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NHQ
Liber et Solutus

Change at the helm is always an event of some significance in the life of a periodical, bound to bring about a correction of course and various editorial innovations. This time the change—and not quite accidentally—coincides not only with the transformation this country and the whole region is currently undergoing, but also with a change of publishers and ownership of *NHQ*. At the time of writing, in mid-January, our autumn and winter issues of 1989 (*NHQ* 115 and 116) are yet to appear because of serious liquidity problems resulting from mismanagement by our previous publishers. Unprecedented and embarrassing as this is, it should, nevertheless be seen also as a sign of renewal. The huge, wasteful, ineffective propaganda-machine of the former system is grinding to a halt and, as the new, and by now constitutional, freedom of the press is being allowed to establish its own structures, many subsidised newspapers, journals, magazines, and some of their publishers are folding, while scores of new, independent ones are appearing, some of them remarkably good and successful. The state, the former almighty proprietor of all publishing is, even under the present lame duck government, gradually withdrawing from the field, cutting its subsidies everywhere. In the future support will only go to the serious cultural press, and even that on an annual application basis. Competition will rule supreme, with all the consequences this implies.

As from January 1 1990, starting with this issue, *NHQ* appears under the imprint of the Publishing Division of MTI, the Hungarian News Agency. This transition, together with the death a year ago of Iván Boldizsár, the founding editor, is the most profound change in the thirty year history of this journal. *NHQ* had to be literally rescued from dangerous manipulation—no doubt leading to gradual extinction—by its sinking former publisher-owners who, in their death throes, used still considerable influence to hang on to our paper. A decision at the highest government level had to be petitioned—and was immediately granted—to sanction the transition, itself an indication of the chaotic state of affairs in this country, where a still centralised administration is hastily rubber-stamping its own way out of existence.

MTI, a financially secure, large government-owned organisation that certainly does have a future, whatever the results of the oncoming free elections in March will be, provides premises and technical background, as well as production and distribution support for the magazine. The present issue of *NHQ* was compiled, edited and prepared for the press in a private flat, as the former publishers had evicted us from our premises of twenty-five years and we, in turn, refused to move into the primitive shack offered to us on the urban fringe. Under the new arrangement, *NHQ* will enjoy total editorial independence, and will have to earn its keep.

We intend to realize the latter by simply exploiting the former. We hope that by producing a truly independent, high quality, liberal journal of ideas, reflecting the intellectual ferment in not just this transforming society but, to a degree, also in the entire region, as well as providing a wealth of reliable, in-depth information on relevant topics, past and present, *NHQ* will stay alive and flourish. Providing some kind of outlet for the best in Hungarian writing and culture remains, of course, a strong commitment.

I was, during my long tenure as Literary Editor of *NHQ*, lucky to have been directly associated with the part of the magazine on which its present reputation rests, with no say whatsoever in the editorial decisions concerning the heavy political front of the paper that was meant to shellack the image of the Kádár regime. I am proud and happy to be able to realize my old dreams. It is difficult to grasp for most of us that, a mere two years ago, such dreams were still fantasy.

Miklós Vajda

Disintegrating I

GÉZA SZŐCS

The man who started it all

László Tőkés was born in Kolozsvár (Cluj—Klausenburg) on April 1st 1952 as the seventh of eight children. His forefathers for nine generations had been Calvinist ministers of religion. His father, István Tőkés, is a theologian with an international reputation, deputy to the bishop, and professor at the Calvinist Theological Academy in Kolozsvár from which László Tőkés, having left school in 1971, graduated in 1975. He was appointed Assistant to the Minister in Brassó (Brasov—Kronstadt) where, in next to no time, he brought the congregation to a new lease of life.

In 1979 the congregation at Dés (Dej), a town 60 km north east of Kolozsvár, elected him Assistant Minister with tenure and Bishop Gyula Nagy of Kolozsvár appointed him to the post. The effect on the stagnant intellectual life of the town was remarkable; and not only on church activity, which energetic and tenacious work placed on new foundations, for he also exploited options which were present, articulated requirements which created a genuine community of minds in Dés, and allowed the town to take its proper part in the intellectual life of Transylvania.

This in itself sufficed to bring him to the notice of the Securitate, the political police, prompting them to action designed to intimidate and isolate Tőkés. What, however, secured his membership of the inner circle of known opponents of the Ceausescu regime was the fact that he contributed to *Ellenpontok*, the first *samizdat* underground political paper to appear in Rumania. It was published in Hungarian and lasted from December 1981 to November 1982. In 1982 the editors were arrested, subjected to torture, and held for various lengths of time. Tough police measures were also taken against the contributors, including László Tőkés.

From that time on Tőkés was subjected to open and growing aggressiveness. At the same time his father was gradually ousted from church affairs, finally being—illegally—compulsorily retired on November 1st 1983.

1983 saw the start of the Wall Calendar Case. Early in the year László Tőkés addressed a round robin to his fellow ministers arguing that Calvinist congregations were in need of a great many more calendars than were supplied to them. In August 1983 Tőkés asked the church authorities responsible to arrange for the printing of as many calendars as were needed. The episcopate, however, instead of attending to the satisfaction of genuine religious needs, initiated a punitive campaign against László Tőkés. They accused him of sowing discord, in other words of incitement and rebellion.

The Dés congregation and its elders expressed their solidarity at a number of meetings. A petition in defence of their minister, and as an expression of their insisting on his continuing in his office, was signed by two thousand five hundred, and submitted to the bishop. These people were later regularly hassled by the police.

Géza Szőcs, *a poet, born in Transylvania, now lives in the West and is a correspondent of Radio Free Europe in Budapest. His most recent collection of poems was reviewed by Mátyás Domokos in* NHQ *114.*

On April 26th 1984 the Synodal Committee of Kolozsvár voted against the Bishop's motion condemning László Tőkés, but Bishop Gyula Nagy, in the manner of a feudal overlord, ignored the Synodal Committee's decision and, a fortnight later, transferred László Tőkés to Uzdiszentpéter, a small remote village with a hundred and fifty inhabitants and reckoned to be a sort of place of exile.

László Tőkés did not accept the flagrantly unjust order to move, but no notice whatever was taken of his appeal against the decision. It seemed then that he might never ascend a pulpit again. The police fined him to try and get him to move from Dés where he no longer had a job, nor—since the Bishop had him evicted—a home. He went into hiding, different friends put him up at night. Bishop Gyula Nagy of Kolozsvár, in letters to the West, mentioned him as one who was no longer a minister of religion, though he was not de-frocked, presumably because they did not want to risk the hostility that would follow such a crying injustice.

All the same László Tőkés's name was often mentioned in the West. He had been invited by universities but could not go, not being granted a passport. In the spring of 1985 the United Church of Canada and the Faculty of Theology of McGill University in Montreal extended an invitation, but once again his application to travel abroad was refused. His case started to become an embarrassment, especially in the United States, a country of key importance for Rumania. On June 12th 1984 János Butosi, a Calvinist Bishop in the United States, appeared before the Senate Foreign Affairs Committee.

Mindful of the international contacts of the Calvinist Church and of the threatening public scandal, as well as of the need to save Bishop Nagy's face, it was decided in the spring of 1986 to offer László Tőkés a chaplaincy, that is a minor office indeed, in another jurisdiction.

Bishop László Papp of Nagyvárad (Oradea—Grosswardein) entrusted László Tőkés with the care of the moribund congregation at Temesvár (Timisoara).

Within a short period of time the Brassó and Dés miracles were repeated there. Poorly attended services were a thing of the past, the Rev. Tőkés addressed full churches, and, as in Dés, an amateur dramatic society directed by him became the nucleus of autonomous cultural activity.

Knowing this, it will surprise no-one that the Securitate, employing the familiar energy and methods, should do its best to create a vacuum around László Tőkés by putting pressure on his friends, the Dramatic Society, and the congregation. Their efforts met with failure, László Tőkés's popularity grew, and he became even more active, finally moving beyond the confines of the church. Starting with July 1989, the Rev. Tőkés openly engaged in politics, being no longer concerned with merely making known, and protesting against, abuses of authority related to the church, but drawing the attention of the world to the war waged by the Ceausescu regime against the Hungarians of Transylvania. A video-interview broadcast by Hungarian Television—the text

From Bishop Nagy's letter

The regrettable and pitiable case of László Tőkés, assistant pastor is true in the sense that I had to transfer him from Brassó to Dés (in accordance with §1/67 "the bishop appoints the assistant pastors"; this is a non-appealable right of the bishop!) By his attitude at Dés, he stirred up the peace of the congregation which has almost 5000 members. (On account of him, the pastor-dean—unable to take the burden on László Tőkés' instigations—left for another, smaller village church.) The aforesaid assistant pastor created undesirable atmosphere also in the territory of wide-spread diaspora classis by his agitation against his highest superiors. For these, he was brought into disciplinary procedure, and the Judiciary Court sentenced him for "written warning".

For the interest of peace in the congregation as well as in the classis, but also for the interest of saving László Tőkés from his error I, the undersigned used my legal right and transferred him to a rural congregation. But aforesaid (Tőkés), despite of my previous responsible verbal and written warning, did not take possession of his new place of ministry. Consequently, according to now existing laws, he excluded himself by this action from the pastoral ministry. (The Bishop's own English.)

follows this article—also meant a break with Hungarian practice. For many long years those who fought for the rights of Hungarians in Transylvania in vain looked for support to the Hungarian media. 1989 at last produced a change. Whatever happened to László Tőkés became constant headline news in Hungary. This, as a new element in the situation, troubled the Rumanian authorities, both local and central. For a long time the latter had hesitated concerning open and irretrievable confrontation with Hungary. At that time Tőkés was made to feel the weight of heavy pressure, but was not subjected to brutal treatment yet.

Finally, however, chosing to ignore that Tőkés had become a national cause in Hungary, the Rumanian authorities decided that Tőkés would have to be removed from the overexposed city of Temesvár. Making use of the fact that the Calvinists of Temesvár came under the jurisdiction of Bishop László Papp of Nagyvárad, they wished to exile the Rev. Tőkés to Szilágymenyő, a village in the hills north east of Nagyvárad. His congregation fully supported Tőkés, and even the death in October 1989—which may well have been murder—of Ernő Újvárossy, one of the most respected elders of the Church at Temesvár, could not break their spirit. On October 14th a meeting of the elders, convened at short notice, manipulated, and subjected to threats, removed the Rev. László Tőkés from his office. Bishop László Papp was aided and abetted in this dirty work by the Revs. Sándor Halász and József Kovács, as well as the Rev. Botond Makai, who was designated to be Tőkés's successor.

László Tőkés did not accept the dismissal as lawful, and decided to stay put until he was removed by force. On October 20th the City Court of Temesvár issued an eviction order against Tőkés. In Budapest there were demonstrations in support of Tőkés, the World Calvinist Federation also protested, but the Rumanian authorities would not give way. On November 2nd four masked terrorists attacked the Tőkés home, vandalising the furnishings and wounding Tőkés with a knife.

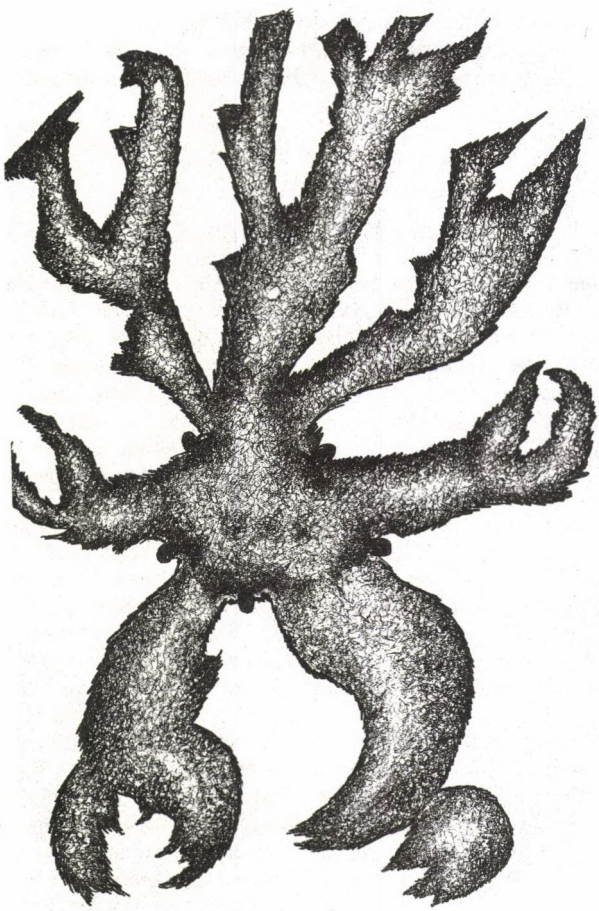
From the Testimony

of the Rt. Rev. Dr John Butosi before the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations on June 12, 1984 on the protection and promotion of religious rights in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union focusing on the religious rights situation of the Hungarian minority in Rumania and Hungarian believers in Hungary.

(...) A recent illustration of this policy of total interference in ecclesiastical matters is the case of the Rev. Laszlo Tokes. This 32 year old Reformed minister whose father, Dr. Istvan Tokes was illegally forced to retire as theological professor and general secretary of the Cluj-Kolozsvar bishopric as of November 1, 1983, serves in Des, Transylvania. As a dynamic youth leader in church and society, he conducted a survey among the ministers in his presbytery on the situation of the distribution of hymn books and wall calendars. He sent the complete report of the results to the respective church authorities with the intent of accurately informing them on the actual situation. As an "acknowledgment" of his work, the Bishop initiated disciplinary action against him. Evidently because he had to discipline this young minister who dared to associate himself with an underground publication, *Ellenpontok* (Counterpoints) which, in October of 1982, published a memorandum proposing a course of action for the participants of the Madrid Conference reviewing compliance with the Helsinki Final Act. The charges were dismissed by the respective board of the presbytery, nevertheless the Bishop continues to enforce disciplinary actions by removing the Rev. Laszlo Tokes from Des to some remote village where he can literally "disappear". On April 16, 1984, I wrote a letter to the Bishop inquiring about the case. I have not received a reply, perhaps because I should have inquired at the Department of Cults...

The over-reaction of the Bishop to the Rev. L. Tokes' innocent survey can be understood from another aspect, too. He touched a very sensitive area of church life in Transylvania: it is impossible to buy a Reformed hymnbook in Cluj as it has been out of print for years! Freedom of publication of theological books, periodicals, and other religious material is extremely restricted, and only selected persons can receive religious books or magazines from abroad. The Rumanian State is particularly fearful of Hungarian Bibles!

On November 8th the Rumanian Ambassador was summoned to call at the Hungarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The European Parliament also expressed its support, and the Hungarian National Assembly passed a resolution nominating László Tőkés—jointly with Doina Cornea, the Rumanian human rights campaigner—for the Nobel Peace Prize. Meanwhile, on November 28th, the Temesvár court decided that Tőkés must leave town within six days. Base methods were used, not only against Tőkés, but also against his family. Menacing Securitate men guarded the house, but Tőkés did not give way to pressure and the police did not know what to do: they had not yet received orders allowing them to use brute force. On December 6th Mátyás Szűrös, the interim President of the Hungarian Republic, sent a message concerning Tőkés to President Ceausescu, but Ceausescu would not be moved. On Friday, December 15th, the news spread like wildfire that they wanted to drag off Tőkés. First fifty, then two hundred people formed a chain around his house by noon the same day, maintaining a constant vigil. It nevertheless proved possible to kidnap Tőkés at dawn on the seventeenth. But it was too late to curb the crowds in Temesvár. The revolution was victorious, first in Temesvár, then in Bucharest and the whole country. On December 22nd the Ceausescu dictatorship came to an end for ever.



Evolving

Tumbling the wall of silence

The Rev. László Tőkés speaks

You ask why I am ready to speak. There is a certain absurdity in it, not only reason urges, I feel a prompting inside me that will not be resisted, to speak out what I have so often gulped down, not for personal satisfaction but in others' stead, and their interest as well. Why just address the wall of silence, why become one of its bricks? This wall is much firmer, much more impermeable than say, the Berlin Wall, and the way I feel some of us must make a start at demolishing it. This step only continues what I have done these six years past, in secret or openly, conspicuously or taking cover. As a minister of religion I owe a certain responsibility to the people amongst whose spiritual leaders I happen to be one, and this responsibility is multiplied by the awareness that the bulk of my fellows in the ministry have stayed silent.

I happen to be a member of the ministry of a church, the Calvinist Church of Rumania, whose clergy—and bishops in the first place—have closed ranks backing a policy of which the hair-raising plan to raze villages is merely a part. When in September 1988 some of us wrote to the bishops and asked them to say something about the village question, all of us who had lent our support to the raising of the question were summoned by the bishop. An inspector of the State Religious Affairs Office was amongst those present. And there, believe it or not, Bishop László Papp eloquently defended the Village Systematisation Plan, even saying that it would be to our considerable advantage if certain congregations ceased, and the people were resettled. There was no need to grieve because churches were being demolished. Bricks and mortar were not of the essence but what went on inside. He literally said to the moderator who was present: "Even if the Calvinist Church at Arad were demolished, the people would have somewhere to say their prayers, they would go out to the chapels on the urban fringe. So even that would not be a loss we would have to lament."

Whenever I preach I always try to establish a link between the present and Holy Writ and this goes particularly for the specially difficult situation which now prevails here. I read the Palm Sunday Epistle from Philippians in such a way that it should refer to present conditions, at least implicitly. When speaking of the entry into Jerusalem of Our Lord Jesus, as a counterpoint, I mentioned in my sermon, that the expectations, and regard, with which kings are met by the world, is entirely different. Holy Writ and history abound with examples of the manner in which power turns the heads of kings and rulers. I mentioned Nebuchadnezzar in the Old Testament, Hitler in our own times, and Napoleon, a little earlier, as men who had worked their way up from the depths. In cases like that, power is even more dangerous, even more likely to turn one's head.

At that meeting of ministers of religion early in September 1988, I had proposed that prayers be said for our villages in every congregation, precisely in view of the razing of the villages.

Videorecorded at the manse in Temesvár and broadcast by Hungarian Television, as part of its "Panorama" programme, on Monday night, July 24th 1989. The text is edited and slightly abbreviated.

What was even more important was that my colleague János Molnár, who unfortunately is already beyond the frontier, in Hungary, suggested in writing that the church authorities should not simply watch with arms folded what was being done in connection with rural systematisation, that, instead, they should get in touch with the responsible state authorities, but also with the other churches, the Roman Catholics, the Orthodox, and the rest, coordinating their points of view, making it quite clear what the razing of the villages means to the churches, how many congregations were affected, and what the church could count on.

Silence is complete in this respect, as if we were not interested in what would happen to hundreds of our congregations and churches, most of which are several centuries old, what would happen to our churchyards, where they would take our people from these villages, what the church could expect, what we all could expect.

We summed up in a number of points what the episcopate, the bishops of Kolozsvár and Nagyvárad, or the representatives of the church, should bear in mind when negotiating with the state. The questions, or rather aspects, were: that the church should not suffer damage as a consequence of regional systematisation. Let them bear in mind the principle of least possible

Herod the Messiah

The wheel of time had turned full circle again; the advent of the Year of Trumpeting was here and the month of the Ram was approaching. The country counted the waning days in sleepy expectation of the Messiah, and all its remaining faith managed was preparation in dull surrender for the winter, the cold and the dark that were about to bear down on them. Its morale had sunk to a reading close to the zero of survival.

Peace ruled Herod's age-worn heart. He remembered with satisfaction the triumphant stations of the consolidation of his power, political victories, the liquidation of factious courtiers and the splendid achievements of the rounded off years of the age that bore his name. With closed eyes he mused on the beauty of places of worship raised to the glory of his name and, feeling rejuvenated, his mind's eye saw the passing parade of the abased multitude celebrating him on the Avenue of his Victories.

His complete satisfaction was not even disturbed by the tormenting memory of Christmasses of old. On the first step of his apotheosis promising eternal glory, after so many Christmasses successfully drowned in blood, he could allow himself to ignore the King of the poor, and the ragged crowd of carol singers. Pompously drunk with a power soaked in cruelty, he rose to such heights of absurdity that he lost all sense of reality or of time. He had no doubt whatever that he was the true Messiah. The centuries of his glorious rule were his justification. The consciousness of his immortality dawned upon him. Times out of mind, he played with his ornamental sceptre which was always there, handy, and with it, whenever necessary, he paternally beat his people, that great, big, stupid child, one at a time. Take that, Messiah! What, compared to that, did the Massacre of the Innocents amount to, which the tender-hearted were always blaming him for. A legend. A trifle. And even if it was true, it was one reason more why he should enjoy exclusive rights to the post of Messiah. As everything else that he achieved, he had obtained it using his power and his weapons—it was therefore his due. His was the kingdom, the power and the glory, for ever.

(Matt. 2, 3a: When Herod the king had heard these things, he was troubled.)

Herod did not want to believe his ears when, after several days of whisperings, toings and froings in the palace and the prevarications of troubled courtiers, the news of the Christmas commotion at Bethlehem finally reached him. Hearing, he lost his head. He did so not as a ruler anxious about the fate of his country, or as a tyrant made to tremble by the anger of his people, but like a romancer unpleasantly disturbed in the crazy dream of his glory. His quiet dementia, like stagnant wa-

damage, and let there be compensation. If in any given case a village disappears and a congregation is resettled, then there should be compensation in some other place, in some other way.

The point is that the church cannot just sit with arms folded and accept what is happening. To start with they must obtain information on what is brewing under cover of darkness, to the tune of empty slogans. On the other hand, it must act in defence of the basic interests of the church. I think it was our duty to express this, since every one stays silent, the high church dignitaries in the first place. My fellows in the ministry, and our congregations, are scorched by the question but they do not dare to speak.

That is why we thought that we would raise the question at a meeting of this sort, where one gains courage, being together, amongst our own kind. In essence we organised this campaign in the whole Calvinist Church in Rumania, in every church district. There are altogether thirteen church districts. Everywhere somebody undertook to raise the question at their respective church district meeting early in September. Unfortunately, characteristically, people dared to speak in only one church district out of the thirteen, which clearly shows how even the ministers of religion are paralysed by fear, people whose living is affected. They will be without congregations, they too will have to abandon the place where they live.

The razing of villages does not take place in "romantic" circumstances—romantic in inverted commas, of course—as some, at a great distance, imagine. Say that ten bulldozers appear and raze

ters whipped up by a storm, turned into enraged raving. He could not sense the danger that threatened his rule, he was not the least bit afraid, he only raged. His unbridled anger did not look for something to vent it on for long, and certainly did not look for its real cause.

First he poured his fury on those near him.

He called his ministers all the names in the world.

He chased out the courtiers.

He slapped the face of the commander of the palace guard.

He threw out his co-ruler-wife who had come to calm him down.

He smashed the windows and mirrors of the throneroom. His raging fury knew no bounds.

Once the first attack abated, he resolved to take sober measures.

He sacked the government.

He made public the secret police.

He ordered that Bethlehem and its environs be wiped from the face of the earth. He prescribed that a miraculous underground nuclear bomb-proof city be built instead.

He liquidated the pride of the crown stock, the peace dove dove-cot. He ordered the doves to be slaughtered.

He introduced unceasing applause in the whole country, it was to be interrupted only exceptionally, at the time of cheering and ovations.

The people were organised in the shape of his country-size portrait, clothing individuals in loud colours, without regard for age, sex or race. These measures were meant to break the singing of the angels, the domination of holy ikons and the power of bourgeois individualism.

(Matt. 2, 3b: and all Jerusalem with him.)

As dusk was falling, the whole of the court started on a mad dance. The over-excited high spirits, pulsating with the dance steps, reached the chandeliers, the flood of one big delirious whirlpool of dancers licked the King's majestic feet.

Every heated, heaving breast panted loyalty: the dance discipline clothed in the pitiful garments of the age, obeying inner commands, was tense to bursting point. The beat of rhythmically recited hosannahs channeled the lecherous enthusiasm of the subjects.

Herod lay prone on the couch below the throne-room canopy and meditated on the idea of eternal values. With the sublimity of half-witted calm he allowed himself to be swept along by the surf of churned up glory, and the enormous dynamics of the court agitated by the dance filled him with a languid and pleasant weariness.

From a sermon by László Tőkés, Advent 1989.

the whole village, from one end to the other. Things are much more complicated than that. They have to create the conditions first, for this or that village to disappear, and room must be found elsewhere for the people who live in places condemned to death. This is all the more necessary since international protests have probably produced some alteration to the original plans.

One cannot tell precisely how they imagined things originally since, before they really got under way, the whole world raised its voice in protest. Thus what they planned remains a secret, we do not know how they meant to start, and what was changed on the way.

The other question is how they will go on. This is not the sort of policy that might be abandoned because of international protests. They changed their methods, that's all. Biding one's time, intrigue and trickery are employed to try and conceal that which they will finally implement. Some months ago, to give an example, they started on the administrative amalgamation of villages, thus diminishing the weight of those which lost their independence, which are, of course, the villages picked for future destruction. As they did decades ago, at the time of collectivisation, they send out party apparatchiks and various state officials who convene a village meeting, or various Party functions, and there they put the questions in a way to make it appear that the villagers themselves desire their village to be abandoned, since they are made to declare that proper living conditions no longer exist.

I know of a village where they got people to sign papers asking for relocation in prefabricated tenements, which would be built in the future. A spectacular razing of villages is thus replaced by a policy of atrophy which is difficult to keep track of. They might abolish a surgery in a village, or put an end to a school because of the small numbers. The children are then compelled to attend school in a larger village nearby, and the sick have to attend surgery in a neighbouring village as well. Frequently the electricity is cut off, and less and less becomes available in the village shop, making the position more and more hopeless, so that people will leave the village by themselves. It is indeed a devilish policy.

There are some who argue that these megalomaniac plans do not deserve all that much attention since, for financial reasons, they will not be able to implement them anyway. But this destruction did not start now, when they proclaimed it, indeed in my opinion it was a huge mistake to proclaim it in the first place. Take the fringes of Kolozsvár, for instance, where a population living off the land that would have filled five or six villages was moved from their homes, and settled in prefabricated tenements, and defrauded of their houses and gardens and the acres they leased.

Paradoxically, village razing started long ago in towns. In recent years urban districts, with the population of dozens of villages, have been destroyed. The trend is undoubtedly present, the question is only the extent to which the plan can be implemented, how much the economic situation helps or hinders them, to what degree their hands are tied by international protests and, let me add, how far God will allow them to go. It is in His name alone that we can put our trust. "A powerful stronghold our God is still": Martin Luther's hymn means much to us now. If I may paraphrase it a little in keeping with conditions here, I might say that the Church is our powerful stronghold, since the Church is all that is left to us.

It is certainly true that, relatively speaking, ministers of religion can or, rather, could, do a great deal. They are not only the mouthpiece of God but the mouthpiece of the people as well. In my view what we did in September last year concerning this question was no more than the duty of our office.

When it comes to protest against rural systematisation, the emphasis is placed differently by the Rumanians who are hostile to this plan and by us Hungarians who oppose it. Naturally, the Rumanians who are anxious about the survival of the peasant way of life that has not reached a stage of final dissolution yet are right. They are fearful that the village population will be broken up and dispersed. The truth is that, essentially, the peasantry is the only section of society which disposes of the material and moral background that makes it possible to resist the regime.

We Hungarians, in our extreme jeopardy, however, place the emphasis on the fact that this, essentially, is the last, or the penultimate, phase of a long process. The issue is that for many years now they have systematically, and step by step, crushed our institutions, our culture, and our

schools. They have gone over into the attack against every form of common ethnic or communal life and it is my impression that it is the turn of the Church now. A frontal attack has been launched against the Church as well. This is as true of Catholics as of Calvinists. The frontal attack on the villages is thus one of the final phases of a process that has lasted many decades. Demographic figures show that in recent decades Transylvanian towns with a Hungarian or German majority were successfully romanised. One cannot tell precisely, but somewhere between three and five million Rumanians from beyond the mountains have been resettled in Transylvania. Always from the other side of the mountains. Israel is blamed for settling Jews amongst Arabs for demographic reasons. It equally deserves attention that large numbers of Rumanians, recruited beyond the mountains, were settled in towns which used to be 100 per cent, or at least 60 to 70 per cent, Hungarian. But there was no way of undermining the villages, Rumanians from the Old Kingdom would not move across the Carpathians to settle in villages. I am not alone in arguing that it is for this very reason that they set their sights on the villages. The idea was to take apart a relatively whole section of Hungarian society that is not dispersed, and which, even ethnically, is most integrated. That, I think, is the most important aspect of the question.

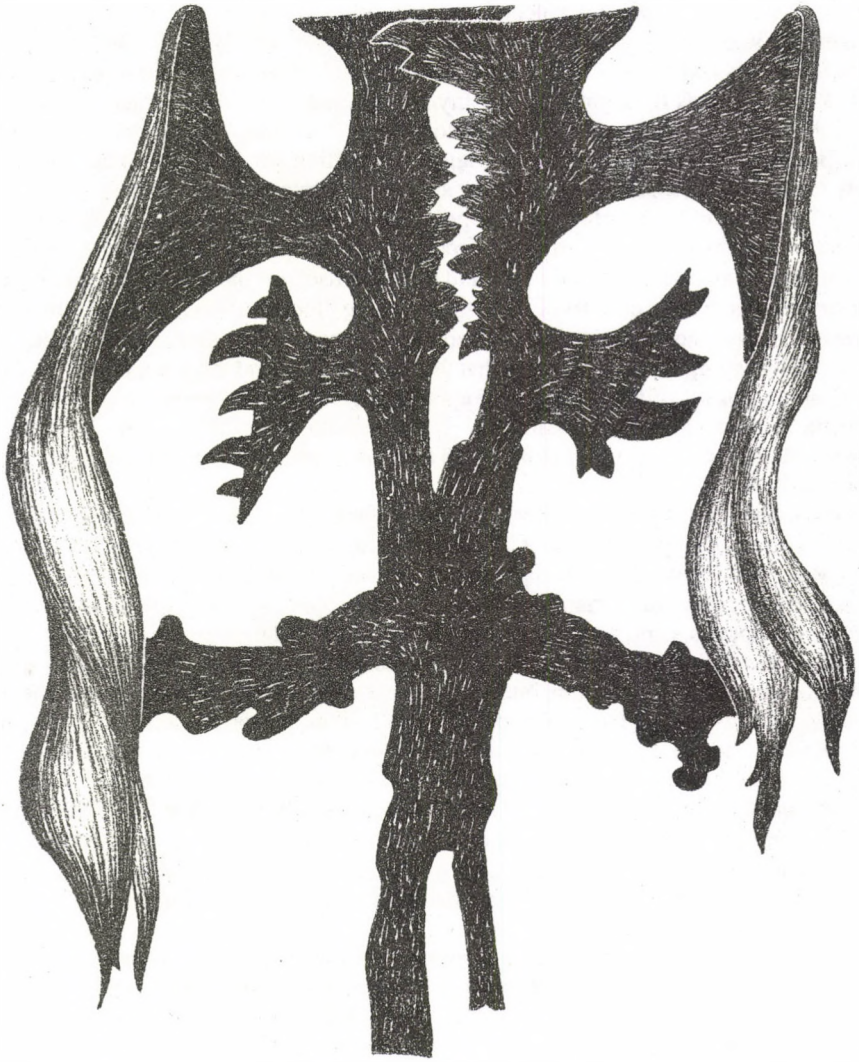
The razing of villages has a subjective aspect, concerned wholly with human rights. What happens in the minds and souls of men cannot be measured or broadcast world-wide to make the headlines. The road leads through a great many human tragedies, family tragedies, and defeats suffered by the soul. The only possible comparison is with the fifties. It is common knowledge that at that time people suffered complete psychological deprivation. Now, when in other countries they are already raising their heads again, gathering strength to replace the old losses, recovering their sense of self, something is underfoot against people here that can be likened to collectivisation.

No options are open to people faced with a process that takes place as an objective event, beyond their control. What can people do? Some go and hang themselves, the more vital, and a section of the disillusioned, leave their country. Flight speaks more eloquently than any argument of what goes on here. The argument continues unabated, will we go, will we stay, will we hold out, or is there any sense in staying. I am wont to say that this has gone beyond the articulate stage. Our state can be compared to that of animals sensing the approaching eruption of a volcano, or an earthquake, and stampede. Unfortunately, persuasion or sermons are no longer of any use. I often feel that preaching is useless because people are impelled to act in a certain way by their momentary social and historical situation.

