changes that have taken place in Hungary, and elsewhere in Europe, since the Wall's collapse.

This does not mean, however, that the poets in this collection write explicitly about the social and political changes that have taken place in Europe over the past few decades. In fact, there is little overtly political writing. One of the few poets here who writes directly about history and conflict is János Térey, although his poems reach back into the Second World War. Several of his poems explore the bombing of Dresden, and combine an impassioned tone with original imagery:

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Anna Lewis

won the 2010 Orange/Harper's Bazaar short story competition, and has been selected to take part in the 2011 Scrittura Giovani literature exchange project. Her poems have been published in magazines including Poetry Wales, Agenda and Modern Poetry in Translation.



*A colossal rug will descend on Dresden  
and impose its own pattern on the town.*

(What Would Have Happened, If...")

Many of his poems here are on themes of destruction and cruelty, but the style is fresh and avoids polemic. In "The Circus", Térey tells of someone who, fleeing to the park to avoid the Dresden bombs, encounters a tiger escaped from the circus:

*It was the hour of the second attack.  
It snuggled up to me, trembling,  
allowing itself to be fondled. Poor thing.  
It was more frightened than I was.*

Filled with dangers and escapes, the poem has the sinister charm of a children's story.

Childhood images, inverted with threat, also occur in the poems of István Kemény. "Hide and Seek" begins in a tone of excitement:

*I zoom off down to the hide-and-seek place  
and hide on a step in the hide-and-seek stairwell...*

before revealing the adult narrator, cowering

*... like a terrified animal  
till all the children have been discovered  
and chant in unison demanding  
that I be found out as well...*

Danger is concealed inside cosiness, as in the book's opening poem, "Grand Monologue":

*...The churches, courtly gardens and gas-chambers  
will turn alike into a sort of warm  
Sunday afternoon in a quiet house...*

These are poems with a grand concept, in which present details of life disappear quickly into the mass of the past.

The poems of Szilárd Borbély are similarly ambitious in scope, written in various voices and bearing weighty statements. They are dramatic pieces

which sound as though they should be read aloud from a stage; indeed, "Fragment II" concludes:

*... I say that the Fates,  
omniscient, have woven my own speech,  
the theatre-stage upon which we meet,  
while I declaim to you. I am the prince  
of simulation, worshipper of the arts,  
and of momentous deeds. Of ultimate beauty.  
For whom murder is the truest art.*

The writing is careful, and aware of its own duplicity; in "Allegory IV", Borbély writes:

*Like after the performance, it will be difficult  
to tell what occurred and what did not...*

The delivery of these poems and the assumption of the personas within them is so controlled, however, that it is sometimes difficult to hear the poet's own voice underneath.

One poet whose voice resounds through his work, together with a backing-chorus of family and childhood characters, is Tamás Jónás. "Ballad of the Tortured" is a vicious catalogue of damaged and wasted lives:

*... My aunty Roza, chewed by cancer cells,  
was married to a man whose leg was lost,  
Mum suffocated and my brother's face  
some crappy surgeon fudged into a mess...*

These are poems peopled by ghosts and demons, but the hauntings have a sticky, fleshy quality that makes them all the creepier, and all the more real. Even light and quiet have a physical presence:

*The stillness gnaws upon our flat, our home.  
You breathe. The moon chews on its bone.  
("Slowly It Comes to Light")*

In these blunt poems, terrors are personal.

A lighter side to grim subjects can be found in the poetry of Virág Erdős. Her



anthemic "A Lying Tale" was the one poem in this collection to make me laugh aloud, while her fast-paced prose poems, loaded with gory images and—in translation at least—American colloquialisms, have the feel of computer games in which real-world violence and intrigue have mutated into science-fiction. "Aliens" begins as a surreal tale about spotting aliens on the tube and in local villages:

... In fact everyone here is an alien. Waders, tracksuits, aprons, and fur coats to top it all, never mind the silver boiler suits. Then the shape of their heads... there must be a obvious reason why they tie them up, the country bumpkins...

As it develops the poem turns slyly on its narrator, to reveal her own isolation from those around her.

Alienation is a theme present in the work of László G. István, whose poems are populated by characters detached from the noise and confusion of contemporary society. There is a religious intensity to his subjects: in "Headwaiter", the character performs

*... a blindly  
accomplished ritual among the paraphernalia  
of the acolyte's long service*

while in "Fishmonger", the character "who does what he does / for us all", has

*... no bark around his heart. I mean picture a tree  
nailed by lightning, the hanging flash of it aflame.*

*No, I meant  
the fish aflame in his hands, its last supper, its  
mouthing  
for water in the air.*

In carrying out their daily mundane tasks, the people in László G. István's poems are drawn as priests or as prophets, steadily serving others as they distance themselves from the world's clamour.

Like László G. István, András Imreh

writes about the everyday, but his subtle poems have powerful undercurrents. "Light Bedding" begins with a description of bedclothes being aired on a balcony. At the end of the poem, and the end of the day,

*... we noticed them  
on our way home  
in the slant light,  
among luminous ears of grass.  
They were visible a long way off  
and kept stirring and rising  
as though someone were searching them  
in the draught  
but they were simply airing.*

The revelations in Imreh's poetry are quiet. "The Bright Boys" is the declaration of those who "tick you off / if you smoke on a train", "slip a beer mat / under our guests" / glasses", who "keep asking" and ultimately "get hard time, / twenty years, / for talking back..." There is little drama or heroism here, in these poems which are not so much about lives as about days mounting up.

Anna T. Szabó also writes poems grounded in the day-to-day, but her poems are highly physical. Her long poem "The Labour Ward" is an account of giving birth; the muscular rhythm pulls the reader through every contraction, every moment of fury and hope and exhaustion. The child is a "dead weight, you hot iron, you stone", childbirth "turns / a woman to a wolf that howls", until eventually:

*The pain's no longer physical. I am  
a basin it has carved out of the earth.*

In the sequence "Winter Diary", Szabó imagines herself as a houseplant:

*Nectar jewels wobble in flawless globes.  
Outside snow. Inside jungle.  
I stand at the window in the silence, the  
shaft of sun...*

Szabó has such a gift for texture and sensation that, here, the reader can



almost smell the plants and feel the sun's warmth.

András Gerevich is another writer who engages with the physical, but also with domesticity. In "Desire", he writes:

*Desire is a cramped, fusty apartment  
noisy with the highway traffic;  
scents line up before the mirror  
but the fridge is empty, the handle sticky.*

Whilst "In the Storybook..." is a coming-out poem, few of the others here are statement-pieces. Much of his writing is set inside the home and inside relationships, and is characterised by intimacy and privacy:

*I cling to you, water to skin.  
The cells of my body are shoals  
of excited fish and now the funnel  
blares and the nets  
are broken, the mesh has caught  
on a reef.*

("Mediterranean")

Imagination and physicality are closely bound together in these poems, which have the quality of windows or portholes through which the outside world is viewed from a safe interior.

Krisztina Tóth writes with a cinematic vision. Several sequences are included here, in which settings are richly painted and narratives are built from impressions, colours and shapes:

*The way the teenage me would circle endless  
afternoons of snow.  
The silences the sleeping the furniture of dusk.  
The fault-lines in the drifts of snow its midnight  
blue.*

("The Year of Snows II")

Some fine images are contained in the sequences ("... the nylon-coloured mist / the drowsy headlights..."—"Tram Depot I") but, for me, the most affecting poem was

the single piece "File", in which the narrator bumps into a long-ago lover on the bus. It is a casual, conversational poem with what seems an insignificant revelation, but the resulting disappointment—"Santa Claus. Storks. And now comes this"—is so raw, so sharp, that it spears from the poet into the reader.

As with Tóth, the writing of Orsolya Karafiáth tends toward the impressionistic. Her poems are constructed from quick phrases, glimpses of colour and fantastical landscapes, but the underlying ideas do not always come across clearly. "Earth" begins:

*The earth is scarlet. Or ochre.  
It is here to be enjoyed.  
Darkness. A Persian cavern.  
A demi-semi shade of void.*

Unfortunately some of her poems, possibly restricted by the nursery-style rhyme scheme, seem somewhat vague in translation. Her most immediate piece here is "Lotte Lenya's Secret Song", a singer's confession:

*No footlights here. Visualize  
a spotlight beaming broken gloom.  
The corridor in my shut eyes  
leads to a cheap old dressing room.*

Unlike her more abstract poems, the images and emotions here are personal and vivid.

The poems of Mónika Mesterházi are self-conscious and self-questioning. In "Sors Bona" the narrator reflects at length on her decision not to have children:

*I'm studying my own self, cell by cell.  
Shall I dissect myself to find out more?  
What pain, what higher pressure may compel  
me now to tell this, as never before?*

Despite the doubts and questions, however, Mesterházi's are confident



poems in which the narrator stands at the centre. Her images range from the minute (*"a mop of grass hangs in the water"*—"On the Move") to the cosmic:

*I've come home to a different place...  
The gravitational force is weaker. I fall down,  
so what, I can bounce back again.*

("Gravity")

This mix of self-confidence and of looking out into the world, this scope that turns easily from the introspective to the external, is representative of many of the poems in this book.

Twelve individual voices are collected here and, whilst the banner of the "post 1989 generation" may give context, each

voice is a very different response to the contemporary world. Most of the poets are translated by several different translators, a sensible editorial decision which helps the reader to hear the original voice of each poet break through. It is a complement to the translators as much as to the poets that the voices sound so fresh and distinct.

This strong, diverse anthology is an excellent introduction to the twelve poets, some of whom are already well-known outside Hungary, whilst others are less so. A great number of beautiful and memorable poems are contained here, and I would look forward to seeing full collections from these writers in English translation. They deserve serious attention. ♪

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Clare Pollard

# Confessions and Prophecies

András Gerevich, *Tiresias's Confession*. Translated by Thomas Cooper, David Hill, George Szirtes, Christopher Whyte, Peter Zollman.  
Budapest: Corvina Books, 2008, 54 pp.

**A**ndrás Gerevich is one of the most interesting of the post-1989 generation of Hungarian poets, and *Tiresias's Confession* is his first full collection to be published in English. He has already won critical acclaim in Britain for his gay love poems, and his use of the lyrical 'I', his poems being, in the words of George Szirtes: "a little like a diary, a little like a letter, a little like a confessional, the first person singular being at the centre of each." There is certainly plenty of material that fits this description in this collection, though the book has an interesting arc, which makes me wonder whether the poems are arranged chronologically (no clues are provided within the text), and where Gerevich's poetry might go next. It begins with "Cemetery", about the death of a father figure, seemingly from suicide. This signals the start of

adulthood and a dislocation from home and Hungary:

*The bridge is missing, the 78 runs into the Danube,  
I realise it can't now take me home  
because I've forgotten where I live, because the city  
is unrecognisable, because no one lives there.*

After this the book moves into in the anecdotal vein which Gerevich has made his own, with poems that journey from childhood through university, travels and lovers, and are deceptively simple. They have a lean, stripped quality that combined with the American setting of many made me think of the minimalism of Raymond Carver. What is also immediately noticeable is the direct way in which they address the poets' homosexuality. Whilst there are some young poets emerging in the UK who are beginning to tackle similar territory—

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*Clare Pollard,*

*a poet and playwright living in London, was the recipient of the Eric Gregory Award for a collection by poets under the age of 30 in 2000. Her first play, The Weather (2004), was staged at the Royal Court in Autumn 2004, and her documentary for radio, My Male Muse (2007), was a BBC Radio 4 Pick of the Year. Changeling (2011) is her fourth book of poetry. Her translations of contemporary Hungarian poets appeared in New Order: Hungarian Poets of the Post-1989 Generation, ed. by George Szirtes (see a review by Anne Howard on pp. 153–157 of this issue) and also on the pages of The Hungarian Quarterly.*



John McCullough and David Tait, for example—it still feels very fresh. *"It was years before I discovered / that sometimes a little prince / fell in love with the coach boy"* he tells us in "In the Storybook". This commingling of lucid style and complex emotion, innocence and guilt, runs throughout Gerevich's work.

"Meal" is typical of the best of these poems—a spare description of two lovers sharing an ordinary evening that seems charged with significance and sadness. The shutters on the windows have broken so no sunlight can get in, and seem to make a prison of the flat. Every word spoken adds to the claustrophobia (*"The food was great, really great, / but you needn't have talked about it all the time."*) It ends with the speaker trying to write whilst his partner lies down, and then declaring: *"I'm beginning to loathe poems. / I get in beside you, your skin smelling of food."* Is the prison really his head, and his lover the escape? Or is this an act of submission? I love the ambiguity of the final image, which could suggest either sustenance or revulsion.

"Anglers on the Bodrog" brings a similar, queasy uncertainty to desire, as both lovers are imaged as various beasts. *"I want to squeeze / the warm avian body"* the speaker says—unexpectedly figuring his male lover as a bird. But does he want to hug the bird or crush it? The lover becomes *"a fish struggling at the end of a taut, extended line"*, and then the speaker transforms to fish himself, biting the lover *"as a fish might seize on a worm"*. As in many of these poems, identity is unstable, and pain and pleasure, love and hate, are easily blurred.

From the first poem onwards there is also an overwhelming sense of melancholy. Gerevich is a poet of missed chances, endings, words left unsaid. In

the wonderful "Mediterranean" sex is viewed as a type of homecoming:

*Our bed is rocking like the sea  
beneath a ship. Your smell  
is as unfamiliar as the harbour  
to the tramp steamer.*

But in the end the ship splits in two and *"a pool of diesel spreads across the water"*—a horrific image of pollution and shame. Elsewhere there is a sense that homosexuality is itself inherently mournful as it means the end of the (blood)line—the speaker reaches the age his father was when he was born and kisses his lover:

*I felt your stubble when I kissed you,  
like the prickly realisation inside me  
no-one would upend that sandglass again.*

The book has five translators, and given this the consistency of tone is very impressive, although translating such pared-back work does have its dangers—the merest hint of cliché is very noticeable and sometimes the language tips into the banal, as in "Farewell to London":

*London could have been our home,  
My home.  
But you banished me.  
I escaped.  
Made you a scapegoat.*

I wonder if the scapegoat image is so overused in the Hungarian? Generally though these pitfalls are avoided, with the poems rendered into English with lightness and delicacy.

In the final half-dozen poems though, the book moves away from this spare realism, and this sequence is the strongest, suggesting a new direction as Gerevich shifts from the confessional into the mythic. In the chilling "Seasons", a boy tells of entering a wood in springtime,



as the "bees and bugs fizzed around my face", but it is soon clear it is turning rapidly to autumn, the "mulch" of dead leaves "heaving and crackling" and finally the snow gets under his clothes: "As it froze to my skin / it compressed me, snow covered me, my body was snow." Gerevich has a degree in screenwriting and has scripted short films, and this poem feels cinematic—it almost tips into horror. Its sudden fast-forward lurches between seasons evoke climate change, whilst the poem is also clearly about mortality and the horrifying speed of life.