We have knowledge of all that happens. Thus we knew about the appeal and letter of protest addressed to Ceausescu by six former CP leaders. If there is no other source, there is always Hungarian Radio and Television. Hungarians in the border area watch Hungarian television programmes, and not only Hungarians, Rumanians and Serbians do so as well. Whatever is bruited about, whatever happens, is privately discussed. Every detail, all that can be expected, is weighed up, but in absolute passivity, merely on the level of reception. Now and then someone speaks up, that can be likened to a partisan action, but people generally expect a solution from someone else, or from the way things shape of their own accord, that is, if they expect a solution at all. There are some—I have to admit this in all honesty—who are not even aware of what is happening. Let us say that this is an expression of the standard of their thinking and their education. Some fall for obvious commonplaces and tricks of propaganda. Our view of human rights is also peculiar to us. The situation compels us to raise the question of human rights in keeping with the nature of our social conditions, and not in their Simon-pure western state. Here collective rights, as it were, upstage mere human rights. In a totalitarian system of this sort there is no possibility to protest against individual human injustice.

Even thinking of what I personally am free to do, and what you may do, appears a luxury. What we have to stress is that we suffer the absence of human rights in our collective being. It is not I, László Tőkés, who may not do this or that, who is deprived of his right to free speech, to express my opinion, to engage in correspondence, to maintain contacts, or to participate in education in my native language. All this happens to me not as László Tőkés, but as a member of the Hungarian community. Naturally, I presume that the question is put in a somewhat different form by the

Rumanians. They do not suffer injustice as members of a national minority, human rights and collective rights are therefore not intertwined to the same degree as in our case. Apart from that, rights laid down in the UN Charter and the Helsinki Final Act are offended against every single day in a most brutal manner. The reason why we do not speak more about these rights is because people are not even aware of the rights which they are entitled to. I am speaking of the majority. Naturally, there are many, especially in Transylvania, who are aware of the human rights of which they are deprived every day of the week.



Brother against brother

JÁNOS RÓZSÁS

In the Gulag with Solzhenitsyn

In the course of my correspondence with Aleksandr Isaevich Solzhenitsyn, he put the following question to me on March 12 1965: "By the way, I have never asked you—since you learnt the language only later and did not know Russian at the time they read out the charge [...] to you—what language did they use to conduct the investigation of your case? Or was there no such thing at all?"

In my letter of April 12 1965, I answered with the following: "They conducted the investigation of my case in Russian, with the help of extremely poor interpreters (Poles and Hutzuls, former prisoners-of-war). I signed the record, as I still clearly remember, on page 16. It would be good to know what it contained. When I was rehabilitated I was burning with curiosity and thought of asking for a copy of the sentence: what did I actually serve a sentence of nine full years for? But then I changed my mind. Why should I take up the past? It might occur to someone to wonder why on earth I needed that? All things considered—it was not necessary at all..."

That settled the question for the time being.

In the spring of 1974, I learnt that Solzhenitsyn included a paragraph of a few lines on me in the first volume of his *Gulag Archipelago*, published by Harper and Row (page 279 in Chapter 7 of Part One—"In the engine room..."). It reads:

> *The ten-year-sentence of János Rózsás, a Hungarian was read to him in the corridor in Russian, without any translation. He signed it, not knowing it was his sentence and he waited a long time afterwards for his trial. Still later, when he was in camp, he recalled the incident very vaguely and realized what had happened.*

If one compares the relevant section of my letter of 1965 on the subject with the paragraph just quoted, it becomes clear that the two descriptions do not altogether tally.

I think that due to several reasons (his house having been searched, moving house repeatedly, etc.), Solzhenitsyn must have mislaid my letters. When he wrote it all down, he still remembered that I had not understood what was said during the court proceedings and did not know what I had signed at the time—but the real facts looked somewhat different, although, of course, the essence remained the same.

During the court proceedings I always knew what was happening to me and where I was, but I really do not know to this day why I was given those ten years, of which I fully served nine in various Soviet prisons, reception and labour camps. I do not know, even today, what were the war crimes they listed in the papers of the proceedings against me, because of which for a long time they called me a fascist, a bandit, an enemy of the people.

János Rózsás'*s two-volume memoirs, following a Hungarian-language edition in Munich (1986-1987), was published by Szabad Tér, Budapest, 1989.*

Kazakhstan, 1950. Early in August, a consignment of about a hundred convicts arrived at the prison camp of Ekhibastuz from Pavlodar prison. Most of the new arrivals were intelligent, educated men, mainly from Moscow and Leningrad. It was with this group that Aleksandr Isaevich Solzehnitsyn reached our forced labour camp. I did not know him at the time. He was one of the many newcomers who were strangers in this desert camp. For quite some time they stood out amongst the drab mass of old prisoners, broken in body and spirit.

On July 26 1951, our brigade, which had so far worked on a construction job, was redirected to new employment, in the metal works, the *masterskaia*. Here we had to extend the barbed wire around the plant and the generator station to make room for new workshops in the shadow of the watch-tower.

At the first opportunity, after the noon roll call, I looked up my friend and fellow countryman Tibor Benkő in the iron-foundry. The strict discipline in the camp made it much too dangerous to visit someone in the huts, and I could rarely risk seeing him there. I was glad to be able to have a word with him during the day, and before the evening roll call on the job where one could move somewhat more freely.

That was when I met Tibor's foreman, who had come there recently. He was Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn.

"Sasha," Tibor stopped him. "Come here. A fellow countryman of mine."

He turned to us and his sharp-featured, bony face broke into a friendly smile. He held out his hand and introduced himself, giving a slight nod.

"I like Hungarians," he said. "All those I met in prison and in the camps have been resourceful and honest men."

"He reads a great deal," Tibor pointed at me. "He's the one I've already told you about."

"And what kind of books do you read?" Solzhenitsyn asked.

I shrugged uncertainly. "Here I have been particularly impressed by Lermontov, and I like Lev Tolstoy. But I really read everything printed that comes my way. The camp library does not offer much choice."

"Well, we shall certainly talk again. I hope now we shall meet more often." Solzhenitsyn held out his hand and continued into the workshop.

"He is a decent fellow," Tibor said. "He knows a great deal, is a great reader, and he also writes. He always speaks of serious things in our room. You would surely enjoy his company. He never quarrels with anyone, and does not accept anything from those who get parcels. He only looks after official business, otherwise we are scarcely aware of having a brigade leader."

Slowly I made friends with Solzhenitsyn. We had many subjects in common. He mainly asked me about what I read, and he was also interested in what I thought of the Russians.

Sasha liked to talk about the peculiarities of the Slav languages; the old pre-reform spelling occupied his mind, the reform, and he enjoyed explaining the history of Old or Church Slavonic.

We often talked sitting on the scrap-heap beside the iron-foundry. I was an attentive listener, whatever the subject.

Since he was a maths and physics teacher, he once asked me whether I would like to take up mathematics. He must have missed teaching a great deal. But I shook my head—let us just stay with literature, this is much more interesting.

I liked to listen when he talked about the Russian classics. He always asked me what I happened to be reading, and what I found interesting in it. He advised me how I could study the works of Russian and Ukrainian writers methodically, even under those dire circumstances, so that I could most fully catch the essence of their message.

Contact between us was broken off for several months when they divided the camp and separated the two halves by a mud wall. Between October 7 1951 and January 6 1952, I could not meet my friends in the tradesmen's brigade either on the job or in the camp.

On January 6 1952, a great migration started between the two neighbouring camps. The prisoners were regrouped from one camp into the other according to their nationality. The

Ukrainians, together with the Estonians and the Chechens, as the most unruly nationalities, were put in the larger Camp 2. Prisoners of other nationalities were moved over from the other side into our Camp 1, which now also housed the tradesmen's brigades. The reason for this grouping according to nationalities was that they were afraid of a Ukrainian mutiny and thought it better to put them under especially strict guard.

I was very happy that Solzhenitsyn and his brigade were moved to our camp, together with the other tradesmen's brigades. The Ukrainian tradesmen were brought over as well, they made an exception with them.

As soon as Tibor and his lot arrived, I visited them daily. Although it was still strictly forbidden to stroll about and visit other huts, doing so could be severely punished with detention, I took the risk just to be with them.

Engineer Karbe, Panin, and a few other good friends usually came over from the next room to join Solzhenitsyn. It was always worth listening to their nightly conversation.

Usually there was a newspaper on the table. If the brigade members were off to eat, I sat down at the table and read the latest news in the *Kazakhstan Pravda* (the central *Pravda* was only available in the "house of culture").

In the weeks of the great reshuffle in January, I once again wanted to leave my old brigade and switch to Solzhenitsyn's brigade. In vain did my friends try all sorts of things, they failed once again. I knew work would be harder in the foundry, but it would also have put an end to the period of starvation and I could have worked with those whom I could only meet now by taking the risk of being caught.

In the evening of 22 January 1952, a mutiny broke out in our camp, of all places. Not in the camp of the dangerous Ukrainians, but among the selected, screened, timid lot.

I was in the room of Tibor and his mates, who had gone to eat. Yury Karbe came over from the next room, for some reason he did not go to the mess that day. He took up a book from Solzhenitsyn's table and started to read. I was turning the pages of the paper at the table. We made brief comments now and then, but otherwise sat in silence.

We sat up at the sound of irregular shooting. Machine gun bursts and separate shots. The concert was soon joined by the clatter of light machine-guns. "Soldiers exercising in the steppes," we commented casually.

But men running breathless into the hut brought news in a choking voice that the camp inmates had stormed the stone prison and were breaking up the wooden fence around the building. The alarm had sounded and the gates were opened to let the soldiers enter the camp area. They fired warning rounds over the heads of the men, but some stray bullets of course went lower as well.

In these feverish moments my first thought was to get back into my own hut in the other half of the camp. Come what may, I had to be in my place. Tibor came running from the opposite direction and stopped me rushing headlong into the confusion. He drew me back among themselves.

The noise of the meeting slowly began to subside, but the time of cruel retaliation was still to come. The prison guards drove the prisoners into the huts with iron rods, raining bone-breaking blows on the stumbling and moaning crowd. Those who did not strip to their underwear promptly, lying down on their bunks, were threatened with shooting.

Luckily there was an empty place on the bunk above Solzenitsyn in Tibor's room. I undressed and covered myself with the quilted jackets they lent me, lest the goalers found fault with me.

Next morning I succeeded in slipping away out of the hut into the mess from where I could get back to my brigade and join the inmates of my own hut.

The excitements of the revolt and the general hunger strike that followed were scarcely over, and a period of retaliation had started, when Solzhenitsyn became serously ill. He grew very thin. For weeks already he had felt unwell, suffering with stomach pains. He was taken over to the hospital in the other camp. We did not know whether we would ever see him again.

The mutineers and those suspected of having taken part were taken to lead and copper mines.

Suddenly the news ran through the camp: "They are taking away the literate": in other words, the regular clientele of the "house of culture," accused of having prepared the mutiny in the minds. Those who liked to read books and newspapers, were now trembling with fear. Miraculously, I was left out of the deportation. Perhaps when they saw from my file that I was Hungarian, they did not believe the stool pigeon that I was one of the literate.

In all probability Solzhenitsyn would have been taken away with the literate after his operation, from his sick-bed. He described it all in his *Cancer Ward*, which includes many autobiographical elements.

The protagonist is operated upon for cancer of the stomach by a German surgeon by the name of Karl Fiodorovich. As far as I know, however, the surgeon was Hungarian, Dr Ferenc Várkonyi (Fiodorovich!) from Budapest, who was deported right after the operation. Unfortunately, I have never since heard anything about Doctor Várkonyi, who must have been about 30 to 35 at the time.

Solzhenitsyn left the hospital sometime in the last days of March. He was very weak and could not work for quite some time. He did not take back the leadership of the brigade; his successor was a small Russian lad called Chaly, and he was followed by a stocky, ruddy-cheeked Russian by the name of Aleksandrov.

In the beginning of April 1952, a new accounting system was introduced in the camp. A fragment of what we earned was credited to our account as wages. We could draw some of it as pocket money, and the rest accumulated until our release.

As soon as he was able to start work, Solzhenitsyn went to the iron-foundry as an unskilled labourer. He had less than a year to go until his release. Release meant the need for money, and earnings in the iron-foundry were among the highest in the camp. So he chose hard work rather than the pittance which was the average earnings of the brigade. It was hard for him to get used to tough manual work, but fortunately his fellow-workers were considerate and spared him excessive effort.

Solzhenitsyn now spent more and more of his spare time browsing in Vladimir Dal's large black-covered dictionary, writing out in a tiny script the words he found interesting and making notes about their possible use in current usage, but he still found time for me as well.

Like all Russian intellectuals I had occassion to talk with, Solzhenitsyn was interested in the 1848-9 Hungarian Revolution. He was curious to know how the role Prince Pashkievits's army played in Hungary, when the Russian soldiery crushed the Hungarian fight for freedom, survived in Hungarian historical memory.

By the end of August 1952, me and my brigade were back in the metal works, where we built a new workshop. Towards evening, after work, I always went to the foundry. I took a shower there and then talked to Solzhenitsyn, Tibor and the other foundry workers until the evening roll call.

Late in September, our brigade was moved into Hut 2, where the tradesmen's brigade lived. This meant that I lived in the same hut with Solzhenitsyn and his mates. I only had to go over to the neighbouring room and could join their evening palaver.

As I recall, Solzhenitsyn never talked about himself, his childhood or youth, and he did not even mention his earlier prison and camp experiences. Anyway, it was not customary in the camp to question others about their past, and particularly the circumstances of their sentence, if they themselves did not speak about it.

Solzhenitsyn was particularly reticent in this respect. Whatever I know about his life I have learned from his works which have appeared in print, mainly *The Gulag Archipelago*. As regards his character and behaviour, there is no contradiction between the Solzhenitsyn as he appears in the pages of his books and the Solzhenitsyn I came to know. But I would never have thought that Solzhenitsyn, always so polite, helpful and smiling, had the resolution and prophetic vocation he displayed in his later years.

Only once, on a single occassion did I notice the burning passion that animated him, when he recited a poem by Aleksandr Blok to me. Blood rose to his head, his eyes flashed, and the frail, thin man shook his fist.

Another time he recited Lermontov's poem, *Borodino*, to illustrate how one should speak verse. He was an exceptionally evocative elocutionist.

It was from Solzhenitsyn that I first heard about the great and tragical role Novgorod, the former Russian capital city, had played in Russian history. I first encountered the concept of *Gospodin Veliky Novgorod* in Sasha's fascinating account. He did not like Moscow the supercilious city, and even less Moscow as the Bolshevik capital, but he also disliked the Leningrad which Czar Peter the Great had built as St Petersburg in the northern swamp, on the bones of Russian mujiks, and where it had been proper to speak French only. For him the old, holy Novgorod was the real capital.

Solzhenitsyn made me familiar with all the Russian writers and poets who were not published at the time. Of the poets, he spoke with the greatest enthusiasm of Sergey Esenin. He wrote down several of his poems from memory, and he also recited them. Apart from Esenin, he had great regard for Aleksandr Blok, whose poems he also knew by heart. He also spoke about Boris Pasternak and his popular poetry readings, which were prohibited later. Vladimir Mayakovsky's life, work, and particularly his tragic death, also appeared in a new light in his presentation, which differed from the official version.

Solzhenitsyn's sentence of eight years, under Section 10 of Paragraph 58, expired on February 6 1953. Early in February he was already preparing for his release, and he was summoned on the 7th. He was given, from the clothes depot, his former military uniform, without the shoulder straps and with rusty patches on the spots from where his decorations had been torn. That was when I first saw him not wearing prison garb or a number.

Of course, he had not outgrown his youthful clothes, indeed, they were not very close-fitting. He was 27 when he had to exchange them for prison clothes, 35 when he could change back into them and start out to the place that had been appointed for his exile, somewhere in Asia.

In parting, Solzhenitsyn presented me, in memory of our friendship, with a volume from his "private library", which consisted of some 3 or 4 volumes altogether, Griboyedov's play, *Gore ot uma* (The Mischief of Being Clever). It was out of the question for him to write a dedication or some parting words into it, as that would have landed both of us in trouble. The state security authorities knew of no such thing as friendship. In every human relationship they saw the spectre of conspiracy against the system.

In parting, Solzhenitsyn asked me to keep up my interest in intellectual matters and to stay the friend I had showed myself of the Russian people and of Russian literature. It was extremely unlikely for us ever to meet again, or even to hear of each other. Those who had served their sentence were scattered even in exile, and it was impossible to hope that I would get to the same region where he was to live as an exile to the end of his life, deprived of the right to change his place of residence.

Together with Engineer Karbe, Solzhenitsyn was able to arrange at the labour office for me to get his place in the iron-foundry as an unskilled labourer. There was not much left of my sentence of ten years either, so he wanted me too to earn a bit before starting out on my new life, somewhere in eternal exile. That was the last friendly gesture he could offer me before disappearing from my eyes for a long time.

Browsing through the Soviet illustrated weekly magazine *Ogonyok*, early in December 1962, I noted a caption: THIS IS HOW IT WAS, THIS IS HOW IT WILL NOT BE—about Solzhenitsyn's novella, *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich (Novy Mir*, No. 11). The review was by Nikolay Khruzhkov.

After reading the article, I kept pacing the floor and could barely calm down. Although no place names were mentioned, I felt the events in the story could only have taken place in Ekhibastuz, where Solzhenitsyn had spent three years and I nearly four. What we once experienced out there in the Kazakhstan desert, far from every human habitation, was to become known to all the world! How incredible...And they were related by my friend Solzhenitsyn, of all people!

I thought things over for a long time whether or not to write to my old friend. Would he still

remember me? Ten years was a long time, was it worth renewing our relationship from a distance of several thousand kilometres, from another country? And anyway, he had become a famous writer, would he have the time to reply? I went on turning things over in my mind, until one day I sat down to write him:

January 12 1963
Dear Sasha,
I send my warmest greetings from distant Hungary... I do not know when I will have the chance to read Ivan Denisovich, *but I have no patience to wait with my letter. So let me congratulate you on the occasion of the publication of the story without knowing its content...*
It will be ten years in February that you were discharged and left us. Many things have changed around us during these ten years, to the true delight of millions of people.
*Nevertheless, nothing can obliterate the past from our memory. What has been done cannot be undone, and I can honestly say I would not exchange my past. It was a harsh but most valuable school, which taught me many things that remain unattainable to others. I got to know people from their dark side as well, under unnatural circumstances. I have learnt to respect people who there too stayed worthy of the name of man. I also learnt that the colour of people's skins, their language and differing convictions cannot interfere with friendship and mutual understanding. When I was released, I promised my fellow inmates who still remained there never to forget the Russian people and Soviet men, and not because of the sufferings I had to endure, but because of their warm hearts. And I have kept my promise. I keep up an interest in the life of the Soviet peoples as a good friend.**

Solzhenitsyn did not take long to answer. He enclosed a copy of the literary magazine which carried *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*, with the following dedication:

To my dear János Rózsás, in memory of our friendship and his profound love for Russian literature.
Solzhenitsyn
February 4 1963

And the letter read:

Dear János,
I was deeply touched by your letter. Naturally I remember you perfectly well and also how fond you were of literature in general, and Russian literature in particular...
I very much like the way you interpret the vicissitudes you endured, and your ability to perceive what is good and fine in strangers, even under adverse circumstances...

In our later correspondence, Solzhenitsyn told me to use the familiar form of address in memory of our old friendship; after all, I was not all that much younger. This is true, of course, as I am only eight years his junior, but he was a fully qualified teacher, and I fell into captivity without having completed school.

In my letters I wrote about myself, my family and my circumstances. On April 30 1964, he wrote:

My Dear János,
You write wonderfully kind and cordial letters—and I answer you irregularly and briefly. Forgive me! The way you write enables me to conjure up your presence, I was always fond of you, you know that well, and I still like you and hope that once we shall meet again. Of course, I would gladly visit your country and your town sometime, but that depends on circumstances. For the time being one can only dream about this...

*The letter was written in Russian, and Solzhenitsyn quoted from it somewhat freely in his *Gulag Archipelago*. (Editor's note)

Do write me whenever you feel like it and do not wait for me. True, I won't be at home in the summer. This past winter I was also away for a few months, that is why I am late in answering. But even if belatedly, I shall read your letters with pleasure and interest.

On September 16 1965, I wrote him another long letter. Here are some passages from it:

...I am very glad you too believe and hope that we shall still meet once again in our lives. How good it would be if you were to come here, to Hungary...

I am sure you would like our hospitable country and would not regret your trip. It is easy for one to leave behind a piece of one's heart forever here with us as well...

I have read the last chapter of Ilya Ehrenburg's People, Years, My Life in Novy Mir. *I do not find everything clear in it. At the time there used to be a saying among us: "Who is doing all right in Russia?**—Ilya Ehrenburg!" From our point of view his position seemed to be firm, as we thought of him as Stalin's court writer. But Ilya Ehrenburg tries to create a different impression in his reminiscences...*

Here are some excerpts from Solzhenitsyn's letters:

February 24 1966

My Dear János,

Forgive me for taking so long to write to you. Natasha has already told you about how difficult this past autumn was for us, very, very difficult indeed...

I am always very pleased to feel that unselfish and touching fellow-feeling which radiates from you letters...

I do not like Ehrenburg's memoirs; their aim is to justify their writer and place him in a light that has never been...

November 24 1966

...Before we can meet you (and I strongly believe that this will once come true), our letters can little express our complicated and changing lives. They are evidence that we are in good health, that's all. This is no small matter either. But on the other hand, life is dizzyingly complex, and I cannot even attempt to give an account of it to you in a letter. Suffice it to say that Novy Mir *has refused my new novel,* Cancer Ward, *and so next year they will carry nothing by me...*

June 29 1967

My dear János,

I was happy to read your friendly letter (of April). I am sure we shall still meet and have a long, free talk. Events are humming around me, I have written about all this in detail in a letter to the Writers' Congress, and I would be very sorry if you had not heard about this. Natasha joins me in sending the very best, heartfelt wishes to your whole family.

Sasha

From that time on, my letters to him were answered by his wife, Natalia Alexeievna Resetovskaya, on her husband's behalf.

In 1975, Solzhenitsyn's first wife, Resetovskaya, whom he had meanwhile divorced, published her memoirs about her former husband, and the third volume of *Gulag Archipelago* also appeared. My person featured in both works, with some warm words about our friendship which had been born in the camp.

**The question refers to the title of a famous 19th century poem by Nekrasov. (Editor's note.)

Circumstances only allowed me to renew my correspondence with Solzhenitsyn much later, and even then not on the earlier, regular basis, just as signs of life: I am still alive and not in any particular trouble.

In his letter of May 18 1987, Solzhenitsyn expressed his delight over the appearance in Munich of my memoirs, *Keserű Ifjúság* (Bitter Youth):

I was pleased to learn about the publication of Bitter Youth. *I am also glad to see that you are travelling. As for myself—I go nowhere, never at all. Work takes up all my time—and then my 70th year is soon approaching. I still have my health, thank God...*

His latest letter to me is dated January 31 1989:

Dear János,

I see from your letter that there is greater freedom of publication in your country. I am very glad your memoirs will at last be published in your native land as well...

With the very best wishes to you and your family,

As ever yours,

Sasha.

Devil fights angel

OTTÓ ORBÁN

Poems

Translated by George Szirtes

The fire breathing bull

A tűzfújó bika

I was born under the sign of the bull: ponderous and explosive,
everything about me is bound to the body;
now that the body is cooling my confidence dwindles.
The bull imagines Bull as God: an inflamed eyeball,
his nostrils a saxophone blowing like wildfire—
the cell to whom life is a matter of studious craftmanship
freely expanding its superfluous energy,
till nothing is left but the suction effect of a dented container,
the reverse side, a whirlpool of abstractions;
what can he do in there, in that etherical medium
where ideas flaunt their parthenogenesis, sexless…
the dying volcano shudders at the memory of old eruptions
with their bubbling streams of molten lava;
above him the old miasma, image of the soul, smoke rolled by wind.

(1982)

The snows of yesteryear

A tavalyi hó

Where is Mr Orbán, last year's visiting professor?
Where is his queer accent, his strange opinions?
Deep, deep, deep in the hill he sleeps,
like other citizens of the Spoon River.
I contemplate this man in boots and anorak,
whose grey curls peek out under his fur hat;
an aging party waiting for the bus to take him to St Paul—
I would not notice him were he not me…
Incredible that my past should belong to him,
still more incredible, that his is mine…
Some third person is writing my poems, one who knows my obsessions intimately,
before his eyes the orange malleable lava of the day before yesterday
is hardening to a dark basalt grey that one might study, and the dumb snow falls like lint on the open wound of the world.

(1989)

The flying Faust

Faust röpköd

By the time our spirits can fly our bodies are crippled—
something for something, state the terms of our contract,
which for the sake of precision we tied with the devil.
The Dread One, of course, is not a ringleted dandy wielding a trident,
nor a professor-cum-inspector of taxes thirsting for blood, but an air-traffic controller with wider horizons than usual;
before our departure he strictly observes that we have surrendered
our childhood, our youth and our loves, our small sum of years
and in a syrupy baritone announces over the speakers:
"Tower to broom. Permission granted for take-off."
And the world which is used to rubbishing its heroes, watches and cackles
as a pack of warty, twitching, wheezing grandads and grannies
straddle the broomstick and sing the loud praises
of all-renovating, flame-haired, eternal youth.

(1988)

The exploded treadmill

A lerobbant járgány

Should I trust in history, that elusive old harridan?
The past is idiotic and tells lies;
I was sitting by the bedside of my dying friend
smiling encouragement at him: everything's fine.
The present at least is certain. Certain intense schizophrenia—
in childhood I was an old man, now I long to recover
my mad adolescence as an ethical yardstick…
Sooner or later we grasp that our fickle companion for life, our talent
has rented its studio on that plot of land between bull and red rag,
and that patience in real life does not bear roses
but a heap of embers on the frame of a hospital bed…
There's nothing to trust in but my idle improvisations,
up to my neck in the grease, I pimple the world with a verse,
once in God's likeness, now a rattling and clattering old wreck…

(1988)

The caravan rests for the night

A karaván megpihen éjszakára

A desert shuddering in the bleak half-night.
The Thing born under the Sign of the Earth is sweating and snoring.
The demon cackles and shows clips from movies.

His first is of a lissom blonde aged seventeen who writhes
and braces her arms behind her as she moans NO NO
but what she is thinking is Get hold of my breast.

On the second a disembodied mouth hovers above a man's lap
like a thirsty snake, its tongue downy with feathers,
which sucks from the velvet groin the spine that runs beneath it.

The third shows a naked post-coital couple who seem to have dropped from a height,
and through their hearts, as in some gothic novel, a wooden-handled kitchen knife,
their bodies, the bed, the room, the curtain, everything covered in blood.

The rest shows nothing, no-one. Stygian darkness. Loud snoring.
The moon rises and pours metal into the deep creases of a face that was recently smooth.
The blanket of dust above the skeletons billows in the currents of cool air.

(1987)

The spirit of the age

A század szelleme

A saw a beggar. Recognized him. Knew him instinctively. "You have a damned nerve," I cried and shook his shoulders in cold fury. "Your dare to poke your nose in here! Aren't you the liar who told us this would be positively the last struggle? Wasn't it you who promised every poet a redhead or red way ahead—to each according to his need?" I stood there for a long time screaming furiously… eventually he raised his hooded head and I saw he had no eyes. His hollow sockets were a keyhole opening on to a smooth and endless pain where fire and smoke mingled, and invisible feet pounded over a few exposed bones. It might have been cavalry or fugitives. There was the dreadful constant sound of something grinding. I couldn't tell whether it was a loose axle or a human cry, or if it was the earth scratching its bloody surface in the eternal drought that follows tears of suffering. Then he addressed me in a flat exhausted voice as if talking down a microphone. "You think yourself a seer because you've been disappointed. And in your infinite wisdom you bawl at me like some cheap whore. You come back with your dowry, your naive ideas, your bloody revolution! Bring back God, the family, tradition, and kick me out! But are we not one person? And isn't your imagination the whole problem? The wheel of time remains indifferent, you are the squirrel in the cage rushing round on the wheel which like a lathe turns out the centuries." He fell quiet and the wind dispersed him and nothing remained of him except the cooling ground where he had sat, and fire and smoke and dust.

(1989)

GEORGE SZIRTES

Beat poet to master craftsman

The poems of Ottó Orbán are instantly recognizable to a Hungarian reader: marked by a brisk, vernacular, apparently unliterary unconfined energy, they carry an authority blended of the humorous and tragic, of the commonplace and extraordinary. Often they take the form of anecdote or comment. A voice buttonholes the reader, carries him along in its narrative sweep, then detonates a mine (or several mines) under his feet before returning to the texture of dialogue. The voice appears almost garrulous at first, afflatus and deflation quickly succeed each other, seemingly engaged in some violent inner argument. The whole procedure seems to have a dizzy, scat quality about it which spins free of formal constraint. Having been the translator of Allen Ginsberg's *Howl* it isn't suprising that Orbán was for a while regarded as Hungary's own beat poet. This opinion had a pinch of truth in it but it was far from the whole truth: Orbán in his long career has also translated Chaucer, Auden, Dylan Thomas, and Robert Lowell, among many others, and is an acknowledged master-craftsman. His own poems too, on careful listening, are revealed to be highly disciplined. Under the unliterary tone lies a deep literary sophistication, a craftsmanship that diverts attention from itself to its subject matter. The field of reference is wide and rich, ghosts of English iambics and Latin hexameters hover about the verse. The mines, however, are real, and it is only Orbán's literary self-discipline and humanity that prevents them from blowing the poems up.

The texture of the dialogue is therefore vital: it is what most accurately defines him. This texture, as with most poets, is derived from the formative experiences of his life. If the inner argument is violent, it is because life is perceived to be so. As he says in one of his later confessional "sonnets":

I'm of that parting generation whose baptism of fire
bequeathed them epilepsy and a sense of solid values.
The moderns in their screaming nosedive showered us
with cream-puffs that exploded. I tasted them
and have been this way since, standing by the cellar,
light, light, infinite light and a fluttering, the wrecked yard.

The baptism of fire and the wrecked yard belong to the war, but so does that "sense of solid values" alternating with epilepsy. As an eight -year- old child in 1945 Orbán was living in central Budapest, close to the river. He was the product of a mixed marriage, a Jewish father and Christian mother, both solidly middle-class, but since 1938 on the slide owing to anti-semitic laws. The family had had the opportunity to emigrate to Argentina but a sense of obligation kept them behind. The tenement block into which they had moved when Ottó was two years old was a social microcosm within which they found a respectable enough place and where life proceeded with a degree of regularity, or at least a show of comfort, circumscribed only by increasing poverty. Then

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George Szirtes'*s latest volume of poems,* Metro, *was published by Oxford University Press in 1988. See also his essays, book reviews and translations from Hungarian poetry in recent issues of* NHQ.

the air-raids started. Orbán vividly describes the braying of the sirens in one of his essays: that noise became the constant accompaniment of his childhood. The Germans arrived in the spring of 1944. His father disappears behind barbed wire. The nearby bridge is blown up with a tremendous explosion. Saturation bombing begets a cellar-based existence where each excursion into the daylit world becomes an exercise in surrealism. A length of railtrack hangs in the courtyard: the caretaker strikes it with a metal rod to alert the tenants of raids and the sound is amplified in the well of the building. A woman on the third floor, an impoverished member of the minor aristocracy, insists on her daily bath and takes up a basin full of water from the yard. After a particularly severe raid, in which nearby buildings are brought down, she returns to her bathroom to find an unexploded bomb. She screams out in her terror, "There's a bomb sitting in my tub!" The image of the bomb in a sitting position makes a striking picture in the young Ottó's imagination.

The young Ottó was a bright, artistically-gifted child whose ability was early recognised by his middle-brow family. But in the spring of 1945 he learned that his father had died and that now, being an orphan, he would live in an institution along with others in his position. In the meantime his mother was forging a new alliance and Ottó gained a step-brother. The young talent of the family circle now became the prodigy of the institution. The teacher there encouraged the war-scarred incommunicative children in his class to write poems in order to relieve their tension. The result at first was nonsense but some of them soon managed to shape their experience through the medium of verse. The poems were published and widely circulated . This was not the last time Orbán was to discover the therapeutic value of writing poetry. Part of the therapy lay in success. He was asked to edit an anthology of children's war poetry, was interviewed on radio and was received by the Minister for Information. The success took his family aback, and slightly frightened them. The prodigy became public property: Orbán's mother had not only lost a husband to the war but was losing a son too. Orbán himself does not have a particularly high regard for his verses of that time: he does not reproduce any of them in his collected poems, though he does quote a pair of lines in an autobiographical essay. Inadvertently he had created an expectancy and an audience without quite knowing what poetry was. Looking back at that period of his life, he sees himself as "an ordinary, scruffy, Neanderthal child" with a pleasant sense of his own importance.

He is seventeen when, at grammar school, he discovers the poetry of Dezső Kosztolányi, and is intoxicated by its music. Having grown accustomed to "free verse" based entirely on content, he is suddenly seized by the delights of pure form. His first attempts at this are disastrous, and one of his teachers, the outstanding poet Ágnes Nemes Nagy—known at that time as an oppositionist and unable to publish—tells him as much. Nevertheless, within six months he writes the poem with which his collected poems are later to open: his subject the war. Rimbaud lurks in the background, the ghosts of *Le Bateau Ivre* lurch through Orbán's own quatrains. He is still naive. As he says, he has written poems but is not yet a poet. Soon enough 1956 is upon him. He is not an actor in the uprising, merely a witness, once again re-living the cellars of his earlier experience. In 1957 he breaks down from nervous exhaustion.

Since 1947 he had been making frequent visits home and there met the various men in his mother's life. One of these eventually married her. The early fifties closed around Hungarian society. The widow of an impoverished nobleman on the third floor had turned to drink and one day she threw up in the lift, whereon a notice appeared there saying: "Whoever is sick in the lift is an enemy of the people".

The tenement block saw considerable movement: class enemies transported out and new lodgers settling in. In the meantime, Orbán was enjoying considerable academic success, unlike his step-brother who appears to have been dull and lazy. Comparisons inevitably caused friction at home. Worse was to follow when, despite his prizes and commendations, the university refused Orbán's application. His step-father objected to his further attempts to enrol, and even more to his poetry. Eventually he was thrown out and restored to sleeping on benches or at friends' flats. At the same time he received his first official translating commission. By 1956 he had been taken on at the university, and could return home to live. The days of the uprising marked a rapprochement between Orbán and his mother, and in the wake of its defeat his step-brother emigrated. The break-

down interrupted Orbán's education but also saw the publication of his first volume of verses. Soon after his recovery he married and became a father. His mother though died of a brain tumour.

Such potted lives inevitably leave out the present and the immediate past, but sometimes they may serve to annotate one or other tendency in a writer's work.

Orbán's immediate fate was to move from wunderkind to enfant terrible with his very first book. Some time later, in reviewing his 1972 volume, *Emberáldozat* (Human Sacrifice), the critic Balázs Lengyel was quick to point out—lest the reader should imagine Orbán to be gripped by some sort of terminal infantilism—that the poet had grown up, and that he had done so within the framework of confessional verse. Lengyel suggests that the young Orbán was attempting a synthesis of Pilinszky and Ginsberg, a suggestion which Orbán himself confirms, in one of his later poems, *Egyéniség* (Individualism). But others too shadowed his verse: Dylan Thomas has already been mentioned, but there was also García Lorca and Attila József. Those commonly called confessional, especially Lowell, came later.

The Second World War, and war generally, has always been a subject for him and, as he has become a much travelled writer, so has the encounter with other cultures. One finds a number of poems about art itself, about the conflict between the visionary and the terrible. The visionary element is constantly raised, shot down and resurrected. He begins his poem, *The Apparition*, with an assertion that:

Yes, an angel has summoned me too
though not just like Blake or Weöres:
kindling a freemasonic burning bush in my room
or dictating lines to me over the phone...

The continuation defines his own spiritus mundi:

"Come on", the voice said, "there's no one at home."
The shoddy victory among ancient furniture
was outlined sharply in the cigarette-smoke:
there we lay on the World War I family bed,
like monumental sculptures bathed in sweat.

And end with a typical defiant rhetorical gesture.

"O shaggy mustang, O fiery youth!"
plunging in Professor Piccard's live bathyscape
into the absymal wheezing I fell asleep.

Whichever subject he writes on, however, he continually brings it back to be tested in the crucible of his wartime experience. Formally he is extremely versatile, and there are some excellent verses in a variety of styles, but arguably his greatest achievements have been within the realms of the prose and the fourteen line unrhymed, often dactylic, "sonnet", in which he freely owes his debt to Lowell. The reference to "Mr Bones" however does not derive from Berryman, as one might have thought, but rather from Marcel Aymé's *Le passemuraille*—and indeed from the poet's own illness. The fascinating thing is that Orbán never really sounds like any other poet: he is always precisely himself, mannerisms, mines and all. The city and the culture out of which he speaks are characteristically Budapest. The ironies are close in tone to the classic tough jokes of the fifties. However, if Orbán brings a current British poet to mind at all, it is Peter Porter. There is a likeness in the apparent garrulousness, in the range of reference, even in the ironic yet questing attitude to experience.

The enfant terrible is not totally buried. He is the one who lays the mines in the busy streets of Orbán's verse, the one at whom the older poet often looks back and trusts to. Now in his own fifties, and subject to attacks of a debilitating disease, Orbán's work has gathered a dangerous gaiety. Paradoxically the poems have grown graver and more human. Despite their earlier avowals of poetry as therapy, there is another process described by Orbán in one of his marvellous prose poems, *A Small Country 1*.

"I don't believe that poetry is a care package dropped from a helicopter among those in a bad way. The poem, like a bloodhound, is driven by its instincts after the wounded prey. But the latter will change form and essence on the run...It cajoles, with a reasonable image of the future, a passion for gambling."

It is the gambling, and not the care package, which invests his own poetry with a dangerous human gaiety.

FROM OUR NEXT ISSUES

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CHURCHILL AND HITLER—THE EIGHTY-DAY DUEL
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IVÁN MÁNDY

The Veteran

(Short story)

He woke up at the ring of the bell. The afternoon sleep vanished. That lovely, peaceful afternoon sleep. And now he was lying on the sofa in the shower of ringing. He didn't get up. No! Not yet! He grasped the side of the divan. Let them ring. Let them go on ringing. Could they have stopped?

They didn't stop. Maybe several of them were attacking the bell.

Feeling drunk and giddy with sleep, János Zsámboky staggered out. He opened the door.

And they burst in, simply sweeping him aside. A group of boys and girls. A boy threw himself down on the divan. Two girls pulled him off by the legs.

"Veteran visit!"

"I beg your pardon?"

"We're collecting veterans. You know, those old activists..."

"Why not stamps, paper napkins or pebbles?"

"What?"

"You heard. Stamps, paper napkins, pebbles."

"We were set a task."

That voice! Where could that flat, official voice have come from? He cast a quick glance over the faces. Like leafing impatiently through a book.

While they were looking at him as if he were a fossil. They'd be walking up to him soon and touching him with cautious curiosity. Would he stay in one piece? Or fall apart?

A girl spoke up from somewhere in the corner.

"We challenged Cukor utca."

"Why did you challenge Cukor utca?" He somehow felt sorry for that fine old street. The defenceless street.

"A competition. On veterans. Which school can..."

"...collect the most: All right, I've heard that already. So this is a school competition. Who sent you to me?"

"Miss Zsóka."

"Your form teacher"

"Yes."

"But she didn't want to come with you."

They looked at each other and shrugged.

"No, she didn't."

"Give my greetings to Miss Zsóka. Don't forget now. What else did she tell you?"

Silence.

It sounded as if someone were reading from notes.

"János Zsámboky, 25 Mező Imre út, fourth floor, number 4. An old fighter for the cause."

Unfamiliar name. Unfamiliar address.

Really: The name and the address sounded so unfamiliar. Who knows? Why shouldn't János Zsámboky have been in the Spanish Civil War? In the fighting along the Ebro. The War was lost, but along the Ebro we managed to hold them back. (Them...? Who's that them?)

Iván Mándy'*s latest collection of stories,* Önéletrajz *(Autobiography) appeared in 1989.* *(See the review by Miklós Györffy on p. 116 of this issue.)*

"The impatience of hands."

"What's that about hands?"

The boy at the desk was messing about with the slips of paper. He poked at one of them.

"Look, here it is! The impatience of hands. Why are the hands impatient?"

He dragged the boy swiftly to his feet.

"What are you rummaging around here for?"

Embarrassed giggles.

"I was just looking at those..." He pointed to the tiny slips of paper. "Do you write?"

"Didn't Miss Zsóka mention that?"

"No, she didn't. She just said that..."

"...I threw bombs...I made a sortie from the hills with a detachment... a suprise sortie."

He paused for breath and took stock of the company. That fat boy sprawled out in the armchair. He'd be lighting a cigar soon. He turned him angrily out of the chair.

"You wouldn't think of giving up your seat, would you?"

"To Uncle János."

"Not to Uncle János. To this girl."

He flung a slender girl into the armchair. And she disappeared. She just sank.

Zsámboky was still raging at the boy.

"Have you never heard of this sort of thing?"

He stopped. What am I shouting for? What good does it do? All of a sudden he sat down on the carpet. Cross-legged in the middle of the carpet.

"How many veterans have you got so far?"

"Two. But one of them was dead."

"Then he doesn't count."

"He does. His wife said..."

"You mean his widow."

"Yeah, his widow. Well, his widow said that she fought alongside him. They salvaged spare parts from some sort of factory, important spare parts."

"I've got nothing like that to my credit."

"Did you hand out leaflets?"

"No, I didn't hand out leaflets. I didn't hand out anything. And if you really want to know, I didn't shelter anyone and no one sheltered me."

While he was speaking, he kept looking at them.

Legs dangling from the divan. The knees pressed together. A hand slipped under a girl's bottom. It stayed where it was; it felt at home there. Two girls swapped pullovers. Someone was munching a bread roll. His neighbour scolded him: "You're making crumbs, Hunyadkürty!"

I'd better go and get them something after all. Yes, but what? Grape juice, coke, tonic... I'll have to go and have a look. Have I gone mad? Have I lost my senses? Am I going to offer this lot a drink? These little scroungers, who just broke in here?

Veteran collectors?

Garbage collectors! That's it: Your real sucking-up collectors of old rubbish! I'll go round to the Csorbas. I'll flop down on a divan. Have a good sleep. Sleep this whole thing out of my system.

It was as if he had stumbled into the kitchen of an unknown flat his movements were so uncertain. There was a half-empty bottle of wine on the table. DEBRŐI HÁRSLEVELŰ Demi-sec.

Empty bottles on the kitchen floor. Slightly dissolute wine bottles.

No sign of a soft drink. No coke, no grape juice, no tonic.

What then? Am I supposed to take in this half bottle of Debrői? Should I serve this?

He milled around at a loss.

General Franco had sparked off the uprising. There was another general alongside Franco. They were always mentioned together, at least at the beginning. What the hell was his name? They called in the Moroccan troops. Those notoriously cruel...

He clenched an old cork in his palm as he went back.

A boy was sitting on his desk smoking. He exhaled the smoke pensively.

"Didn't you keep a diary, Uncle János? Of those days?"

"What sort of diary?" He hurled the cork in the air. "What sort of diary of what sort of days?"

All this time he was looking at that girl. A stiff face, dark blond hair. Pink suit. Not really pink, rather a kind of... Smart, whatever the case. She is bored to death by all this. She doesn't understand how she got here.

Zsámboky kept looking at her. Staring at her. He was filled with the same kind of excitement he'd felt when he chatted up a girl for the first time in the Kinizsi Cinema.

"Your father?"

The girl didn't appear to have heard. Slowly, almost painfully, she turned her head towards him.

"What about your father? I mean, what does he do?"

A distant, uncomprehending glance. The girl gave a hardly perceptible shake of her head. She's going. She'll get up and go this minute. No. Unexpectedly, she spoke.

"Hairdresser."

"Barber," said a boy with derision. "And does he still love the bottle?"

The girl smiled at him. And replied in such a pleasant, mellow voice.

"Go and fuck your mother, Tihanyi."

"My dear girl!"

The first girl faded from his mind's eye, the Kinizsi Cinema faded, everything faded. He stretched out on the carpet. Someone bent down to him.

"Uncle János! Those books in the corner...?"

He raised himself slightly.

"One of my novels. They've come from abroad."

He said it like that, ceremoniously. They've come from abroad.

A small group by the books. It was as if they hadn't known each other before. They had met up here quite by chance.

One of the boys turned back.

"Have you been published abroad too, Uncle János?"

"There's nothing special about that."

"It's Cyrillic script."

"Cyrillic."

"So that means it's..."

"Bulgarian. The Bulgarian edition of one of my novels."

They stood around Zsámboky, looking at him as if he had dropped off one of the shelves.

Footsteps from the hall. Hesitant steps. Someone had gone out. Looking for the loo more than likely. I won't show him where it is. Not me. He can look for it. Let him look for it! The veteran's lavatory!

He lay on his stomach, stroking, combing, scratching at the patterns of the carpet.

"How many press-ups can you do, Uncle János?"

Suppressed giggles.

A voice.

"Restrain yourself, Kalocsai."

"Behave! Behave!"

Zsámboky sat up. He clasped his knees.

"I'm not in training."

Eyeing him, a girl remarked: "Thin. How thin!"

"Not at all. I'm just on burial weight."

"But Uncle János!"

Uncle János standing at the window, looking out onto the square. Burial weight... Why did I say that? To scare them? To horrify them? Not an unqualified success, if that was my aim.

"There used to be stalls here once."

"Stalls? Where?"

The girl in a checked shirt drew away from him.

"Did I interrupt you?"

"By no means. Yes, there were stalls… Vendors's stalls. And the square was called Vendors' Square."

"Father said it was called the Teleki."

"Of course. The Teleki. But the old stall-keepers called it Vendors' Square."

The two of them were on their own.

The girl in the checked shirt and János Zsámboky. Zsámboky rested on the pleasant, serene face. A resting place.

"What could you buy there?"

"Everything. A big selection of gents' and ladies' fashion items. But that goes without saying. Gramophone records and books, old theatre and cinema magazines, bath tubs, basins, double beds and double chandeliers. But that's not the half. Don't you want to buy an aeroplane, Miss?"

"An aeroplane?"

"As you say. All the best families need an aeroplane nowadays. Even if it isn't quite the latest model… And where can you get one from if not at the Vendors' Square."

"Aeroplane! Aeroplane!"

The girl suddenly fell silent. She touched Zsámboky's arm.

"And the stalls? What became of the stalls?"

"They disappeared. The stalls and the stall-keepers too."

"Why was that?"

"Why…? Why…?"

And now they were just standing at the window. Looking at the square. The empty square.

"Get off Uncle János's back!"

The boney-faced boy shoved the girl aside. He looked at Zsámboky without a word. Then a question welled up inside him.

"Were you in any sort of camp?"

"Camp? What camp?"

"Well, I mean…"

"Prison camp? Concentration camp?"

Silence. From somewhere in the distance he heard that thin shuddering voice. Where do you want to put me away? What sort of camp? There surely must be a camp for me too somewhere? Out with it! What can I expect?

The boy retreated towards the door.

"I think it's time we were going. And we really didn't want to disturb you."

"You're not disturbing me at all. Why don't you stay. We could talk some more… Let's talk!"

Now they were trooping out.

Zsámboky at their heels.

"Wait. We haven't even said goodbye."

Not a word. They didn't say goodbye. They didn't even look back. They galloped down the stairs. The building resounded with their clatter. Then it was as if they had all stopped suddenly somewhere at the bottom of the stairs.

A voice from the depths.

"Did you happen to know Lenin?"

Zsámboky peered down the bare, shabby staircase. He clasped the railing compulsively as he leant forward.

"No, I didn't know Lenin."

Translated by Elizabeth Szász

KÁLMÁN KECSKEMÉTI

A house blown up

On November 14, 1988 L. J. woke up in his concierge's flat at 86 Baross utca, Budapest, VIIIth district, to find that water was dripping on his face from somewhere. His first thought was that it must be a tap left running again in the flat above him—as had happened once before—and that the water was seeping through the ceiling. He tried to get up but was unable to move his limbs. It was then that he discovered that his whole body was buried under bricks and broken glass. He struggled free with some difficulty and saw that the partition walls were gone and so he had to scramble out to the street through the rubble. He was greeted by an apocalyptic sight. Wrecked cars, blown out window frames, remnants of shutters and glittering shards of glass strewn around as far as the eye could see. Shattered windows down the entire length of the street, and people escaping into the open in nightshirts and pyjamas.

It was half past four in the morning.

A retired school mistress on the third floor woke up to find the wardrobe toppled half over her bed. She was lucky because the wardrobe had held up the fallen-in partition wall—thus the old piece of furniture had saved the teacher's life. In the bathroom, where the mirror had been, stood the engineer from next door, as white as a sheet, in his nightshirt. The mirror had gone together with the wall. The flats opened into one another.

Three tenants never woke again. One young man and two elderly women had died in the blast. I can't help thinking of Thornton Wilder's *The Bridge of San Luis Rey*. Three different lives had ended in a common fate—why then and there, one may wonder.

The house was occupied by soldiers and, later, by policemen. Two blocks down the street everyone was checked for their identity and only those living there were allowed in the cordoned off area.

The military were carrying mysterious green crates from the house. The firemen didn't have much to do. Later the Gas Works denied rumours that the blast had been caused by a gas leak, saying that there had been no fire. Indeed, gas stoves continued to operate in the ruined flats. Tenents who lived through two world wars swore they smelt gunpowder.

Now—a year after the disaster—no one seems to know what caused a six-storey house to collapse in central Budapest in the winter of 1988. Most of the flats in the house were made uninhabitable. The State Insurance Company paid only for the movable goods of the victims, since the District Council Housing Maintenance Company had never insured the house itself: it had found that insurance cost too much. This is the same company which refuses to sign a contract with a prospective tenant until he duly presents his flat rate insurance policy.

Following the explosion the officials, so arrogant before (and after), of the State Insurance Company and the Housing Maintenance Company wandered among the ruins with visible emotion. They were assessing the damage.

Kálmán Kecskeméti *is a painter and photographer, living in the house he describes.*

The victims of the disaster stood there shocked and accepted with or without grumbling how their lives had been depreciated. Each searched for some relic in the rubble: an ear-ring or a photograph, or a chestnut that had been kept for years as a souvenir. And despite the presence of the soldiers and the policemen, gone too was the pension money put aside, gone were paintings and furniture—everything left unattended tended to vanish.

The Maintenance Company organized a work brigade of those liable for public work to clear the debris. The rest anyone can imagine. No doors could be locked in the house. The wind went in and out of the flats. Only the main walls were left standing. The homeless were put in emergency flats. And not even that was simple. The VIIIth District Council had one and one only emergency flat at its disposal. The whole capital came to their rescue and so the old neighbours were scattered. The tragedy modelled on a small scale how unprepared the public administration of the city was for a situation like this. Anarchy reigned. Information was spread orally in a haphazard way, completely out of anyone's control. No one seemed responsible for anything. No one knew anything. It was characteristic that those affected listened to their portable radios to hear what was happening to them in the midst of the events. The radio broadcast information that kept changing by the hour. In the beginning even the house number was given wrongly, then—no one knows at what central directive—a gas explosion was consistently referred to despite statements to the contrary of experts they themselves had interviewed.

Even a full year has proved too short to have a plausible account of the incident published. Thus rumours of all sorts were given ample scope. Here is a selection of them: a secret ammunition depot of the Workers' Militia blew up; an army officer in the chemical division experimented with some explosives; the young man among the casualties was a "follower of Satan" and he blew up the house; Arab terrorists had left behind them some explosive device in a ground floor flat let to paying guests; a Second World War bomb had lain hidden among the walls and something or other caused it to go off—and so on and so forth.

The fact is that the house had been damaged neither during the war nor the fighting of '56 to anything the same extent, although the neighbourhood has always been exposed to the hazards of war.

The old tenants, though shaken by the incident, became apathetic. The house had long ceased to be the same house where they'd spent their youth and to which they were attached by so many memories. That house had blown up a long time ago as far as they were concerned, and that the thing had really come to pass was merely the consummation of a literary metaphor which only here in East-Central Europe can happen, and become a bloody workaday reality.

In the photos taken by Antal Klösz in 1880 there are only one-storey houses visible around the baroque parish church of St Joseph. They all had the air of a provincial small town, the atmosphere was recreated in Krudy's dream-like novels and stories; it had vanished by the end of the century. This district—the Józsefváros, or Josefstadt—is an Atlantis that has been submerged several times over. Yet it makes one pause that despite so much destruction and uninspired reconstruction, and despite the changes in its population the district has preserved a spirit of its own that affects all those living here. Or rather it has done so until recently. Nowadays, however, it is gradually sinking into squalor, becoming engulfed in mindless destruction and blazes (see the gutted market-hall in Rákóczi tér) and in explosions, declining into complete decadence and debasement, becoming a run-down, a lumpenproletarian quarter. As a cab driver put it to me: it's no better than Harlem. After dark a resident does not dare to go out, although a few years ago Baross utca used to be a lively promenade. Today the crudest street walkers and their knife-wielding pimps have taken over, to live off the fat of the land. They pull out wads of crumpled banknotes the equivalent of three years of an academic's salary from their trouser pockets, drive around in cabs and have the latest currency rates of the Zurich Exchange at their fingerprints. They are hand in glove with the police. They too are entrepreneurs in a way—and might well think that they are having their day.

Numbers 86 and 88 Baross utca were built in 1913. The twin buildings were erected by the Foncière Insurance Company. The neon sign FONCIÈRE still glowed on the facade of 86 in 1953 and the name and address of the company together with the name of the architect and the date of building could be read in gold letters on a black glass tablet in the doorway. That glass tablet had been there, scrupulously clean, for 40 years. No one today would think of putting up a glass tablet—everything gets smashed up. There were three lifts working in the six-storey house. Two capacious ones with mahogany panelling, a leather upholstered bench, cut glass mirrors and copper buttons, always well-oiled and burnished, as well as a freight lift to carry the fuel from the cellars up to the flats. During the Second World War the tenants used this lift to get down to the wood cellar used as an air raid shelter.

The assistant caretaker used to sweep the stairs and the corridors every day and scour the entire house every week. This is now done, if at all, twice a year: before national holidays. The house could do with being cleaned up daily after today's tenants. Spilt milk, excrement of diverse origin, discarded beer bottles, unidentifiable liquids of other kinds, and dust, dust over everything, grime, soot and dirt, the deposit of several decades.

The flats opening from the staircase were built for well-to-do middle-class families. They were five room apartments complete with servant's rooms, and appointed with all the contemporary touches of luxury with specially manufactured window and door frames, brass door handles and fittings. These spacious flats were in the course of time partitioned off in a zig-zag way into smaller flats. The transposed pipes and the bad plumbing result in continual leaks in the flats below.

The house regulations had once ensured comfort and quiet for the tenants. Everyone respected these rules—except perhaps the kids, who the strict concierge managed to restrain from going haywire. I remember that in the early fifties if anyone shook the dusting cloth out of the window after ten a.m., the policeman went up and fined the person twenty forints. Let's not put this down to the Stalinist Rákosi regime—it was still a remnant of the old bourgeois social order and was in the public interest. It was one of the babies that got thrown out with the bath water.

What really can be linked with Rákosi's name was the social mobility, rarely ever based on personal ambitions and often put into effect by a certain degree of armed police assistance. It did not spare the house either. The wife of Count Festetics on the third floor was deported and two working class families moved into her place. Her servants adored the countess—and followed her for years bringing her food to the distant farms in the puszta and, later, to Sztálinváros. Then the black car stopped outside the house at night, steps were heard in the staircase—the bell fright.

And the new tenants arrived with new customs.

Tall trees with large crowns still arched over Baross utca in those days. The trees were felled in 1953 when the overhead cable of the trolleybus was laid on. It was then that the tram was taken off, the tram that was the first in the capital to tinkle here in what was then called Stáció utca. In those days people still dressed up of a Sunday in these parts and the girls wore large bows in their hair. People greeted each other and stopped to chat in the street. They went to Czeizing's confectionery where the tables had lace covers and the customers ordered mignons, or had Stefánia or other cakes packed to take home for dessert after dinner. Behind the church there was the Saint Joseph's chemist's, furnished with Endre Thék's finely carved furniture. Today a cheerless and hostile dive can be found in place of the confectioner's, while the chemist's was closed down, its furniture chopped up for firewood, and although a government decree forbids the use of shop premises as offices, naturally an office operates there now in the place of the chemist's shop.

One of the many schools built in the style of owl-haunted castles under the mayorship of István Bárczy is the one in Horváth Mihály tér. The explosion did not spare the windows of the school, either; (today it houses the Fazekas Secondary School.) In the old days the *pedellus*, the school janitor, flooded the school yard to make a rink where the old and young of the neighbourhood came to skate. There was another skating rink not far from here, opposite the former Benedictine Secondary School at the corner of Rigó utca, on the bombed-out site of the old Tobacco Factory. In the summer travelling circuses pitched their tents on the site. There were four cinemas—today

there is none. But there are some sights left. There is, for example, the notorious back street with a row of parked cars where the joyless sisters of joy parade in wait for their customers. In the evenings Pista can be seen around here in high heeled shoes, wearing net stockings, adjusting from time to time his false breasts under the silk blouse.

No less than four cafés were able to make a living at the intersection of Baross utca and the Grand Boulevard, where today there is a quick and dirty self-service cafeteria, a dive of a coffee bar (called the Jolly), the night club Savannah (strictly for the hard men), and an ailing restaurant, The Baross, furnished in the worst of tastes.

We have come a long way from the blown up house, and as we can see, the whole district has gone to seed. Some ten or fifteen years ago the bulldozer set out on its way and wreaked considerable havoc. The old quarter from the Botanical Gardens to Szigony utca was virtually razed to the ground, doing away with the old urban structure and replacing it with a jungle of high-rise prefabs. Luckily, the money was used up and so this crazy fling of concreting stopped. It is worth looking at the houses built ten years ago. Their epidermis is peeling off. Huge shreds of their plaster is off the walls revealing the crumbling hungarocell foam underneath. Dirt and decay everywhere. The surroundings of the new school makes the bleak industrial landscape of Antonioni's Red Desert look like an oasis of exciting stimuli. Harlem.

The chairman of the District Council says things are going to get worse. We are in the heart of Budapest, though. Incredibly precious building sites have stood vacant for years. Does no one claim them? Things don't work here as logic would dictate and as things work everywhere else in the world.

A foreign contractor has put up a new hotel complex within a single year in Kálvin tér. The wind goes in and out of the house that exploded a year ago, and it slams the doors at night. Every single thing that could be moved has been moved from the deserted and empty flats.

Translated by László T. András

ANDOR BAJOR

Coach and five

(1. NEAR HORSE)
Dream by the river Szamos

I had a dream that the Szamos was turned off with a huge monkey-wrench for rivers: they turned and turned it for a long time before it stopped, though it still dripped a little; however, it had stopped by the time the Chief Commisioners of Water Management had arrived, who had a writ to lead the Szamos back; the Szamos gave their paper a cold indifferent glance, for after all this made no difference whatever to it, so it started back at leisure, without the least hurry, I mean, it wended its way in the direction of the Lóna bridge, though it did have the impression that it had seen before those ten-storey concrete blocks, only the ones that used to be on the right now appeared on the left, and those on the left were on the right, which the Szamos accounted for by its now flowing backwards, which was true enough: there were superior, inexplicable principles involved in all this, which left the river cold anyway, because however it was, it was assured of acquiring all the worn shoes, dead dogs, torn plastic bags, its ration of oil, dole of petrol, share of waste, that is, all that a many-sidedly developed river needed to proceed forwards or backwards—for rivers had no say in deciding the direction, and anyway, who could a river turn to, what could a river do in the face of influential people? there was no flowing against them because they might get angry with the river and take its name away, have the trees on its banks cut down, plough its bed and sow it with cockshead (for thrift), or sprinkle it with salt (out of spite) and have its source stopped up with a special cork which they'll get hold of somehow, say, from Honduras, from where it will be brought by a ship, specially built for the purpose, to the snow-capped mountains; for a new bed will have been dug and filled with water, and a ship set afloat in the water, and there'll be a special cork aboard the ship with which to stop up the source of the river Szamos to put an end once and for all to these turbulent floods, continuous uncertainties, these volatile elements, which a river continuously presents to the most advanced science—a cork once and for all to stop this irresponsible babbling, a cork to stuff into the filthy mug of the clear spring, such a measure alone can be the final solution of the Szamos, or more precisely, of the Szamos that used to be.

(2. POLE-HORSE)
Baltazár

I have no idea who poisoned our dog. Perhaps the First Dog Poisoner of the County, or possibly, the First Deputy of the First Dog Poisoner of the County. These extremely important individuals are most likely elected by us, by a ballot so secret that we do not even notice it. That night, as on all other nights, it was pitch dark in our neighbourhood, and my wife only dared to venture out some twenty or fifty yards into the unlit world because she had our dog Baltazár with

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Andor Bajor *is a Transylvanian Hungarian writer living in Kolozsvár (Cluj). He clandestinely sent this story to Budapest where it appeared in the October 1989 issue of* Holmi, *a new literary monthly.*

her, and Baltazár, our dog, wasn't afraid either because he had my wife with him. The dog, courageous and eager to trust, as Dalmatians are in general, bolted then came running back to see if they—my wife on the one hand and he himself on the other—hadn't gone astray on this definitely black planet where Goodness had so much declined. While running to and fro it came upon the poisoned meat that had been prepared for him by the First Dog Poisoner of the County or the First Deputy of the First Dog Poisoner of the County; anyway, one thing is certain: good fortune was represented by some important individual, for otherwise how could he have got hold of meat to go with the poison? Baltazár came running in to me as cheerfully as ever, then took fright of a sudden, first wanting to hide under the bed but then, choosing to escape with tail between legs, he slid into my wife's room, had just enough strength to get on his feet again and hobbled off to the balcony, panting like a pair of bellows, his livid tongue lolling out. We called him once or twice but he could not hear us any more, the light of intelligence was gone from his eyes like it does from a modern philosopher's works, or from this poisoned world, or from the look turned in on itself of a crazed dictator. Baltazár was a real dog. He was buried in the Hajtás valley. A Rumanian shepherd, of his own free will, helped with the digging of the grave, for no other reason than that he knew the dog. Finally he had this to say: "This was a dog!"
When our resplendent age is submerged in the dust, mingling with charitable obscurity, the dry leaves, the parched seeds, the sheep droppings, the dropping holidays, the indifferent mould of the Hajtás valley—who then could a shepherd say of, "This was a man!"

(3. SIDE-HORSE)

My father related

that in the time of the Emperor Francis Joseph convicts were given pearl barley soup and in the summer they tied broomcorn into brooms in the prison yard and ate the barley soup and talked while making the brooms and then the guard ladled out the barley soup for them and after dinner they went on tying the broomcorn and when they had finished them all they were given barley soup again—naturally by the guard who didn't have a gun for it would only have weighed down his shoulder and so he too ate of the barley soup when the fancy took him and tied broom but only when he felt in the mood, not like the rest of them his guests who were most of the time busy making brooms and then ate the barley soup, but once a lad, one of the broommakers, sprang up and was over the fence and disappeared into the trees which was rather hard to understand, what a new unheard-of lawless ruffianly cheeky thing to do so rudely walk out on the guard to spurn all traditions so after this the broom makers tied the broomcorn any which way for a time and when they sat down to eat one of the grey-haired respectable tramps fetched a sign and said: Oh what a fool, an idiot, a stupid nitwit, he could be sitting among us now eating the nice pearl barley soup where on earth will the stupid arse find a place to make brooms hereafter?
(1986)

(4. REIN-HORSE)

Prayer for the Pursuers

The pursuers have not a moment's quiet looking day and night and night and day for those pursued who find the craftiest ways to hide in the houses factories under beds and who could tell if they are not hung in wardrobes or in the shoe department of the huge central super hyper market where they pretend to be one of the mucked up shoes in the identical boxes and they are all as like as two eggs they keep silent and won't tell on one another the pursuers exert themselves every hour God made from arse-hole till breakfast time while all those pursued like so many rabbits fade into the faded world the concrete walls the drabness of enthusiasm while the pursuers run alongside sweating blood and still can't see them not even when those suspicious beings venture into the street mingling with the unsuspecting crowds the pursuers watch in secret if the pursued

are still all there if they haven't put on disguises and dressed as traitors saboteurs or perhaps Mickey Mouse so as to become lost to sight and like Frankenstein the cinematic monster walk the streets now without anyone noticing the pursuers well know that any human face is suspect while a horrible face is not conspicuous the pursued populace has grown weary too and think nothing of their pursuers even though they live but for them a prayer must be said for them please Lord continue to help the pursuers do not let them run their legs off sweating blood do not let their eyes go round and round like crazy sheep go on oh Lord helping the pursuers calm their terrible hearts so they can understand the soul of truth the soul which is a live coal put that live coal into their hands help the pursuers to take a rest too.