The final sequence also contains some fine retellings of Greek myth that make me think very much of Cavafy—there is the same sense of sorrow and yearning, the same interest in the detritus of history. One poem is spoken by Patroclus, who massages Achilles' limbs and washes his face "with a cool cloth dipped in the stream," as Achilles rants:

*All that snarling has given me toothache.  
There aren't enough women.  
We've been through all the villages but  
there aren't enough, never enough women.*

Patroclus has to listen silently, knowing he himself will never be "enough" for the man he loves.

The Tiresias poems are also haunting—Tiresias has become a threatening figure, a homeless man on an urban bench spitting and smoking a cigarette, or on a bus "scratching his shin / with his

white stick" and stinking of "alcohol, urine and something medicinal". He is like Coleridge's Ancient Mariner, an unwelcome companion doomed to tell the young poet about the slipperiness of gender and of joy: the fact desire can never be fulfilled. He is here to tell us that: "The loveliest time of my life seems / so short, a matter of minutes now."

The collection ends with his prophecy of a world in which:

*You'll not be able to tell the men from  
women,  
There'll no longer be any difference, men  
will turn into women  
and women turn into men several times in a  
lifetime.*

Is this a vision of heaven or hell? Such fluidity seems at once liberating, and yet also fraught with danger—that sense of never belonging, never knowing who you truly are, "constantly / passing through places that have no place for me" ("Thursday") which aches through this collection.

András Gerevich's voice is a melancholy one, but there is beauty in the sadness. In the end, he reminds us to prize the present, and the moments of intimacy which a life is made of. We must follow Odysseus's friends, who drunkenly embrace each other "so they should not remember the future". And for now, at least, I hope that English readers will embrace such a remarkable young Hungarian poet. ♫



Gábor Murányi  
**After the Fall**

András Gervai, *Fedőneve: "szocializmus"* (Code Name: "Socialism").  
Budapest: Jelenkor, 2010, 395 pp.

Three students of the College for Film and Dramatic Arts were waiting in the foyer for Act 2 of Luigi Pirandello's play *Six Characters in Search of an Author* to begin on February 11, 1957 when they were joined by several chaps clad in brown leather coats discreetly pressing pistols in their sides. They were hustled out of the buffet into black limousines parked in front of the entrance, taken to the Budapest police headquarters, and forced to endure the usual humiliating routine, part and parcel of being taken into custody. They were made to wait for hours facing the wall, identity cards, money, pocket knives, belts and bootlaces were all taken from them. A policeman's boot and fist were malevolent accompaniments to verbal tirades along the lines of "worthless counter-revolutionary"; which at least alerted the detainees to the nature of the crimes of which they were accused.

This sort of thing was quite common in Hungary in late 1956 and early 1957. János Kádár and his henchmen broke earlier promises by starting a major clean-up barely a month after they were

installed in power with the help of Soviet tanks. The ideological basis was a resolution passed in early December 1956 by the Provisional Central Committee of the refounded Party. It declared the popular uprising to be a "counter-revolution" (until 1989, the obligatory designation) instigated by "elements" loyal to Miklós Horthy—the work of fascists in cahoots with international imperialist forces. Mass arrests began the day after the resolution was passed. (Imre Nagy, the revolution's symbol, was by then a captive in Romania.) Executions followed over the next three years. Popular workers' councils, which had mushroomed in late October, were banned as "foci of counter-revolution"; the union of writers and journalists was suspended and "ringleaders among the instigators," including the internationally acclaimed writer Tibor Déry, were arrested. An extensive campaign unfolded in the media under renewed and reinforced Party control, with interminable articles feeding proof of how Imre Nagy and his revisionist collaborators had not

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**Gábor Murányi**

*is a journalist on the staff of the weekly HVG and the author of several books on press history.*



only betrayed the Hungarian people but had joined forces with the enemy—borne witness to by the United Nations General Assembly vote in January 1957 allying itself with the warmongers by resolving to send a five-man international commission to investigate events in Hungary.

The three hapless students were put behind bars on the very day the Kádár government first protested against "interference in the domestic affairs of the country" (though this may well have been a coincidence given that the wholesale arrests across the country had little to do with foreign policy). In the general climate of retribution and intimidation the political police were given the added task of recruiting informers, using the tried and tested method of arresting "small fry" off-guard before putting the fear of god into them to make them squeal. This is what happened.

The interrogations as transcribed in the central register went along the lines of: "So why do you think you're here?" "No idea." "But you should know that better than anyone else." "I've told you, I don't know." "Well maybe it'll occur to you later on." And then they'd drip "incriminating evidence" of how enthusiastic they had been in October 1956 in helping set up the college's revolutionary committee; they had "made counter-revolutionary statements"; someone had seen them carrying arms, and that was no longer kid's stuff. An honest, sincere confession was expected, and if they did not provide it they could expect to kiss good-bye to freedom for a good few years. And they should not even dream of ever graduating. Unless—now the carrot was dangled—they agreed to meet a plainclothes policeman every now and again and tell him what was going on in college and what the general mood was

like. Of course, if they were willing to take on such a trifling job everything would be forgotten. If they signed a piece of paper to that effect then they would not have to sleep in the slammer, but nice and snug at home.

It took two and a half days for two of the three young men to cave in. (The third never did.) Suddenly it turned out that their arrest had been due to a "mistake", but the Hungarian justice system was always ready to correct any mistakes of its own making instantly.

This and other such dialogues follow one another with depressing similarity in the files of early 1957 when an army of snitches and sneaks were unleashed on all kinds of workplace. Nineteen-year-old "Endre Képesi" and 21-year-old "Tibor Lévai" went back to the College for Film and Dramatic Arts. Each could only suspect that the other had toed the line and signed the piece of paper. And they diligently carried on preparing for their careers (both wanted to become film directors). Every now and again, sometimes reluctantly, at other times revelling in the secret power they wielded, they would report on their fellow students and teachers and, not infrequently, on each other.

**T**wo weeks after being released, "Endre Képesi" filed his first report, following which, until 1961, he would steal into a secret apartment to hand over altogether forty-seven reports of various length to the operative officer, who gave instructions on who to keep tabs on. According to the latter's comments, at the very beginning the informer passed on much useless information, but he soon got the hang of his new job. One typical task was to produce reports on the general mood. "Képesi" reported with a keen eye, though rather schizophrenically



both as an insider and an interloper. There are places where he would venture an opinion or offer praise; other times he would pass on advice to the authorities, such as: "Have a word with those who are unable, or do not want, to return to a peaceful life." Over four years, "Képesi" provided around 200 pages of reports covering the quotidian lives and secrets of a total of seventy-two friends, colleagues and teachers. These were not always well-intentioned: he occasionally drew attention to ideological deviations ("he has problems with his class consciousness"; "she called Kádár a traitor"). Occasionally he passed envious comments about others who had done better ("He always seems to have money. No one knows where it all comes from, but he has a good life."), and it transpires that he may have provided sexual gossip. (We don't know for sure, since the freedom of information act in Hungary forbids the disclosure of any personal data on file which relates to a pathological addiction, sexual habits, racial origin and other 'sensitive' aspects until thirty years have elapsed after the person's death. But information gleaned from reports here and there show that "Képesi" passed on tittle-tattles of that sort.)

"**K**épesi", recruited and held in line by blackmail, was not a noxious informer. Throughout his reports there is a clear sense that he wrote his reports under duress, and, unlike more than a few contemporaries, it seems he got little joy from his assignment. As soon as he had finished college, he made efforts to throw off what was an increasingly burdensome task. It appears his last report was written in November 1961, but the file on the now

far less tractable informer was not closed by the state-security service until some two years later, not long before he, a film director, began shooting his first feature film, at the age of 26.

The time bomb exploded four and a half decades later at the end of January 2006, when film historian András Gervai made public, in an unusually long three-page article in the weekly *Élet és Irodalom*, details of "Endre Képesi's" former secret life, together with the shocking revelation that he was none other than that idol to generations of filmgoers, István Szabó—so far the only Hungarian to win an Oscar for a feature film.

The story of Szabó's ordeal is one of about a dozen such case studies covered by Gervai's book. It summarises research into the film world, theatre and opera scene which the author had been engaged on for half a decade. Gervai wants to show the machinery and operations of Hungary's post-1956 dictatorship, confronting us with those who pushed the buttons. He demonstrates how incriminating data were accumulated through a vast range of channels and then meticulously put together by the Interior Ministry apparatchiks. The grasses were links, some big, others small, in the chain, some of them proving to be weak, defenceless victims; some were careerists who did more than they were expected to do. As Gyula Illyés famously put it, "*In tyranny's domain / you are the link in the chain, / you stink of him through and through, / the tyranny IS you*".\* There were those who explained, in self-justification, why they did it or, on the contrary, they were profoundly ashamed of their sneakiness—each depending on temperament and the degree of stress they were subjected to.

\* ■ Translated by George Szirtes.



The "Képesi" can of worms had been well and truly opened. Gervai's well documented case history could have helped the collective understanding of a sordid chapter of recent history. It did not, though Szabó himself, in many of his films, examined the importance of confronting the past as a moral obligation, starting with *Confidence* (1980), which won a Silver Bear for Best Director at the 30th Berlin International Film Festival. He continued with *Mephisto* (1981, winner of an Academy Award for Best Foreign Language Film, and the award for the Best Screenplay at Cannes), then *Colonel Redl* (1984, winner of a Jury Prize at the 1985 Cannes Film Festival), and ending with the haunting *Taking Sides* (2001), starring Harvey Keitel as the lead American investigator and based on Ronald Harwood's play about the US investigation of conductor Wilhelm Furtwängler on charges of having served the Nazi regime.

Among the frankly hysterical and insincere statements that were issued following Gervai's article, those by István Szabó himself came across as embarrassing to say the least. The next day he adopted the wretchedly pathetic tones of Hendrick Höfgen, the title role in *Mephisto*—based on Gustav Gründgens, an actor who enjoyed the blessings of collaborating with the Nazi authorities—to say:

I am grateful to fate, and in looking back I can be proud of what happened. My work for the state security organ was the most courageous and daring deed in my life, for by this means we managed to save one of our fellow students in our year from being denounced and hanged in the aftermath of the 1956 revolution.

Szabó's version of the story has been refuted on a number of points. To start

with, it is hard to account for the fact that Szabó agreed to be an informer at the request of two fellow students as this would have implied his cooperation in the surprise arrests. Besides, he himself stated that he only discovered in 1958 that his fellow student had been caught in a highly compromising newsreel shot. In response to arguments of this sort by historians, Szabó turned his wrath against those who unmasked him:

They are seeking to destroy me because it has been trumpeted out to all the news agencies, and it is splashed in newspapers round the world, that Hungary's sole Oscar-winning film director ... was a police informer.

That he indeed had been he did not deny. What he did deny were his own earlier statements and, above all, the message of his own films. "I need to narrate stories which induce viewers to face up to themselves," he said in 1978 replying to the question as to why he stopped making films delving into biographical details of his own life and why he made the film *Confidence*.

That remarkable film was set in what were, for Hungary, the very difficult days between November 1944 and February 1945—the final months in power of the country's home-bred Nazis, the Arrow Cross Party. A man and a woman who have been thrown together by the storms of history have to pretend that they are husband and wife. They go through every hellish, bottomless pit of mutual interdependence, fear and vulnerability at a time and in a place where, in the provocative words that Szabó, who wrote the screenplay, puts into his hero's mouth "the country is a polluted river. You only have to stir it a bit and the filth comes to the surface." It is against this background



that their relationship grows into love, and then, trust.

Four years before Szabó's unmasking, his biographer, József Marx, threw in: "Everyone has his own invisible baggage, shameful, humiliating and to be hidden away, which opens up to joy, injury... and the contents of which will influence the behaviour of the owner." Szabó intimated something very similar in 1980, when *Mephisto* was still in the planning stage. "I would like to be concerned with public therapy in the film" he said. "Doing this by pointing out sickness in a personality and drawing attention to the symptoms."

The "invisible baggage" proved too heavy for Szabó. How such a confrontation could be a catharsis for an individual and for society which might lead to reconciliation, and how he failed to undertake it is very much a story fit for Szabó's cameras. He may yet film it, in which case we may get an answer to why he took refuge in self-justification, why he did not, after his unmasking, seize, "one of the greatest opportunities to surmount himself and move on," as Szabó put it himself in a 1992 interview.

In searching films Szabó moulded the thoughts of generations suggesting that the artist is not just a creative person but a social being. His artistic being—and that applies all the more in perilous, critical times—is inseparable from that of the private person. His creative gifts do not exempt him from the consequences of his moral lapses.

Responses after the story broke, duly recorded by Gervai, indicate that public therapy, too, is sorely needed. Szabó's hysterical outbursts might be attributed to oversensitivity and overreaction by an artist. More troubling is the fervid and

cynical crusade of his supporters that set off in pursuit of a writer who had unearthed the facts. (One Free Democrat Member of Parliament declared that Szabó is the "President of the Republic for Hungarian film culture and, as such, enjoys immunity." "Rats rummage in wastepaper baskets, a creative artist can and should be judged solely and exclusively by his works"). More importantly, Attila Péterfalvi, Hungary's Commissioner for Data Protection, declared: "István Szabó cannot be considered a public figure until he is asked about it and he accepts the role." In other words, Gervai had broken the law as "a researcher may only bring to public attention data in which names are given if this is necessary for the faithful presentation of a historical period." Thirty-six hours after Szabó had characterised his work as an informant as the most courageous and daring deed of his life, around 200 distinguished figures of the Hungarian intelligentsia lined up behind him to express their solidarity. "We love, honour and respect" Szabó, they declared, and even Ferenc Gyurcsány, the prime minister at the time, deemed it proper to lend his symbolic support at the gala premiere of *Relatives* (2006), a film which castigates the corruption of power, giving the "vilified" director a lengthy embrace and patting him on the shoulder. The philosopher János Kis saw it differently. Szabó's major films tell us that there are moral consequences for collaborating with dictatorships, he argued. Those who signed the declaration of solidarity either reject his message or believe that its validity does not apply to a creative artist. ■



Graham Avery

# An Alien's View of Hungary

Colin Swatridge, *A Country Full of Aliens: A Briton in Hungary*  
Budapest: Corvina Books, 2010, 187 pp.

In about 1785 the poet Robert Burns wrote in Scots dialect "*O wad some power the giftie gie us to see oursels as ithers see us*", which can be transcribed in English as "O would some power give us the gift to see ourselves as others see us". Has Colin Swatridge in this book given us that gift? In my view he has succeeded to a large extent, and evidently others agree, for this book first published in 2005 is now available in a second revised edition.

The character of a people is often best understood by foreigners who have lived among them. Outsiders, though they may be biased by personal experience, tend to have a more objective point of view than natives. The experience of Swatridge includes teaching English in Hungarian schools and at the University of Miskolc, so he has a particularly good knowledge of how the younger generation in Hungary thinks and behaves. Indeed, his work has inspired a blogspot entitled *A Country Full of Aliens* devoted to translating his book into Hungarian, managed by Attila Dósa, an expert in Scottish literature also teaching at Miskolc.

In his foreword Swatridge writes that the book's aim is to explain how Hungarians are different from others, and why they are how they are. Since this kind of enterprise can provoke a negative response, he wisely took the precaution of disarming Hungarian critics in advance by borrowing its title from a book written by a Hungarian: *How to Be an Alien* by George Mikes, published in London in 1946, is a humorous commentary on the British way of life, in which Mikes himself refers to Hungary as 'a country full of aliens'.