(5. RIGHT-HAND LEADER)

I do not understand the Kurds

I do not understand what the Kurds want when it is hardly known how many of them there are, two million, ten million or twenty million of them, because the Kurds have never been taken a decent census of by the Kurds. And one can't very well understand what else the Kurds may want when they have five nice and proper native countries and no one knows why they should find it too few. What else could the Kurds want when they can write Arabic characters, Latin characters, even Cyrillic characters, but it seems that these three different scripts are still not enough for the Kurds. Perhaps they are set on getting Chinese characters in addition or maybe the Incas' quipu or the Teutonic runes, as well as Egyptian hieroglyphics so they can use them to scribble, these Kurds. You can't really understand these Kurds what else they could want when the Turks accept them as Turks and the Persians as Persians and the Arabs as Arabs. But that is not enough for the Kurds and they won't rest until the Turks take them for Arabs, the Persians for Turks and the Arabs for Persians. But the Kurds are not satisfied with that either, they go on shooting their mouths off, and shooting their guns as well, and they even go as far as to allege that they are being exterminated by gas, I can't really see what else they are out to get, these Kurds. Unless they want that these absurdities should be given the lie by the Turks and the Persians too, for it is unimaginable that the Persians should pick a quarrel with the Turks or the Turks with the Arabs simply because the Kurds won't stop at inventing so much horrible stuff like this. It is absolutely inconceivable what else the Kurds may want seeing that they can escape wherever they like since no one in the world is killing them off with poison gas like bugs, these Kurds. I can't really understand why it would be such a great scourge for humanity if the Kurds were really to die out and why they should make such a meal of their extermination, of the Kurds, I mean. What's more, I don't really understand who the Kurds in fact are, why they keep making such hell of a fuss, bellyaching, fighting, feeling, and why they want to perish at all cost if they really are Kurds. And absolutely no one can say for certain if there really are Kurds or they just pretend to be Kurds while they are a rabble of riff-raff wishing to get differential treatment from all those who are not Kurds at all. I for one can't see for the life of me what a narrow-minded provincial gang these Kurds can be believing that mankind attaches the least importance to their lot, or that there should be anywhere in the world a government minister or even a nature lover or even a treasurer of a society to prevent cruelty to animals who would be taken to hospital with heart trouble at receiving the indifferent news that there are no Kurds at all from that day on.

Translated by László T. András

The Hungarian Democratic Forum on the political scales

Interview with József Antall, Chairman of the Hungarian Democratic Forum

József Antall, 58, political, cultural and medical historian, Head of the Semmelweis Museum, Library and Archives of Medical History, President of the Hungarian Society of Medical Historians, surprised everyone by showing himself fully equipped to be a politician in a pluralist society.
How could someone achieve this without being a party member in a party state, where even the state party required executives rather than politicians?

I believe in politics one must possess certain knowledge and perhaps certain inclinations, and additionally one must be clear about the ideas and objectives one represents. It has certainly helped me that I grew up in an environment in which politics was a natural vital element for our whole family. During the Second World War my father was government commissioner for refugees, afterwards Secretary of State and Minister in the Zoltán Tildy and Ferenc Nagy governments. In my childhood already I met a great many politicians and public figures. My very busy father often took me on his official trips, so we could be together. I accompanied him to refugee camps as well as to parliamentary sittings.
In my political and intellectual commitment my interest in the populist writers and descriptive sociologists was decisive. While still at secondary school I read the works of Imre Kovács, Ferenc Erdei and László Németh. István Bibó was an older friend right up to his death. Nevertheless, I never thought of myself a Third Roader in the way many people define this notion in an overly concrete manner, as a third way between individualism and collectivism, much as Wilhelm Röpke had done originally.
My intellectual commitment was defined by the political and social approach to national democracy, political liberalism and Christian Democracy. Let me note here that I was a founding member of the Hungarian Piarist Student Association. This is not a religious issue, since in Eastern Europe—as it is often said—even the agnostic are Christians. The integration of Catholicism and Protestantism in Christianity certainly had a great influence on European thinking.

In 1956 you were elected by the staff of the Eötvös gimnázium chairman of the school's revolutionary committee, and you found yourself under arrest for other political activities at the time of the retributions. But unlike others who suffered a similar fate, you kept up with the political process systematically without playing a political role.

In 1956 I worked for the Smallholder Party, of which my father was a member as well. I was a founding member of the Christian Youth Federation, and also maintained close contacts with the Petőfi Party. After this I devoted myself mainly to my historical studies. I wrote my doctoral thesis on national liberalism, whose great figures, Széchenyi, Kossuth, Deák, and Eötvös also serve as my political models. My political idea is harmony between the rule of law and the security of society.

You stubbornly avoid answering my question related to the sources of continuous information which—in addition to your ideological foundations—made it possible for you to face professional politicians on an equal footing in the recent negotiations that drafted key legislation.

My interest in politics was always decisive. It would, of course, be boasting to claim that I knew about everything at the same depth as those who had all the information available to them. But I kept up with world political events, and Hungary happens to be a gossiping country, where it is possible to know within a few days what was said at meetings of the Political Committee or the Government. Applying a comparative approach to such information, it was possible to draw more or less correct conclusions about what was happening in the country.

A week ago, at your national conference, you discussed and adopted the Draft Programme of the

MDF. What do you personally consider the strongest feature of this programme?

I would not like to differentiate at the present stage of the programme, since that would express a judgement on the authors and the working teams. I believe that there are some weaker and better elaborated paragraphs in every chapter. After it has been published, we shall be able—in the light of the comments of political opponents—to improve it to an extent where it can become a concrete action programme. In other words, we must try to confront the programme with the present situation in Hungary.

What do you think will prove most controversial?

Obviously economic policy. Then, probably, the relationship between central state power and self-government. In foreign or security policy there really are no realistic alternatives. Of course, in respect of economic policy too there is agreement among the parties that a market economy is needed, just as everybody advocates autonomy and self-government. But here there can be differences in implementation. In the last resort what can be realised of the election programme and how depends on the credibility of the parties and of the persons active in them, as well as on the quality of formulation.

In a recent article, the economist László Lengyel argued that the MDF—although it is fundamentally a movement or party of professional people—has not succeeded in obtaining access to the holders of the commanding posts in the economy. What do you feel about that?

It is only natural that in a closed society managers should not be members of an opposition party. It is part of the nature of politic that managers and technocrats usually approach opposition movements after the latter have left the embryonic stage, once they have a chance to share in power. Practical people are interested in action and control and not in theoretical preparation. A contributing factor is that in

The MDF

The Hungarian Democratic Forum (MDF) dates its birth from a conference held at Lakitelek, a village between the rivers Danube and Tisza, on September 27, 1987, where the approximately 160 intellectuals present defined themselves as an independent intellectual-political movement. "The Hungarian Democratic Forum wants to be the successor to those Hungarian traditions and movements (primarily the ideas of the Reform Period of the early 19th century) which wanted to link...national and popular interests...with social progress, struggle against absolutism, for independence and the idea of European humanism"—their foundation manifesto pointed out. From the beginning it considered as an unalienable part of the nation those Hungarians who were locked out of the country by the new borders drawn up by the peace treaty following the Great War and all those who considered themselves Hungarians in whatever part of the world they lived.

The first mass function of the Hungarian Democratic Forum was the demonstration held in Budapest in June 1988, with the participation of hundreds of thousands, in the vital interests and rights of Hungarians in Transylvania, that were being trampled on by the Ceausescu regime in Rumania.

The MDF received official recognition in September 1988. But it did not transform itself into a regular party even after the recent Party Act: it calls itself a movement with registered members which functions as a party. At the present time (January 1990) the number of members exceeds 23,000. In November 1989 the leaders of the Hungarian Socialist Party, the successor party established at the congress of the Hungarian Socialist Workers Party (HSWP) at the beginning of October, cannot claim with full creditibility that more people have registered as members of the new party. Only one of the historic parties, the Independent Smallholders, Agricultural Workers and Citizens's Party, claims that the number of its members exceeds 25, 000.

Of course, size of membership alone does not tell much of the influence and attraction of a party. Recently a former HSWP member claimed that a Bolshevik HSWP in process of reorganization will have as many as 120,000 members, but that would mean precisely 120,000 votes. The MDF is attractive and enjoys considerable authority especially in smaller villages, being unfettered by an ideology. Within the framework of the basic principles, populists of the Third Road school, Christian Democrats and liberals make happy bedfellows.

Of these it is perhaps the populist Third Road trend which requires some explanation. The concept of the "third road" derives from the Swiss economist Wilhelm Röpke, but it became "Magyarised" by the interwar movement of Hungarian populist writers. They conceived a democracy in

Hungary a considerable part of managers were appointed to leading business posts after an earlier career in the Party apparatus or the state administration, precisely because of the commitment to the governing party.

Managers have not, but others frequently complain that while parties are being established in quick succession, their own political interests are not present anywhere. Do you think there are sections of society whose complaints of that nature are justified?

The time of class and sectional parties is definitely over in Europe. As a result of social processes, a homogenous working class no longer exists. The Social Democrats were their party when first organized in the 19th century. The peasantry has also changed in character and diminished in numbers. Consequently the parties relying on peasant support also have to change their policies. With various emphases, and expressing different political traditions, every party now tries to behave like a people's party. What we can speak of is only whether there is a section of society or group which parties that have the nature of a people's party cannot cover. In Hungary, at the present moment, the opposition movements do not yet adequately cover the industrial workers. The Hungarian Social Democratic Party has not been able to do so either. It is in the interest of all parties, as well as their duty, to create an adequate representation for the industrial workers. I am not in favour of a class party, but the Austrian People's Party is a good example. It has a peasant association, a workers' organization and a professional and employee organization, i.e., it relies on major sections of society.

Not only the workers, but for instance artisans and shopkeepers too reproach the parties for not standing up for them!

I believe that this is due to the underdevelopment of the system of political institutions. In a well-functioning democracy it is the job of professional asso-

which the leading force would be the peasantry which was held to be the quintessential representative of the nation. It would transform itself into a body of farmers with middle-sized properties, following a radical land reform, and carry on independent small-scale production of high quality, or would unite voluntarily in cooperatives, and could thus be organised into a well-to-do and educated, strong middle-class.

Of the programmes adopted at the second national conference of the Hungarian Democratic Forum, held between October 20 and 22 1989, the agricultural programme still reflects this spirit. This would make it possible for those who make their living on the land to leave cooperatives created under pressure from above and not without threats and violence, but it does not want to dissolve by force well-functioning agricultural cooperatives. It only wants to free them entirely from state intervention, so that they should be independent and autonomous.

Autonomy generally is a major point in the programmes of the MDF. This includes municipal and professional autonomy as well as the self-government of production entities, school and health care institutions. Unlike most other opposition parties and movements, the MDF is not in favour of unlimited privatisation, not considering it realistic in the present period of transition, owing to a lack of adequate capital. The MDF does not want to restrict private property by administrative methods either, but besides its existence on an equal footing, it attributes great importance to a broad choice of communal ownership forms. This would include municipal, church, county, and foundation property as well as joint stock companies.

The MDF functions according to the principles of democracy at the base. The local (village, town, metropolitan district) branches are independent legal entities with their own statutes. They delegate members to a general meeting, the parliament of the MDF. The national leadership is formed by the presidium, i.e., the council of the presidents of local organizations.

The absence of leaders of standing, universally accepted by members, causes great problems to most Hungarian opposition political organizations. It was a major achievement of the second national MDF conference that it was able to elect a president by a majority of over 90 per cent, a man who, during the drafting of key legislation (amendment to the Constitution, Electoral Act, Party Act, etc) won recognition not only among the representatives of the parties gathered in the opposition Round Table, but who was respected even by the representatives of the Socialist Party (at the time of the negotiations still HSWP). The interview with the chairman of the MDF took place a few days after his election.

ciations and trade associations to represent professional interests, and protection of workers and employees is the duty of the trades unions. In the parties, on the basis of the interest systems, and indirectly, the formation of the political will should take place. It is only in the present transitory situation that the demand to directly represent professional and personal interests is made.

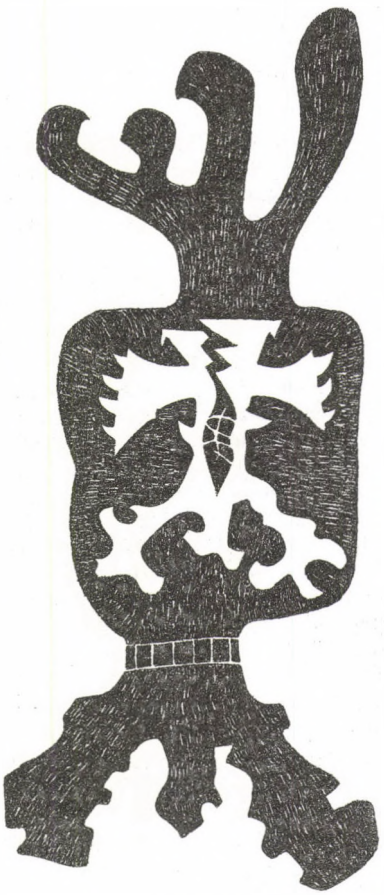
Mr Chairman, you have declined to answer questions concerning your person and private life. But perhaps you will tell me whether it was easy for you to accept the office of president of the MDF?

I accepted only after being importuned for a long time by my friend, the poet Sándor Csoóri. It was he and Professor György Szabad, the historian, who invited me to the first MDF meeting at Lakitelek. Professor Szabad was assistant lecturer when I was a student at the same university, and we have known each other since then.

To what degree have you been able to reconcile your work as the head of a museum with the intellectual leadership of what is, at the present moment, after the transformation of the HSWP, very likely the political organization with the largest membership?

If in other countries, to the west of us, it was possible to reconcile the leadership of a party with high government office, why would this be more difficult for a museum director? It is of course a condition that I should have a good staff in both areas, and especially, that people should believe that things can be arranged without talking to me personally. Under no circumstances would I agree to be a fulltime member of a party apparatus.

Iván Érsek



Warrior

LÁSZLÓ SÓLYOM

Data protection and freedom of information

The use of computers and of electronic data processing in general is relatively new in Hungary. It was only in the seventies that the first major plans for an integrated state administration data system were made and the relevant institutions were established. Just as in underdeveloped countries, the Hungarian state also has maintained its dominant role in the extensive use of new information techniques even after the pioneer period of computerization. Relatively little is known of the use of computers in industry or commerce and only tentative data are available on the number and use of privately owned personal computers.

Attention and financial resources were concentrated on the modernisation of administration. Unfortunately, this modernisation did not include changes in the policy of centralisation. On the contrary, the computers seemed to bolster the old system by making central information gathering and processing more effective. This first period was the age of big computers, big registers, big power. Big Brother was forgotten; mathematicians and bureaucrats were enthusiastic about the apparently unlimited possibilities, nobody seemed to be aware of the dangers, or the threat to human rights. (Orwell's *1984* was only published in Hungary in 1989.) In 1972 a huge data processing centre to serve the State administration was established. This was the Public Administration Computer Centre (Hungarian abbreviation ASZSZ.)

In 1975 a Citizen Register was established containing the basic personal data of all Hungarian citizens and permanent foreign residents. A personal identification number was introduced for this purpose. At the same time a further integration of state data banks was announced. The Bureau of the Citizen's Register propagated its plan to develop into an integrated personal data bank, storing up to date data on all residents concerning their family status, education, health, accomodation, income, property, descent, etc. All data could (and still can) flow without legal restriction between or within all public authorities and state organizations. Official propaganda stressed the benefits of this modernisation for citizens. If their data are kept in central data banks they would not be bothered by inquiries and surveys; in case of an accident a hospital could immediately obtain their health record; public administration would be speeded up, etc. An unchangeable personal identification number (PIN) was the condition for all these benefits and its wide use was introduced without delay.

Legislation concentrates on the feeding of data banks. An unbelievably high quality of data must be collected and processed. The obligatory data flow between data banks is also regulated. Thus the Citizen Register has to transfer personal data regularly to local councils, the National Statistical Office, the Ministry of Defence, the Ministry of the Interior as well as to the Social Insurance Office [1]. On the other hand security had to be ensured. Secrecy and safety measures were extended to cover data banks (who should have the key to the computer room, or who should know the password),[2] but little attention was paid to ensuring the privacy of data subjects. For instance all organizations (incorporated or not, public or private) have access to the Citizen's Register if they need data to carry out their duties; private persons must show a legal interest in order to obtain the personal data of others.[3]

The same law provides that the disclosure of data must not breach state or official secrets or violate the public interest or any personal rights (right to privacy). In everyday practice, however, this general

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1. Decree of the Presidential Council 10/1986 on the Citizen's Register.
2. The respective legislation has been continuously amended, most recently by decree 5/1987 on state secrets and official secrets.
3. See Note 1.

prohibition is not of much weight as the conditions for getting data from the Register are easy to fulfill.

The most important protection for personal data is section 83 of the Civil Code, an amendment of 1977.[4] This section provides that electronic data processing must not invade privacy and gives the right to every person to be informed about his stored data, and the right to correct incorrect data. However, the individual has no access to his data, if "the state or public interest would be violated" by such access. Technical data protection rules were implemented, but the protective rule of the Civil Code remained a dead letter. No action has been brought before the courts so far. This is due partly to deficiencies of section 83 of the Civil Code. Who is to decide whether access violates the public interest, the keeper of data or the court? If the keeper of data is a public authority there will be no judicial review of the refusal.[5] Moreover, nobody knows who keeps his data and where, and what kind of data they are. Even if he knew of his right to access (something the average man does not), he does not know against whom this right is to be enforced.

The centralised model was characteristic of the first period of computerisation. It has been strengthened and prolonged in Hungary by the centralistic philosophy of the socialist state. We are all aware however that this unity covers up conflicts of interest groups and power centres. Despite the fact that there are central data banks, such as ASZSZ and the Citizen Register, in reality the data stocks, and thus the power exercised by information, have remained divided. Each central state authority has built up its own information system. Ironically, the unrestricted information flow is blocked not by civil rights, but by the rivalry of data users. In many cases the computers of the different ministries are not compatible. But even data processed by the computers of ASZSZ are separated strictly according to "owners." Not only does each authority insist on the right to dispose over their data but the codes remain different. ("Dwelling" does not mean the same to the Building Authority and the Statistical Office.) Even the Citizens' Register has been doubled.[6] One cannot therefore speak of data integration in public administration. Another question is that some powerful ministries, such as the Ministries of the Interior, Defence or Finance, can obtain access to data they need. Under such circumstances the nature of the Computer Service of the State Administration, ASZSZ, is changing, this organisation is turning into a commercial enterprise.[7]

Of course this is no substitute for legal guarantees. It is true that there is no real demand for data protection rights in Hungary where citizens have not customarily insisted on civil rights. Thus the personal identification number is generally asked for and readily given. Not only public authorities, but banks, insurance offices, doctors, schools, even shops use it, it has become natural to add the PIN to the signature. It should be noted, that the law makes identification by PIN obligatory only for administrative agencies and courts.[8] Nobody else has the right to make a service or performance depend on obtaining the PIN; yet in practice no form of cash transaction can be effected without it.

The Data Protection Bill

As section 83 of the Hungarian Civil Code shows the legislature considered it necessary to protect privacy against data processing. Bearing in mind the absence of lawsuits, even this very incomplete protection seems excessive. On the other hand, data professionals must have been aware of the laws in developed countries and of international conventions and recommendations. Around 1985 the Statistical Office initiated the study of foreign legislation as preparation for a Hungarian data protection law. This was all the more creditable as the Office, the biggest data user in Hungary, knew that the law would restrict its free data handling and as, at that time, civil rights were on the agenda. I was asked to write a paper for the Statistical Office on the principles of the future Data Protection Act and later in connection with drafting the bill[9] for discussion in the Office and among the Ministries.

The time was favourable for new legislation. Foreign experience with first generation Data Acts could be utilized. A general right to "informational autonomy" had already been formulated by the German Federal Constitutional Court.[10] The precedent of Freedom of Information Acts was also available. Different models for independent data control could be evaluated.

4. The Hungarian Civil Code: Law IV/1959 as amended by Law IV/1977.

5. In Hungary there is no administrative jurisdiction. Administrative courts will be set up within two years as part of the present reforms. At present some 17 kinds of administrative decisions can be reviewed by the courts of general jurisdiction, but the decision mentioned in the text is not among them.

6. It takes up nearly 50 per cent of the capacity of ASZSZ, but the Bureau of the Citizens' Register has all the data in its own computer in another system suited for its special services. On the plans and the realization of the integrated data system, see the ASZSZ yearbooks. (in Hungarian.)

7. ASZSZ sells computer hours not only to public authorities. Its status will be that of a pure "Computer bureau" or "Verarbeiter" in terms of the UK and Austrian Data Protection Acts.

8. See Note 1 on page 3.

9. A German translation is available.

10. Recht auf informationelle Selbstbestimmug, in BVerfGE 65. 1. (December 15th, 1983).

The Hungarian Bill is deliberately stated in general terms. The general rules are necessary in order to clarify the priorities expressed by the Act. Later these priorities can be formulated more precisely in a set of second generation data acts for specific fields, but cannot be altered. On the other hand, the basic rights of individuals regarding their personal data must be regulated in detail by the Data Protection Act. The Act will guarantee all rights connected with information. It is not restricted to electronic data processing, or to special data collections, the rights are independent of the technology used. Protection must however bear in mind the dangers of electronic data handling. The Bill covers all information with no distinction between the public and private sphere, and allows no general exemption for any state agency (e.g. for state security or the police). All personal data are worthy of protection. All data related to an identified or identifiable person are personal.

Two basic rights create the framework of the Bill: the right to informational autonomy and the right to freedom of information. The former means that everybody has the right to dispose over the disclosure and the use of his personal data. No data processing is lawful without the consent of the individual (except if it is ordered by law). The right to autonomy has priority over other interests in using data.

On the other hand, the law has to promote the free flow of information. The abolition of secrecy is also a condition of the freedom of citizens. This right makes the State apparatus transparent and gives citizens a chance to informed participation. The Bill provides that all public agencies are obliged to give everybody access to all data of public interest except personal data and data classified as secret. By introducing this right the traditional secrecy of the socialist state will be overcome. Freedom of information further means the publicity of the information policy of the state and its liability for the transparency of the information flow and data use. As part of this, a public register must be established. In this, all data keepers have to record the objective of their data processing, the individuals covered, the nature and the origin of the data, and the persons to whom data will be regularly disclosed.

Further basic principles of the Bill are: personal data should be processed only for a specialised and lawful purpose. Data processing must be in conformity with the registered purpose in all of its phases (Principle of the specific purpose). The principle of the divided information systems implies that different records should not be connected unless all disclosure conditions for each item are fulfilled. By virtue of this principle public administration is no longer a single unit from the point of view of data processing. Parallel records must be kept because data flow between authorities is limited by the specific purpose rule. As a guarantee, on line connections to personal data banks and computer matching need a specific legal ground and have to be licensed. Data collected for statistical purposes must not be used as individualised personal data. This question is highly sensitive since the West German census was stopped on this ground in 1981 and 1983, and a similar plan to use census data caused severe anxiety this year in Hungary. In all data protection and freedom of information cases recourse to the courts is possible. The importance of this guarantee could be seen above in the case of section 83 of the Hungarian Civil Code. Individuals are provided with rights complying with international standards: they have the right to inspect the register of data users; to be informed and to be given notice of processing their personal data; to correct or to erase data; to be compensated for losses (the data user has strict liability). Individuals are entitled to call on the Data Protection Commissioner and not only the courts in any case regarding rights under the Data Law.

The Bill gives full details of these rights. All data protection laws provide for an independent control agency. Of the usual types (special administrative court, government agency, ombudsman) the Hungarian Bill chose the last. We will have a one-person agency, the Data Protection Commissioner (who is at the same time the Information Commissioner in the sense of the Freedom of Information Act). This solution flows from the growing role of courts in defending civil rights. The Bill is part of this process. The Commissioner, not being an administrative authority, cannot issue directives to the data user. He can make objections to unlawful data use, thus initiating mediation. If he is unsuccessful he can sue on behalf of the person who asked for his help, or on behalf of the public. The Commissioner's weapon is publicity. He will publish annual reports on Data Protection and Freedom of Information, and will often appear in the media. The Commissioner will have access to all data banks and will have to be furnished with all information needed to carry out his duties. He will also keep the register of data users. The Commissioner will be independent, elected by parliament, and only responsible to it. This Bill was drafted and submitted to the Statistical Office in February, 1988. After a year of silence the Statistical Office presented the "Principles of the Data Protection Act" to the Council of Ministers, which decided that Parliament would debate the Bill at the end of 1990.

Data protection attitudes and laws revisited

The spectacular collapse of socialist regimes in Europe and the geometrical progression of the acceleration of the process may well hide the true hour of decision from our eyes. The scenarios on the basis of

which one-party dictators were apparently liquidated within a fortnight in East Berlin and Prague were written by round table conferences over six months in Hungary and an even longer period of time in Poland. The bicentennial of the French Revolution should remind us of the contribution which the *illuminés* of the Ancien Regime make to drafting the legislation of the New Order. The change is explosive, produced by the masses in the street, in countries where oppression was most cruel, reversing the order of events: the structures of the opposition will have to be created *ex post facto,* and the legal system will have to be transformed. One cannot tell as yet in which sequence the debates and clashes of interest cause least damage to the changes.

In Hungary relative prosperity and freedom inclined the masses to come to an arrangement with the old regime; it was up to technocrats and intellectuals to struggle for the conditions of true democracy. The people only gave tongue at a number of mass demonstrations that acted as a warning and expressed support. In the eyes of the man in the street the bankruptcy of the regime was primarily an economic bankruptcy. The fight for the rule of law was a war on two fronts. Civil society was reborn on the one hand when individuals and their associations started to avail themselves of constitutional rights which, owing to restrictions by the authorities, had been a dead letter before. On the other hand, the reformers within the system, in keeping with what was undertaken when signing the convention on human rights some years ago, started a feverish activity concerning civil rights legislation. Their attitude and language were those of an enlightened absolute monarchy: we grant rights to the people. The people had to engage in a press campaign in the spring of 1989 to ensure that it had some say in matters that affected it. The result was a law on associations that truly assured that freedom to associate, and legislation that guaranteed the right to strike. The political round table negotiations of the summer and autumn then led to laws that pointed the way to democracy, the amendments to the constitution and the penal code, the new electoral law and the law on political parties. Negotiations, and the demands for freedom in general, were governed by rights in the classical sense of the term. Freedom of information and data protection seemed out of place and no time was given to them. Warnings were in vain that the power of the administrative apparatus largely depended on the information available to it.[11] No more was demanded of the law on the press than the end of censorship and a universal right to publish a newspaper. Perhaps it was fortunate that the immediate interests of a number of oppositional groups—their demand for the return of confiscated samizdat publications—took the press law off the agenda of the political negotiations. Thus it became possible to include general rules concerning freedom of information in the draft of a Press Act in the course of the sittings of the committee of experts, and there is hope that—should the Ministry of Justice neglect to do so—a parliamentary representative of the oppositional Hungarian Democratic Forum (MDF) will table a Data Protection and Freedom of Information Bill.

It proved possible to include both the protection of personal data and the right of access to data of public interest amongst the amendments to the constitution, matters of great future importance though barely noticed by the public. The amendment also introduced the ombudsman and provided that special commissioners can be appointed by parliament for the protection of certain constitutional rights.[12] It was the Data Protection Commissioner that the various ministries had most vociferously objected to in the past. It would appear that government offices react more quickly to the changes than citizens who are the subjects of data. People are still primarily interested—in my opinion at least—in democratic changes that echo 19th century demands. Even the Greens, generally reckoned allies of data protection, were largely prompted by democratic demands, their wish for participation and for autonomous communities when starting their activities early in the 80s. Data consciousness is nevertheless getting off the ground, even if slowly. Interviews and articles have pointed out the dangers of the personal identification number. This has received a wide echo over the past three years. It happens occasionally that people refuse to give their PIN or, if they are compelled to, they protest. The administration is well aware that an explosion, a tidal wave of protest, related to data protection rights, might occur at any time. That is why they show caution. Last year a decree gave the Citizens Register the privilige to obtain data of each individual's education, using the 1990 census data. I opposed this in public, reffering to the principle of specific purpose which prohibits merging statistical and individual data, further to German experience with something similar. In the summer of 1989 the Bureau of the Citizen Register announced, that (for financial reasons) it would make no use of this privilige.

In recent weeks the reflexions on the Bill of some ministries have become known. It appears to me that even the Data Protection Act of the land of Hesse in Germany would fall short of the ministries' expectations. The criticism is partly due to the fact that the authorities learned from the Bill to what extent their data processing practice would be limited after the Act becomes law. Few go as far as rejecting the Bill

11. László Sólyom: "Egy új szabadságjog: az információszabadság" (A new right: the right to information) *Valóság* 1988/9.

12. § 32/8/3 of the Constitution

on the grounds that it threatens the security of the state. Indeed I am certain that the bulk of the objections occurred before the major political changes and that more understanding is likely to be shown today. However, the vast majority of the ministries will not be reconciled to an independent control agency and they insist on a definition of exemptions. As I already said, I will not budge on the question of the Data Commissioner. A government agency would certainly be unacceptable. On the other hand, there are real problems with the Draft. [13]

Nevertheless I hope that after clearing up these problems the Bill will become law. This will not only serve citizens's rights but Hungary will fulfill the conditions for accession to the Strasbourg Council of Europe convention on the protection of personal data and free data flow.

13. I am not sure wether the registration duty is not exaggerated and what kinds of data or data user could be exempted from it. I do not know whether a notification of the registered person is a workable guarantee. Perhaps the too wide scope of the law, especially the fact that it also applies to the commercial sphere without specific rules, will be the source of difficulties. It is also a source of disquiet that no further laws concerning specific applications, such as data protection in the field of public health, the police, banking and insurance, are in preparation.

Facing tanks

FERENC GLATZ

Writing history in Central Europe

Modern historical studies in Europe are said to be a century and a half old, dating back to the time when Leopold von Ranke and his disciples formulated the rules of historical method, when Droysen, Waitz and Wattenbach insisted that historians criticise their sources. Historians of every generation have since then undertaken to cultivate their discipline objectively: to free themselves from the prejudices of their age, from the social-political and personal impressions they had gained. These generations indeed believed that they really could stand outside the struggles of the present.

My generation has grown up after the war. We are the children of the consolidation, we were spared the experience of wars, radical movements and fascism. We had every reason not to challenge the teaching of the old master, Leopold von Ranke, concerning *"wie es wirklich gewesen ist"*. Yet, a present factor, more potent than anything before, stimulates our generation to revise the interpretation of our predecessors concerning the nature of historical studies, and the basic categories of the handbooks and textbooks of European history. Why and in what respect?

Just because they were brought up in the period of consolidation, members of my generation, after university studies, moved about with natural ease as scholarship holders in the institutes of Germany, Austria, England, France, and in the same way in those of Moscow, comparing national histories written from various national points of view. When they began examining these national historiographies for their roots, they continually ran up against the masters of the 19th century, who had always made use of the auxiliary disciplines, of course criticisms and meticulous annotations, perhaps just in order to hide, even from themselves, how much they were bound to the great experience of their generation: the experience of growing into a nation.

Today's historian already writes with a quasi-offensive rationality: it is the evolution of nations that turned historical studies into a major discipline in Europe, for the basic material of national homogeneity had to be the common past and sense of citizenship. But as we—Austrian, German, French, Irish, Rumanian, Finnish, American, and Hungarian scholarship holders—asked in the 1970s in the canteen of the Mainz Institut für Europäische Geschichte, what good would it do the world today if we, each and every one at our respective universities at home, would teach, e.g., the history of the Great War from our own national angle? Were the earlier historians right, to cut up history into national histories, back to antiquity, in the same manner as they now make national histories out of the history of the Central European region? Merely because the development of states in the 19th and 20th century requires the historian, even today's historian, to compile textbooks in which history is presented as an important adjunct to civics, in accordance with current state boundaries?

Text of an address, given in Vienna on 26 October 1989, on the occasion of the presentation of the annual Gindely Prize, the highest Austrian distinction in the social sciences. Ferenc Glatz, a historian, was Head of the Institute of Historical Studies of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences before becoming Minister of Culture in 1989.