Swatridge frankly confesses that although he has some knowledge of the Hungarian language, he has not succeeded in speaking it fluently. While he says that he has read everything about the country in English that he could lay his hands on, and indeed the book has a useful select bibliography of publications in English, his linguistic handicap must surely be an obstacle to penetrating the Hungarian psyche. Nevertheless, he has written a book which goes more deeply and perceptively into the question than some other books—written by Hungarians—

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which compete for a place in the same market, such as *The Xenophobe's Guide to the Hungarians* by Miklós Vámos and Mátyás Sárközi (Oval Books, 1999) or *The Essential Guide to Being Hungarian* by István Bori (New Europe Books, 2010).

Although *A Country Full of Aliens* includes amusing anecdotes from the author's experience in Hungary, it is essentially a serious book, not a humorous one. It does not include a chapter on Hungarian jokes, though a few jokes are mentioned, such as the old one about the Hungarian police: why do they patrol in pairs? because one can read the information in your papers while the other can write it in his notebook. Perhaps if he had included more jokes it would have shown that many of them are not exclusively Hungarian, but part of a repertoire circulating widely in Central and Eastern Europe. For example, he tells the story about the visitor to Hell who, seeing vats of boiling oil occupied by persons of different nationalities, asks why the vat for Hungarians has no cover to keep them inside, to which the guide explains that it is unnecessary: a Hungarian knows that if he tries to get out, the others will pull him back. Well, it's a good story, but when I first heard it the vat was for Poles, not Hungarians.

Nevertheless, the author naturally quotes the well-known story of the convention of mathematicians in the USA at which an American asks "if Martians were able to disguise themselves as humans, how should we know that they were aliens?" to which his Magyar neighbour replies "we call ourselves Hungarians". As far as I know, this joke has never been transposed to another nationality: it is a joke about Hungarians, and supposedly by a Hungarian, for the reply is attributed to Leo Szilárd. Perhaps

Swatridge should have added that the reason why the Martians chose to go to Hungary, rather than another country, is that Hungarian women are the most intelligent and attractive in the world.

His book is especially good on certain aspects of Hungarian character and life which I have observed myself or learned about from Hungarian friends. "A Certain Pessimism" is the title of the chapter in which he quotes an older Hungarian's remark "things were better when they were worse", which illustrates nostalgia even now for the days of goulash communism. While this trait of pessimism is not exclusive to Hungary—it is a common frame of mind in Central Europe—the Magyar version is well developed, and it is powerfully supported by historical experience.

That brings me to another theme of the book which is particularly good: the importance of history for Hungarian national consciousness. Here again one must beware of exaggeration: history is important for every nation, but arguably Hungary's history includes, in addition to its successes and victories, a considerable number of unfortunate choices, disappointments, defeats, and disasters. Swatridge's chapter "A Bruise Under the Skin" explains well the role played by the revision of Hungary's frontiers at Trianon in 1920, and the unhappy decades that followed. He describes Hungarian nationalists' resentment in the past of the success of Jews in academic and business life, and the disturbing way in which it is echoed today not only by certain politicians but even by people who would deny that they are in any way prejudiced against Jews. He remarks perceptively that in modern Hungary "there is a consciousness of the Jewish



presence that is illiberal" and later he analyses the problem of the Roma who also pose the problem of a too-narrow contemporary attitude to the question "who is Hungarian?"

Finally there is the national educational system, an area of which the author has had direct experience, having worked periodically since 1997 with school and university students in Hungary. His chapter "The Prussian Model of Education" is severely critical of some aspects of Hungarian teaching, which is "perceived as to do with the transmission of knowledge-as-information" rather than the teaching of skills for the developing by students of their own ideas. Swatridge discusses in painful detail the syndrome of "only one correct answer" for examination questions, and the "culture of copying" which affects even academic dissertations. He reports that

many of his students have complained to him "we aren't taught to think for ourselves". While this reviewer has never taught or been taught in Hungary, I have heard about the problem from Hungarian friends—though here again, of course, it is not unique to Hungary but is rather widespread in European education.

The Ministry of Education in Budapest publishes on its website an overview "Education in Hungary, Past, Present and Future" which refers to the "struggle at national as well as local levels between disciples of traditionalism and devotees of innovation and reform". It is to be hoped that Swatridge's book and his teaching in Hungary will not only help Hungarians to see themselves as others see them, but also give an impetus to educational reform so that future generations are endowed with the extraterrestrial qualities that Hungary's friends expect of them. ☛



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Zoltán Fejős

# Paul Fejős: An Innovator in Vernacular Modernism

The federal programme aiming at the preservation of the “culturally, historically, or aesthetically significant” American films now refers to 550 items to be placed in the film archives of the Library of Congress.<sup>1</sup> The 25 films listed in the yearly National Film Registry in 2010 included *Lonesome*, released by the Universal Pictures Corporation in 1928. The entry on *Lonesome* reads:

One of the few American features directed by the gifted Hungarian-born filmmaker and scientist Paul Fejos (1897–1963), the film has been recognized for its success as both a comic melodrama (about young lovers who become separated during the chaos of a thunderstorm at Coney Island) and for its early use of dialogue and two-color Technicolor. The film was restored by the George Eastman House and has found renewed popularity with repertory and film festival audiences.<sup>2</sup>

After its premiere and relatively successful release, the film was forgotten. It was shown for a short time only because Universal lacked a network of cinemas of its own and the copy in the United States was lost. It was rediscovered at the Telluride Film Festival in 1994, following the George Eastman House’s restoration of the nitrate positive copy made available by the Cinémathèque Française. *Variety*’s critic wrote that the best film of the Festival was the sixty-six year old *Lonesome*,<sup>3</sup> seen there with a new musical accompaniment for silent films performed by the Alloy Orchestra. Thereafter

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## Zoltán Fejős

is Director of the Museum of Ethnography, Budapest. His current publications are on the musealisation of contemporary culture, on the history of ideas, on Hungarian ethnography, and on the history of Hungarian emigration to the US.

His books include a book on Hungarian-Americans of Chicago (1993) and a volume of museum studies (2003). He was curator of the exhibition Images of Time – A Millennium Exhibition (2001); The Images of Boldog (2004–2005); József Huszka, the Collector and Draughtsman (2006); and Plastic (2006–2007).





*A scene from Last Moment, 1928*

the film became popular at festivals, so much so that the copy had to be restored again. This time the original tinted, stenciled, and hand-coloured parts were also renewed at great expense, and in the past decade the film was shown at major international festivals in New York, California and Europe.<sup>4</sup> Finally, with the sound and the missing parts reconstructed with the help of the UCLA Film and Television Archives, it was given its premiere in Los Angeles in October 2010,<sup>5</sup> barely a month before the decision of the National Film Registry. The original version was a silent film accompanied by music and various sound effects, later to be released also as a talkie with three short scenes including dialogue, which did not fit in well with the images of the film. Contemporary reviews were justified in criticizing that aspect of the film, it was not Fejős however who recorded it. It was produced at the insistence of Universal, or more precisely, its head of production, Carl Laemmle Jr., in order to quickly satisfy the public demand for talkies.

The film was released in Europe with a different title in practically every country where it was shown. It was certainly screened in the Netherlands, Finland, Austria, Germany and France. In Germany it was praised by Sigfried Kracauer and was Walter Benjamin's favourite film. For them it appears to have been a valid depiction of everyman confronting the monotony of a modern city. They understood and appreciated the director's endeavour to convey this by focusing on everyday pleasures, and most of all the role of love.<sup>6</sup> The film reached Hungary as well, where it was shown in 1929, under the title *A nagyváros mostohái* (The Stepchildren of the City). It briefly resurfaced here



sooner than elsewhere: Fejős was rediscovered at the Pécs Film Festival in 1967. The Paris copy was shown, and it is still screened occasionally. The newly restored, coloured copy, not to mention the latest version, with restored music, has not reached Hungary yet.

The "postumus" career of *Lonesome* places the film and Fejős's lifework in a new context compared to the original evaluation. It is a particular twist of fate that made this of all his works a film history classic. In the United States he directed five films and adapted a finished film in two different versions. The *Last Moment* (1928), his first, which made him famous, is lost; yet it was this film that was the real sensation. Various sources and recollections mention the enthusiasm of Charlie Chaplin and the Hollywood film press and the fact that it cost only \$5,000, as compared to the half a million that was the norm at the time. Apparently, it was a film of original genius, which, in an experimental manner that was unique in Hollywood, told the story of a man's life as seen by him at the moment of his death.<sup>7</sup> The later films kept to the standard patterns of the Hollywood film industry; histories of the cinema emphasize only certain brilliant technical feats and artistic solutions. Thus, the monumental scenes and the novel camera movements using a "floating" camera placed on a vast crane in the 1929 *Broadway*, the first five-million-dollar super-production by Universal, are still recalled, but Fejős's Hollywood career is looked on as incomplete and abandoned.

Fejős travelled to Europe in 1931, first to France, where he directed two films, and then to Hungary. By then he was an American citizen, but he only



Posters for *Lonesome* (1928)



returned to the United States in 1940–41, and from then on devoted his second stay there to archeology, anthropology and extensive organizing work connected with these disciplines.

*Lonesome* reveals certain features of the director's personality and artistic endeavours that can be observed in other stages of his career and in his interests outside the cinema as well. In this article three themes will be developed in connection with certain episodes of his work in Hungary: his invention of himself; his peculiar relationship to truth; and symbolism in his use of the language of the film.

**P**aul Fejős's life is a mystery, comprising various twists and turns. A man of many-sided, almost universal talent, he was a bohemian, a personality whose constant search for a path forward was wrapped in legends, largely of his own creation. He tended to give fabulous explanations of certain episodes in his eventful life, particularly as regards his unexpected decisions and their consequences. His friend, the American anthropologist John W. Dodds, wrote a biography under the title, *The Several Lives of Paul Fejős: a Hungarian-American Odyssey*.<sup>8</sup> To this day this is the only biography to cover virtually all the important stages of his career. The book is colourfully written, with personal recollections and many quotations from Fejős's own autobiographical account in the Columbia University Oral History Archives, but it makes little attempt to confront its subject's "tales" with other sources. The biographical details have gaps in them, and there are doubts about the factual accounts. It must, however, be said that since Fejős's activities extended over several continents, studying primary sources and their critical treatment seems well nigh impossible. The years spent in Hungary, in the United States (1923–1931; 1940–1963), France (1931), Austria (1933), and Denmark (1934–1935) raise many questions that would require research on the spot, without even mentioning the periods spent in Madagascar (1936), in Indonesia



Paul Fejős in Hollywood, 1931.

Unknown photographer. Property of the author



(1937–1938), Peru, and also in Bolivia (1939–1941). There are even fewer independent accounts of the films made in those places and of the circumstances of the scientific expeditions led by him; what is more, the films made in the course of the expeditions were inaccessible for a long time and are still not widely known.<sup>9</sup>

The last two decades or so of Fejós's life were also of epochal significance. He spent this time organizing The Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research, and then, as its director, engaging in scientific organizational work. It was thought by people that after her husband's death his wife of the time—the fifth—would clear up at least some of the mysteries. They were to be disappointed: she also kept her secrets. "Many of the events and anecdotes recounted there [in Dodds' book] stretch credibility, but when I once asked Lita Osmundsen which were true and which were exaggerations, she said that the more unbelievable ones are true", writes Sydel Silverman, one of the later directors of the Foundation in an article<sup>10</sup> reconstructing the launch of the foundation's scholarly journal, *Current Anthropology*. Luckily since Dodds' book, not only has Fejós as a film director been rediscovered in the United States, but at least a few of the factual details of his eventful life have also become known.<sup>11</sup>

Following his sensational Hollywood debut, journalists tried to find out who this new "genius" was. The title was bestowed by the article introducing him.<sup>12</sup> Already at this time anecdotes coloured his portrait. Following his first success, while he was directing *Lonesome*, *The New York Times* introduced him as follows:

Fejos is about 37. He was born in Budapest, and his ambition when young was to become a designer. His parents were not in favor of such a career, so they effected a compromise with him. They permitted him to attend an art school for two years, in return for which he was to study for a degree in medicine. Both parties carried out their end of the agreement and Fejos received his M.D. from the Royal Hungarian University after seven years of application to a subject for which he did not care. He did not practice his profession. His first year away from study was spent in working as set designer for the Royal Hungarian Opera House.<sup>13</sup>

There are other sources as well testifying to opposition from his parents, even if not to a "contract" with them, and also to his activities at the Opera House, though we have no precise information about this either. The medical degree is a recurring element of the legends. It appears to be part of a consciously constructed self-image. He probably attended lectures at the medical faculty of the university, but his mother told a journalist in 1928 that to the best of their knowledge "he returned to chemistry, because he started studying that as well". According to the Budapest university register, he did not graduate.<sup>14</sup> Nonetheless, American newspapers usually referred to him as "Dr. Fejos". Another legendary biographical detail concerns the family background. Everyone writing about Fejós



takes it for granted that he was of noble origin, and that the family's wealth disappeared following the First World War. This is the tale he told his biographer as well; he so clearly identified with this tale that it shaped his personality. Yet the family did not have noble origins, it rose rather over several generations to become clerks and civil servants from a shepherd and artisan background responsible for the family name Fejős (milker in Hungaria). Paul Fejős could have mentioned his grandfather, who during the 1848 revolution was for a few months the town clerk of Szekszárd, as a consequence of which his property was confiscated after the failure of the revolution. But Fejős did not mention him, only fictitious nobles. This was an expression of a desire for a way of life that the middle class aspired to. Riding, fencing, being wounded in the First World War, as well as that other emphatic element of the Fejős mythology, the womanising, all stressed in his biography, fit into this picture. Dodds and other biographical works mention five wives, all of them in the context of romantic adventures, but it is far from certain that this number is correct—without even mentioning the relationships that did not end in marriage.

The article in *The New York Times* goes on:

Then after a year with the Corvin Film studio in a similar occupation, the war came and Fejos found himself fighting on the Italian front. He was wounded several times and was discharged with the rank of Lieutenant of the Seventh Royal Hussars. His next job was with Mobile Film Company, this time as a director of motion pictures. After making a succesful picture called *Pan*, based on Greek mythology, he was engaged to transfer to the screen Oscar Wilde's *Lord Arthur Sackville's Adventures* and Pushkin's *Pique Dame*. (...) His European career came to a close with the filming of *Stars of Eger*, a historical picture. After that Mr. Fejos decided to leave for America. That was in 1923.

Paul Fejős's mother in the interview quoted above also said that he had begun to concern himself with the cinema on his return from military service. Before that, he had wanted to be an actor. Fejős's films of that period have not survived. According to the latest research, he directed six films and two cinematic sketches in the course of five years, and before that had designed the sets for five films. Besides these, he also directed an American adventure story under the title *The Black Captain* and *The Last Adventure of Arsen Lupin*.

These films were all experiments in their content, idiom and also in the use of film as the thoroughly modern self-expression of the young generation. They were made quickly, in a few days or weeks, with little money and modest technical facilities. For the makers, directing films meant a free way of life and much fun. Fejős, however, began to shed the influence of mass-produced American films; his artistic ideas show an interest both in the adaptation of historical themes and in avant-garde imagery. The fullest realisation of the latter, however, was achieved in America, in *The Last Moment*, and in part, in *Lonesome*.



*The New York Times* article, quoted above, goes on:

In 1923 he was called upon to direct a Passion Play. The production is said to have had no principal players and there were about 4,000 persons in the cast, none of whom could read. The lines had to be spoken to them until these "actors" memorized them.

This sentence can be found, almost word for word, in John Dodds' book.<sup>15</sup> Talking of 4,000 illiterate village actors is a romantic exaggeration; what is interesting is the approach to film-making, which gives a foretaste of *Lonesome*. The location becomes of primary importance: Fejős moves out of the studio.

**T**he location of the village Passion Play in 1922 was Mikófalva, near the town of Eger, in northern Hungary.<sup>16</sup> We have little information regarding Fejős's role in the venture; what is certain, however, is that it was not he who thought up the production, nor was it on his initiative that the roles were played by villagers. The idea was originally that of the village notary, Imre Peller, and the chief helpers were the parish priest, a Franciscan, and the cantor-schoolmaster. For the performance of the Passion Play,<sup>17</sup> envisaged on the model of the Bavarian Oberammergau, they translated and adapted the text of the play as performed there, formed a Passion Play Society, and asked Paul Fejős to direct and József Pán (1900–1956), a painter, who later became an influential set designer in the Hungarian cinema, to design and build the sets. It was planned that the stage and auditorium would be built on the hillside next to the village, with the help of tradesmen. At first they experimented with drama teachers, but this did not prove successful, so it was decided to import actors from Budapest theatres. The village notary went to see them in Budapest in the spring of 1922.<sup>18</sup> By that time the 24-year-old Fejős had built up a reputation in the artistic circles of the capital owing to the silent films he had directed for the Mobil film studio and his scenic work in theatres.

According to a contemporary account, the theatrical concept was developed by Fejős. It was in line with his ideas that József Pán prepared large-scale set designs clearly visible from a distance, and painted them with the help of Dezső Udvary, a painter from the Szolnok artists' colony. The artists "first of all carefully studied the collections of the national, ethnographic and fine arts museums".<sup>19</sup> The sets were painted on cloth woven in the village, which they bought in vast quantities from the locals. The Jerusalem backdrop was borrowed from the Budapest Opera House, and the costumes were also from the capital. According to the account of a participant, who was a child taking part in the play, some of the costumes were copied by people from Budapest from a famous painting, *Christ in front of Pilate*, by Mihály Munkácsy. The construction of the auditorium, built to accommodate an audience of 4–5,000, was the work of local and Tiszafüred labourers; the timber merchant of a



neighbouring town donated four and a half wagonloads of timber for the construction of the stage. The music was composed in an "eastern style" by a young composer, Sándor Szlatinay. It was performed by an army band from the nearby city, Miskolc, with a choir composed of local farmers, as well as—according to contemporary reports—a 400-strong opera chorus.

As *The New York Times* mentioned, the text was taught orally. The rehearsals indeed took months, but it is an exaggeration that in Mikófalva no-one in 1922 could read as claimed—on the basis of Fejős's account—in the article and later in John Dodds' biography. The teaching and rehearsing of the text was not Paul Fejős's responsibility, though he did occasionally help, but that of the cantor-schoolmaster. During the winter and spring months the work went on in the local school from seven in the evening till eleven or twelve at night, which in the spring put a great burden on the villagers, tired after their day's work. Actors from Budapest also took part in teaching them how to perform their roles; the principal actors were selected by the director, Fejős. At the end of the 1970's a local historian was told by the woman who had been Mary:

We were called together in the village school to choose players for the various roles. (...) I was 17 at that time, thin in the face as well, and a blonde. I positioned myself modestly at the back of the large crowd. The director took a long time examining the crowd, till finally he stopped in front of me, and said: well, girl, would you take on the role of Mary? I was reluctant but I did not give him a straight answer then. I told him that I would discuss it with my mother. But he came home with me and talked and talked until my mother agreed.<sup>20</sup>

Nonetheless, during the rehearsals the mother at one point wanted her to leave, but once again Paul Fejős talked her into changing her mind. He must have had a good relationship with the family; he was even quartered at their house for a while. No-one wanted to take on the role of Judas, till finally they managed to persuade a mild young man of 21 who, according to a contemporary opinion, was the best of the players: "He performed his lines very naturally, and thus effectively".<sup>21</sup> How many people took part in the ten acts of the play has not been established. Contemporary articles mention about 120–140 principal players and 1,000–1,200 extras, which is probably an exaggeration, but the players must have numbered around 150–200, plus the orchestra and the choirs. About 25–30 Mikófalva people might have had speaking parts. 4,000 players is a wild exaggeration.

By the middle of September there had been about 25 performances, seen by audiences which altogether must have numbered at least 25,000 people. In the longer term the venture turned out a failure: there was no trip to America, nor was the performance repeated in the following years. There are few direct accounts of the work of the director. According to them, they concerned the movement of the players and the composition of crowd scenes. According to



some critics, the movement of the players lacked naturalness; certain scenes gave the impression of being directed for filming.

The photographs that have survived give the impression that the scenes had a spectacular tableau-like visual effect. The play was performed in front of a huge auditorium built like an amphitheatre into the hillside. On the large, plateau-like stage the places known from the Bible were represented by "film-style constructions".<sup>22</sup> Here the movement of the players and extras also had to serve the spectacle. The idea of filming the play did arise; according to a newspaper account it was to be made by the Hungarian Astoria Film Company, and was to be shown "by way of the Pathé review all over the world".<sup>23</sup> We have no knowledge of such a film.

The subject matter of the play, the immediacy of contact with village folk, the countryside, all these factors had a strong influence on the young, adventurous director. This must have been the moment when the idea of making a series of films occurred to him. Six Hungarian films were planned for the near future, a film magazine reported in 1922:

The film director Paul Fejős and the set designer József Pán intend to give a huge impetus to Hungarian film-making as a whole. (...) They persuaded a serious commercial enterprise to back the making of six Hungarian films. They are not revealing further details as yet. Filming is to begin at the huge plants of the Ózd, Borsod-Nádasd & Rimamurány-Salgótarján steel works. Interior filming will be at the Corvin and Phönix studios. The script is to be written by one of our prominent writers.<sup>24</sup>

That is all that is known in connection with the grandiose plan—one more mystery concerning Fejős—but it clearly failed as the films were never made. It would seem that filming was to take place in village and industrial settings: the influence of the recent village experience is obvious. It can be assumed that Fejős's interest in the lives and culture of peasants and workers played an important part in this plan: this is manifest also in the scenes of *Lonesome*. We know that in the following year he participated in popularizing one of the regime's projects to help the poor. The Hungarian News Agency reported in a brief communiqué on 28th February, 1923 that "the Concordia Film Works made a propaganda film for popularizing the Regent's project of relief for the impecunious. The film's script was written by Paul Fejős, and it was directed by Kornél Tábori". The report concerns the home screening of the film on 1st March, which was restricted to the representatives of the Regent, Miklós Horthy, and members of the press.<sup>25</sup> Thus, there is scant evidence that Fejős had to leave the country for political reasons, as related by film historians in the 1960s.

Paul Fejős's interest in social affairs and the "village experience" at this stage merely indicated a marginal aspect of his artistic ambitions; he was, at the time, primarily challenged by the potentialities of the cinema. He made one more feature film in Hungary: *Egri Csillagok* (Stars of Eger), based on a popular historical novel





Egri csillagok (*Stars of Eger*), 1923.  
Hungarian National Film Archives

set in the Turkish period, written by Géza Gárdonyi. The location scenes of the siege of the fortress were not filmed in Eger but at the castle of Csesznek in Transdanubia. Once again villagers were used as extras. According to the recollections of a participant, the Hungarian and Turkish warriors were played by the men of two villages. "No-one wanted to be a Turk!"<sup>26</sup> Like all his other early Hungarian films, this one too is lost. According to some writers, Fejős did not complete the work, and possibly the final version was made by someone else. The most recent research, however, shows that the film was completed and screened. The first, restricted, screening was reserved for the Regent, Miklós Horthy, at Gödöllő—possibly with the director also attending, though we have no certain information about this. According to news items in the papers and the evidence of advertising posters, it was also shown in the country, and possibly abroad as well, since it was given an export

licence.<sup>27</sup> As to whether the film led to his financial ruin, as some claim and, let us add, family recollections too, and was in fact the reason why he left the country, cannot be satisfactorily determined at this time. It is certainly true that even without waiting for the December premiere of the film, in October 1923 he crossed the Atlantic and on the 15th disembarked in New York. Beyond doubt, he was also driven by his restless temperament, always searching for novelty. It is also certain that he had dreams of becoming a film-maker. But it is an exaggeration to say, as often alleged though without much evidence, by those writing about Fejős as a film director, that he made the journey with the definite intention of realising his ambition of becoming a director, something that could not be done in Hungary. After some hopeless months, he took a job as a laboratory technician. "Strangely enough he spent the first two years in this country in work for the Rockefeller Institute"—states the article in *The New York Times* quoted earlier, echoing what Fejős happened to want to say just then: "He took that position so as to earn enough money to go to Hollywood and also to acquire a knowledge of English."

**F**ejős, despite his American successes, soon became as disenchanted with the film industry there as he had been in Hungary. When he returned to Hungary through France, he, however, made sure that he did not burn all his bridges.



He still had a valid contract with Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, and it seemed that he was leaving the United States only temporarily. On his return to Hungary a journalist quoted him, let us hope faithfully: "I am happy that after 'the land of unlimited opportunities' I can once again working here in Europe, freely, as my artistic feelings, taste and convictions dictate." It is a remarkable fact—as claimed by the journalist, for which there is no other source—that the director, who came back to direct *Spring Shower* (*Tavaszi Zápor*), mentioned, in March 1932, that his next project was "to make a film about an expedition amongst the Eskimos".<sup>28</sup> This is the earliest information that we possess of Paul Fejős's interest in faraway peoples, more exotic than Hungarian village dwellers.

This reminds one of Robert Flaherty. It can be assumed—we have no hard evidence—that Fejős had seen Flaherty's films, or at least had heard of them. The fame of *Nanook of the North* (1922) must have reached him, he may even have seen it, as well as *Moana*, filmed in Melanesia and screened in the United States in 1926. We do not know whether he read the Scottish film-maker and critic John Grierson's piece in *The New York Sun* (8 February 1926) praising the film and its methods as 'documentary'—a term invented in this review—though by that time he worked in the Rockefeller Institute. He may even have seen *Tabu*, a film by Flaherty and F.W. Murnau also made in the South Seas, before travelling to France.<sup>29</sup> Robert Flaherty's approach can also be discerned in Fejős's two new Hungarian films, but his interest in a primitive setting could also be connected with the more general influence of the then popular travel and expedition films.

Although fictions, the two new feature films directed in Hungary, *Spring Shower* and *The Judgment of Lake Balaton* (*Itél a Balaton*), have ethnographic-documentarist characteristics. As befits the mysteries shrouding Fejős's character, these were also lost after their initial screening, and it was only decades later that they resurfaced to be screened in Hungary.<sup>30</sup> Both show scenes filmed in village locations and both deal with social problems that are presented in the framework of peasant life as subjects, and also in their visual presentation. At a round-table discussion held by the literary journal *Nyugat*, Paul Fejős outlined definite ideas, a programme, when he said of *Spring Shower* that it was a "peasant film".<sup>31</sup> What he had in mind was to present peasant culture and its representation in the manner of the *Gyöngyösbokréta* (Pearly Bouquet) movement, which put peasant players on the stage, a movement that was gaining momentum in 1930–32. Fejős certainly planned something like that when he was persuaded in Paris to make a film in Hungary. It is not generally known that he already knew his story as in 1931, before leaving Hollywood, he had bought from Universal the film rights of a script by Ilona Fülöp (1891–1953), a writer who had emigrated to the United States in 1914. Right after his first film, *The Last Performance*, on 9 September 1928, *Universal Weekly* reported that his next film would be *Spring Shower* written by Ilona Fülöp and starring Mary Philbin.<sup>32</sup>



The peasant-folksy milieu was in the air in Hungary for certain modernists and also in the entertainment industry; both in the cinema and the press of the 1930s the "Hungarian style" was all the fashion. The dominant image of the peasantry at that time was a fake and sugary concoction as represented by the sentimentality of operettas and upper-class peasant *Kitsch*. Fejős's two films had a very different approach.

**S**pring Shower was the fourth Hungarian talkie. It was produced by the Hungária Film Studio and financed by the French-Hungarian Osso Company, with significant French technical backing. Fejős wanted to make a film which was different from the "deliberately naïve and deliberately dumbed down American films, and he wanted to make it in Europe, in Hungary". As he told the above mentioned *Nyugat* meeting:

That is why I came from Paris to Budapest, and why I made *Spring Shower*. Not because I was convinced that it is a literary masterpiece, nor did I think that I was making the best film ever, but because I thought that this film had possibilities in America. (...) I made this film for America, in order to start something through which we can get closer to art.<sup>33</sup>

The story is about a maidservant in the provinces in the family way. According to the text introducing the film on screen, it presents a legend "told by old people" all over the Great Plain according to which April showers "are poured down from paradise by dead mothers, to protect the virtue of their daughters against the temptations of spring and love". Mari Szabó, a maidservant employed by petty bourgeois in a village, is seduced by the steward of the local squire, who naturally deserts her afterwards. Learning that the girl is expecting, her mistress sacks her. She goes to the nearby town where she finds work first as a servant and then in a low reputed inn, where she gives birth to her daughter. The other women and the customers treat her well. At Easter she goes home to her village and presents her child in the church. Then she is shown once again in town; there, however, an association for the protection of public morals forcibly takes the child from her mother, the fallen woman, putting her in a home of destitute children. Mari Szabó once more returns to her village. The locals now laugh at her and humiliate her till in her despair she starts drinking in the village inn. She goes to church for the May devotions. While at prayer she dies and goes to Paradise. Fifteen years later she sees from there that a gentleman tries to seduce her daughter, just as she was once seduced. She pours down water from a shiny gold bucket which as a spring shower down below saves her 16-year old daughter.

The film is a problem piece, arguing a thesis in a Hungarian village setting which is actually alien to it. "Fejős is not trying to depict Hungarian society but portrays a petty bourgeois milieu which exists everywhere. There are no



families like this (i.e. like the petty-bourgeois family where Mari serves at the beginning of the story—Z. F.), and there is no such milieu in a Hungarian village."<sup>34</sup> Even if there is some truth in this, the film nonetheless endeavours to create a specifically Hungarian atmosphere in three ways: by using peasant amateur actors, a village environment and Hungarian-style background music.