And let us now look at what is meant by states. In this respect the experiences of our generation have perhaps been more staggering than those of people who lived through wars and the birth of national states. If we look at the history of Europe over the past hundred years with our eyes open, we can see that citizens in the 19th century grew up under the magic spell of the state and its institutions. Indeed, the state ensured a framework for life in European development: the institutions of labour-safety and employment, law and order on the highway and in trade, schooling and the transmission of culture. It is only natural that historical studies—even though pretending to be free, or desiring to be liberated from factors present earlier—divided the history of mankind in terms of states. The politics of the 19th and 20th century and its creation, the state, or, rather, the national state, seemed to be the true pinnacle of historical progress. But, we asked when, sitting on the bank of the Rhine in the 1970s, we stared at the lifeless waters of the river, and then looked with genuine respect on antinuclear movements that were not manipulated by the Great Powers, and saw that not even the so highly regarded consumer society would overcome social tensions, were earlier historians right to argue that the state and its institutions could be regarded as a solution to everything? Our prompt rejoinder was that such historians neglected to mention that everyday living conditions are ultimately determined by factors outside the institutional system of the state: by demographic factors, the learning of a trade, self-preservation, adaptation to the common body of conventions, etc. These were the events at the depths of community life of the people moving in the various regions, including our own Central Europe. The state, in the first place the national state—I admit—is a very important factor in shaping man's communal culture, but historians so far have expected too much of it. Our students, our readers, all of us now have to explain what has led to the global problems of the late 20th century: the destruction of the environment, the upsetting of the biological balance of nature, or that an uncontrollable technological-military potential can decide the fate of the entire region in the age of the chip. While looking for an explanation, we have to admit that the state and nation-centred world of ideas, and the system of viewpoints which have so far dominated historical studies, are in a pityful state.

But we also have to break with such points of view even if we at long last wish to present the history of a community from the point of view of man who is active and intends to live his life with all its sorrows and joys. What is more, we have to break with the ideas of the old historians, even if what we investigate in the life of these communities are the intellectual cohesive factors, the ethnic traditions. How can a state-centred notion of nation, a national minority, etc., handle the history of a region with an ethnically mixed population? It calls the Germans in Germany a nation, the Hungarians in Hungary equally a nation, and then includes the Germans of Hungary and the Hungarians of Rumania in the lesser category of national minorities.

Nation-state vs. society

Besides grumbling with my coevals about the national limits of the old way of writing history, we thought that historical research, with a global approach to the region of Central Europe, became a favourite pursuit of the political and intellectual great powers of a particular time because the historians of the local small states were hamstrung by the state-nation complex. As I already argued many years ago: the comprehensive history of the region was written by German, then American or Soviet historians. The historians of the small nations in the region—the Czechs, South Slavs, Austrians, Poles, Hungarians, Rumanians—busied themselves in their writings scratching off the scabs of the injuries they inflicted upon one another. (All this is done, of course, in treatises equipped with a scholarly apparatus.)

For this very reason, when we began, in the first half of the 1980s, to occupy positions as assistant directors of institutions, university department heads, etc., we immediately set to work on subjects which related to all the national communities of the region and compelled us to deal with regional problems. With former scholarship holders of the Mainz Institut für Europäische Geschichte in the early 1980s, then with Austrian friends in 1986, we prepared a series of conferences to discuss

subjects like migration to and within Central Europe; the demographic impact of industrial and agricultural areas; assimilation; the role of religion in determining ethnicity and occupation; the determinant role of the natural environment in thinking, in the work ethic, social conventions, etc. There was good reason why we wished to organise these programmes under the patronage of professors who had even in earlier decades striven to bring the national-historical institutions of the Central European region closer together. Men like my fatherly friend, the early departed György Ránki, then Karl Otman Aretin, or others whom I also may call my friends: Richard Plaschka and Péter Hanák. Let me add that it is high time for young historians in Prague, Warsaw, Vienna, Belgrade, Bucharest, and Budapest to prepare a four volume handbook of the region, which we might introduce in our own languages, in the spirit of Central European quid pro quo to our universities, perhaps in the 1990s.

When I received the invitation to deliver this lecture, I thought this would also give me an opportunity of outlining thematically the vantage-points which we in Hungary had defined when writing about Central Europe, more closely about the Carpathian basin, in our first comprehensive essays and in the periodical I edit. I also gladly undertook this address because my old friend, Professor Friedrich Gottas, with whom I have often discussed these issues, is the recipient of the award.

Labour organisation and ethnic affiliation

My first proposition is that what is decisive in the history of the various ethnically defined societies in the Carpathian basin is not the national point of view. That, as a preferred point of view, reflects the national consciousness of the 19th-20th centuries and the thinking of the educated middle class linked to this sense of national identity. It is easy to see: the nations here have cohabited for a thousand years without their existence being determined by any particular national ordering principle. The history of the Carpathian basin displays a labour market and labour organisation created by different social and ethnic elements living within a given area; where up to the 19th century the principle governing life of this most diverse population was adjusted not primarily to the ethnic principle but to the exigencies of labour demand, production, the reproduction of subsistence. Consider the facts. The peoples pouring into the Carpathian basin beginning with the 9th-11th centuries came here in the first place not as representatives of one or another ethnic group, of a sort of national spirit, but as a work force supplying labour needs arising here. The larger number of Saxons establishing themselves in Upper Hungary and Transylvania from the 12th century onwards were attracted there by the needs of the mining industry of medieval Hungary, by the desire to exploit the soil, or by the duties of defence. True, the nomadic and semi-nomadic peoples that infiltrated from the eastern steppes were, until the middle of the 12th century, under outside pressure to move into the territory of the Kingdom of Hungary, but their differences with the Hungarians living here arose not on a national basis but on account of their differing work organisation, and their customs which conflicted with Hungarian ways. Agricultural societies, the Hungarians among them, had natural differences with Cuman tribes which wanted to drive their herds freely over the fields, as they had earlier done in the steppe. Farming and private property conflicted with the way of life of nomadic herdsmen, and this was to appear as an ethnic difference between Magyar and Cuman before the battle of Muhi (1241). In like manner the German burghers, guarding urban patterns of life and usages brought from the West, refused to allow alien settlers within their walls, and this was to appear as a German-Magyar difference in the 16th-17th centuries. In the 18th century, after the expulsion of the Turks, some of the country lay waste, so it seemed most natural that settlers, primarily of German, i.e., Swabian, Frankish origin, should move into the Carpathian basin from lost Habsburg lands in the West. Landed proprietors granted them privileges. These newly settled people brought with them their own ways of working, in the same way as the Serbians moving up from the Balkans at the time of Turkish domination had brought with them their own ways of life. What is it that the ethnic characteristics consist of, if not social conventions and be-

haviour patterns established in the course of centuries? The Rumanians infiltrating into Transylvania out of the Transcarpathian territories gradually, from the 13th century onwards, and then in very large numbers in the 18th century, were not the vanguard of the future Rumanian state's territorial aspirations. They were pastoral people who grazed their sheep on uninhabited mountain pastures, very good at exploiting the environmental conditions; they were welcome and even served as frontier guards of the Kingdom of Hungary. One may continue the list by pointing to the great industrial-bourgeois prosperity which set in during the second half of the 19th century, when the bourgeois changes in the country, decade after decade after 1867, attracted hundreds of thousands of skilled industrial workers and people experienced in commerce and industry from other Habsburg provinces. And let us not forget: the coin of the Austro-Hungarian Empire was accepted everywhere, from Salzburg to Brassó, communication was free. Artisans and merchants alike—and, let me add, peasants as well—were free to move within the region. In the latter half of the 19th century the modern industrial state built up its infrastructure, the road and railway network was extended, and a press for the masses was created. Compulsory education became a fundamental condititon for skilled labour, for the new bourgeois way of life. The dominant nation, the Hungarians, tried to assert its own national supremacy. For what reason? First of all because, at the cultural level of the age, it would have been impossible to operate the railway system, the postal service (and the Army) in five or six languages. Working people could not be expected to come up to such requirements. It seemed obvious to a reasonable citizen around 1900 that a homogeneous state organisation must necessarily have one language. Judged by this standard, leaders of the Hungarian state were indeed nationalists. But, over and above the requirement that the Hungarians and the non-Hungarians in the Carpathian basin should recognise Hungarian as a state language, there was no forced process of Magyarisation. (On the other hand, the parties of the coalition in power between 1906 and 1910 pursued such policies.) Forced Magyarisation did not become part of declared government policy. The Hungarian ruling classes were nationalist as much as the interests of the bourgeois state demanded. At the same time, this state-nation concept made it possible for the non-Hungarians of the country to live as cultural nations. Hungarian was the official language of the state, but the individual citizens could freely use their own native language and think of themselves as Rumanians, Slovaks, Serbs, etc. The conclusion I have drawn from my work is that, by comparison with other European, French, German, Russian, etc. nationalisms, Hungarian nationalism can be described as a tolerant kind of nationalism.

A consequence of the capitalist modernisation of the region, of the evolution of free bourgeois conditions of life and labour, was that in the second half of the 19th century the national aspirations of non-Hungarians gained strength. What grounds were there for this? If we look at the economic map of historical Hungary, we can see that modern industrial development made headway at an exeptional speed precisely in the peripheral areas. First of all in Upper Hungary, in Transylvania and in Southern Hungary. That is to say, in addition to the area close to Western Europe, which had a developmental advantage.) Historical Hungary as a labour market connected the fringe areas ever more organically to the country's life-blood and constructed a road network and a system of railway branch lines.

A paradoxical phenomenon: by organising its territory into a state and, last but not least, by developing an operating instrument, national culture appropriate for organising this body politic, bourgeois Hungary prepared the demise of its own state-nation principle. Prosperity promoted the rise of the middle classes of non-Hungarian nations in these territories. And this went, of course, with the strengthening of the national consciousness of these same ethnic groups.

A community composed of several nations

My second basic proposition, which follows from this notion, is that by the early years of the 20th century a new Hungarian nation had formed in the Carpathian basin. The aforementioned industrial development resulted in internal migration as well as in the rapid assimilation of non-Hungarians.

This involved not only people from Germany and Moravia, but also immigrant Jews from Habsburg ruled Polish Galicia. At the beginning of the 20th century an ethnically extremely mixed nation of a new type lived on the territory of a state that already had a bourgeois character. The nation-characterology of the time, derived from Hungarian 19th century national romanticism, calls for radical criticism. Determinant in this old picture were first of all the conventions and habits of the lesser nobility. These lived on in literature and the arts as Hungarian national characteristics. Twentieth-century Hungarian society has combined all those patterns of custom and behaviour required by the middle class work ethic, and this bourgeois nation has integrated into itself all those ethnic groups (Slavs, Swabians, Jews, etc.) whose creative power established modern Hungary. All the attempts made in the 20th century to split up this nation have proved basically reactionary. This includes administrative, discriminatory measures and decrees against Jews and their genocide, as well as the deportations and population exchanges, intended to tear out by force people who had already become an organic part of society, and to resettle them, according to their ethnicity, in Germany or even in Czechoslovakia, as well as resettling Hungarians from the latter in Hungary. Within the Hungarian political nation, every kind of ethnic intolerance shown to those who are non-Hungarian speakers, or have strange foreign customs, are simultaneously marks of an anti-Hungarian mind.

My third proposition follows from this train of thought. It concerns assimilation. Hungarian historians—and also historians elsewhere—identify assimilation in the first place as the adaptation of the minority to the dominant nation. That was either favoured or opposed. My interpretation of social history gives emphasis to self-supporting, productive (social) activity, and it sees assimilation as ethnic adaption to one another, i.e., reciprocity. The body of conventions of the Hungarians in the region alters and grows richer in this vast process, precisely by the agency of the culture and customs transmitted by non-Hungarians. Individuals, as well as groups, with a German, Rumanian, Serbian, Slovak or Jewish background, adopt at least as many Hungarian habits as the Hungarians adopt habits typical of Jews, Slavs, etc. It is also a result of the reciprocal adaption of these conventions that in the second half of the 20th century—in my opinion—we can talk of a Hungarian nation that is new in its ethnic composition as well.

The way out: a federation of states

My fourth proposition concerning the relationship of state and nation reads as follows: if we trace the history of the peoples of the Carpathian basin regarding labour organisation and reciprocal social adaptation, we cannot accept as exclusively expedient the present territorial division of states in this region.

With regard to the nations: as historical Hungary with its Magyar supremacy around 1914 did not prove to be a convenient state formation for the nations of the area, in the same manner the state-nation conditions created after 1918 brought no solution to the nations of the region. The territorial revisions between 1938 and 1941, as well as the post-1945 peace arrangements, were also false tentative solutions. In a region where such ethnically mixed societies exist, national states are the wrong sort of state organisation. As a historian I have come to the conclusion that the only solution offering itself as a practicable alternative at present is some kind of voluntary federation of states. This may perhaps be realised some day by intellectuals not only of Hungary, but also of neighbouring states.

In addition to all these conclusions, as far as the present is concerned, one should carefully consider the historical usefulness of the existence of small states from the point of view of the societies of the area. The standard of usefulness is what this system of states has done to allow people to step up their own human labour productivity. I am convinced that a flourishing Rumanian, Slovak, South Slav native language culture is a condition of their attaining high levels of productivity. A well-known psychological and linguistic observation maintains that everybody is able to acquire professional skills most proficiently in his own native language. After 1918 the

small states formed in the region boosted also the native-language cultural standards of the majority nations and thereby their general educational standards. This was their contribution. But a nation damages its own state, economically as well, by denying minorities the same possibility. With regard to the working societies in the area: progress is hindered by these state-nation divisions in the age of the chip, towards the close of the 20th century, by labour markets which are separated from one another by state boundaries which produce stagnation in socio-economic development in East Central Europe. Let us compare the standard of living of the Rumanian industrial worker of the 1910s in Transylvania with the contemporary world standard, and let us compare the current state of living standards. Today's conditions lag hundreds of per cent behind those early this century. But the same applies to workers in Hungary today, and in Czechoslovakia as well. The underlying reason is what we now like to keep emphasising, that after 1945 this region was joined to a Soviet zone of a lower standard and inferior in terms of production and technical performance. Furthermore, artificial state boundaries and protectionist customs policies are unable to "bring out" the productive capacities latent in the natural and human resources of the region. Although there is no dearth of desire for cooperation, areas which had been interdependent for centuries are not able to cooperate. This is a most serious misfortune which may even become fatal. The national misery which intellectuals of non-Hungarian peoples had articulated with regard to the Habsburg Empire or, rather, pre-1918 historical Hungary, has been replaced after 1918, and then after 1945, by the social misery of the region.

Early on I argued that the formulation of historical ideas had been determined a hundred years ago, as today, by the environment in which historians worked, by the contemporary way of putting the social questions, but that this influence does not mean that the writing of history must become less scholarly. What is more, this is precisely where new points of view emerge. Now, at the end, I have to admit that the opposite is also true. Ideas based on the historical material may guide the thinking of the student of contemporary history and of the politician. Being a scholar by profession who has for a few months now been engaged in politics—to be sure, not in party politics—I let my political steps be guided by the same Central European ideas which I formulated for myself as a historian. I am led likewise by the desire to be rid of étatism, of divisive state systems, of nationalisms. To the question, "what is the greatest obstacle," my answer—and my fifth and political proposition—is: as long as the Stalinist political system, established after the Soviet model, prevails in these states, there will be no chance of creating in this region a federal system, or at least a federation of states, or any kind of association of states which looks on state boundaries as national. This dictatorial system is the "ideal" means of maintaining national states. It is unable to tolerate the minorities, nor does it really desire to do anything of the sort, be they either ethnic or religious minorities. Centralist, étatist principles of state organisation obstruct the non-state sector in the economic and cultural fields. That system is unable to tolerate the free movement of labour, or of manufactured and intellectual goods either, i.e., the mutual accomodation of the peoples of the area: their reciprocal adaptation as nations and as communities of producers. In my judgement we shall not be able to alter the ethnic and, at the same time, social misery of the region, until a radical reform of the system takes place.

TAMÁS STARK

Two hundred thousand missing

The untold story of Hungarian prisoners in the Soviet Union

Sometime in the fifties the Hungarian inmates of PoW camp No. VII in Vorkuta, Siberia, learned from fellow-prisoners that the mortal remains of compatriots who had died in the mid-forties were buried under mounds beyond the barracks. The Hungarians still remembered the custom of commemorating the victims of wars on the first Sunday of May, on Heroes Sunday. They formally asked the Vorkuta camp commander to permit them to go out and take a look around. They would have liked to place some wild flowers there but were refused permission. What is more, the mounds were planted with trees. But the trees over the mass graves withered away or remained stunted. In 1955, when the last Hungarians left Vorkuta, the mounds covering five hundred or a thousand or three thousand bodies were still visible. Perhaps they still are today, since direct evidence is not easy to destroy. Still less was it possible to delete from the nation's memory the tragedy that had led to the death or suffering of several hundred thousand men. For the general public this PoW issue was taboo, a blank spot. "But blood seeped through the blank spot."[1]

Even during the years of silence and intimidation many recorded their memories, even if only for their personal use. Such works are now coming to light contributing to authentic history and a sense of the past.

Not everyone in Hungary experienced the liberation of the country as personal liberation, indeed the word is not in common use in this sense. One thinks of those events as "the coming of the Russians." There was a war on that somehow explained pillage and rape, but the taking of civilians in large numbers when the war was over could only be a deliberate, organised action of a punitive character. On June 27, 1943, V. M. Molotov, the Foreign Minister of the Soviet Union, had declared "The Soviet government is of the opinion that the responsibility for the armed assistance furnished by Hungary to Germany must be borne not only by the Hungarian government but, to a greater or lesser degree, by the Hungarian people as well."

During the Second World War 900,000 Hungarians fell into captivity.[2] The vast majority were rounded up by Anglo-American and Soviet troops in the closing stages of the war after the surrender.

Up to November 1944 about 70,000 prisoners of war were registered by the administrative apparatus of the Hungarian Army still functioning at that time.[3] The retreat of Hungarian troops to Germany began late in the autumn of 1944 and lasted till April 1945. Nearly one million Hungarians sought temporary refuge from the Red Army on German soil. They included approximately 580,000 soldiers of the Hungarian Army, who made a last effort to reach the zones expected to be occupied by the Western Powers. Later Defence Ministry records suggest that 300,000 of them succeded in this effort and were taken prisoner by British, American or French troops. The rest were sent east by the Red Army. Add about 250,000 men who had fallen into captivity after October 1944, during and after fighting in Hungary. A considerable part of these 600,000 were civilians picked up in the street. At the time and since then people have often asked themselves a question that could not be spoken aloud: why had the "liberators" dragged off tens of thousands of unarmed civilians in violation of all the laws of war? The answer must be sought in the

Tamás Stark *is the author of a book on Hungary's human losses in the Second World War.*

[1] "Hungarians in the Gulag." A conversation with János Rózsás on May 5, 1989, at the Jurta Theatre in Budapest.

[2] See Tamás Stark: "Magyarország hadifogoly vesztesége a II. világháborúban" (Hungary's PoW losses in the Second World War).

[3] Ibid.

inhumanities of the Stalinist system. Labour had to be recruited for postwar reconstruction in the Soviet Union by all possible means, regardless of age, sex or fitness.

The editors of the Communist-controlled paper *Magyar Hadifogoly Hiradó* (Hungarian PoW News), which recorded the particulars of returning prisoners, perhaps really did not notice facts which clearly proved that the indiscriminate removal of part of the population had taken place. The July 16, 1948, issue of the paper announced the return, after four years' activity in camp No. 72720 at Borovich, of "József Szentiványi, b. 1883 in Budapest; Ferenc Sági, b. 1929 in Várpalota; György Nehrer, b. 1929 in Székesfehérvár." Thus, the aforementioned persons had become "prisoners of war" at the ages of 61 and 15. In its issue of October 14, 1948, the paper reported on the return from Soviet captivity of Béla Bajtor, b. 1931 at Rinyabelenye. That young man must have been carried away at the age of 13. Many, many more names could be added to such a list.

Another reason for the removal of people was that Soviet army commanders, to explain the protracted military operations, spoke of the superior numbers of the enemy. Following the siege of Budapest, civilians were used to boost the numbers of German and Hungarian captives.

The third motive for deportation was the principle of pacification and collective responsibility mentioned above. In November 1944 approximately 80,000 people were taken from Ruthenia (then in Hungary).[4] Tibor Tollas in the March 1989 issue of *Nemzetőr* speaks of the population of whole villages being taken from the Upper Tisza region. *Magyar Hadifogoly Híradó* accidentally furnished evidence by proudly disclosing in its issue of June 17, 1946, that "forty thousand civilian prisoners domiciled in the environs of Miskolc have returned home from the Soviet Union" thanks to the efforts of the Hungarian Communist Party. But the captives included also French and Polish nationals who had earlier found refuge in Hungary, and even White Russians who had come to Hungary in the 1920s.

In 1945/46 more than 200,000 Hungarians on the way to the Soviet Union passed through camps at Cegléd, Vác, Baja, Jászberény, Kecskemét, Esztergom, Mezőtúr and elsewhere. One such ill-famed intermediate station was Brassó in Transylvania. In January 1945 alone 12,000 men, mostly civilians captured after the siege of Budapest, were taken from Cegléd only to be transported, a few weeks later, through Focsani to the Soviet Union.[5] Thousands of them died at stations on the way there. "In the summer of 1945 many thousand contracted dysentery in the large concentration camp at Temesvár. The seriously ill of the two temporary camps in the environs of Brassó were taken to Kereszténytalva: the dead now lie there in mass graves. In terms of mortality the worst were the prisoner camps of Focsani in Moldavia, Balti in Bessarabia, and Sambor in Galicia. About 75 per cent of the prisoner transports went from Hungary to the Soviet Union via those camps. The number of Hungarians buried there is high. Some 20,000 Hungarians of Ruthenia alone lie buried at Sambor in Galacia." [6]

The general situation was not better in the Soviet camps either. Apart from exceptional cases, the Russian guards did not deliberately cull the inmates. That job was done by the prevailing sanitary and nutritional conditions, indeed by conditions in general.

White Book, published in the Federal Republic of Germany (Bad Wörishofen) in 1950 by the Prisoners of War Service of Hungarian Veterans, gives a true picture of the circumstances.

"The lonely PoWcamp already established during the Great War we were taken to was somewhere in the Ural mountains, along the railway line leading to Chelyabinsk and Omsk, at a place I still don't know the name of. The prisoners, altogether some 5000-6000 Hungarian and German PoWs, were housed in dilapidated underground 'bunkers'. The inferior rations consisted of cornpone and, twice a day, of warm water with bran. The lead-containing water could not be drunk without boiling, we therefore, seldom got any of it. If somebody complained of the poor food, he was beaten black and blue and placed in the camp lock-up. Torn clothes were not replaced, even the quantity of food depended on whether or not we achieved the daily darg, which we never did, although we were driven like animals. The number of sick steadily grew but neither doctors nor medicines were available in the camp. The dead were stripped naked and buried in mass-graves."

"... in the Stalingrad camp No. 7362/6, 943 of 1825 Hungarian PoWs died of starvation within two years. The corpses were simply thrown into bomb-craters. The efficiency of PoWs was improved by the use of machine-pistol butts. One of the daily reports, characteristic of camp conditions, shows that on February 7, 1947, only 1009 of 2407 PoWs held there were in a state allowing them to march to work."

"From Focsani I was taken to the Bauxittogorsk camp No. 7572/2. About 8000 PoWs were held in this district of whom 3000 were Hungarians. The

[4] *Fehér Könyv* (White Book) on the situation of prisoners-of-war and civilians taken to the Soviet Union. Bad Wörishofen, Hungaria, 1950, p. 23.

[5] Rezső Palásthy: "40 éve történt (It happened 40 years ago). Historical documents (manuscript). Oberprechthal, 1985, p. 13.

[6] Ibid. pp. 16-17.

Slavery, Russian style

It presented a large obstacle that those of our workers who could not stay in the factory were very frequently unable to come to work. They set out from home but on the way they were stopped by Russian soldiers. In vain did they have a certificate from the Russian command of the factory, one Russian soldier paid no attention to a certificate issued by another. They were taken away and asked to do various kinds of work, such as loading railway wagons, shoveling coal, clearing away rubble, whatever it was that the Russian military unit concerned had just been assigned to do. There was also a more serious peril: then (one or two weeks after the "liberation") the Russians had already begun to organize labour camps for Russia. These were called prisoner-of-war camps, although they were filled with civilians who had never been soldiers. At the begining this was still an official and open 'action' against those with German names. They were picked up in Ujpest too, including in the factory, irrespective of whether they had done anything reproachable, had taken part in any kind of rightist political activity, even those who belonged to a leftist party had to report. Hardly a month had passed since we had to make huge efforts in the factory to save the lives of a couple of Jewish engineers whom we had been able to hang on to somehow, and now we had to begin to undertake similar efforts for our engineers and workers who happened to have German names. But now the task was easier for two reasons; one was that the Russians were far from having the excellent organization that the Germans had. If somebody did not show up, they did not look for him.

The other reason was that—as we found out later—the Russians were far away from any racial approach. The aim was exclusively to organize unpaid work. Picking up Germans sounded justified for them but they did not force it and continued to pick up "prisoners-of-war" in the streets.

It was easy to convince the military commander of the factory to help some of our engineers on the grounds that they were "indispensable." The others, whom it would have been difficult to save in this way, were advised by the commander himself not to leave their homes until the matter had blown over. He knew that it would and it did blow over within a few weeks. Those who reported in the first shock, either returned from Siberia after two or three years, or never returned at all.

Walking in the streets became that more dangerous and this continued to be for months after the liberation of Budapest. I do not believe that since the campaigns of medieval times there has been any example in history of what the Russian army then committed in Hungary. The Russians proved that they were able to treat humans as mere numbers. Fathers of families and young men—without being asked where they came from, where they were going, who waited for them at home, for whom they had to provide a daily living—were simply stopped in the street, put among the other unfortunates, into groups surrounded by armed soldiers, and were taken away. If one of the cleverer succeeded in escaping at a corner from the group, then the Russian soldier grabbed another person in the street. It was not the person but the number that was important. Nobody was able to send news and consequently Hungarians were slow to discover what was happening.

We learned later that these unfortunates were suffering first in prisoner-of-war camps in Hungary, where many perished from starvation and cold before the rest were transported to Russia for forced labour over several years. One of the assistant professors in physics at the Technical University, who was of Jewish descent and had keenly awaited the Russian liberators, starved to death in the prisoner-of-war camp at Cegléd. Of my own kith and kin, several got home after years. My nephew succeded in escaping when they were being taken through a dark street in Buda. He fled to the ruins of a house. One Russian soldier went after him but decided not to take him back to the group: he took his watch, wallet and pen-knife. It was probably the latter that saved him, because it made the soldier very happy. It was a beautiful knife with a cork-screw, punch, tin opener and scissors.

From the memoirs of the physicist Zoltán Bay forthcoming from Csokonai-Püski Publishers. Between 1936-1948 Bay worked in the Tungsram light bulb works noted for its englightened research policy. There he carried out the first Lunar radar experiments simultaneously with those in the United States. He settled in the United States in 1948.

Germans taken prisoner earlier, still at the time of fighting near Leningrad, told us that the camps of this region formerly held Estonian, Latvian and Lithuanian civilians: these were transported to Siberia when the Germans came. 40 per cent of the Hungarians taken there from Focsani perished in the first 4 months. The stark naked dead were thrown into mass-graves near the camp." (...)

"On December 20, 1944 the Soviet military command announced in the village of Szigetcsép, Hungary, that men aged 16-45 and women aged 16-30 had to report for military work. Since an insufficient number turned up voluntarily, on December 28, 1944, Soviet soldiers armed with machine-pistols surrounded the village and, going from house to house, violently dragged off people holding themselves to instructions given by local Communist leaders. 120 persons were taken away from our small village. Together with the inhabitants of several other Hungarian villages, they were taken to the mining camp No. 1026 at Novydonbas where, within a short time, more than 10,000 Hungarian civilians were gathered. The prisoners were not provided with either food or clothes. Epidemics and starvation killed them off in large numbers. In consequence of lack of medical treatment and medicines 18-20 men died daily. As the coachman of the cart which carried away the corpses, I personally took part in the burial of 4600 fellow-prisoners, who like dogs were thrown stark naked into unmarked mass-graves, 10 into each. Of the men and women dragged away from our small village alone, 48 died in the camp within two years..." [7]

The lot of the prisoners of war who stayed in the West worked out differently. Those in the British and American zones received humane treatment as a whole, none of them succumbed to epidemics, physical exhaustion or debility. As one remembers: "The fate of Hungarian military formations... depended on the widely differing arrangements made by local commanders of the forces of occupation... In certain districts military organisation was maintained even after the Americans had marched in... orders of the day were issued, briefings were held. In other districts, however, this was strictly forbidden, and only rarely did it happen that mayors were instructed to procure the food supply..." [8] Work was not compulsory, yet many did so to improve their living circumstances.

Life in French captivity was not so happy. The way from rough camps run by ruthless guards, often did not lead homeward but to the Foreign Legion.

Even in the midst of the struggle for power between parties and the trials of post-war reconstructions, the lot of prisoners of war and their repatriation was uppermost in everyone's mind. There was hardly a family in Hungary that was not directly or indirectly involved. Many relatives went on pilgrimage to the village of Makkosmária, to ask the Blessed Virgin to intercede and secure the return of PoWs. Those dragged off were referred to in pastoral letters, and Masses were said for their salvation. In country towns and villages people wanted to erect war memorials to "the unknown dead prisoners of war." Another spontaneous action resulted in the formation of an Association of PoWs and Relatives, which worked for the repatriation of prisoners and assumed the defence of the interests of those who had returned. In the struggles for political power all parties tried to capitalise on the PoW issue. PoW bureaux were set up in quick sucession by the Smallholders Party, the Social Democratic Party and the National Peasant Party.

The totalitarian policy of the Hungarian Communist Party manifested itself on the PoW question just as it did in all other matters related to power. The policy concerning the deported persons thus also serves as a paradigm of Communist tactics and shows how Soviet policy and influence gradually gained ground in Hungary.

In the middle of 1945 the Hungarian Communist Party set up its Central PoW Bureau headed by Sándor Sziklai, who was charged later also with the duties of editor-in-chief of *Magyar Hadifogoly Híradó* (then changed into *Magyar Hadirokkant és Hadifogoly Híradó* (Hungarian Invalid and PoW News). There was no shortage of promises, as in every spring after 1945 Mátyás Rákosi held out the prospect of repatriating all prisoners that same year.

But the real strength of the Hungarian Communist Party was most manifest in its influence upon the executive. Thus the struggle was shifted onto the plane of the state administration.

The official handling of the PoW issue had originally come within the purview of the Ministry of Defence; the Allied (Soviet) Control Commission however refused to consent to the establishment of a general PoW agency within the Ministry of Defence.[9] The Control Comission gave as its reason that the related problems were already taken care of by the Communist-run Ministry of the Interior. What was at

[7] *Fehér Könyv*. English edition: White Book concerning the status of the Hungarian Prisoners of War illegally retained by the Soviet Union and of Hungarian civilian persons forcibly deported by the Soviet authorities. pp. 46-48.

[8] Gyula Borbándi: A magyar emigráció életrajza (The biography of Hungarian Exile). Munich, 1985, pp. 14-15.

[9] War History Archives. Defence Ministry papers in preparation for the peace treaty. Box 2, A/I, 956/792.

the bottom of this singular decision? The Ministry of Defence, that had been organised by field officers of the former Royal Hungarian Army and now stood under the influence of the Smallholders Party, was not a fit partner for either the Control Commission or the Communist Party.

Soldiers fallen into captivity in the British and American zones of occupation returned in large numbers from the West already in the summer of 1945. It was no small problem for the British and American military authorities to provide for those hundreds of thousands of prisoners, and they wished to be rid of them as soon as possible. In mid-August 1945 a large delegation headed by Mihály Farkas, then Undersecretary of State for the Interior, went to Salzburg with a view to discussing the details of repatriation. Numerous representatives of the Allied Control Commission, as well as Gábor Péter, Chief of the Hungarian Political Police, and György Pálffy, Head of the Political Section of the Ministry of Defence, were included in the delegation. There was good reason why the delegation was composed largely of officials of the Communist Party and the Ministry of the Interior. The Hungarian Communist Party held the view that the uncontrolled influx of those set free in the West might mean a political risk for the coalition power structure, and even more so for a purely Communist power set-up.

The home-comers therefore passed through screening camps. The camps at Komárom, Székesfehérvár and Szentgotthárd were equipped by the Ministry of Defence, but administered by the police. The interrogating officers were provided by the Ministry of the Interior. The idea was to find the war criminals, but in practice the potential opponents of the Left were also arrested and interned. The act of screening was more than once influenced also by personal revenge and the desire to intimidate the ex-officers of the Royal Hungarian Army.