The filming took place over five weeks in May–June 1932, with some peasant amateur actors, the Pearly Bouquet group, and other villagers of Boldog, a village near Budapest. The public notary in the village chronicle reported of the filming in detail, giving an idea of Fejős's directing and this early "employment" of the village extras.<sup>35</sup>



*Paul Fejős and Annabella at the shooting of Spring Shower, Boldog, 1932.*

*Photograph by Jenő Bruckner (?). House of Culture and Library, Boldog*

The village was first visited by the director and the crew, among them the star of the film, the French actress Annabella, and the other actors. The first shooting took place in Budapest; a 70-strong Boldog group was taken there by bus. The studio filming lasted two days; in the evening the villagers were taken to a cinema. On the second evening five girls and five lads, together with the public notary, took part in a night shot. The participants each received a fee of five pengő per day; a labourer's normal daily wage at that time was 80 fillérs (one pengő is one hundred fillér). The following week shooting on location began at Boldog. The film company's equipment arrived from Budapest on 8 May: two huge electricity generators mounted on cars, as well as lorries, scaffolding, 30–40 reflectors, other machinery, mirrors, and a crew of forty or fifty. The shooting went on in the village streets and in front of the church for a week, with the participation of 350 locals. Two weeks later the crew returned, but this time only 12–15 of them, to complete the missing shots. For a railway scene they hired a train for 600 pengő a day. The public notary understood that the making of the film cost a million and a half pengő. "The actress Annabella's fee was supposedly 1,000 pengő per day." For the villagers the filming meant a significant income, "about 4,000 pengő were





Paul Fejős at the shooting of *Spring Shower, Boldog*, 1932. Photograph by Jenő Bruckner, House of Culture and Library, Boldog

distributed among the players," plus there were the sums paid for the lodgings of the crew. The film's financial backer, Dr Lajos Mannheim, a Hungarian banker in Paris, donated 500 pengős for poor Boldog schoolchildren in honour of Annabella.

According to a certain source,<sup>36</sup> the director organised an early showing, combined with a debate, at Boldog, but that is far from certain. What we know is that the official first night was held in the Radius cinema in Budapest on 3 November 1932. The screening was preceded by an explanatory address by Paul Fejős. Contrary to plans, the villagers could not be present because of an epidemic.

The film has a number of scenes depicting village life with all its characteristic objects. The main sequence of shots, in line with the story, are aerial shots of the village, a village ball, streets and a peasant home, the feeding of pigs and chickens, kitchen and room interiors, characters dressed in folk costumes in various

situations—at the railway station, in the street, in church—the people of the village in a procession about to attend the Easter Mass, church interior and a statue of the Virgin, village inn with a Gypsy band, children dancing a round dance, harvest, vintage, and the May devotions in the village church. It was in these situations and activities that the inhabitants of Boldog played a spectacular role. The most dynamic scene, which also depicted the local costumes to the greatest advantage, was the Easter procession of villagers, with 350 extras. The film also depicts other actual environments; thus an urban inn of ill repute and its customers, and in the early shots a petty bourgeois family in a Great Plain market town.

As a unique experiment, Fejős created the soundtrack by avoiding dialogue, theatrical in the early talkies; thus there is hardly any talking in the film. On the other hand, he put great emphasis on movement, gestures and mimicry. The star, Annabella, says only one brief sentence. This once again reminds one of the dramaturgy and visual solutions of *Lonesome*. Most importantly, music



was lent a special role, composed by László Angyal (1900–?) and a Frenchman, Vincent Scotto. When the film was restored, the Hungarian composer recalled the musical devices employed. The film was recorded in five languages—in other words, five times one after the other. The music was performed by an orchestra of 110 players and there was a mixed choir and a children's choir numbering 160 between them. This was a first in Hungary, but one might say, also “in the history of the European cinema”. As well as these, there appeared the French singer Simone Helly, and the Hungarian actress Erzsi Pártos sang a chanson in the Fortuna coffee-house scene.<sup>37</sup> The film's music combined folk music elements with hymns, an urban chanson with symphonic music, and the musical utilisation of various sound effects also played a dramaturgically important role. At that time the artistic tools of the talkies were nascent, and so were those of film music. László Angyal in *Spring Shower* was “presented with, and made use of, musical opportunities which opened an entirely new chapter in the history of film music,”<sup>38</sup> says one of the contemporary reviews. The Hungarian character of the music was ensured by the use of elements of instrumental folk music and folk song, instead of the “Hungarian-style” urban Gypsy music conventional at the time. The composer managed to avoid this even in the village inn scene.

**N**ot many people have depicted the Hungarian village as beautifully, and at the same time as faithfully, as Paul Fejős”, a critic wrote.<sup>39</sup> The folk elements of the film were seen as more problematic, however, by those discussing it later. According to István Molnár, the realist message of the film is “frequently coloured by folksy ornamentation and sentimental diversions.”<sup>40</sup> He appreciates nevertheless that the film endeavours to be ethnographically sound and that the folk costumes are not invented as in many other popular pieces at that time but derive from an actual village. According to István Nemeskürty, the film displays a “stylisation and the use of symbols that is so naïve that it prompts a smile,” as exemplified not only by the “gilded kitchen in paradise” in the final scene, but also by the “forced folk-costumed church-going”.<sup>41</sup> Siegfried Kracauer had shown much more understanding as regards the similar, by today's standards excessive, romanticism of *Lonesome*. Elsewhere Nemeskürty expresses the view that the director by his individual way of filming—that is, by not letting the actors talk just at the time when the talkies were taking wing—and with “the forced ‘Pearly Bouquet’ folk costumes, isolated himself somewhat from the audience as well”.<sup>42</sup>

Contemporary criticism was right to object to the fact that the audience's attention was diverted to the folklore elements. That is why one may ask whether the story was realistic in a Hungarian peasant environment. To the present-day viewer, some of village scenes appear to be there for their own sake as an advertisement for Hungarian folklore, for the festive, “picturesque





*Local extras of Spring Shower, 1932. Photograph by Jenő Bruckner (?).  
House of Culture and Library, Boldog*

folk costumes". It may be the case, but what Fejős wished to emphasize was the Hungarian character as a contrast to foreign, mainly American, films. This is expressly the visual-aesthetic counter-effect that film theorist Mirjam Hansen terms vernacular modernism.<sup>43</sup> The cinema, she contends, as an attribute of modernism, has developed in local variants against Hollywood dominance all over the world. As Fejős explained in his address at the premiere as well, *Spring Shower* is meant to be different from the "American film". It is an artistic experiment, a local production searching for a new idiom. If it finds new ways, it can "teach" America as well.

Quite apart from this, even if the depiction of folk culture in the film—its folklorism—is not entirely convincing aesthetically, it undoubtedly documents various aspects of that culture. For one thing, there exists no other such early, technically high quality and artistically valuable record of the performances and numbers of the Pearly Bouquet groups as in this film. The film's recording of the contemporary village and of the Boldog folk costumes precedes the first professional descriptions and is valuable as a source. Of course, *Spring Shower* is not an ethnographic film, the camera does not record local events as parts of the process of everyday life. Here folk culture is an element serving the aesthetic ends of a work of art, moreover, it acts as symbolic imagery. The signs of festivity constantly come to the fore. For example, even though it is an ordinary weekday, two girls waiting for a train are wearing the snow-white dresses of the Daughters of Mary of Boldog which are only worn on festive religious occasions.



For the director this culture represents something exotic, an aspect which Paul Fejős also discussed in the *Nyugat* round-table:

I am not saying that *Spring Shower* is art, only, at most, that it has to do with art. I know that there is a lot of kitch in it, but it is impossible to create art films overnight. Because of the exotic elements in the film, America will forgive the fact that there are other things in it as well that are not present in American films.<sup>44</sup>

Just as in *Lonesome*, here too, it is the naïve human desire for happiness that is expressed. The maker of *Spring Shower* regards it as his own, exotic—vernacular—version of film-making, and is confident that in this local vernacular more can be expressed than is possible in the dominant language of the cinema.

**F**ewer details are known regarding the shooting of the other film, *The Judgment of Balaton*, produced by the Phőbus enterprise, with additional private financing. The script was by István Mihály (1892–1944), one of the most popular film writers of the inter-war period. A contemporary critic summed up the story as follows:

The new Hungarian film depicts a Balaton fishing village. There has been hatred as long as anyone can remember between the well-to-do Kovács and Szabó families of fishermen. Nonetheless, Mari Kovács falls in love with Mátyás Szabó. Fatefully. But old Kovács, the father, forces his daughter to marry someone else. Immediately after the wedding, there is gossip about the unhappy young woman, alleging that it is not her husband that she loves. On the night when a sudden storm catches the fishermen out on the lake, the truth comes out. The woman fears not for her husband but for the other man. It is the latter she embraces when he luckily reaches the shore. The faithless woman is now confronted with the dreadful judgment of the people. In the raging storm it is her own father who thrusts her into the surging waters in a boat without oars. Let the lake be the judge: if she is innocent, she will survive. In the roaring night storm, two men in two boats set out to save her: the husband and the other man. And love is victorious.<sup>45</sup>

The picturesque location shots of the film took place in September 1932 around Lake Balaton and Lake Velence, and also at Csillaghegy.<sup>46</sup> The sequence of shots includes, besides the Balaton fishermen and their gear, the wedding scene, with the bride in her headdress and the wedding procession leaving Tihany Abbey, the busy, whirling scenes of the fair and the vintage, as well as a village inn dance originating in another part of the country. There are a fair number of ethnographic objects: fish-baskets, dragnets, painted chests showing tulips, a gingerbread heart as a token of love, and so on. All the elements are genuine, though those taking part in the vintage have empty butts, while a choir sings the Transdanubia folk song, *Hey, fishermen, fishermen (Hej, halászok, halászok)* in the background. Fejős as director clearly



wants to construct the "village framework" in as complex, almost excessive a manner as possible. For this he utilises several characteristic objects of folk culture, especially those preserved as representative of certain traditions, which thereby became symbols of peasant identity. He uses this generalised image of Hungarian folklore to depict the folk character of a single location.

The dance scene in an inn deserves particular attention. According to a news item concerning the shooting of the film, for the studio shots at the Hunnia film studios, "twenty couples came from Nagykálló in original national costume and danced the *Kállai kettős* to various lyrics".<sup>47</sup> Ferenc Farkas, who composed the music for the film, also recalled that "Besides several folk songs, it was in this film that the Couple Dance of Kálló, which later became famous in Zoltán Kodály's arrangement, appeared for the first time. Naturally, its traditional tunes were played in the film by a Gypsy band." The song, however, was sung by the peasant Pearly Bouquet group of Nagykálló, in Eastern Hungary. A good example for the use of music with a deliberate dramaturgical intent is where "the vintage festivities of the two hostile families, held at the same time, are accompanied by two folk songs, sung simultaneously, with at times one and at times the other dominating". The songs were sung by the Budapest University Choir conducted by Viktor Vaszy, who also composed music for the film.<sup>48</sup> For example, the part song rendering by the choir of the folk song, *Oh, how many fish* (*Óh, mely sok hal*) is heard in the scene where the fishermen pull their empty nets into the boats to return to shore, and the fisherman, upset because of the rumours concerning his wife's adultery, angrily starts for home. This episode, shot with a moving camera, is one of the highly effective scenes of the film, while the array of spread-out nets and other fishing gear arranged in the background deserves attention from a documentary aspect as well. The shots of the storm over Lake Balaton are also accompanied by the choir. A sudden storm is depicted with virtuosity in Fejős's *Lonesome* as well to enrich the location shots of Coney Island; here it expresses an even darker tragedy. The musical accompaniment in *The Judgment of Lake Balaton* follows the procedure already employed in the other film: speech is reduced to a minimum and various sound effects, the sound of the storm and of the crowd, assist to enfold the drama. Fejős was the first to employ authentic folk songs and folk song adaptations in a Hungarian film.

It might be true that in the film "occasionally the scenes slip into naïve folklore illustrations", though these are unquestionably "beautiful, richly produced, idyllic, folk genre pictures".<sup>49</sup> Let us stress once again: these folk genre pictures comprise very carefully composed, genuine elements. These peaceful pictures are contrasted with the storm scene, which is the key motive of the film. "The storm scenes in particular are striking and would be a credit to any film director"—a contemporary critic wrote.<sup>50</sup> According to another, however, "the storm scene is artificial and over-long", and even more critically:



It is a pity that that the piece lacks the power to convince. The depiction is too dark throughout: these Hungarians grew out not from the Balaton region but from a literary style: excessive naturalism. The Hungarian-style environment appears more as external decoration, framing an entirely alien, fictitious literary ballad, whose *punctum saliens* is an 'ancient Balaton custom' which never existed around the lake.<sup>51</sup>

The same type of complaint is made, therefore, as in connection with *Spring Shower*: despite the peasant environment and sets, the story that is filmed does not spring from this soil. The depiction of the features of folk culture thus becomes formal and external.

All this could have played a part in the fact that the film, made with great technical skill and carefully directed, did not achieve the hoped for success. It only had a short run, though after its first showing at the beginning of March 1933 the best cinemas in the country showed it within six weeks. According to the composer Ferenc Farkas, who went on to compose music for later films by Fejős, his films were not always appreciated by the audience because "their dramaturgy and visual means of expression were ahead of what the age demanded".<sup>52</sup>

In the two 1932 films by Paul Fejős the "folk scenes" are meaningful, sovereign compositions. Owing to the Boldog, Nagykálló and other village players and material objects, the depictions are full of life. Fejős aims at authenticity, but simultaneously wants to construct his "folk" ideal. In *Spring Shower* he achieves this by choosing a local style, in *The Judgment of Lake Balaton* by combining several styles and regional variations into an integrated whole. It is precisely in this respect that the focus on folklore in the two films results in highly individual means of expression for Fejős. Contemporary objections focussed mainly on the subject matter, but the use of folkloristic elements—and in particular their combined, mass use—also met with much criticism. Yet the two films are challenging works, light years ahead of the Hungarian films of the period advertising "our unique ethnographic features" as constructed by the tourist industry, and piling up "populist-nationalist" clichés.<sup>53</sup> For Fejős, folk culture and folklore represent something that is not some sort of primitive world viewed from above, but rather a chain of dynamic, decorative and ceremonious manifestations, which are reinforced by the lustrous series of pictures, often shot with back-lighting. Fejős avoids artificial folksiness; he aims at authenticity as regards the details of what he depicts. The total picture is, as we have seen, an individual construct composed of selected features, which depicts popular culture as an aesthetically attractive, somewhat romantic world, far from urban, middle class and genteel life. The story, told in this way, at the same time expresses the social sensitivity of the director.

Influenced by the Passion Play, Fejős turned his back on the studio on his return to America, too: he shot the Coney Island scenes of *Lonesome* as a



member of the crowd, using a hand-held camera. *The Big House*, made back in 1930, depicted life inside a gaol and a prison mutiny. Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer commissioned Fejős to make German and French versions of the originally English-language film. Fejős essentially redirected it, having first made a long study of the Chicago prison for the purpose.<sup>54</sup>

To sum up: Paul Fejős's films display both social sensitivity and an avant-garde will to experiment. The expressionist visual technique of *Lonesome*, using multiple expositions and sharp cuts, "a remarkable blend of social consciousness and expressionism",<sup>55</sup> gives us a taste of the latter. The truly experimental among his films was *The Last Moment*. His social sensitivity on the other hand led the film director Fejős first to a society with a living substance, and then the same sensitivity carried him to outlandish parts and contributed to his break with film-making. That was the beginning of Fejős's other life. 🍷

## NOTES

1 ■ On the basis of the 1988 National Film Preservation Act, the United States National Film Preservation Board and the Library of Congress compile an annual list of 25 works, taking the recommendations of the public into consideration. See: <http://www.loc.gov/filmnfr.html>; <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National-Film-Registry>.

2 ■ See: <http://www.loc.gov/today/pr/2010/10-273.html>

3 ■ It is with this quotation that the web compilation of the year 1994, telling the story of the festival, begins: <http://www.telluridefilmfestival.org/photoscroller.html>. For the restoration of the film, see: Joshua Yumibe, "Das Illuminierte Märchen: Zur Farbästhetik von Paul Fejos' *Lonesome*." In: *Paul Fejos, Die Welt macht Film*, trans. Wolfgang Astelbauer, ed. Elisabeth Büttner. Wien: Verlag Filmarchiv Austria, 2004, pp. 62–78.

4 ■ Susan King, "It's a 'Lonesome' Return to Sound". *Los Angeles Times*, 2 September 2007. (online edition)

5 ■ The restoration of sound, a great challenge, was the work of Chase Audio by Deluxe in Burbank. "We wanted to make the sound as good as the day Paul Fejos heard it" says Bob Heiber, vice president of audio at Chase. Susan King, "'Lonesome' to Screen at James Bridges Theater". *Los Angeles Times*, 25 October 210 (online)

6 ■ Siegfried Kracauer, "Lonesome". *Frankfurter Zeitung*, 9 April 1929. Republished *Paul Fejos, Die Welt macht Film*, ed. Elisabeth Büttner, pp. 48–49. Vienna: Verlag Filmarchiv Austria, 2004. Benjamin's view is mentioned by the German writer, Alexander Kluge, in a fine essay "Children of Life" devoted to the film. See Alexander Kluge, *The Devil's Blind Spot: Tales from the New Century*. New York: New Directions Books, 2004. pp. 91–95.

7 ■ See Lewis Jacobs, "Experimental Cinema in America. Part One: 1921–1941" *Hollywood Quarterly*, vol. 3. No. 2. (Winter 1947–1948), pp. 111–124.

8 ■ Johns Dodds, *The Several Lives of Paul Fejos, A Hungarian-American Odyssey*. New York, 1973.

9 ■ The best summary of these: Werner Petermann, "'The Sweetest People Under the Sun' Paul Fejős' Film-Expeditionen nach Madagaskar und Indonesien" In: *Paul Fejos, Die Welt macht Film*, Elisabeth Büttner ed., pp. 178–202. Wien: Verlag Filmarchiv Austria, 2004..

10 ■ Sydel Silverman, "A Social Experiment. Sol Tax, Paul Fejos, and the Origins of *Current Anthropology*" *Current Anthropology*, 50. 2009. No. 6. pp. 949–954., quote: p. 949. For the activities of Lita Bins, (after her second marriage Lita Osmundsen), see: Mary Douglas, "Lita Osmundsen and the Wenner-Gren Foundation: An Appreciation" *Current Anthropology*, 27. 1986. No. 5. pp. 521–525.

11 ■ See: Graham Petrie, "Paul Fejos in America." *Film Quarterly*, 32 (Winter 1978–1979) 2. pp. 28–37; *ibid*: *Hollywood Destinies: European Directors in America, 1922–1931*. Second, revised ed. Detroit, Wayne State University Press, 2002. pp. 176–183; Petér Nau, "Paul Fejos (1897–1963)."



Filmregister, Abenteuer, Anthropologie". *Filmkritik*, 23. 1979. Heft 8; Bruce Frankel, "Double Vision: The Film Career of Paul Fejos". *Natural History*, Vol. 105. 1996. Issue 11. pp. 93–95; Richard Koszarski, "'It's No Use to Have an Unhappy Man': Paul Fejos at Universal". *Film History: An International Journal*, Vol. 17. No. 2/3. 2005. pp. 234–240; Paul Fejos, *Die Welt macht Film*. Elisabeth Büttner, ed., Vienna, Verlag Filmarchiv Austria, 2004; Gyöngyi Balogh, "Budapesti évek" (Budapest Years). *Filmspirál*, X. 2004. 2. pp. 4–43. Zoltán Fejős, "A művészet és a tudományos érdeklődés határán" (On the Borders of Art and Scientific Interest). *Filmspirál*, X. 2004. 2. pp. 44–71. Another important earlier work which cleared up important biographical details as the author was still able to speak to Paul Fejős's sister: Philippe Haudiquet, *Fejos*. Paris: Anthologie du cinéma, 1968.

12 ■ Introducing to You Mr Paul Fejos, Genius. *Film Spectator*, 26 December 1927. quoted by Petrie ibid.. (2002) p. 178. The title of the article is a frequently recurring motive of writings about Paul Fejős.

13 ■ Mordaunt Hall, "A Guy Maupassant of Film. Interesting Career of Paul Fejos, Bacteriologist, Who Has Produced Weird but Brilliant Screen Study" *The New York Times*, 26 February, 1928.

14 ■ "10.000 ezer dollárjába került Fejős Paulnak, hogy el tudott válni pesti feleségétől" (It Cost Paul Fejős \$10,000 to Divorce his Budapest Wife). *Színházi Élet*, 1928. No. 40, pp. 50–51. Balogh ibid. p. 4. The Spanish film historian, C. F. Cuenca, does not know of the diploma either; he was told by the family that after secondary school "he went to university, where he read medicine and chemistry". *Filmkultúra*, VIII. 1967. No. 6. pp. 61–62.

15 ■ Dodds. ibid. p. 10

16 ■ I reconstructed the play on the basis of the press material and the sources in the Dobó István Museum in Eger; for further details and references, see Fejős, ibid. pp. 50–54.

17 ■ The history of the Bavarian Passion Play which provided the model was told in a film, *The Legend of Oberammergau*, also screened in Budapest in 1921. Cf. Balogh, ibid. p. 36.

18 ■ Balogh op.cit. p. 33

19 ■ Kálmán Tóth, "Mikófalva, a magyar Oberammergau" (Mikófalva, the Hungarian Oberammergau). *Érdekes Újság*, X. 1922, 25. pp. 12–14. ( 14.)

20 ■ At the time of the play there were malicious rumours in the village e.g. that Mary was expecting a child.

21 ■ Sándor Tóth, "Passiójáték Mikófalván" (A Passion Play at Mikófalva)". *Új Ember*, 41. 5 December 1985; Tordai Ányos, "A mikófalvi passiójáték mérlege" (The Balance of the Mikófalva Passion Play). *Magyar Kultúra*, X. 1922. pp. 743–746. (p. 745)

22 ■ That is also how contemporaries saw it. Tóth ibid. (1922) p. 13

23 ■ *Mozgófénykép Híradó* No. 16, 9 April 1922. Balogh ibid. p. 36.

24 ■ *Mozihét*, 13 August 1922. (34.) The starring role was to be played by Fejős's then wife, the actress Mara Jankovszky.

25 ■ MTI (National News Agency) 28 February 1923, p. 4. 3rd. edition (MTI News Archives/ 1920–1945. online: archiv 1920–1944. mti.hu) The decision on the film was taken by the No. 240/1922. decree of the Ministry of Interior (12 June 1922., *Belügyi Közlöny*). The film did not survive.

26 ■ *Szocialista Művészetért*, 1969.

27 ■ Balogh, ibid. 43.

28 ■ Andor Varó, "A trypanosomától a Tavaszi záporig" (From the Trypanosoma to Spring Shower). *Színházi Élet*, 1932. no. 14. 22 March. pp. 22–23.

29 ■ *Tabu* was first shown on 31 March, 1931. Its commercial screening began on 1 August. The precise date when Paul Fejős left is not known as yet. The screening of the first French film bearing his name, *L'amour à l'américain*, began on 24 December 1931.

30 ■ Both films were lost after their initial screening. *Spring Shower* was obtained from abroad in 1958; it was then dubbed into Hungarian. Even so, it was shown again only in 1967, and then in 1970. The film was shown abroad under the title, *Marie, légende hongroise*. In Paris, Berlin and Vienna it was a great success. *The Judgment of Balaton* only surfaced at the end of the 1960's. The French version, called *Tempêtes*, was found by Philippe Haudiquet in Paris. (Cf. Haudiquet 1968). The Hungarian public was able to see it in 1985 after it was dubbed into Hungarian. Later a German version also turned up. It is not possible to analyse here the differing emphases of the two versions. See Gyöngyi Balogh–Jenő Király, "A parasztragédia és a folklór-show között" (Between



Peasant Tragedy and Folklore Show). *Filmspirál*, X. 2004, No. 2. pp. 85–106.

31 ■ Paul Fejős and Endre Nagy, "Az amerikai filmről" (On American Films). *Nyugat*, XXV. No. 1932, pp. 583–602. (p. 589)

32 ■ Quoted by Koszarski, *ibid.* (2005) p. 236.

33 ■ Fejős-Nagy, *ibid.*, pp. 588–589, emphasis in the original.

34 ■ István Nemeskürty, *A képpé varázsoltság* (Time Turned by Magic Into an Image) Budapest, 1983. p. 365.

35 ■ The chronicle can be found in the village library. Cf. Zoltán Fejős, *Boldog / képek*. Katalógus. (The Village of Boldog – Images). Catalogue. Budapest: Museum of Ethnography, 2006.

36 ■ István Molnár, "A filmstúdiótól az egyetemi katedráig – Fejős Paul életműve a pécsi filmszemlén" (From the Film Studio to the University Chair – Paul Fejős's Life's Work at the Pécs Film Festival). *Film, Színház, Muzsika*, XI. 1967, No. 42. pp. 10–11. (p. 11.)

37 ■ A. G., "Felújítás – majd negyven év után" (Restoration – After Almost Forty Years). *Ország Világ*, XV. 1971, No. 2. pp. 22–23; *Filmkultúra* 1 May 1932. (no. 5) p. 10.

38 ■ *Filmkultúra*, 1 December 1932 (no. 12) p. 8.

39 ■ *Ujság*, 5 November 1932. The critic also deals with the view expressed by the director that even in a talkie there is no need for much speech. He regards *Spring Shower* as an excellent work but is not confident that the director's style will be successful since "in theory a film hero who speaks is after all more perfect than one who is condemned to be at least partly dumb".

40 ■ István Molnár, "Fejős Paul és a Tavaszi zápor" (Paul Fejős and *Spring Shower*. *Filmkultúra*, I. 1960. 10. pp. 91–129. p. 119.

41 ■ István Nemeskürty, *A meseautó utasai. A magyar filmesztétika története 1930–1948*. (The Passengers of the Car of Dreams. The History of Hungarian Film Aesthetics 1930–1948) " Budapest, 1965. pp. 44.

42 ■ Nemeskürty, *ibid.* (1983) p. 367.

43 ■ Mirjam Hansen, "The Mass Production of the Senses: Classical Cinema as Vernacular Modernism". *Modernism/modernity*, Vol. 6. Number 2. April 1999. pp. 59–77.; *idem*, "Vernacular Modernism: Tracking Cinema on a Global Scale". In: Natasa Durovicova, Kathleen Newman, eds., *World Cinemas, Transnational Perspectives*. New York, London: Routledge, 2010, pp. 287–314.

44 ■ Fejős-Nagy *ibid.* p. 589.

45 ■ *Mozivilág*, 5 March 1933.

46 ■ Gyula Bisztray, "A magyar hangosfilm problémája" (The Problem of the Hungarian Talkie) *Magyar Szemle*, XVII. 1933. 4. pp. 364–372. p. 367.

47 ■ *Filmkultúra* 1 December 1932. p. 12., p. 5. The same news item mentions that at that time the film was still called *Lelkek a viharban* (Souls in the Storm). The discovery and popularisation of the dance, the "kállai kettős" was helped by the fact that it was revived at Nagykálló on 5 April 1924, on the initiative of the Calvinist teacher there. See "A 'kállai kettős' felújítása Nagykállóban" (The Revival of *Kállai kettős* at Nagykálló) *Ethnographia*, XXXIV–XXXV. 1923–24. pp. 117–118.

48 ■ Ferenc Farkas, *Az alkotótársak visszaemlékezése – a zeneszerző* (The Recollections of the Fellow Creators—the Composer). *Filmkultúra*, VIII. June 1967., pp. 56–57., p. 56.

49 ■ Mária Urbán, "Fejős Paul : Ítélt a Balaton" (Paul Fejős, *The Judgment of Balaton*) *Filmkultúra*, XXI. March 1985, pp. 60–63. (p. 61)

50 ■ *Filmújság*, quoted by Nemeskürty, *ibid.* (1965) p. 61.

51 ■ Bisztray, *ibid.* p. 367.

52 ■ Farkas, *ibid.* p. 56. Farkas provided the musical accompaniment for the expedition films, too. The composer composed an orchestral piece, *Gyász és Vigasz* (Mourning and Consolation) to commemorate Paul Fejős's death.

53 ■ See Bisztray *ibid.*: pp. 367–368.

54 ■ Dodds, *ibid.*, p. 46; Molnár, *ibid.* (1960) p. 110.

55 ■ Bernard F. Dick, *City of Dreams: the Making and Remaking of Universal Pictures*. Lexington: The University of Kentucky Press, 1997, p. 74.



Graham Petrie

## A 1919 Hungarian Film of *Oliver Twist*

Several of the almost a hundred films based on the works of Charles Dickens during the Silent Period (1896–1927/8) were made not only in Britain and the United States, but in a variety of European countries. The nations involved include France, Italy, Denmark, Germany, Russia and Hungary—a wider range, in fact, than in the subsequent Sound Era, perhaps because it was easier in the earlier period to insert brief written intertitles to explain plot and characters than to translate and then record complex dialogue or provide lengthy subtitles. As with the majority of silent films, many of these works are now considered “lost” or survive in incomplete prints; yet copies continue to turn up, often in surprising places. The 1919 Hungarian-made film of *Oliver Twist*, directed by Márton Garas, a prolific and successful film-maker of the period, was considered a “lost” film until a print was discovered quite recently in the Serbian Film Archive in Belgrade. It is unfortunately incomplete, lacking two of its six twelve-minute long reels, but a

knowledge of the original book allows a viewer to fill in missing details. Apart from these, the print is in quite good condition and retains the original tinting, mostly in red or blue, common in the period (red being used mostly to indicate scenes of violence or great emotion, and blue for those taking place at night). The Serbian intertitles sometimes alter the names of the characters—Nancy is “Nannie”, for example—, but I will retain the originals in the description that follows.

The film opens with a character identified as “Linford” sitting at a desk and looking very unhappy as he reads a legal document and keeps glancing at a calendar that gives a date of September 27, 1827. Printed extracts from the document establish that it is a will by Linford’s father disinheriting his wife (who had left him) and his son (described as a “crook”) and leaving all his property to “Anica Felmino” [sic] and the child who Linford’s father “hopes will be born to her”, on the “condition that the child in his youth does not break the law or

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commit a deed that will bring shame to his name". Though it is alleged (the document continues) that Anica Flamino has disappeared, this has not been proved; but, if neither she nor her son claims the property before September 27, 1827, the whole property will revert to the elder Linford's widow and her son after all, unless another written document is found contradicting this.