Serious atrocities verging upon armed clashes between members of the army and police were everyday occurrences in the screening camps. The loser was ultimately the anyway ignored Ministry of Defence. At an interdepartmental conference held on September 1st, 1945, the parties agreed on setting up a Government Commission for Repatriation. The person appointed to head the new organisation was the Social Democrat Sándor Millok, Under-Secretary of State in the Prime Minister's office, who was in theory directly responsible to the Council of Ministers. In reality, however, the Government Comission for Repatriation was controlled by the Ministry of the Interior.

By the autumn of 1945 very few PoWs had returned from the Soviet Union, and the Ministry of the Interior only started to keep them under surveillance later. The reception stations of Szeged, Debrecen, etc. were set up by the Hungarian Army which, however, could not maintain them owing to restrictions continuously tightened by the Allied Control Commission. That was how, at least for a while, the care of those released from Soviet captivity came under the control of the Hungarian Red Cross. In view of financial difficulties and owing to the absence of systematic businesslike management, however, the PoW service of the Hungarian Red Cross soon found itself in a state of crisis.

In order to put an end to the chaotic state of affairs and — without saying so openly —to reduce Communist influience, the National Peasant Party and the Smallholders Party drafted a proposal for the uniform handling of PoW affairs. Essentially they proposed that all problems concerning the PoWs who were still absent and those who had already returned should be dealt with by a politically neutral, non-party Minister without Portfolio. One of the framers of the draft was Lajos Magyar of the Smallholders Party, who headed the PoW service of the Hungarian Red Cross. Its other author was László Battha of the National Peasant Party, a leading official in the Ministry of Defence.

Starting with the autumn of 1945 relatives of PoWs also became more active. Mass demonstrations were held. In March 1946 a deputation of thousands of dependants of PoWs assembled before the building of Parliament and handed a memorandum to the Prime Minister.[10]

In the increasingly scandalous situation the Hungarian Communist Party, making use of its key position, and with the help of its patron, the Soviet Union, went onto the offensive. Battha and Magyar, as well as other non-Communist experts in PoW matters, were branded as reactionaries. The Communist press launched a vicious campaign against them. First the attacked politicians and specialists were ousted from power, then some of them were arrested and interned.

In the summer of 1946 the Allied Control Commission banned the Association of PoWs and Relatives which had organised the demonstration.[11]

The exceptionally informative and unbiassed paper entitled *Magyar Vöröskereszt Hadifogoly Tudósító* (Hungarian Red Cross PoW Herald) was also muzzled in the spring of 1946. Contributors allegedly included Arrowcross and other right-wing elements.[12] Besides *Igaz Szó,* published in the Soviet Union, the only source of news for prisoners of war and their relatives was the propagandistic and manipulative *Magyar Hadifogoly Híradó* issued by the PoW bu-

[10] *Magyar Vöröskereszt Hadifogoly Tudósító* (Hungarian Red Cross PoW Herald). March 1946, Note No. 5.
[11] *Magyar Hadifogoly Híradó* (Hungarian PoW News).
[12] *Magyar Hadifogoly Híradó*. April 8, 1946.

reau of the Hungarian Communist Party. In 1946 non-Communists were also driven out of a charitable institution called National Relief.[13] Naturally it also became impossible to erect the PoW memorials desired by so many people.

On July lst, 1946 PoW matters at least passed into a single hand, although not in the way proposed by the Smallholders Party and the National Peasant Party. Upon the request of the goverenment and the Supreme Economic Council, the Ministry of Public Welfare, which was under the influence of the Communist Party, was put in charge of PoW affairs instead of a neutral, independent and non-political authority.

The waves of inter-party conflicts and infight ing did not extend to international relations. Until the spring of 1947 — when the Smallholders Party was definitively destroyed — Hungarian diplomatists had maintained a uniform position truly expressing the national interest. It was not their fault that these interests could not be made to prevail against the Soviet Union.

The armistice agreement conluded in Moscow on January 20, 1945, and ratified under Act V of 1945, contained no provisions regarding the future and repatriation of Hungarian prisoners of war. In the absence of concrete arrangements one had to be satisfied with the promises of Marshal Voroshilov, the Chairman of the Allied Control Commission, that all of those dragged off would return home before the peace treaty was signed.

Prime Minister Ferenc Nagy of the Smallholders Party raised the isssue of deportees at the time of his visit to Moscow in April 1946. Upon his return he told representatives of the press: "On the occasion of my first talk with Prime Minister Stalin I raised the issue of the Hungarian prisoners of war. On the occasion of our second talk the Generalissimo reverted to the subject and declared that the repatriation of Hungarian prisoners of war would be continuous."[14] It was characteristic of Stalin's cyninism that he spoke of repatriation at a time when prisoner transports from Hungary to the Soviet Union were still taking place occasionally.

An overall solution of the issue based on agreement was ultimately to be expected from a peace treaty.The organisations and authorities concerned, but particularly the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Defence, worked hard on drafting proposals to be submitted to the victorious powers. The Hungarian delegation in Paris aimed in the first place that all the prisoners of war should be repatriated within six months from the signing of the peace treaty. The delegation also requested that persons domiciled outside the Trianon frontiers, who had served in the Hungarian armed forces during the war and fallen into captivity, should be allowed to return to their homes without being threatened by injurious consequences.[15] The Hungarians also tried to obtain concessions in regard to the costs incurred in connection with the maintenance and repatriation of prisoners of war.

Unfortunately, it was not possible to obtain even one concession, and the peace treaty was signed as originally drafted. The obligations regarding prisoners of war were defined (Part II. Title II, Art. 21) as follows: "1. Prisoners of war to be repatriated as soon as possible under the terms of agreements concluded to this end between the particular Powers and Hungary. 2. All costs, including those of the maintenance of Hungarian prisoners of war undergoing repatriation... as calculated by the Allied Power concerned... to be defrayed by the Hungarian Government." Confronted by the obvious dejection of the Hungarian delegation, the British and Yugoslav emissaries reassuringly pointed out that "as soon as possible" implied that repatriation could be delayed only by technical difficulties.

In keeping with the above provisions, the Hungarian government had to pay considerable sums to the Soviet Union, in spite of the fact that hundreds of thousands of PoWs had laboured hard there for years, in dreadful conditions, and without pay. "Track money" had to be paid to Rumania, because the route of repatriation implied the use of Rumanian railways. On April 8, 1947, the Minister of Finance estimated repatriation costs at Ft 120 million.[16] The Western Powers did not demand reimbursement of the costs of repatriation.

The only chance left for the PoW issue to be brought to a solution by diplomatic means after the conclusion of the peace treaty was the prospect held out for an agreement in terms of the treaty text. This applied only to the Soviet Union. After the summer of 1946 there were no Hungarian prisoners of war in the West.

From the spring of 1947 onwards the Hungarian Communist Party became the decisive factor not only within the executive but also in the external relations of the country. This fact was reflected particularly in a "spontaneous" action initiated in early May. A delegation of a hundred members from the Democratic Union of Hungarian Women called on Mátyás Rákosi and requested him to inter-

[13] *Magyar Jövő*. January 1947.

[14] *Kossuth Népe* (daily paper). April 21, 1946.

[15] War History Archives. Defence Ministry papers in preparation for the peace treaty. Box 2, A/I, 94/4766.

[16] War History Archives. Defence Ministry papers 1947, Presidental Section 10903.

cede with Stalin for the return of the prisoners of war. "Having carefully considered Rákosi's letter the Soviet government ordered the release of prisoners to be started already in the month of May."[17] This Soviet move was no more than Communist electioneering in view of the coming general election.

Things did not work out all that smoothly. After the first happy moments of reunion it became apparent in what a dreadful condition the home-comers were. One could not help noticing the rags in which they were clothed. Of course, the explanation followed promptly: "Since the Soviet authorities let the home-comers travel as free people, the prisoners changed clothing items issued in camp for fruit, cigarettes and bacon with Soviet civilians crowding at the railway stations. As a consequence they returned home dressed in the rags which the country folk had given them in exchange; on the other hand, having gorged themselves on food forbidden because of their physical condition, they often seriously damaged their health.[18]

Those who expressed doubts about the above official explanation had to reckon with severe punishment. "The police and the authorities must deal most severely with such pig-headed persons, an example must be set to discourage them from 'entertaining' people with slanderous rumours. Democratically-minded individuals should not stay silent when such things are spoken. Those responsible must be turned over to the police," thundered László Szendrő, head of the PoW Bureau of the Communist Party.[19]

A team of eighteen, appointed by the Foreign Ministry to conduct negotiations for the conclusion of a PoW agreement, was assembled by the spring of 1947. They prepared a draft agreement which would have obliged the Soviet Union to provide a list of those who died in custody. The Hungarians also asked to establish PoW cemeteries and memorial places in Soviet territory.

Unfortunately, neither the carefully chosen delegation nor the draft reached Moscow.

On May 22, 1947, the Council of Ministers decided to send Rákosi's brother, the Communist Zoltán Bíró, and Szilárd Újhelyi, likewise a member of the Communist Party, to Moscow.[20] They failed to obtain any tangible result during a three-week stay. Inquiries about the numbers of prisoners produced no information whatever. The reason— according to Szilárd Újhelyi—was not only secrecy but the enormous chaos characteristic of the military bureaucracy.[21] The question of a PoW agreement envisaged by the treaty of peace could not even be raised in earnest during the talks. Between the spring of 1947 and February 1948 the Hungarian Minister in Moscow sent home several dispatches stating that the Soviet government would shortly make a proposal for the conclusion of an agreement, but nothing happened. A government delegation headed by Mátyás Rákosi, however, signed a treaty of quite a different kind on February 18, 1948, namely a Hungarian-Soviet pact of mutual friendship and cooperation. During the negotiations Stalin promised Rákosi — as he had earlier promised Ferenc Nagy —to repatriate the prisoners of war starting on April 1st. And indeed, prisoners again returned in larger numbers between May and late October. Then the government considered the PoW issue as solved as far as the public was concerned, arguing that only men found guilty of war crimes, and sentenced by the Soviet authorities, still stayed behind. The paper *Magyar Hadirokkant és Hadifogoly Híradó* also ceased publication without notice. PoW welfare agencies and the PoW sections of the parties and ministries also stopped operations. The Brotherhood of Former Prisoners of War, which had been founded with so much difficulty, also went out of existence.

Officially it has never been admitted that the mortality amongst prisoners was high. Everybody talked, though in secret, about the huge numbers who had died, so some "information" nevertheless had to be supplied. The stupid and cynical explanation was usually: "...the notoriously ill prisoners of war were always ill not owing to some scourge of fate but because they did not want to work, did not want to do the little bit of work needed to maintain the camp. These persons ate soap... artificially induced fever; they deliberately did not work in cold weather to induce frostbite ...in order to be taken to hospital, where the food was better and they could lie in bed all day long... Many of those died in captivity often of self-inflicted diseases. Of course, the forces of reaction would like to place the blame for those dead upon the Soviet authorities." [22]

After 1948 the defence of the interests of prisoners still in the Soviet Union was undertaken by self-confident and patriotic Hungarian exiles in the West. What the Hungarian government

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[17] *Magyar-szovjet kapcsolatok 1945-48.* (Hungarian-Soviet Relations 1945-48), p. 197. Joint publication by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Hungarian People's Republic and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Soviet Union.

[18] *Magyar Hadirokkant és Hadifogoly Híradó* (Hungarian War-Invalid and PoW News). December 31, 1946.

[19] *Magyar Hadifogoly Híradó.* August 26, 1946.

[20] Council of Ministers Archives. REcord No. 177, May 22, 1947.

[21] Personal communication by Szilárd Ujhelyi.

[22] *Magyar Hadirokkant és Hadifogoly Híradó.* December 7, 1946.

ought to have done was finally done by an organisation of the soldiers abroad, the Fraternal Community of Hungarian Combatants. In 1949, under the leadership of Zoltán Makra — a Ministry of Defence official from 1941 to 1944 — there came into being a PoW service bureau, which located and identified more than a thousand camps in Soviet territory. On behalf of the Fraternal Community a former prisoner of war, Rezső Palásthy, compiled a *White Book* in 1950 disclosing the tragedy of the Hungarian prisoners in the Soviet Union.[23] The UN ad hoc Committee on Forced Labour and Slavery examined this unique collection of documents and recognised it as authentic. The success of this action is demonstrated by the fact that, under the pressure of public opinion, additional PoW transports arrived from the Soviet Union. Unfortunately State Security confined the homecomers in internment camps in Kazincbarcika and Tiszalök, where some stayed till 1953 and even later.

But prisoners of war arrived also after 1953 and even in 1956. In spite of obligations assumed under the treaty of peace with Hungary, the Soviet Union never concluded a PoW agreement. It was not in its interest to let anything concrete about their fate leak out. The Soviet government was aware of the prevailing administrative chaos which meant that it would be unable to account for the lives of hundreds of thousands.

How many people remained there for good? The answer can be given only indirectly. One must establish how many of the 600,000 returned home. Unfortunately, there are no exact figures since up to July 1946, when the Ministry of Public Welfare took over PoW affairs, there was, and could be no comprehensive record of prisoners of war in Hungary. Thus the press and official documents published widely differing estimates regarding the number of those who had come home earlier. If we accept as correct the highest of the contradictory figures given by the two competent departments, the Ministry of Public Welfare and the Ministry of National Defence, 200,000 people at most had regained their freedom by the summer of 1946. Authentic data are available for the number of prisoners who came from the East between July 1946 and November 1948. Precise records of the Debrecen reception camp, contain the names of 200, 920 persons, of whom 16,322 returned in 1946 and 100,283 before October 31 the next year. The latter transport included 16 infants born in camp as well as 7,171 officers, 9,984 N.C.O.s, 72,751 private soldiers, 817 wartime forced labour service men, 5,829 civilian men and 3,596 women, furthermore 124 members of the Levente Youth Organisation. The composition of the transport of 84,310 persons sent home in 1948 was similar.[24] Inclusive of those released during the 1950s, the number of the repatriated prisoners can be estimated at a maximum of 400,000. Thus at least 200,000 of the 600,000 have never returned.

The 300,000 Hungarians who had been American, British, or French prisoners, suffered a better fate. Thanks to the Government Commission for Repatriation, the PoW transports from the West were accurately registered. As mentioned above, this was necessary for domestic political reasons. On June 30, 1947, when General Lucius D. Clay, military administrator of U.S. occupied Germany, stated that the last prisoner of war had been repatriated, the Government Commission already had the names of 189,993 persons on its reception register.[25] The overwhelming part of them had returned home by the summer of 1946, but about 100,000 never returned. Those who stayed abroad chose to do so, and there was good reason for their action. Of those repatriated by the Western Powers, 12,205 men (1,721 officers and 10,473 common soldiers) were identified in the screening camps of Komárom, Székesfehérvár and elsewhere and handed over to the authorities of the Interior Ministry for further investigation.[26] The manner of reception, often motivated by the desire for revenge, as well as the likely prospect of a one-party dictatorship in Hungary, discouraged many well-trained men who might have been of invaluable help in post-war reconstruction.

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[23] *Fehér Könyv* (White Book), referred to in note No. 4 above.

[24] War History Archives. Defence Ministry papers in preparation for the peace treaty. Box 2, A/I, 94/4766.

[25] War History Archives. Defence Ministry papers 1947, eln. 1333.

[26] Ibid.

ANDRÁS GÖRÖMBEI

Lifeline for a huge minority

Transylvanian Hungarian writing between the wars

In the aftermath of the Turkish conquest, Hungary, one of the major powers of medieval Europe, was sundered into three by the middle of the 16th century. Its eastern part, Transylvania, gained importance from that time on as a principality, the character of which was shaped by the co-existence there of the three governing nations, Hungarians, Székelys and the Saxons, and a rapidly growing population of Vlachs. Throughout the centuries there were various attempts to reunite Transylvania and Hungary, although union was only proclaimed by the Diet of Kolozsvár in 1848. Following the Hungarian defeat in 1849, Transylvania was directly ruled from Vienna; thus the actual union of Transylvania and Hungary was ultimately the result of the Austro–Hungarian Compromise of 1867. What is called historical Hungary, constituting part of the Austro–Hungarian Empire, was a multinational state which was reluctant to grant rights to its minorities, and urged assimilation. The Austro–Hungarian Empire fell apart as a result of the Great War, and Hungary fell prey to the political interests of the Great Powers. As early as the end of 1918, the boundaries of state around Hungary were so drawn up that the country lost two thirds of the territory of historical Hungary and one half of her population. The new borders were confirmed by the Treaty of Trianon, signed on June 4th 1920. This dismembered Hungary in an unprecedented manner, and eliminated her as one of the significant factors in the European balance. Prior to the War, Hungary had a territory of 325,000 square km. After Trianon, 93,000 square kilometres were left to Hungary, the rest going to the successor states: 103,000 to Rumania, 62,000 to Czechoslovakia, 63,000 to Yugoslavia and 4,000 to Austria.

Transylvania and her associated parts stood for undeletable values for centuries in a more or less uniform national culture and literature. After 1867, Budapest became a centre of decisive importance, and by 1900 it was a rapidly growing, vibrant metropolis. Different local values added colour to a by and large uniform literature. However, the situation changed after Trianon. The Transylvanian Hungarians were no longer a state-creating majority but an ethnic minority. The National Assembly of Transylvanian Rumanians, held in Gyulafehérvár, proclaimed the unconditional unity of Transylvania with Rumania on December 1st 1918. Rumania thus grew to twice her earlier size. Despite misleading promises, meant to reassure the minority Hungarians, the Rumanian aim from the moment of achieving control was to assimilate the Hungarians and the Saxons through cultural policy and administrative decisions. At first — between and 1918 and 1920 — the Transylvanian Hungarians protested, refusing to believe that the peace treaty would confirm the realization of the Rumanian dreams in essentially multi-ethnic regions. However, the Rumanian administration took its hard-hitting measures with an alarming rapidity, requesting officials to take an oath of allegiance. Rather than do so, however, a great many people chose to leave: between 1918 and 1920, close to 200,000 Transylvanian Hungarians—the overwhelming majority educated professional people—moved to Hungary. Those who remained had to accept a fate of living as strangers, as a designated ethnic minority, in what had been their ancestral home for a thousand years.

The crying word

Out of this hopeless situation, Transylvanian Hungarian literature, cut off from the mother country, had to make a start. In it the largest ethnic minority in Europe sought a means to organise and express itself, to represent intellectual and, in part, political interests. In 1921 the frightened and desperate Transylvanian Hungarians received their first effective encouragement from a pamphlet by Károly Kós, *A kiáltó szó*

András Görömbei *has published a book on Hungarian writing in Slovakia between 1945—1980.*

(The Crying Word), which proposed an attitude and a strategy best suited to the new situation. Károly Kós had been an architect of renown already before returning to Transylvania from Budapest in 1918. Following Trianon, he maintained the morale of the Transylvanian Hungarians as a writer. *The Crying Word* is an account of the situation and an outline of a programme, formulated in a prophetic tone. It expresses the disappointment over the compromised situation of the Transylvanian Hungarians and over an unjust and unfair decision. It calls for a constructive approach under the banner of Transylvania as a separate historical unit, and looked upon Transylvanian Hungarians not merely as distinct from the Hungarian nation as such, as a result of their historical, geographic and, primarily, cultural particularity, but as an independent people, conscious of their identity and able to pursue an autonomous life of their own. With the purpose of achieving this Hungarian national autonomy, Kós proclaimed the necessity to organize action to replace passivity. In the decades to come, leading writers were those who expressed the fate of the Transylvanian Hungarians most deeply and most fully. At first Transylvanianism meant introversion, with the consciousness of landscape and history serving as a source of self-knowledge; later, in the thirties, an increasing emphasis was, in contrast, laid on openness, on the idea of being European. In literature this first appeared in a deluge of novels on historical themes; later the need to face up to the conditions of their times became increasingly stronger. The unique beauty of the Transylvanian landscape became an integral part of the works, stimulating readers to stand their ground; huge mountains, lonely firs, lakes, brooks, rivers appear in the novels as symbols. The unique coexistence of man and nature had an outstanding role in Transylvanian Hungarian literature between the two World Wars.

Relying on long-established Hungarian cultural traditions, and through unstinting efforts by those showing a sense of responsibility for national morale, Transylvanian Hungarian literature managed to find itself after Trianon. In the early years, attempts to found journals and newspapers, mostly short-lived, closely followed each other. In a matter of years, a great many papers started up and went out of existence, and a multitude of publishers tried their hand at publishing Hungarian books in Transylvania. Of the initial ventures, *Pásztortűz* (1921—1944) proved to be enduring, almost all significant Transylvanian writers worked for it. In the first half of the 'twenties it was looked upon as the organizing focus of Hungarian intellectual life in Transylvania; although after the establishment of the journals *Helikon* and *Korunk,* it lost some of its significance, to the very end it nevertheless remained a somewhat conservative organ with remarkable steadfastness. Next to it, an important place was taken by Elek Benedek's paper for children, *Cimbora* (1922—1929).

Following the initial attempts, new and more secure foundations were created for Transylvanian Hungarians by the publishing house *Erdélyi Szépmíves Céh* (Transylvanian Arts and Crafts Guild), founded in 1924, which became a crucial factor in the history of Transylvanian Hungarian literature through activities lasting until 1944. The books it published, both in their content and, let it be said, in their design, conveyed the most important values of Transylvanian Hungarian literature. In addition to beautifully bound books, it also published a cheap series in large editions for the wider reading public. It represented security for writers, helping and encouraging their work, and publishing their books quickly.

As early as the time when Hungarian literature in Transylvania was first beginning to find organized channels, the idea of creating a writers' association was raised. In the summer of 1926, *Erdélyi Helikon,* the writers' association, was founded by twenty-seven writers in the Marosvécs chateau of Count János Kemény. Its primary objectives were to create an indigenous literature, to assist and protect Transylvanian values. This loose association of writers, meeting only in the summer to discuss literary affairs over a period of several days, attempted to encourage all that was valuable, irrespective of style of writing or political orientation. Almost all significant Transylvanian Hungarian writers took part in these annual meetings of *Erdélyi Helikon.* What their work had in common was a respect for literature, and also a desire to fuse the Transylvanian and the European. *Erdélyi Helikon* was destined to be the main organizing focus, and to this purpose a journal of the same name (1928—1944) was founded. It undertook to represent the principles of humanism and a modern approach to literature. In outlining its programme, the editor, Aladár Kuncz, raised regionalism to European standards, putting the stress on intellectual values. Kuncz as editor displayed a writer's responsibility for the whole of Transylvanian Hungarian culture.

The poets' stand

Poetry's greatest source initially was the pain felt over losing the country and over the changed fate of Transylvanian Hungarians. Between the two World Wars, in the 'twenties, the poetry of the Transylvanian triad, Sándor Remenyik, Lajos Áprily and László Tompa, shaped its character; later on special mention should be made of János Bartalis and Jenő Szentimrei, while in the 'thirties a new chapter was opened

up by Jenő Dsida. The early writings of Sándor Remenyik (1890—1941) reflected traces of the conservative poetry of the end of the century. The loss of Transylvania deeply affected his approach, rooted in the Hungarian historical past, and at the turn of the 'twenties he became the poet of Transylvanian survival, who exerted the greatest influence. He expressed the duty to stay rather than escape in despair through a rich emotional verve and an elevated pathos. He was the one to express most forcefully the feelings of Hungarians who had the fate of a minority imposed on them. At the time of the collapse, he was the poet who truly expressed the consciousness of the Transylvanian situation. Initially, lament for the homeland was at times transformed into hatred against alien oppression, but the main feature of his verse, published under the pseudonym Végvári, is a passion against unlawfulness and the demand to "take back what used to be ours": *Eredj, ha tudsz* (Go if you can). His poems have the looseness of polemics and breathe an ardent passion for his native land, a passion stemming from helplessness and a sense of threat. Initially this is articulated, but later his feelings appear in a purer form, and link truthfulness with the beauties of the Transylvanian landscape. To him responding to one's fate was a moral obligation, his behaviour at first was that of a poet keeping watch; more and more forcefully he held to the general values on which a religious morality is founded. In his nature poetry, he indicated that man might find his happiness in a community that offered him a home and truth. Instead of bitter passions, he advocated self purification and transcendent reconciliation. At the time of the emergence of the successor states, he raised a dam that held in a flood to a symbol; by the 'thirties this was replaced by the command to defend, under all conditions and at all costs, the small area to which Hungarian life had been restricted. He resolutely turned against racialism and later, fascism. In 1941 he wrote his *Korszerűtlen versek* (Anachronistic Verses): memorable poetry of humanism, rising above national hostilities.

Lajos Áprily (1887—1967) is a poet of a completely different character. His work is full of music, he is the virtuoso of Transylvanian Hungarian literature. The most important elements in his impressionist verse are landscape and traditions. Nature expresses moods. Evening arrives as a "brown beggar", "in tears and blind" and the poet talking to his sons raises his musings to the vision of the appearing evening shadows: the shadow of the father, embracing his sons, keeps on growing "and Laokoon loomed up on the wall dark as fate." Thus the evening mood is transformed into a tragic vision, the personal feelings of the father talking to his sons grows into the myth of Laokoon and his sons being killed by the snake. In Áprily's poetry Transylvanian scenery and culture equally express the motifs of loneliness, exposedness, fear, fragility, and suffering. The awareness of predestination is powerfully present. He shrinks from the struggles of history, and feels a stranger in the clash of arms of a noisy world. In his poem *Tetőn* (On Mountain Tops), dedicated to Károly Kós, he describes how he survived the loss and collapse of Transylvania: he fled to the mountains, his disturbed spirit was purified by pain, and the immobility of the mountains gave him a hope that raised him above the ongoing chaos of history. Fighting was alien to him, his world one of intimate feelings, in his poetry memory always has a moral import. His use of forms makes claims on substance: through his finely drawn forms he testified to the value of harmony at a time of the devastation of values. Although he left Transylvania for Hungary in 1929, the character of his poetry preserved its Transylvanian character to the very end.

László Tompa (1883—1963) is also a poet of the Transylvanian landscape but his poetry is rougher, less smooth and more narrative in scope than that of Lajos Áprily. In the landscape and the life of Transylvanians, he sought not harmony but the models of roughness. He lived all his life in Székelyudvarhely, a small Transylvanian town, and wrote self-reassuring parables that urge the reader to stand his ground. Their aesthetic value and moral message are remarkable. The idea develops organically from the landscape, there is no intrusive explication. In his soliloquy *Magányos fenyő* (Lonely Fir), the fir exposed to loneliness, storms and devastation stands firm against the mood of death that spreads over everything on the barren cliff; the fir does not expect death but "with resolution, lonely, and without a companion", "remained green" beneath the snow. In his *Lófürösztő* (Horse Bathing) the toughness and ability to do their job of the Székely lads swimming their horses in the river in flood provide lyricism amid the epic events, and the two lads become symbols for all Transylvanian Hungarians: they oppose time's adverse and ruthless circumstances and they will stand their ground for ever. In Tompa's poems nature always appears concretely, in a recognisable manner, and it becomes the starting point for a set of symbols suggesting a chaotic, manly, stubborn fight, an almost bitter steadfastness. In his poems constructed around mythological motifs, we see the simultaneous appearance of the awful sordidness of the world and the image of the poet, vainly seeking humaneness and humanity with the lamp of Diogenes. It is this conflict that makes his poetic language uncouth, passionate, frequently approaching a dramatic monologue in style.

János Bartalis (1893—1976) wrote spontaneously flowing free verse; he was called the Transylvanian Walt Whitman. Although he held a teacher's di-

ploma, he lived as a smallholder in a small village, and described the beauty of nature in poems that are imbued with a bucolic atmosphere. His is an instinctive avant-gardism. Although his scope of life is narrow, his experiences are simple, far from the great challenges of the 20th century, he still exerted a significant influence because of a pantheism unique in our age.

Of the poets who started publishing around 1930, Jenő Dsida's life was closed by an early death, while the more significant work of others was done following the Second World War. Imre Horváth may be described as the master of miniatures: like him in this respect is László Szabédi, an artist of forms with a strong intellect, assimilating folk art elements in his poetry. A simple, idyllic approach is typical of the poetry of Jenő Kiss. Ferenc Szemlér started writing free verse and proceeded towards more regular forms, moving from a superficial approach to philosophical depths. István Horváth, born into a peasant family, had a natural talent, and Sándor Gellért made good use of what folk poetry had to offer.

The poems of Jenő Dsida (1907—1938), with their ingenious forms, are permeated by the tension of a transcendent yearning and the joys of worldly pleasure. The characteristic voice in his poetry is created by the conflicts of love, the pleasures derived from contemplating nature, and constantly appearing intimations of death. His community messianism prompted him to represent general human values, but the essential element in his nature is its immersion in the loneliness of learning and nature, escape from the urban "mob engaged in constant quarreling". His ideal was St Francis' closeness to nature; his impressionistic poems replaced early calls for action, expressed in a shrill and uncertain tone. He created an idyllic scenery, he revelled in bucolic pastoral moods, but about to be immersed completely, an elemental feeling of a lack of community surfaced. His poetic music was constantly disrupted by the" care of a coarse voice". His pleasures left him, his enjoyment of life was reduced by a philosophical clash with the awareness of annihilation. This internal tension created a balance and a specific bitter-sweet tone through the formal elements. In various poems he frequently assumed the role of Christ preparing for death. In his *Nagycsütörtök* (Maundy Thursday), the experience of waiting for the night train finds parallels with Jesus, left alone and fighting against the fear of death: the conflicts between suffering and complete indifference, sweating fear and the sleeping disciples, express the poet's place in the world. At the end of his life he wrote a famous poem, *Psalmus Hungaricus*. The fate of the Hungarians, the sufferings of a "small island doomed to deterioration" forced him to realise his responsibility: instead of the "wisely noble, beautiful Greek mood", probing universal human secrets, he wishes his words to help alleviate Hungarian pain, and he curses his own head should this not happen. That is how the man, the son of Europe, was transformed — through the dispossession of his race — into a patriot of sharpened tone. The refrain of the incandescent poem is a paraphrase of Psalm 137: Dsida drew a parallel between the fate of the Hungarians and that of the Jews in exile in Babylon.

Three novelists

Here only three names are selected among the many who graced Transylvanian prose between the two World Wars, including Károly Kós, Aladár Kuncz, Áron Tamási, Miklós Bánffy, Mária Berda, Irén Gulácsy, Sándor Kacsó, Benő Karácsony, Sándor Makkai, Rodion Markovits, Károly Molter, József Nyírő, Géza Tabéry, Albert Wass, István Asztalos. They figure here to illustrate three trends. Károly Kós provided the Transylvanian version of the historical novel, Aladár Kuncz created significant work of universal humanism, and Áron Tamási is the most outstanding and original of all those who wrote on the life of the Székely people.

Károly Kós (1883—1977) became the paragon of Transylvanian Hungarians as early as the inter-war years. His work reflects the idea of Transylvanianism. The intention of helping the Transylvanian Hungarians in their fight to survival, induced him to take up his pen at a time of escape and dispersion in order to furnish people with hope and faith. He projects the dilemmas of his time by examining the compulsions of man in the whirlwind of history, by presenting models. Kós delves into what helped maintain Hungarians for centuries in spite of their harsh history. In his most important novel, *Varjúnemzetség* (Varjú-Clan) (1925), the dilemma of truthfulness or success in life is projected historically. Kós judges people in their relationship to this basic problem, dividing the heroes of his historical novel into contrasting groups. Three generations of the Varjú family, as well as a small circle of people strongly attached to them, and allied with them, belong to those who are true to their homeland and morality, having a pure, almost ideally strong character. They represent the independence of Transylvania, they are destroyed and suffer, but again and again re-build their castle in the mountains, Poiana, in order to protect those who are faithful to the independence of Transylvania. Contrasted with them stand those who are weak and waver. It is characteristic of Kós that they too perish and suffer, they too are victims of the calamities of fate, which punishes them for their betrayal and wavering. The extraordinarily tight link between man and nature serves the basic ideas as well: the preservation of the Transylvanian Hungari-

ans, their identity with their native soil and its secrets, and this integral link also serves as protection. The historical chronicle is elevated by a language of poetic beauty; history is permeated by the timeless beauty and eternal dignity of life.