This scene then dissolves into what becomes an extended flashback, taking place in Linford's memory, that fills out the remainder of the film. A well-dressed woman is seen leading a child by the hand—a child whom Linford then imagines being sacrificed and killed. After what may be a missing scene giving Oliver's origins and his introduction to Fagin's gang, we see a group of boys, including Oliver at the age of 10 or 12, fooling around and then picking Mr Brownlow's pocket at a bookstall, while an uncomprehending Oliver looks on and is then arrested as the others flee. Linford, now calling himself Monks, is seen talking to the Artful Dodger as Oliver is taken to court and the Dodger reports to Fagin what has happened, with Monks present. Fagin tells Monks that Oliver was found on the road after escaping from an orphanage. In court the judge refuses to listen to Brownlow's attempts to establish Oliver's innocence, as the boy collapses, and only the intervention of the bookseller saves him. Back in Fagin's den Monks explains that the inheritance will be his unless his "dear kid brother" shows up and that Fagin and his gang will not be safe as long as Oliver is in police custody.

Meanwhile Oliver has been taken to Brownlow's lavishly furnished home, while Fagin and Sikes discuss how to retrieve him and decide to send Nancy to the police station to find out what had

happened to him. Brownlow is seen studying a portrait of "my late friend Edward Linford" and musing on how much Oliver resembles him. The police tell Nancy that her "brother" has been taken to Brownlow's home and give her the address (in Pentonville Road, though the police wear the uniform of Hungarian gendarmes of the time). Oliver tells Brownlow and a young woman who seems to represent Rose Maylie in the film that he was starved and mistreated in the orphanage and so ran away. He had no idea that Fagin and the others were thieves and thought that what they were doing was just a joke, and he begs Brownlow to let him stay on as his servant. Appropriate scenes of Bumble threatening him and Fagin and his gang "playing" at picking pockets, which confirm his account, are shown in flashback. Brownlow welcomes him into his home and says he will educate him, and shows him all the books in his library. This reminds him that he has kept a book from the bookseller by mistake and will get his valet to go and pay for it. But the valet cannot be found and Oliver offers to go and to take the money instead. Nancy and Sikes encounter him in the street and Nancy claims he is her "dear brother", while Sikes resists Oliver's pleas to let him return "the kind old gentleman's belongings." Nancy threatens reprisals on Sikes, however, if he harms Oliver. Meanwhile Brownlow waits in vain for Oliver's return.

**B**ack at Fagin's, he and Sikes fight over possession of Brownlow's money. Nancy intervenes to protect Oliver, who is still begging in vain to be allowed to return the money. On the next day Monks, recognizing "an incredible likeness" in Oliver, tries to find out more



about him and offers a reward for information. Bumble and his wife see the notice and contact Monks. Bumble's wife reminds him that ten years ago a woman was found unconscious in the street and taken to hospital, where she gave birth to a little boy. A flashback shows the wife stealing the woman's locket and some documents. Bumble then goes off to meet Monks in a pub, after which they walk by a riverbank. Bumble shows him the locket and a letter from Oliver's father to his wife, written from America, expressing concern about "the young child in your belly" and saying that if he does not return, she should contact his friend Brownlow in London. Monks drops the locket through a trapdoor into a weir and threatens Bumble with reprisals if he reveals any of this.

Monks returns to Fagin's, where Nancy, pretending to be asleep, overhears them plotting to turn Oliver into a thief and robber (so as to make him ineligible for his inheritance). Sikes returns and she leaves him sleeping while she promises that she will help Oliver. Unfortunately the scene of Nancy's murder, which is the highlight of most dramatizations of the novel, is missing here and the next scene shows Sikes running wildly along the street, though there is a brief flashback as he remembers striking her. Repentant, he "sees" her again and her face haunts him in superimposed images. He continues to flee, accompanied by his dog, but when he sees a reward notice that mentions the dog, he chases it away, though the animal subsequently follows him. He returns to Fagin's, where the children call him a murderer and attack him. Passers-by in the street notice the dog scratching at the door and summon the police. After a scuffle with the Dodger, Sikes grabs a rope and escapes on to the roof, followed

by the dog. He is seen against an overhead shot of an obviously Hungarian city and, startled by an image of Nancy that flashes on his mind, he falls over the edge with the rope round his neck and is seen hanging at the end of it, while the dog lies on the ground.

The scene then returns to the setting of the opening, with Linford/Monks reading a newspaper report of Fagin's trial and sentence of hanging. He stares desperately at a clock that registers 11.45, leaves the room, and is next seen at Brownlow's, where Oliver attempts to comfort him and begs Brownlow to forgive him. Brownlow says that he will not prosecute Monks, but he must leave the country and go to America and never be heard of again.

Oliver and Brownlow visit Fagin in the condemned cell on the night before his execution. He begs them to save him; Brownlow says that it is impossible and advises him to repent and save his soul, while Oliver tries to console him as he trembles with fear. Brownlow asks him where he hid the documents that Monks gave him and Fagin reveals the hiding place and asks Oliver to forgive him. They leave and Fagin is seen writhing in terror in the straw covering the cell floor. The last image is a split-screen showing Fagin on the left and a gallows on the right.

**T**he film condenses and presents the story in a manner at least as competent as most of the contemporary English-language treatments of it, and acting and photography are of reasonable quality, with some close-up shots of Nancy being particularly striking. Though it attempts little more than a visual illustration of the story, it has particular interest and originality in employing a flashback structure and in providing an introductory



backstory explaining the reasons for Monk's pursuit and persecution of Oliver—reasons not provided till a relatively late stage of the novel, and a technique employed elsewhere, to the best of my knowledge, only in Alan Bleasdale's 2005 television version of the book. The plot can be followed without too much difficulty—always a problem with early adaptations that had to rely to a large extent on prior familiarity with the story on the part of the audience—and the few missing scenes would probably have clarified things further. Apart from the murder of Nancy,

the film—in its current state at least—unfortunately lacks the only scene familiar even to those who have never read the novel—Oliver's asking "for more", though it is possible that a fuller account of Oliver's workhouse experience was given in a section of the film now lost. Despite all this, and though it is no masterpiece, the film deserves recognition as a not unworthy contribution to the overall history of putting Dickens' work on the screen and in confirming the international interest in it in the early twentieth century in a surprising variety of European countries.\* 🐼

\* ■ I would like to thank Vlastomir Sudar for translating the Serbian intertitles of this print into English for me.

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Tamás Koltai  
**Myths**

Emmerich Kálmán: *Csárdás Princess* • István Mohácsi: *Egyszer élünk*  
(We Live Only Once) • Péter Esterházy: *Én vagyok a Te* (I Am Thou) •  
Péter Nádas: *Szirenének* (Siren Song)

**T**he origins of the theatre are to be found in myths. Theatrical forms predating the appearance of drama were connected to tribal or religious ceremonies. For ancient Greeks myths were part of everyday life and the obvious subject of tragedies. In medieval times, this was the myth of creation for mystery and miracle plays. Later, as the theatre became increasingly secular, it created new myths, but from time to time it returned to mythic roots—even if some of these make a mockery of myths.

For Hungarian theatre operetta, or rather its Viennese variant, has provided such a myth. Two of the composers of famous Viennese operettas, Franz Lehár and Emeric Kálmán, were Hungarian-born. Their best works are still part of the repertoire. Many have discussed how much the rose-tinted illusion, of the operettas correspond to the Hungarian mind. In everyday life, too, there is a wish to shun reality, to find some sort of escape from mundane worries, to get away from it all.

The mythology of escapist dreams is the world of the operetta. "*Dreams, dreams, sweet dreams, dream images, We*

*dream that one day we shall belong to each other*" runs a duet in the Hungarian version of Emeric Kálmán's *Csárdás Princess*. (The original libretto was in German; the Hungarian version not only poured extra drops of sweet syrup into the verses but even changed the storyline to accord with domestic taste.) The unremittingly popular *Csárdás Princess* has become part and parcel of the national mythology. In the early 1990s, János Mohácsi, a director at the brilliant non-conformist theatre of Kaposvár, treated it in an ironic fashion, critically confronting it with national legends. The performance was broadcast on public service Hungarian Television—as it happened, the author of this article was the editor in charge—and the director's sober approach evoked the wrath of some members of the public who sent angry, even abusive letters. When, more recently, the director of the National Theatre, Róbert Alföldi, asked Mohácsi to direct the piece, the head of the Budapest Operetta Theatre who controls performance rights prevented the production arguing that it was part of the national

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tradition that the *Csárdás Princess* be staged in the conventional way. Since he himself is a theatrical director and as he keeps the *Csárdás Princess* in the repertoire, the reasons for the ban are not difficult to fathom. There are many others besides him who consider that the national mythology present in the *Csárdás Princess* is part of the national theatrical tradition, and the National Theatre has no right to present it according to its own norms. Behind this attitude lies the fear that national myths can become something other than national commercial merchandise: art addressing the present endangers the myth.

Like the *Csárdás Princess*, the more than a hundred-year-old Singspiel, *János vitéz* (*John the Valiant*) by Pongrác Kacsóh, is also an emblematic work. It is based on an epic poem by Sándor Petőfi, the great 19th-century national poet. Recalling the world of folk tales, the story, told in verse and known off by heart by young and old, concerns Johnny Corncob, the poor shepherd boy, who, when chased out of his village, becomes a hussar and leads his men to victory over the Turks who were attacking the kingdom of France. The king offers him his daughter's hand in marriage but the hero, by now renamed John the Valiant, chooses fantastic adventures instead, which take him also to the country of the giants. He becomes homesick, but by then his beloved has died because of her sorrow and her wicked stepmother. The sad hero throws a rose into the Pond of Life; this resurrects her, and from then on they live happily ever after as the king and queen of the country of fairies.

The naïve, watered down operetta version of Petőfi's immortal poetry with its pleasant enough folkish tunes has frequently been performed since its first

performance in 1905. The successful and acclaimed production in the current repertoire of the National Theatre has become the subject of a political attack by the political Right disguised as an aesthetic one. Alföldi, who directed the piece himself, depicted the country of the fairies as a Budapest Underground subway, where "fairies" ply their trade, tempting male customers. The outraged critics could not accept the director's interpretation, which brings the tale close to contemporary reality: they regarded this as debasing the work. The performance gave an excuse to the extreme right party, Jobbik, to demand Alföldi's dismissal—so far without success.

Since János Mohácsi was not permitted to direct *Csárdás Princess*, Alföldi chose a story linked to *John the Valiant*, for him, a real event. In 1946, after the war, the locals performed the operetta *John the Valiant* in a village. Russian soldiers from the barracks in the village molested girls performing in the play. The local boys who came to their defence were subsequently transported to Siberia. Several of them never returned from the Gulag. Those who did return, reported that they had also performed the play in the prison camp. The play titled *We Live Only Once* is a joint production by the Mohácsi brothers (István, the writer and János, the director). Tale and reality are ironically juxtaposed: Johnny Corncob, both in Petőfi's poem and in the Singspiel version leaves to conquer the world and then returns to Fairy Land Hungary. By contrast, the players on stage in the Hungarian village did not leave of their own free will, and some never returned.

The first act is set in the Hungarian village of 1946, the second act's play within the play in the court of the French king as performed in the Gulag seven years



after Stalin's death, and the third act once again back in the village at home, where in the seventies, on a 7th of November, the anniversary of the Great October Socialist Revolution is celebrated in Fairy Land-Hungary. (The number seven of the fables is a recurring motive.) Some of the "fairy-tale heroes" come home from a fairy-tale Gulag, a fairy-tale River Don, a fairy-tale Auschwitz, some do not. The village Johnny, thought to have disappeared in the war, returns blind from the River Don—but at the Siberian Gulag the dark isolation cell produces a grotesque miracle: it returns the boy's sight. The hero's beloved, who has become a famous singer in Fairy Land-Hungary at the side of the periodically changing person of the Soviet-Hungarian chief Bolshevik, returns to life, but she emerges from the village water reservoir when the life-saving rose falls into it—a far cry from Fairy Land's Pond of Life.

This is an ironic and tragic tale, this side of the fairy-tale Glass Mountain and beyond Lake Baykal.

According to a foolish legend the twenty-six-year-old Petőfi did not die on the battle field in 1849, in Hungary's war of independence, but was taken away by the victorious Russian army. "Uncle Sándor" lived to a great age in Siberia, even got married, and told many tales to the locals. About twenty years ago an eccentric Hungarian millionaire financed an expedition to locate the earthly remains of the poet and thought to find it in Barguzin, near Lake Baykal. (A skeleton was subjected to a scientific examination, and the quest was only abandoned when it became clear that it was that of a woman.) In the Mohácsi version the Gulag commander recites Petőfi's poem

from memory and argues that the operetta version left out the best parts of the fairy tale—the episodes with the giants, the nest of robbers and the storm in the *puszta*. He gets furious on hearing that in Hungary the classics are frequently rewritten, and are even turned into musical comedy. This can only happen if "instead of a theatre contemporary and modern in style, the Party wants to see a theatre of hope and illusion. A smiling yes in place of the naturalist-nihilist 'no' forced on Hungary." Here Mohácsi quotes almost verbatim the argument of a recently appointed theatre director, who proposed just this, a theatre of illusions.

Through the flimsy veil of a musical comedy the Mohácsi brothers make contemporary theatre. The production shows various layers of past and present by an adaptation of a classic example of the operetta myths presented against the backdrop of a national tragedy of genocides based on different—fascist and communist—ideologies. This is an important performance at the National Theatre, whose responsibility and duty should be to confront our national myths and counter-myths. The Mohácsi brothers take up this challenge, combining absurd drama, nonsense dialogue, visual and musical montage and grotesque, poetic surrealism with exceptional awareness and sure theatrical instinct.

**T**he National Theatre aimed at nothing less than a theatrical examination of the topical issues connected with the myth of creation when it asked ten Hungarian playwrights to write plays on the Ten Commandments. Eight plays have been completed; one was performed earlier.\*

\* ■ I gave an account of Pál Závada's *Magyar ünnep* (Hungarian Celebration) in *The Hungarian Quarterly* No. 201 (Spring 2011), pp. 151–155.



Now the second play, by Péter Esterházy, is performed on the studio stage. The internationally acclaimed postmodernist writer, whose works have also been translated into English, is known primarily for his novels, but makes occasional excursions to the stage as well. He paraphrased the first commandment, "I am the Lord, thy God" into *Én vagyok a Te* (I am Thou). It is difficult to determine its genre: novel, essay or drama, but perhaps it does not matter. Esterházy uses the same "dramaturgy" in all genres: his texts made heavier (or lighter) by a plethora of reflections use similar stylistic devices, whether he writes journalistic commentaries, major novels, or a train of ideas for reading or performance. When he read his *Harmonia Caelestis* in instalments on radio, it became a monodrama. His stage dialogues are not acts of self-expression by different characters: it is he who speaks through all of them. He generally characterizes his writings, or rather their intellectual profile, by two ideas: both appear at the appropriate place in *I am thou*. One of these states that what in the work seems to be a "digression" or "a sticking point," is not a digression at all, but the work itself. In the second statement he characterizes himself by saying that "his life consists of sentences". In the conventional sense I am thou is not a play, since it has no plot, no traditional situations, no characters with distinct identities and fates, no tensions arising from conflicts and events, and so on: instead there are interlinking texts and ideas, a flow of free associations, a cavalcade of devices.