Aladár Kuncz (1886—1931) began by following in the footsteps of modern individualism and aestheticism; he was the literary gentleman of Transylvanian Hungarian literature and, as an editor and man of letters, one of the most important figures during the twenties. His novel *Fekete kolostor* (The Black Monastery), is rooted in suffering. A great lover of Paris, Kuncz was on holiday in France when the Great War broke out, and he was interned as an enemy alien for five years. Following his release, he worked on his novel for many years; it made use of the material he recorded in his note-book, but was freely moulded and frequently had added symbolic meanings. The basic layer of the novel was furnished by the documentary description of the monotony of prison life; excellently sketched figures and short story-like scenes, that highlight events and enrich them with a symbolic meaning are integrated with this; similarly interwoven are the writer's political, moral, psychological, and art philosophy musings. The novel, divided according to the stations of the captives' life, impresses with its objectivity, and the writer's ability to connect the multifareous material leads not to condemnation but a representation of behaviour that probes the secrets of existence. Kuncz grasps the model of human existence in a community that has been created by compulsion: bad instincts and distortions erupt under pressure. He reveals with great psychological expertise the causes and the different versions of the falling apart of individuals. In Kuncz, however, suffering only ripened the philosophy of humaneness and love; in his novel he consistently counterbalances evil deeds with increasingly stronger manifestation of human goodness. One of the settings for the novel, the *Moutier noir*, the "black monastery", is not only where the prisoners suffer, but it also possesses a meaning independent of its walls: it has also become a symbol for the consciousness of belonging together that originates in suffering, the goodness generated by suffering. When *The Black Monastery* appeared in 1931, it was highly esteemed for its underlying ideology as well. Contemporary readers looked upon the "black monastery" as a symbol for Transylvania. They considered its high humanism as projecting the direction of minority life possessing a universal value.

Áron Tamási (1897—1966) was the major prose fiction writer and dramatist of the period. His first volume of short stories was published in 1925, and from then on critics placed him high. The fate of Transylvania finds expression in his short stories. He creates a special atmosphere, whose basic features derive from Transylvanian folklore, testifying to the inspirations of tales and ballads, setting a monument to the everyday struggles of the poor Székelys. Typical of his works is the rich imagery of the Székely vernacular and its specific humour, which lends the characters the strength to face up to the tragedies of their lives. He added a new colour to the Hungarian short story. His anecdotal, playful, tale-like, ballad-like and mythological stories belong to the mainstream of Hungarian short story writing. They are full of ideas, playfulness, tension, and tragic moments. The social sensitivity of his view of the world is manifested in his short story *Rendes feltámadás* (Proper Resurrection) in a playful and mythological manner: the defencelessness of the poor is so complete that they can only trust in justice in the next world, but it comes to light that even God fails, in vain do they die defenceless and humiliated, for even at the Resurrection they are placed at the end of the line, because there too people are grouped according to their titles and ranks, and the poor come last. Tamási's heroes retire back into their graves instead, they scrape the earth onto themselves, they refuse to obey the sound of the trumpets, since even at the Resurrection, those who were thieves and wicked all their lives, are given priority, and the good and the poor are placed last. Tamási's lyrical short stories associate the imagination with reality, pointing to the helplessness and desire for justice of the Székely. Among his novels an outstanding place is occupied by the Ábel Trilogy, in which he drew a picture of the life of the poor Székely after Trianon: the escape of the poor back to nature, *Ábel a rengetegben,* (Ábel in the Wilderness), their taking jobs as servants, *Ábel a városban* (Ábel in the City), and their escaping to America, *Ábel Amerikában* (Ábel in America). The trilogy is lent unity by style and ideas: Tamási dissolves reality into a tale to demonstrate the perseverance, decency and resourcefulness of the poor, along with their desire for a home and freedom. The first volume is outstanding alone: the sixteen-year-old-Székely lad is left alone in the high mountains, he defiantly stands his ground in the ruthless fight for survival, indeed does so with serenity. He fights with nature and people, and he is saved by his resourcefulness. Everything around Ábel receives a tale-like touch because his childish approach dissolves reality into a tale. He became known as the typical Székely character, the archetype of the self-expression of the Székely. His humour is a powerful resource in the struggle, dissipating his sadness and sufferings as well. This novel expresses the deepest desire of the Transylvanian Hungarians who became homeless in their own homeland, the desire for a home. Lines from the novel have become the slogan of the Transylvanian Hungarians: "We are in this world to find a home in it somewhere." Tamási is significant as a

playwright too: ancient beliefs and passions are alive in his plays, the justice of tales and the poetry of the word shine brightly. What distinguishes Tamási's work are the talelike flashes of decency, simplicity and perseverance with a touch of folk art, as well as the liveliness of his language in conjuring up the scenery. What he describes becomes poetry, therefore his art is frequently described as fairytale realism, as a synthesis of myth and reality.

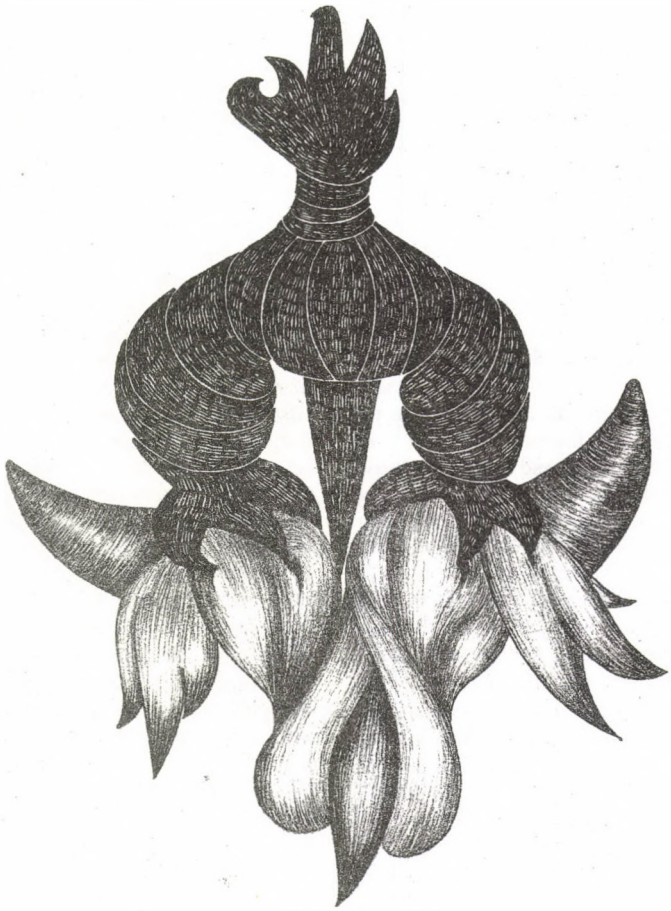
Literary life

Erdélyi Helikon was the most important Hungarian literary journal in Rumania. Contributors included all the significant writers of the time. In opposition to the humanism of *Erdélyi Helikon*, a kind of attempt at a socialist approach, strongly involved in politics, gained ground in the late twenties. Refugees from the Hungarian revolutions of 1918—1919 fled to Transylvania and established contact with the Hungarian working movement in Rumania. In 1926 László Dienes started a journal called *Korunk*, which, around 1930, edited by Gábor Gaál, was to become the most significant Marxist journal in the Hungarian language. *Korunk* sharply criticised the approach to literature of *Erdélyi Helikon*, it was engaged in militant politics, subordinating literature to political activity. It attached the greatest importance to social documentary literature, publishing works of this nature from everywhere where Hungarian is spoken, frequently including works by important Hungarian writers, who were barred from publication by censorship in Hungary. Following the 1934 Soviet Writers' Congress, Gábor Gaál, in keeping with the intolerance of the extremist left, proclaimed the need for socialist realism. The leftist, communist orientation was justified with the advance of fascism. The latter motivated an opening up in the second half of the thirties and a seeking of an alliance with a variety of progressive forces. Special attention should be given to the wide international connections of the journal. Under the auspices of the Antifascist People's Front, in the late thirties, *Korunk* gave space to some of the antifascist writers on the staff of *Erdélyi Helikon* as well. However, right to the very end, its highest praise was given to those who represented militant socialism, occasionally at the expense of art. Among its contributors Gábor Gaál, Edgár Balogh, Lajos Jordáky, and József Méliusz were outstanding. The majority of those who wrote for it fell victim to the Second World War, their work was unable to reach maturity and they are classified as members of the lost generation. Others, however. gained in stature following the war: József Méliusz (1909) became known as the spokesman in poetry and journalism of the feeling and ideas of the illegal communist movement. He had already proved his skill at polemic verse in flowing free verse at the start of his career. Later, after the war, he wrote one of the most important novels of more recent Hungarian literature in Rumania, *Sors és jelkép* (Fate and Symbol, 1946), and his poetry, prose and journalism became equally important. He consistently developed further the horizons of the avantgarde. The most important prose writer of *Korunk* was István Nagy (1904—1977), also referred to as the Transylvanian Gorky. He wrote about the process in which the urban proletariat became organised as a working class; his novels and short stories, based on facts, are examples of socialist narrative of sociological exactitude, a synthesis of a self-educated instinct and the ideology of the working class movement. He depicted the life of the rural and urban poor with an equally deep knowledge of life. Following the war, his art degenerated into mere propaganda for political ideas; finally, in the last phase of his life, he rose to the peak again with a cycle of major autobiographical novels.

Around 1930, several of the writers belonging to the *Erdélyi Helikon* circle felt the concept of pure literature insufficient. They proclaimed that literature must resolutely face the social and national questions of Transylvanians too (Sándor Kacsó, Áron Tamási, Mária Berde). This attempt was reflected by a debate that took place in *Erdélyi Helikon* under the title *Vallani és vállalni* (Professing and undertaking). This demand was accepted by some young writers connected with a student paper, *Erdélyi fiatalok*, who tried to associate populist ideas with the Marxist ideology of *Korunk:* they sensitively traced the different national concepts of moral and social inspiration, and laid down the foundations for Transylvanian rural (Imre Mikó) and ethnic studies (György Bözödi). In the thirties, as a reaction to fascism, the desire for a common programme uniting different schools of thought was made increasingly forcefully. Áron Tamási looked upon the young to create the potential unity of Transylvanian Hungarians. The Communist Edgár Balogh also advocated a popular front against fascism. This is how the Marosvásárhely meeting came about in October 1937; here all the important questions concerning the Transylvanian Hungarians were discussed, and a programme was drawn up which distanced itself from both revisionist and antinational extremes, and advocated a common programme and reconciliation of the peoples of the Danube valley under the aegis of national unity. However, Transylvanian Hungarian literature was unable to effectively express this idea for, from 1938 onwards, the Rumanian royal dictatorship made it impossible for democratic movements to operate in Transylvania. In 1940 Transylvania was split into two, when the Vienna Award returned Northern Transylvania to Hungary, producing grave ethnic

conflicts on both sides of the new border. In the war years, producing Hungarian literature became impossible in Southern Transylvania; in Northern Transylvania, *Korunk* ceased publication and *Erdélyi Helikon* barely scraped by. The only venture of that time worth noting is the journal *Termés* (1942—1944) published quarterly by young people in Kolozsvár. Various talented young writers found a home there for a short while: István Asztalos, György Bözödi, Zoltán Jékely, Jenő Kiss, László Szabédi, István Horváth, and Imre Horváth.

The history of Transylvanian Hungarian literature in the period between the two World Wars truly reflects the intellectual and political strivings of the Hungarians of the region. It created values under difficult conditions, and included a number of writers who exerted an influence on all of Hungarian literature through their best works. This literature has a specific Transylvanian character; its unique feature is the intertwining of the Transylvanian landscape and the perserverance of the minority. And yet, in spite of important talents, this literature could not grow into a truly great one: following the Great War it was first hard pressed to survive and get organised at all, and then it was paralysed and broken by the new threats it was subject to.



Overcoming the devil

JÓZSEF NYÍRŐ

On the threshold of the hereafter

Jesus's birthday has come and gone but the snow–capped Sierras will not be appeased: they have set loose a perishing, biting, cutting wind on us to assail us for weeks on end. The Spaniards huddle over their braziers, legs turning blue above the burning coal, and take stock of the wrathful world. One night beneath the frozen stars I sleep my last peaceful sleep but suddenly must jump out of bed, for a few more minutes and I will surely choke to death. In dreadful agony I gasp for breath but there is not, there is not enough air to be had, as though God had not created enough to go round, or as though someone had made off with it in the night. I am like a war–criminal, strung up, half–dead, half–alive, who cannot breathe, yet cannot die. A desolate, dreadful state.

And since that night there has not been enough air in the world for me.

That is how the battle between myself and threatening death commenced and has continued for eight months now, and I have had no success in staying the ruthless hand that is choking me.

But one must hold out manfully and not give in. I try every method there is to try. I do breathing exercises in front of the open window, bowing like a demented dervish; I sniff vinegar, rub my chest above the heart, staring, glassy eyes lighting up the night, my whole being a supplication, crying to be succoured but I am silent and strong so as not to alarm more than I need this wretched woman helplessly fussing around me.

"Bronchitis", I say intelligently. "I'll soon get over it".

Well, I didn't.

The young doctor set upon me the next day – an excellent young man who has already made a name for himself and is young enough to be my son – he does not say a word, but his face clouds over and he snorts into his moustaches a couple of times; he is visibly anxious. Out of pity I tactfully do not ask him how I am.

But the wife, I decide, must be taken in hand. How dare she call a doctor, I let fly at the poor creature. Does she think we have money to spare for a doctor out of our dollar–a–day income? Has she forgotten that we have now been refugees for over eight years and cannot afford the luxury of being ill?

The old Reaper has given me a sound tug out of bed. It is clear I must bid farewell to any way of lying down for long months. A thousand times I tried and a thousand times failed to remain recumbent. I would have choked to death for certain. A cruel, miserable, but original notion: an invalid who must not rest. My unwitting fellow–beings can have no idea of how good it is to lie down, to sleep. To lie down, to sleep!...

Sitting on a chair I weigh just how long these winter nights are. Only the trees can suffer the way I suffer, the trees that know no peace, no rest from the wind and storm. I watch their eerie struggle

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József Nyirő *(1889–1953), an ex–Catholic priest from Transylvania, was a highly popular novelist and short story writer. Politically on the extreme right during the war, he left Hungary in 1944 and settled in Spain. He died in Madrid. This piece was written shortly before his death.*

from my window and clothe the mysteries of the turbulent, congested sky in fantastic thoughts. And when sleep does overtake me for a couple of hours in my chair, I wake my wife, exulting, with the good news.

But she is no longer there to hear it. She is run–down, worn out, at the end of her tether. I realize with a jolt that she cannot last me out if we go on this way. I banish her to a separate room. One of us at least must live to return to our beautiful Hungary, take stock of the children, know the grandchildren; must live to see the end of these earthly villainies, and be able, after so much horror, to wipe the dust and the spilt blood of innocents off her feet, for I, I will not be able.

And so there is just the two of us left, I and my enemy. This way, when the time comes, there will be no one to hear my last cry of pain. I did not think, could not foresee, that my wife would be there listening, tormenting herself in front of my door, straining every nerve to hear how I fared as long as her strength permitted.

I have always had an aversion for the pert and callous words that promise that things "tend to go from bad to worse". And now for me those words came true. The sweet days of snatching sleep on the chair were past and gone. I could no longer breathe sitting down. There was nothing left but to sleep standing, back to the wall, legs buckling under me, pasting together the fleeting moments of unconsciousness into panting, wheezing breaths with a great, strained effort of will. I do not know to this day how this period passed and how it was possible to live through it.

It is only natural that I was soon smitten by another affliction. My damaged nervous system rose in loud protest. I could eat but little and seldom, the nerves of my withered, wasted body twanged and sang; giddy phantasms arose in my brain, and it sometimes happened, whilst in such a state of mind, that, throwing open windows and doors, I rushed out into the garden, into the stormy night, while my wife hid from me in dread. Spectres and other eerie figures cavorted about me, singing songs in ghastly, reedy voices, while lights appeared to gleam through them, but then angels came from the sky, yes, angels, beautiful, winged angels, warm and terribly clean, ethereal, and chased the visions away. And it seemed as though the world around me had been transformed into an exquisite painting. Then it all faded away and I came to myself, bewildered:

"My God, what happened to me?"

I crawl back up into the house to take laudanum. We bought some yesterday, but I cannot find it anywhere. It is no good looking for it. I know that my wife has got rid of it somehow. She was right.

After thirty–four years of marriage I know her every gesture, I can read her mind. In between gaps I can tell she has something important to say. She keeps putting it off as long as she can but finally lays out my best suit, fresh underwear and says:"You can say what you like but you are going to put on these clothes because Ambassador Marosy will be here in an hour to take you to Madrid in his car. There are specialists waiting to put you through a complete check–up, he has everything prepared, and I don't want to hear you say we don't have the money because even if we had to beg for it...

First on the list is Dr Calender. He is an internationally renowned cardiologist. He is expecting me at eleven.

He is very thorough. To be sure, all is not well with the heart. Hm, yes, there is a little trouble there. But it turns out that he will not accept a fee as the patient in question is a writer from Hungary, a country he greatly admires. Moved by such a handsome gesture I forget that hm, yes, there is a little trouble with the heart, as long as all is well with Hungary.

Dr Alix, the excellent lung–specialist he sends me to, cries out while examining me: *Somos tocayos!* (We are namesakes!) and tells me the next day is our nameday.

But it also turns out that, to be sure, all is not well with the lungs either. A large patch of shadow glowers over them like a map of death. My circulation is jaded, there are certain other disorders and all this adds up to the cause of the *fatiga*, which is the Spanish name for my choking state. The lesser disorders are not worth speaking about.

The only trouble is that the doctors are too vehement in their reassurances and consolation, are in fact coddling me. I know they haven't told half the truth.

At every step she takes, everywhere she goes, strangers stop "Dona Helena", windows are thrown open to ask: *Que tal, Don José?*

It brings tears to one's eyes. It is just another example of the ways in which this happy, warm–hearted, song–loving people try to help us forget our foreignness, homelessness, our exiled state and the hardships that go with it, the tragedy of our lives. Impossible to forget how the street cleaner stops his sweeping when I pass by to spare me from the rising dust, or that the beggar would not take my money as he came, he says, to ask me how I was and ... *Arriba Espana!* leaves after delivering a beautiful sermon on patience and the Senor who dwells above us.

When Holy Week arrives, Jesus dies and arises again on the third day, the sombre, picturesque processions disappear off the streets, life dons its workaday clothes and I know I have not much time left to live.

I am not even suprised when, one gloomy afternoon, my wife says, with ill–concealed fear and perturbation:

"A Franciscan will come to see you tomorrow... you ought to be shriven and take the sacrament..."

I turn my eyes towards her and give her a gentle, searching look, and bow my head, for I know what lies behind that simple sentence. It is an act of which only an exceptionally great spirit such as hers is capable.

"You are right", I gasp. "Thank you. I ought to be shriven and take the sacrament..."

No, no, I cannot die here. Much as I love it, much as I admire it, this land is strange to me. Every land is strange to me. But if there is no escaping Judgement, I will try to transform it. With tortuously strained imagination I conjure up the land of my birth, the Hargita. Its rare, vast, trackless forests, Küküllő, Csicser, Budavár, the trout streams, the flowery fields. I steal the beech–woods, the birches flashing white, the lost, wondrous Hungarian world, and beauteous images pass before my eyes. This way it might be easier.

But the hardest part is still to come.

"Sit down", I say to my wife. "Here, opposite me. Yes. This has got to be decided too... What is to become of you if I... yes... when I die?"

The possibility is so glaringly, flagratly impending that is would be foolish to deny it. It is better and more proper to acknowledge it frankly, openly, even if my wife's face defies description as she hears the words.

What is to become of her when she is left to herself, without support, alone and homeless in the world, with a blank future ahead of her and the burden of increasing years upon her shoulders, perhaps facing the final act of her life herself? She cannot seek the protection of her children, there are no relatives she can depend on, no possibility of employment for her – her Spanish is so broken she speaks practically in infinitives; we have no money put by, living as we do from day to day, and she cannot count on the Hungarians. In twenty-four hours they'll have forgotten her very existence.

"The good Lord will help!"

The Hungarians! Those parricidal, factious, malicious, disunited, scattered, hapless Hungarians, this grievously ill–fated people, spectres of the homeland. Can they be counted upon? In the light of Spanish affection and kindliness, courtesy and compassion, to think of them is all the more painful. Here I am, in the throes of death, alone, forsaken amidst the barren hills, but up till now I have not had as much as a kind word thrown my way.

In my bitterness I do not stop to think that my accusations are biassed and untrue, unjust, unreasonable, for are they not as good as ignorant of what is happening to me here in my very own Rodostó? It was I who withdrew into this cemetery for bison, for species doomed to extinction, among rocks resembling the landscapes of the moon.

And let us not be ungrateful. Erzsébet, Mrs Szántay, who is a doctor, hurries to my side though she was herself unwell. And I have never lived through a greater and more heartwarming moment than when Jani, my friend János Vaszary, ran down from Barcelona, where the company was

playing, especially to see me — Jani, of whom there is but one in the whole wide world, who has been there by my side from the beginning, who shared his home with me, like a brother, a man who can have no like.

"Do with me what you will but take it!. I know what it means to you, but be humble. It is your duty to grasp the opportunity". But enough said. He does not like me to expose this other half of his kindly face.

Several people from the colony came to visit me. Only my friend Dr Muráti stayed away. This grieved me. I later learned that he accepted a job to be able to assist me. He, too, is a diplomat sans fame and fortune, all he had to give up for my sake was his spare time – which he promptly did. There are not many capable of such noble gestures roaming about in the world.

Then the great friend of the Székely people, the former guardian of the monastery at Csík, knight of the Miraculous Virgin Mary of Somlyó, Father Gábor Takács, exiled through the persecution of the minorities, and my friend the editor together sounded the alphorn in the papers. Oyez Hungarians, Oyez!

The news breaks through the Iron Curtain, and the childrens' anxious letters arrive. They do not write at length, but what they write is worth dying for.

Lord! Do with me what you will, but bless these Hungarians and every Hungarian, and let their reward be bounteous; look after them, keep their fate in Your hands, and lead them back into beautiful Hungary, into the lost world of happiness and peace, and tell the corn to grow twice as high for them, and teach the birds to sing for their ears; wipe the sentence of desolation, suffering and death from their brows, do not allow a single one of them to be lost; let the beloved language tinkle like pieces of gold from their lips, let trees of great Hungarian virtues and strengths bloom; let all injustices cease and blessings sprout from every fallen drop of sweat and blood, and let all the agony and pain I have suffered, being as it was too much for four men to bear, let alone for one, as the doctor said, let it all be for their sake, and if you cannot take my body, take at least my spirit back to the cemetery of Házsongárd or Udvarhely, or lay it down on the blessed earth, that the grass may grow greener and the world a finer, better place...

I do not rightly know, Lord, what to ask of You, how to give thanks for all that I have received, but my poor, fatigued, swollen, choking, frail, wretched body humbly bows beneath the burden of all the goodness and beauty that has been my share and I ask you to do what and as you think it fit, Lord, Who stands at the head of this procession of Hungarians, gathered from all parts and corners of the world...

But if it should happen that I must lose my life, I ask you, my people, not to forget poor, old, lonely, forsaken Dona Helena, who speaks Spanish in infinitives, and send a short, passing prayer for myself.

Translated by Eszter Molnár

A sober look at Rumania

An interview with Géza Szávai

Géza Szávai, a Hungarian author of several volumes of short stories, a novel, and books for young readers, formerly lived in Bucharest. Would you tell us about the circumstances under which you and your family moved from Rumania to Hungary?

Europe and the world are not familiar with what happened during the last twenty or thirty years, the Ceausescu era in Rumania. Even people in Rumania were not really aware of what was happening to the country and to them. In such a situation one can only consider one's own lot, try and keep a cool head and presume that one's judgement is sound. I never wanted to leave Rumania. My father is a teacher and my grandfather had a semi–peasant and semi–artisan background, the sort of man who always meddled in politics and burnt his fingers. The inheritance that has been handed down to me over many generations has been the imperative necessity to stay there, in Transylvania, to live, as far as possible, a full life as a Hungarian, and to seek the ways and means allowing one to do this. This has been the moral command for people in Transylvania. Yet it is true that morality and moral expectations by themeselves cannot meet one's daily needs. And so the past decades have brought along much that perhaps should not even be judged by moral categories, as the stage Rumania had come to was the lowermost level of a degenerated, animal existence.

What kind of education did you receive?

I come from the Székely Country, the homeland of several hundred thousand people. The Székely Country is a completely homogeneous Hungarian territory in Transylvania. The peace treaty signed after the Great War should have ensured educational and religious autonomy but the Rumanian Kingdom sabotaged this paragraph. For a few years after the Second World War, Hungarian education was available for Hungarian children within the scope of the Autonomous Hungarian Region, at least in some of Transylvania with a Hungarian population. This, however, was short–lived and transitory. I went to a Hungarian school for my first eight years. By the mid–1960s, however, Ceausescu's sham liberalism began to show its fangs. They started to impress on the Székely Country as well, telling people that those with a university education must fit into the scheme of things and so they would not necessarily be working in areas where Hungarians lived. In Old Rumania they would have to know the language. With this subterfuge they succeeded in completely undermining Hungarian university education. In the 1960s, when I started secondary school, they were already working on us, using various means to achieve their ends. Teachers at Hungarian secondary schools were told that new classes would be organized and they would have jobs, only teaching in those classes would be in Rumanian. As everybody must be familiar with the official language of the country. So Rumanian sections were established in all the secondary schools, and even my own parents told me that I would obviously not be admitted to university if they enrolled me in a non–Rumanian school. Székelykeresztúr is a small town in the Székely Country. Fifty years ago not a single Rumanian family lived there—their numbers now are considerable. A Rumanian class was started there too, and Hungarian pupils were recruited for it. In our class there were some five or six Rumanians. Lessons were held in Rumanian by Hungarian teachers speaking broken Rumanian for Hungarian pupils speaking broken Rumanian.

What did you study at university?

After all that, I was lucky with my secondary school. Once they set up a Rumanian class, they said, let it be an experimental course in Science. After all, Mathematics and Physics constitute a kind of international language. So almost everyone in our class studied

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Physics and Maths, and several of us were admitted to university after passing entrance exams in Rumanian. At that time in the more devious nationalism of the 'sixties, there were still certain concessions made which could be presented to the world. In classes where teaching was in Rumanian, a Hungarian teacher could give optional Hungarian lessons if at least fifteen pupils asked for them. This is how I studied Hungarian language and literature and began to publish. I felt guilty that after finishing a Rumanian secondary school I would enroll in a Rumanian university and then become a Hungarian writer so I decided to take my entrance examination in Hungarian and French. I have no School Leaving Examination in Hungarian, still, as a teacher, I can examine pupils in Hungarian at such an examination.

How did you become the editor of an Hungarian language periodical in Bucharest?

In the 1960s, the unambiguously nationalist Rumanian leadership created many ambiguous situations. They went about breaking up the local autonomy of Hungarian cultural institutions by offering, virtually as a gift, to move everything to the centre, to Bucharest, to ensure better and faster information and high–quality work. By then a new Hungarian newspaper or publishing office could only be organized there. This is how, in the early 1970s, the cultural weekly *Hét* was founded. Some of the Hungarian editors were so to speak compelled to move to Bucharest. I knew what I was doing when I left behind my Hungarian background in the Székely Country and went to Bucharest. In an ethnic minority position, when even to maintain the native language entails dreadful problems, thinking on culture usually becomes distorted. This also follows from the structure of education. It was still possible to study to be a teacher of Hungarian, and for Hungarian teachers the language of instruction could not be Rumanian. I also was taught in Hungarian. But at the same time, law students and physicists could only study in Rumanian. Trades could be learnt only in Rumanian. Up till 1957, a Hungarian university was still functioning, at Kolozsvár. It was attended by the intelligentsia of the two and a half million strong Hungarian ethnic minority. By the early 1960s this, too, was closed down. Hungarian intellectuals could only obtain knowledge in the various professional fields in their native language on their own. This made it extremely important for the magazine where I was working to try and provide all–embracing cultural information. Alongside literature, it tried to sustain the illusion of a need for a diversified culture, and this sounded extremely attractive to me if only because my own interests, backed by the grounding I had obtained at secondary–school, are also varied.

To what extent have you obtained public recognition as a writer? How many of your books have been published? Do you not feel this number to be unjustly low because you are Hungarian?

I do not feel that, as I had nine books published in Rumania. *Kriterion*, the publishing house of the national minorities, also functioned in Bucharest (though they had a branch–office in Kolozsvár too). I think, this carefully organised institution can be said to be of model value anywhere, as with its modest possibilities it serves culture as a whole. They have issued works in German, Rumanian, Serbian and Yiddish. The manager, Géza Domokos, an ethnic Hungarian, tried to offer something to members of other minorities as well. But with the years *Kriterion* operated under severe restrictions. No new staff were engaged to replace those who died or retired, out of print books were not reissued, publication of a number of major scholarly works and handbooks on linguistics and history which were ready was stopped. However defenceless a community may be, when organised from within, it can fortunately create a sound sense of justice and these institutions really functioned well. Soon no ethnic institutions survived except the Churches, but even in the Churches ethnical and other similar conflicts emerged. Rumanian sections were established in every Hungarian theatre. These are naturally losing propositions, and they must be financed by the Hungarian section.

What finally prompted your departure?

It was fairly difficult for us to fit in in Bucharest. I did shoulder this, as all my life I was told that one must put up with it. But my wife fell ill. We came to a state which nearly cost her her life, as she developed pulmonary sarcodiosis. Hospital supplies were very poor in Rumania, and I ought to have taken milk in to her, but I could not obtain any in Bucharest. So I arranged things with a night watchman who lived in a village some 40 kilometres from the capital and who felt kindly to my wife as they had been employed at the same place, to secure me two litres of milk every other day. The old man brought it in every other day and I went to the end of the city where he worked, brought in the milk and took it to the hospital. My wife drank the milk and kept crying that her 12–year–old little daughter cannot have a drop of milk at home. I cannot speak ill of the Bucharest doctors, they did everything possible under those conditions. I applied for a passport for my wife but they did not issue one. The Rumanian people was declared the foremost nation in the world and Rumanian medicine was declared the best. Should I have asked for a passport for medical treatment, this would have been an outrage against the Rumanian

state. So we asked for a tourist passport, but they did not grant one. Time passed and my wife's state grew worse. Then I applied for passports for us by stating that we would leave the child behind as hostage. We had to go to great lengths and create absolutely extreme situations before I managed to bring my wife to Budapest. She was admitted in the Korányi T. B. sanatorium, and I myself returned to our daughter in the Székely Country. I kept commuting between Bucharest and the Székely Country. Finally I asked for passports for myself and the child to visit my wife. It must seem inconceivable in any other country what ordeals I had to go through until at long last the child was granted a tourist passport to visit her mother. Before one could even apply for a passport, the C.P. committee and the collective at one's working place had to vote that one was worthy to leave Rumania. At my working place this involved no problem. I was apart from my wife for about five months and during that time we could only exchange letters or sometimes telegrams. A telephone connection between the two countries was so to speak non–existent. If my wife had not fallen ill, we would still be living in Bucharest. When I came over with our daughter, I was still naive enough to think of returning. I do not know how this would have turned out. It is very good now that we are together. They try to live and recover, and I try to carry on with my work.

There are only unreliable statistics on the number of people who have left Rumania to settle either in Hungary or in another country. Estimates move between ten thousand and over a hundred thousand people. The majority of them are Hungarians. The Germans continued on their way to Germany. But there are also many Rumanians in Hungary waiting to go to another country, and there are some who want stay here. There are signs of growing despair among the Rumanians as well, and of the waning influence of nationalist propaganda.

One should not forget that the last peasant war in Europe broke out in 1907 in Moldavia. This was an unequalled event in Europe. When the starving masses set Moldavia on fire, the regular army was called out and they opened fire. There was a real peasant war put down by the army. It was a famine revolt with 11,000 dead. According to a survey, in 1939 some 40 per cent of the Rumanian population only ate bread occasionally. Having inherited these old experiences from his father and grandfather, what can a person be like, what can his political activity be like? This is a society that proved easy to manipulate. And it was manipulated for at least 150 years, in the token of a national idea. It is this situation the world must bear in mind. Ceausescu's death obviously brings some relief, but it is not certain to bring a real solution. I sincerely hope that Rumania opens its gates to real democracy. I am neither a pessimist nor an optimist, I am sober–minded. I believe that the Rumanian nation will be able to cleanse itself both in its individuals and as a whole, and also in its way of thinking. I think that the disrupted Swabian, Hungarian and Saxon autonomies can be re–established, a possibility which must certainly be granted. And at the same time, the possibility should also be granted for Rumanian young people who had been moved from Old Rumania into Transylvania, sometimes forcibly, sometimes by administrative measures, and sometimes under the influence of chauvinistic slogans, to return to Old Rumania if they so wish, if their longings or their sense of identity move them to do so. But I would even go further. If the Rumanian intelligentsia thinks these things over, they themselves will reach the same conclusions. This is common sense and sound logic. Because common sense tends to spread like wild fire, and so the odds are that the Rumanian intelligentsia of the post–Ceausescu regime will opt for the path of purification. Once progressive thinking gains the upper hand, I am always certainly ready to proceed allied with them, working together in Eastern Europe.