The flow of speech is nothing but a loose chat about rule, divine and human, creation and artistic creation, and of the organising principle in the world and in

the theatre. There is direct and reported speech about the rules we should observe. One of the actors frequently says: "He said", as if passing on the instructions of the main moving force that could be the director, or could be God. The relationship between the Father and the Son is just as ambiguous: it is not necessarily a relationship in the biblical sense, but rather the everyday variant, a conflict between the generations. The text includes a vast number of direct or hidden quotations: history and politics, aesthetics and philosophy. Mention is made of historical events, of the "national culture", the problem of "why the Hungarian theatre is cowardly" (on which topic, it so happens, the author of this article has published a book), of the divine and royal reign, of the country and the homeland. More profane subjects are also touched upon of course, such as why men pull in their stomachs in the presence of women (in the spring they pull them in, in the autumn they let them out, the author says), or how women cope with the problem of certain parts of their body starting to sag. There are straight quotes from the works of writers, poets and pop groups. There are also puns such as "Immanuel Tank" (instead of Immanuel Kant). Others are untranslatable, only Hungarian audiences understand them (if they do). In the meanwhile Esterházy notes, tongue in cheek, that "puns are not appropriate for the stage" and that "in a proper theatrical text there aren't all these reflections", and what sort of play is one where the characters have no fate and all there is, is stories. The whole work is full of paradoxical irony, stretched between ideological pathos and malicious mockery. A struggle on the one hand with the problems of the nation, and on the other with the need to fetch a child



from the kindergarten. "I am torn between the kindergarten and the Hungarian nation", is how one of the actors—one might say, "one of the Esterházy", sums things up.

What we get is a special treat, clever, intriguing and highly entertaining amidst the increasingly disillusioning manufacture of mass products, a blooming island in the sea of done-to-death classics, social and private panels, commercialised, and faith, hope and charity nonsense. The production is first class. The director Péter Gothár understands the writer well: they are on the same wavelength. The actors sparkle well served by the witty sets: at the end the stage tilts, snow falls, but it is words that make visible the virtuosity of the ideas that possess the real visual strength.

**A**nother outstanding figure in contemporary Hungarian literature, Péter Nádas, adapted the classic Greek myth, the *Odyssey*. *Siren Song* was originally commissioned by Essen, one of the 2010 cultural capitals of Europe, and that is where it was first performed, in a German translation. It is only now that it was staged in Hungarian by the Kamra, the studio stage of the Katona József Theatre. The organizers at Essen commissioned plays from six European writers, on a common theme: European *Odyssey*. All six treatments of the myth were performed, in collaboration with neighbouring towns and within the framework of a festival. For 259 euros members of the public could buy a season ticket for all the productions. Accommodation was provided by volunteer local inhabitants, who not only put up the visitors but also welcomed them into their families for the duration of the festival. Thus the audience was absorbed into local life. They chatted

to the locals, and on buses taking them from town to town, to each other as well. It was all like the theatrical festivals (*dionysia*) lasting several days in ancient times. *Siren Song* was performed by the theatre in Mühlheim. Many reviews were published; one of them mentioned "strictly celebrated horrors". According to the critic of the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, on the other hand, the optimal solution would be "to read the play aloud and slowly".

It is certainly true that this is a shocking, complex work that is not easy to digest. Whatever we call it—a play, or free verse: in the age of post-dramatic theatre this has no significance—when one reads it, one marvels at the powerful linguistic current of the text, its intellectual richness, and the emotional charge of its ideas. Sombre pictures are evoked and embraced by one defining image: the ruins of a Gothic church half-buried in sand, with dog-sized carrion flies pouring through the torn window-eyes: a metaphor of death and destruction. A long line of further visions evokes mythological, historical and contemporary pictures, or rather visions: wars, massacres, violence, ecological catastrophes, and so on. A world that has gone mad, "the red thread of fate". All this from a post-history or post-death state of the world, made visible from "Hades", that is, from the void. A vision in which the "historical scenes" do not follow each other in chronological order, as in *The Tragedy of Man*: (*Siren Song* reminded many of Imre Madách's Hungarian classic), but as a cavalcade, merging at the crossroads. Antic Greek mythology and various modern versions of hell, revolution and anarchy, all put in an appearance, Robespierre and Bakunin, the first world war battlefield on the



Isonzo, and Voronezh, Auschwitz, the Hungarian army that perished at the River Don, and other episodes from the Second World War. All these merge into a single "post-apocalyptic dirge", as one of the critics put it. The devastatingly ironic, occasionally macabre effect can be interpreted as cosmic despair, lack of illusions, or even indifference. (Nádas commits the alienating "infamy" of building into the text instructions to the director, the dramaturge and the lighting engineers.) The text is clearly open to many interpretations. The director of the Mühlheim performance presented it as selected acts of barbarism adapted to the world of amusement arcades.

A director searching for the right interpretation of *Siren Song* undoubtedly has a hard task. "A dirge", says the best analyst of the play, László F. Földényi. "It is whereby existence mourns itself: singing the dirge of decay present in everything. The audience is confronted with a universe which gapes like a huge open wound, and it is from this opening that the actors emerge." The Mothers, Penelope, Circe and Calypso. Each of the last three bore a son to Odysseus: Telemakhos, Telegonos and Hyakynthos. Three good-for-nothings, who dream of themselves as flies stuck on fly paper. The three boys fall in love with the three sirens, Thelxiope, Aglaope and Peisinope, or rather, conquer them by force. Later they rape each other's women, while not being averse to their own sex either. In the end the girls prepare to cut each other to pieces, while the boys butcher their own father, Odysseus, who naively

thought that at last he had found his homeland. Death, or, to be more precise, irresistible, eternal destruction, rules over everything in this play. The author in the play tells the director: "The Last Judgment is not metaphorical but actual." In other words, the issue is not the inevitability of death but rather, Földényi says, the fact that "...destruction, decay and disintegration are ineradicably present in everything, just like a genetic code".

The ideal performance of such a dirge would almost certainly be unbearably depressing. András Dömötör at any rate got round the problem. His direction is witty and professionally perfect. Charon's ferry, or rather ferries, are three inflatable rubber dinghies, corresponding to the trinity of players, and this works just as well as the large counterpoised backside statues signalling the entrance to Hades, the occasional projection, or the buffet pavilion, behind whose lifting shutters changing revue girls frequently perform ironically manipulated retro hit tunes. The production has the undeniable virtues of precision, faultless rhythm, the good use of space, and of moving elegantly to and fro between myth, ordinariness, revue and cabaret. The only question is whether this frivolous and cute performance is Nádas's *Siren Song*. Obviously, there might be some spectators for whom it is. A young, talented director, a child of his generation, experiences the catastrophe of existence in this relaxed and playful, one might say, demythologized fashion. We must take it seriously, even if it is a parody. Particularly in that case, since then it is a generational signal. 22

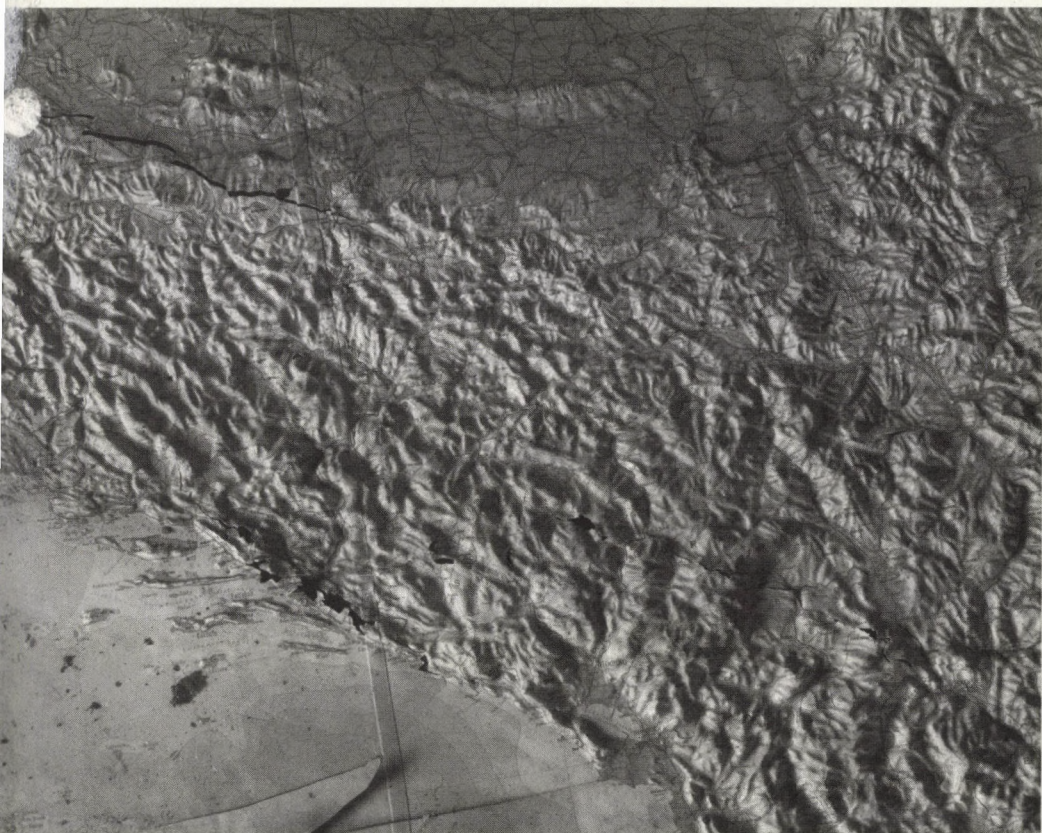


# HUNGARIAN REVIEW

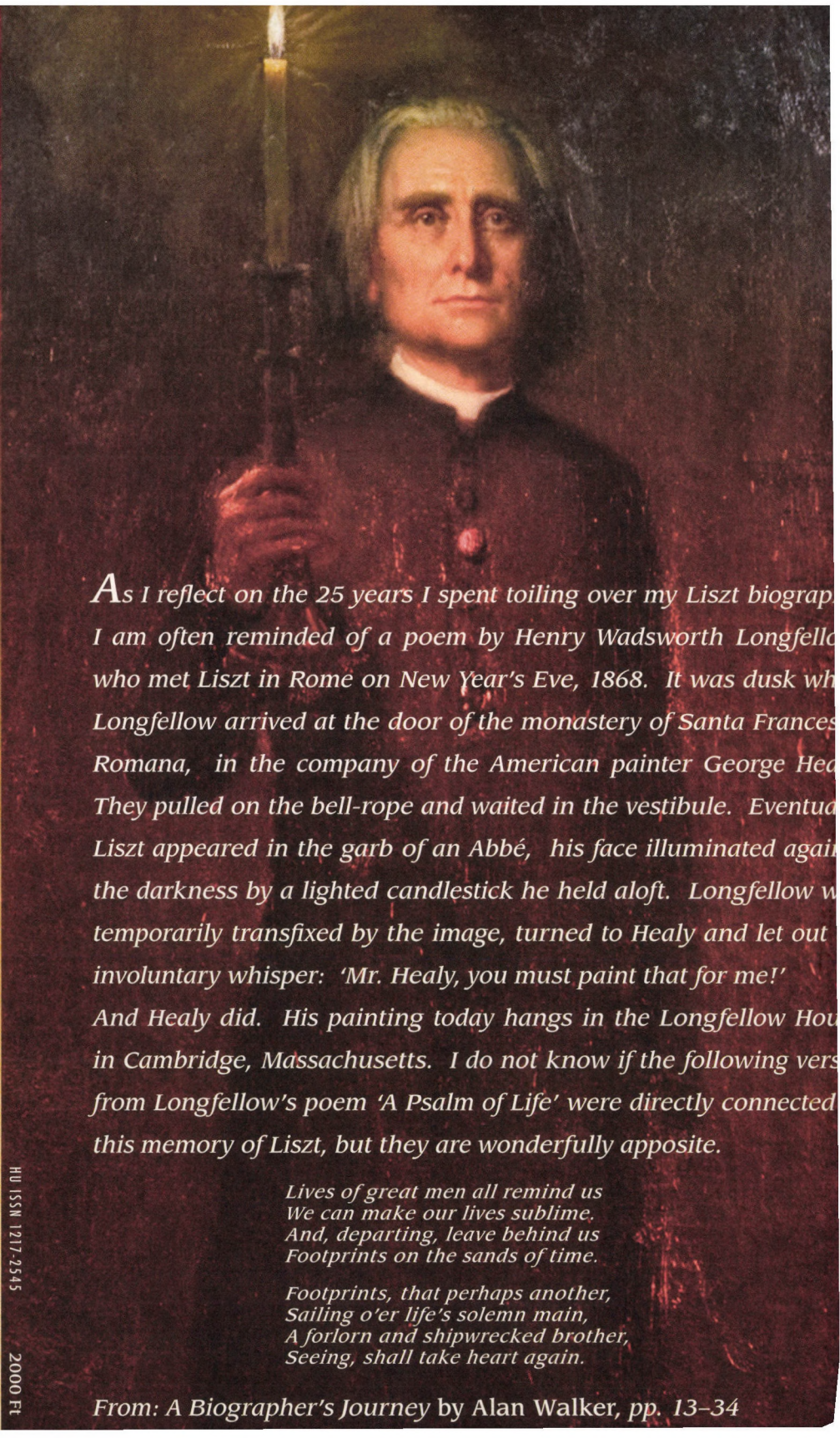
*A bi-monthly journal from Central Europe*

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*As I reflect on the 25 years I spent toiling over my Liszt biography I am often reminded of a poem by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow who met Liszt in Rome on New Year's Eve, 1868. It was dusk when Longfellow arrived at the door of the monastery of Santa Francesca Romana, in the company of the American painter George Healy. They pulled on the bell-rope and waited in the vestibule. Eventually Liszt appeared in the garb of an Abbé, his face illuminated against the darkness by a lighted candlestick he held aloft. Longfellow was temporarily transfixed by the image, turned to Healy and let out an involuntary whisper: 'Mr. Healy, you must paint that for me!' And Healy did. His painting today hangs in the Longfellow House in Cambridge, Massachusetts. I do not know if the following verses from Longfellow's poem 'A Psalm of Life' were directly connected to this memory of Liszt, but they are wonderfully apposite.*

*Lives of great men all remind us  
We can make our lives sublime.  
And, departing, leave behind us  
Footprints on the sands of time.*

*Footprints, that perhaps another,  
Sailing o'er life's solemn main,  
A forlorn and shipwrecked brother,  
Seeing, shall take heart again.*

*From: A Biographer's Journey by Alan Walker, pp. 13–34*