Judit Vásárhelyi

Balt–Orient Express

An everyday story

I joined a family on my way to visit a number of friends. I felt it my duty to pack up some things from time to time and take them to whoever possible, so that they could at least have something to eat and clean their teeth with. That was why I set out once again, at six in the evening, from the Nyugati Station, boarding the Balt-Orient Express. At Biharkeresztes, we smoothly passed through the customs and crossed the border in complete darkness. I had not imagined that the Rumanian passport inspection would take place on Rumanian territory, at Biharpüspöki.

Why is this of any importance?

Because I naturally thought we could ask for official help should there be any trouble, but over there is no longer any possibility to do so. The Rumanian border guards and customs officers boarded the train and asked to see passports. Did they ask for them? Not in a manner one might expect. They bawl at you: "Passport", and if you do not hand it over that very second, another bellowing follows: "Are you deaf?!" I handed over my passport, but was already subjected to the next bawl: "Why are there two Spanish visas?!" Because I have been to Spain, I replied. "Well, we shall see!" And they started turning the whole compartment upside down. They poked about in every corner, and finally one of them said: "Strip." A woman appeared—I am not sure what her job was, I can not even distinguish between the uniforms of border guards and customs officers; they wore uniforms of three different colours.

The woman was also in uniform?

Yes, she was. We stayed in the compartment and she pulled off my pullover. Well she touched me up in an utterly humiliating manner, and asked me, with a broad grin on her face, what my bra was stuffed with: and told me to produce the things I was carrying promptly. There was a letter in the pocket of my slacks. I had been asked back home to bring it to some relatives.

I imagine because they did not really trust that the letter would reach its destination through the mails.

It was not even sealed, nor was it in an envelope. I had put it into my pocket just like that, so that anybody could read it. Well, the woman snatched the letter with a lustful grin: "Is this how such things are carried?" she said. I do not know what exactly the proper way was. Next they frisked the others as well. In the neighbouring compartment there was a mother with a child—I took her to be around ten. They too were searched, including the child. I do not even know exactly what was happening, there was such a commotion in the whole carriage. I only saw that a colonel stood there before me, shouting: "Rumania is *kaput* for you!" He took my passport: "Do not dare set foot here again, and now make yourself scarce!" I did not even know in which direction to go. Then they told me to pack and take my belongings. They beckoned me to get off the train.

Didn't you make any objections? Or wasn't that possible?

Just imagine, a hoard of uniformed people running up and down. To whom should I have spoken? There was no Hungarian border guard to be seen anywhere. Everybody was sitting next to their luggage in a fright, and I think those who were left out of the hassle were happy not to be ordered off the train. I asked one of the guards where I should go. Straight along, that way. I saw a light about a hundred metres away; Biharpüspöki station. There we stopped. Again no one spoke. Soldiers guarded us, that's all. Then I saw the others: three men with parcels,a woman with her child, a man, an old man, a married couple—

Broadcast on November 25 1989, in *168 óra* (168 Hours), a weekly report feature on Hungarian Radio.

they were all there in a group. Finally we were driven into a room at the end of the station, it must have been the size of—let me see—about five times five metres, and had a stone floor. There was a stove in the corner, and twice they threw a few logs onto the fire, but everybody took out their pullovers and put on their overcoats. Particulary later on. We were kept there all night.

Were they all Hungarian citizens?

No. Next to me a fat man was puffing and blowing; he was an American on a trip round the world. His crime was his being an American, a foreigner. Then there were two Austrian girls too.

Why were they taken off the train?

Because they were Austrians. There was a woman on whom they found three packs of contraceptive pills. She was fined 55 leis. That was all the money she had, and they took it all away, but regardless of this, she too was kept there for the whole night. I changed places with an old woman, since there were only a few chairs in the room, and I happened to sit on the only chair with a back, as I had been among the first to enter. She was crouching on a garden bench without any back, and after a few hours she must have felt fairly wretched. When we changed places, I asked why they had been taken off the train. Because her poor old husband, who was around seventy, had wrapped up his dirty boots in some old newspaper.

So what? Why on earth did that matter?

Because they said they wanted to smuggle in newspapers and news from Hungary.

What paper was it?

I did not see it, as the paper had been taken away from them. Later one of the men looked at me. I asked him why he was there. He said that on his way to the railway station he had taken a picture postcard out of his letter–box. A friend of his had sent him greetings from Mallorca. Now he was suspected of having taken some secret message to Rumania. That was why. On some of the people they had found more than 500 leis, and that was the reason for taking them in. Then there were some who had less than 500 leis on them, but allegedly it is compulsory to take along that much money, and so that was the reason. There were some who did not know why they had been ordered off the train. Some were said to have brought too much food. One of them only had a haversack with him and they did not believe him when he told them he only wanted to go walking. In short I could find no logic in their action. It was dreadful. We were guarded there by two or three young soldiers in succession. Nobody spoke. Once they came in to the foreigners, I mean the American and the Austrians, and asked them, through an interpreter, on what business they were travelling. They did so with a friendly smile, and then left them behind without doing anything about them till morning. Next the colonel shouted in through the glass door that I should go out at once. He bellowed at me to list the addresses. "What addresses?" I asked. He just repeated that I should list the add-resses of those they had sent me to, where I wanted to go. "I know of no address at all," I said. I had intended to go with another family, to their acquaintences. That family was left on the train. I do not know why they were not ordered off, there was no logic in that either.

What language did the colonel use?

He started in Rumanian and then switched to broken Hungarian. When he wanted me to understand him, he shouted in Hungarian, in fluent Hungarian. From that time on nobody even looked at us until the morning. People all sank into themselves. I was sitting on the table, chain–smoking. I felt no fear at all, rather a dreadful helplessness. And I was thinking, good Lord, I had even left home hoping that the Party Congress might lead to certain changes. It is utterly inconceivable for us (and this can be felt already at the border of the country) how utterly impossible this would be. How impossible it is for a Congress to change anything there. Then I thought how easy it is for us here to say that people should stick it out, if everybody wants to come over, there would be no one to act when the time came. But just try and live through such a night. Only this humiliation—no beating up, not even to be sacked from your job, only this much.

Well, morning came and it was growing light. By that time we were really worried about what would happen, perhaps they would keep us there for several days. Nobody said anything. Then one of the men went out to use the lavatory. I do not know who he spoke to but anyway, he was told that we might be put on the train from Bucharest, since they usually do not hold people for more than a day, if only because there is no room for the new arrivals. Then it turned out that, apart from the thirty or forty people in our room, there were people waiting in two more rooms. We were waiting for the express to arrive, so that we could return. At last it arrived.

Half an hour passed, three quarters of an hour. Nobody said a word. By that time I felt sure they would not let us go home that day. After an hour a young soldier appeared and told us we could go. They lined us up on the platform. The train stood on track 3. The

colonel stood there between the rails, legs apart, the others, customs officers, border guards, soldiers guarding the train, behind him. He held the passports and called out everybody's name.

The engine kept whistling right beside us and went on puffing. He uttered the names in a low voice on purpose so that he could shout at those who did not hear him. An elderly woman had so many parcels that the poor thing could not gather them together fast enough. People wanted to help but he shouted that she must come on her own. That frightened her so much that she fell over the first rail. Those who helped her were bellowed at again. It was dreadful. I was wondering what I should do. I should have spat at the colonel in the face. Then he called me. He started bellowing immediately: "Do not dare come here again! Rumania is *kaput* for you!" He kept repeating it: "If I set eyes on you once again, you'll die! Away with you!" Those were his last words. And then, I do not know why, I said: "Thank you." I took my passport, boarded the train among the soldiers. Everybody boarded the train, and after that no one could get on or off again. The train was not allowed to start for another hour. Everybody anxiously waited. It was cold in the train and everybody was frozen to the bone. Well, that's how we crossed the border.

The Hungarian border guards suspected that something was amiss. When they saw that the stamps in all the passports were dated that day, they knew. They made a list of the names and passport numbers to file a complaint. I saw a strip of land ploughed and furrowed along the border. We were watching it. We were coming, just coming, and all of us in dead silence. Some fifteen minutes later I was smoking in the corridor, and the big American asked me in English (I know little English, but that much I understood): "Is this already completely Hungary? Is it?" "Hungary," I said. "But really, is this completely Hungary?" "This already is," I said. "I am happy," he said. And he leapt for joy just to be here, in Hungary.

Ákos Mester

The soul of heroes

The shift to a free economy

János Kornai on economic transition

Has a theoretical framework of Hungarian economic policy for the next three crucial years been in fact drawn up? It is not exceptional in countries facing radical economic transformations to have their programme for economic rescue built on the proposals of a single economist. János Kornai's *Indulatos röpirat az átmenet ügyében* (A Passionate Pamphlet in the Cause of Hungarian Economic Transition) puts into words a great many things which others perhaps cannot say for considerations of party policy: it also establishes that in a good many questions the voice of the people is much closer to economic rationality than are some high–faluting reform ideas. János Kornai, Professor of Economics at Harvard University and Hungarian Academy of Sciences answers questions for the economic weekly, *Heti Világgazdaság*.

It was in 1956 that you last presented proposals for an economic policy. Since then you have only published analytical and descriptive economic works. What has now touched off your "passions"?

The change has taken place in the situation, not in me. It is worth making suggestions if you hope they will be followed. This confidence, which I did not feel in the past, is now justified given the freely elected parliament to come and the government to be elected by the new MPs. I should say that my pamphlet is passionate only insofar as it is not just the cool reasoning of an economist but is permeated by a system of values which I consider to be my own.

Nowadays there is no shortage of programmes at all. Where does yours differ from those submitted by others?

In this respect I consider two issues to be fundamental. First, contary to the widespread slogan demanding equal chances for the state and private sectors, my program does not give equal treatment to all sectors. For those spending their own money I claim the right, for ethical and political considerations, and also on the basis of economic rationality, to spend that money as they want to. I am for a genuine and complete liberalization of the private sector, including the free entry of firms, free price–setting, free employment, the free accumulation of all valuables, for instance of precious metals or currency, free export and import of Hungarian forint and foreign convertible currency, free foreign–trade activity and free loans with interest rates based on free agreements between the creditors and the debtors—to mention only the most important requirements. On the other hand, those who do not pay out of their own pocket but out of the state's, no matter whether the person concerned is a minister, a manager of a firm or a bank, a state shareholder or a state stock-broker, should be closely scrutinized. A paradoxical situation has now developed where people spending their own money are submitted to thousands of bureaucratic restrictions, while those spending the state's money tend to be left to themselves and can spend as much as they like. The bill is finally met out of some state cash–box, whether it is a bank or the budget itself. Thus the good of liberty is allocated not where it should be.

The other key element of my programme is a surgery for stabilization. There are measures which can only be implemented simultaneously, otherwise one measure will impair the chances of the other and they will never be realized. The reform steps of the last decade have convincingly proved that the sum total of ten different kinds of half results do not amount to five full successes but to five full fiascos.

What you say on the state sector in your pamphlet sounds to many people as if you repudiated the reforms of the past thirty years. You suggest the introduction of a wage ceiling, you downgrade the managers to "medium–level bureaucrats", etc. Do you really think that there should be an about–face along the thorny path taken towards decentralization and towards enhanced autonomy of firms now when we have nearly reached the "top"?

If the decentralization reform is limited to what is called "market socialism," the essence of which is to have state firms gain autonomy expecting them to act as real market factors, while remaining the dominant sector of the economy, then my answer is yes. Since this cannot be achieved one has to abandon the hope that anything will take place that would be more than the simulation we already know. Because everything is simulated here, everything is spurious: the market, the price–setting, the stock exchange, the playing at banking.

How then should the state sector be functioning?

In any case we should not delude ourselves and each other by thinking that we will ever reach the state where the state firm will behave as a private enterprise does. It will not do so. Or at best only once, when it will be on the way of dying out. And as far as my practical conclusions go there are three delicate points where I would not grant full autonomy to state firms. I would limit their "propensity to spend", prevent them from indulging in unbridled investment, wage increases and imports. The second limitation would concern the alienation of property rights. In my view the management of a state firm has no authority to put the enterprise on the market. You can sell something which is yours but not something that belongs to somebody else. A state firm is the property of the people, and all the legal and ethical guarantees of sale must be drawn up with minute care so that it can only be sold under equitable conditions. As for the third limitation, wherever a firm enjoys a monopolistic position, the government must intervene in price–setting. This intervention is exercised by the state even in a private economy.

One of the leitmotifs of my argument is the need for social and economic discipline. This is either ensured by bureaucratic discipline or by the market discipline of private economy. If the one is dissolved before the other has been established, the system will fall between two stools, and economic discipline will cease to exist. There are a great many signs of this today.

Purely in a legal sense, it seems possible that the freely elected parliament will exercise efficient control over state and firm bureaucracy, which, by their nature, tend to spend excessively. For this control to be achieved every MP must feel like the responsible master of the country. He must be the one who will keep an eye on how the state's money is spent in every branch, throughout the whole country.

"No economic difficulty whatever can justify the sell-off of the national assets for little money," you write "passionately." And, as an example, you quote the case of the Ganz Vehicle Factory, the majority of whose shares has been acquired by a British firm for the equivalent of the price of twelve free–hold apartments of 70 square metres each in Boston. You say the name Ganz itself is worth this many times over. But what is to be done if these factories will in fact not sell for more?

If a capitalist sets his eyes on a Hungarian state firm, he will take into account not only its usually very poor physical condition, but also its environment. He will consider that for every action he will need a thousand permits, that there are hitches in the supply of materials, that transactions are carried out in an inflationary setting, that banks function poorly and that there is no decent telephone network. Once things become somewhat consolidated, a firm will be worth more. Another thing that should be looked into is whether all the potential buyers are present when a firm is being sold. And finally, I do not think privatization should be started with the sale of decrepit dinosaurs. I would begin privatization with foreign trade, by supporting, and not just licencing private foreign trade.

In your pamphlet you describe our pride, the fledgling Hungarian stock–market, as a Plastic Wall Street. A kind of Monopoly game in which the gamblers are not children who play with token money but adult officials playing with the money of the state. If it were up to you, would you bar state firms from capital transactions?

I am not against the break–up of certain state firms taking an institutionalized form, with some sections being taken over by other state firms, but I am against cherishing the illusion that this is a "capital market," because this is neither a real market nor real capital. And meanwhile the transfer of private shares of capital takes place under the greatest difficulties. What I would like to see is a state of affairs when someone makes the announcement: "you can sell and purchase here a sleeping partner's share of ownership." This will be a real stock–market even if it functions in a rented room with a single telephone line.

This economic system in which we live has problems which one might think (on the basis of your previous writings as well) are hopeless, and congenitally diseased. And now you still hold out the hope that a great part of these problems are curable through a single operation.

To cure the economic disequilibrium I suggest "pre–operative measures," "surgery" and "post–operative measures." And let me add that even all of these will yield the required result only in the

presence of adequate political conditions. Now we have a fair chance of having a government that enjoys the confidence of the people necessary for such a programme. The package of measures can be drawn up within a year of the inauguration of the new government. The "surgery" can start on a given day, and it can be basically completed within another year. The individual elements of the operation and the "post–operative" measures must be made known to the public in advance. During the course of the operation inflation can be stopped, a budgetary equilibrium can be restored, and a firm hold on the macro demand of the national economy can be ensured and a reasonable price system can be established. Proper care must be taken so that the operation does not involve a single measure that could have a detrimental effect on production in the private sector.

You have pointed out that stabilization must be financed basically out of domestic resources, but you still deem some kind of "debt rearrangement" necessary. Do you not fear that, as the National Bank has claimed, this might undermine confidence in the country's creditworthiness and financial stability?

No contract whatever must be broken unilaterally. Hungary and all Hungarian institutions should be reliable debtors. But the number one criterion for Hungary's stability is not whether it has paid its outstanding debts but whether it has achieved political stability, whether it is a system whose continuity can be relied on. Continuity means that if a government guarantees something, another government will not come along and say something different; that it has a reliable state bureaucracy, sound commercial life and a stable currrency. Hungary as a debtor in individual financial transactions is highly reliable, without, however, giving the impression of a stable system. This is known to everybody, it makes no sense to delude ourselves any longer and this is why the gestures made towards us are so wary. Western capitalists are easily moved to enthusiasm at a conference table or by a newspaper article, but they are extremely cautious in investing or lending their money.

I have nothing against the Hungarian National Bank representing banking interests but this is as onesided an attitude as a budgetary approach would be. Different interests represent different viewpoints, and Hungary must shape its economic policy by considering all these views simultaneously. It does not have to kow–tow to the World Bank either. The World Bank is a financial organization with many excellent and less excellent experts, who run around in all kinds of countries, laying down all kinds of standardized recipes which either work or do not. It is an important actor in a play with many characters —but only one of them.

You have said that it is only worth giving advice to those who are willing to take it. Do you not think that your programme would be more acceptable if it were not a non–party programme but that of one of the parties?

I do not think that we should place our trust in some expert body that stands above all the parties and listens to my proposals, and then carries them out. This task can only be carried out if it is accepted by a party or several parties, enjoying the confidence of the majority of MPs, and if there is no counter–force outside of Parliament which could successfully block it.

Would you be willing to accept an advisory, possibly a political role in the future?

I would like to remain basically a scholar; I do not want to become a minister, an MP, or an appointed advisor. If by any chance a situation arises in which some member of the new government wants to hear my opinion, I would gladly speak up.

By now the country has become utterly sceptical of all the various "stabilization programmes". If your suggestions become accepted and realized, what will be the first discernible signs of improvement?

It will take five, ten, possibly fifteen years for real improvement to emerge. But there are three fields in which tangible results can be achieved relatively quickly: the stopping of inflation, the termination of the pressing shortage phenomena, and the boosting of private enterprise. This last is advantageous not only to the enterpreneurs but to everybody they provide with employment, goods and services. As part of the programme, the government must lend a helping hand to those who are at the very bottom of the income ladder. The change must make itself felt in the manifest improvement of their conditions as well.

Pál Réti

JÁNOS KORNAI

Surgery for stabilization

In what follows, the study assumes that a new government will be formed as a result of free elections, and that this government will enjoy the confidence of Parliament, and thus of the majority of voters. It is beyond the task of the present paper either to analyse the political conditions necessary for this extremely important development, or to consider its prospects. The relationship between economic policy and politics will be examined in the last chapter. The problem I wish to consider here is the following: what stabilization program should be implemented by this new government?

The present study argues that the execution of some of the required tasks should not be prolonged, and cannot be accomplished by a series of small steps. Instead, these measures must be taken in one *stroke*—of course, not necessarily in the literal sense. I would not say that all the necessary regulations must without exception be put into force on the same day. The schedule outlined below is meant to illustrate my point and should thus not be taken as a concrete proposal:

It should be possible to complete a package of measures within one year of the new government's inauguration. "Surgery" must begin on a stated date, and ought to be basically completed within a year. Certain predictable elements of the operation must be know to the public in advance; others will develop only during the course of the operation. The public must be kept informed on the predictable "post–operative" measures both in the period preceeding and also during "surgery".

Obviously, the operation and also its key political and economic elements should be agreed upon when forming the government. Together, these elements might provide one of the cornerstones of the new government's economic program. The government apparatus could be given, let us say, a year to work out the details.[1] Naturally, this book cannot undertake to present what will require the work of many experts over a period of several months. My aim here is far more modest: I wish to formulate a few key principles as clearly as possible.

Such a stabilization program must range over hundreds of particular issues. The present study

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From *The Road to a Free Economy. Shifting from a Socialist System: The Case of Hungary.* W.W. Norton Company, New York-London, April 1990. Introduction to Chapter 2, Section 2.1 and 2.6

János Kornai *is the author of* Economics of Shortage, *North Holland Publishing Co., Amsterdam, Oxford, New York, 1980.*

[1]Under any circumstances it will be imperative to involve domestic and foreign exports in this huge undertaking, including people not affiliated with the government apparatus. Let me just highlight one problem in this context.

Nowhere in the world can we find a government that would listen to all the experts of the various political and ideological trends before making a decision. When Britain had a Labour government, it never asked the opinion of the Conservative economists. Instead, the latter expressed their position as a criticism of the government. When Margaret Thatcher came to power, she in turn never employed Labour advisers. The economists to the left of Mrs Thatcher advised the shadow government of the opposition party. Generally speaking it can be said that *right from the outset* mutual confidence must exist between a government and the experts it calls upon. In other words, they must come to an understanding on at least the fundamental political and ideological issues. Hence it follows that the future government of Hungary should select its adviser from among those Hungarian and foreign economists who wholeheartedly favour the basic principles of its program.

As far as the foreign advisers are concerned, I think it is not enough to get acquainted with the opinion of those only who deal with Hungary "ex officio," like for example the competent officials of the international monetary organizations. I firmly believe that many of the world's best economists will be pleased to serve Hungary with their advice. Some of them will back the future government of Hungary, while there will surely be others to line up behind the various opposition groups.

should be seen as the first brief outline of such a program. Even in this sketchy form it is far from comprehensive, and skips a number of key issues entirely.

The principles laid down below are all open to question, but I am positive that none of these issues can be dodged. It is not at all unlikely that policy speeches during the election campaign will attempt to blur these issues. It is outside my scope to give advice to one or the other party on how to drum up the most possible votes. Nor do I wish to take sides in the ethical and political issue concerning how much of its own dilemmas a political party can be expected to reveal to the electorate in advance, and how much it should be free to leave to later discussion. For example, I will not provide one list of issues to be cleared up during the coalition talks, and another one to be decided in the course of debates within the new cabinet. Consequently, the present paper focuses on answering the following question: what should the tasks of the new government be?

To be sure, there will be critics who will not agree with this outline. Of course, I cannot circumscribe the areas in which my critics should make their remarks. However, I would like to propose that, for the time being, we set secondary issues aside. At any rate, solutions to these secondary issues will be elaborated by larger groups of experts later on. The genuinely basic issues should be highlighted in political and ecnomic debates.

The operation has several components. First I will discuss these components one by one, then argue in favour of their *simultaneous* implementation.

Stopping inflation

The operation is conditioned first and foremost on the understanding that inflation is a grave problem. This is not self–evident to everyone. A fair number of government officials and economists play down this problem, all the more since inflation is supposedly "in safe hands." In their view, fate has ordered inflation for Hungary, thus it is unavoidable and must just be put up with.

Quite conspicuously, neither the opposition parties nor the governing party have made a clear promise to eliminate inflation, if they should come to power after the elections.

Here is a quotation from Minister of Finance László Békési: "Regrettably, it is not possible to do away with inflation in the coming years. On the one hand, it is the legacy of the earlier voluntaristic economic policy and thus a manifestation of the existing imbalances and inefficiencies. On the other hand, inflation is but the natural fever that accompanies restructuring".[2] I cannot agree with this statement. Inflation exists because the acting finance minister and his predecessors acted in a spirit of "Let there be inflation!" Inflation can be stopped *only if* the current finance minister or his successors switch to a policy of "Let there be no inflation!" Inflation is not a natural disaster: it is created by governments or the political powers behind them, and it is only the governments and the political powers behind them that can put an end to it.[3]

This statement, albeit forceful, does not have to lead to the extremist and obviously mistaken conclusion that the administration is the *sole* originator and ultimate terminator of the inflationary process. This is a game for many players: inflation is in the hands of all those who play a part in the shaping of the financial processes or in determining prices and wages. In the last analysis, citizens willy–nilly also become prompters of inflation, as they must reckon with future price rises when drawing up their economic plans. This *inflationary expectation* is bound to emerge during an inflationary process and, regrettably, it has already emerged in Hungary. Beyond a certain point this *expectation* becomes *self–fulfilling*.[4] If wage–earners expect a 20 per cent inflation rate, they will strive to gain a wage hike not smaller than 20 per cent. Sellers of products or services will aim at a minimum 20 per cent price rise. But a distincion must still be made between the "extras" and the "stars" in a multi–character drama. Whatever the system, the lead in the drama of inflation is played by the government, and more specifically by the financial administration. This obtains even more in the strongly centralized socialist economy, where the influence exercised by the government on prices and wages, the credit system, investments and the other economic processes is incomparably stronger than it is in a capitalist system.

Ultimately, the government controls the banknote press, and it issues extra notes primarily because it

[2]László Békési was interviewed by Iván Wiesel (1988, p. 19).

[3]The following quote comes from a comment I wrote to a debate on producers' prices in 1986: "The documents presented treat inflation as a kind of impersonal spontaneous process which must be slowed down through anti–inflationary measures. In both capitalist and socialist countries, the creation of money is ultimately in the hands of the fiscal and monetary authories. Inflation prevails where the government creates inflation and, in Hungary, an inflationary process has emerged because the government pursues an inflationary policy. As long as the Hungarian government does not change its policy, inflation will not disappear." (J. Kornai, 1989)

[4]A profound analysis of inflationary expectation and other constituents of inflation can be found in Ferenc Vissi's article (1989). Among the works on inflation in Hugary I would mention the articles of Klára Csoór and Piroska Mohácsi (1985), Zita Mária Petschnig (1986) and Tibor Erdős (1989).

wants to cover the gap between governmental expenditures and revenues. Moreover, in a country with a vast state sector, the government resorts to the printing press in order to keep tho loss–making firms afloat and to pay run–away wages. This is why the basic responsibility for inflation rests with the government.

It changes nothing that eminent economists—many of whom are noted reformists as well—recommended that the government may safely proceed with its inflationary policy. This piece of advice proved to be mistaken, and each government is responsible for the selection of its own advisers and the inspirators of its policy.

Nor does the recurrent excuse that inflation has ovetaken a number of other countries as well, provide justification for Hungary's inflation. After all, the defendant before the court cannot refer to the fact that the offence he is charged with has been committed by scores of other people.

I firmly believe that the rate of inflation in today's Hungary is considerably higher than that shown by the official statistics. The official calculation does not assign sufficient weight to the prices in the private sector, especially the price level in the officially unregistered shadow economy, where the increase is much faster than in the state sector. We should not forget here that the products and services provided by the private sector account for a large and ever increasing part of total consumption. The report on inflation contains other distortions as well. It is a pity that so far no one has set up and financed a research team whose task would be to calculate inflation *independently* of the Central Statistical Office, which is a governmental body. I would expect this team to impartially rely on well–grounded economic and statistical criteria, and at the same time to heed the opinion voiced by millions of "laymen": inflation is rising faster than official reports will admit.

But let us set aside problems of calculation, and assume instead that the current annual rate of inflation is indeeed approximately 15–20 per cent. I still consider this a grave problem, for at least two reasons.

1. Inflation descends mercilessly on the population. It leads to perpetual unrest. People see the savings they have scraped together melt away in their hands.

These days we often hear calls for certain *redistributive* measures. But inflation implements a special kind of permanent redistribution, affecting primarily the very poor, salary–earners and pensioners. The widowed and the elderly have to watch pensions dissolve within a few years. The purchasing power of the child and family allowances constantly decreases. In the tug–of–war between prices and nominal wages, the losers are those who lack adequate organizational support and political influence, and who are therefore unable to extract wage hikes in order to catch up with price rises, either through slow–downs or open or covert strike threats.

I have read many papers and listened to many political statements on how welfare policy could help the poor. I will come back to these proposals later. Without taking a position on this question here, I would like to add one comment: it is shocking that these statements skip the issue of inflation entirely. I believe that all those who come forward in today's Hungary with a welfare policy program or statement should be obliged to start by spelling out their view on inflation. Do they resign themselves to its continuation without further ado? And more importantly: do they propose measures that would induce further inflation?

2. Inflation runs counter to the fundamental aims of economic transformation of the economic system, mostly by making rational economic calculation impossible. Prices cease to fulfil their signalling function, as the effect of relative shifts in prices are blurred by the general rise in the price level. If products A and B are substitutive, and we think that under the given marginal rate of substitution A is gratuitously cheap as compared to B, then simple economic logic would suggest the raising of the price of A. Behind this there is the tacit assumption that the price of product B remains unchanged. However, if the price increase of product A is followed by an inflationary price–rise of product B, then the ralative change in prices cuts no ice at all.

In a market economy, the efficiency of production becomes manifest in the profit of the producer. Meanwhile, inefficient production leads to losses, and the loss–making producer is bound to be ousted from the market sooner or later. In this and only in this way can the market economy contribute to the efficiency of production. Although selection is not realized with 100 per cent certainty in a genuine market economy either, the statistical probability of its realization is fairly high. But within an inflationary context, this selection process is undermined, as both efficient and inefficient production are "vindicated." Even if the quality of its work is extremely poor, a production unit can sooner or later cover its costs through a price increase. Those units who want to raise prices are never compelled to admit that perhaps they did not work, but can always cite rising costs. Even if the ownership conditions allow it, a firm's budget constraints cannot be hardened: inflation softens these constraints even in the private sector. Let us recall the private tradesman in Hungary who does not do his job better than the state–owned firm and who generates dissatisfaction among his clients. One way or another he is still able to set high

prices. In this case we should not accuse the tradesman of being greedy and a shark. An economic system cannot be based on self–restraining saints. The problem here lies in the fact that the inflationary process creates money in quantities such that the Hungarian customer is able to pay as dearly for the services of private tradesmen as the latter might wish.

This observation is even more applicable to the state sector in today's Hungary. We can in fact witness a dance to a peculiar choreography. The participants are the following: the Price Control Office, which fixes the official price; the producing state–owned firm, which determines the price of those products which can be sold at free prices; the commercial bank, which hands out the money of the state; the National Bank, which puts money into circulation and is said to regulate the allotment of money; the Ministry of Finance, which is in charge of the budget and whose expenses constantly exceed revenues. The sixth, last and in fact most important participant is the government, and the political powers behind it. Each performer points a finger at the other, and each takes the opportunity during its "inflationary" act to blame the others for their similar role. But hold on! They are all the organs of the same state! Far from being independent of one another, but quite the contrary, they together constitute what in Section 1.2 was called the "governmental section."

As long as bureaucratic state ownership remains the dominant sector in the economy, it will be impossible to enforce hard budget constraints on the state–owned firms. This fact can be attributed primarily to sociological causes. It bears closely upon those guarantees which this state, willingly or unwillingly, must shoulder in connection with the safe employment of the managers and staff of its own firms. It is practically incapable of deciding to liquidate jobs en masse. (We shall come back to this later.) Added to this and to the other comparable sociological factors are the effects of inflation: the budget constraint already soft, is softened further and further by inflation. It is impossible to determine whether the state–owned firm works well or not, and it is likewise impossible to find out the reasons behind rising costs. An analysis of costs would shed light on efficiency only if the price of some of the producing factors was on the rise but that of others not. Similarly, only some but not all of the selling prices should rise. But once there is an overall rise in all costs and in all selling prices, an appraisal of state–owned firms' activity becomes virtually impossible.

Let us look around in the world! The more pro–market a politician or economist, the more he is opposed to inflation. Conversely, the more pro–state he is, the less he cares about inflation.

Thus it is one of the basic tasks of "surgery" to terminate the inflationary process. Macrosupply and macrodemand must be balanced. As a matter of fact, the gist of the operation is fairly simple. There is a given macrosupply, and facing it is a given macrodemand. On the hole we allow free play to prices. In this situation an equilibrum would come about at some price level. Let us examine the three variables of this relationship more closely.

1. It is not possible to estimate the expected *macrosupply* in advance with any real precision. The process of rearrangement might cut production in certain sectors, while increasing it elsewhere. There is labour shortage in several branches, firms and regions, which could absorb the labour surplus present in other branches, firms or regions. The process of rearrangement affords the opportunity to reallocate labour and other material resources. The main thing is this: the better the requirements listed in Section 1.1 are enforced, the greater the chances for the private sector to prosper. None of the measures of the stabilization operation should have an adverse effect on the private sector's readiness to produce. In the light of what has been said above our train of thought starts out from the assumption that at the macrolevel—that is considering the national economy as a whole—*supply will remain unchanged* for a period of one or two years from the start of the operation.

2. *Macrodemand* may remain the same as in the beginning of the operation. It may be unavoidable for it to slightly increase during a short transitional period. But soon after the beginning of the operation it will be necessary to get it firmly under control. A fundamental part of the operation is the strict restriction of macrodemand and all its principal constituents. Section 2.3 will address this issue in greater detail.

3. If macrosupply is given and it faces a given macrodemand, then the question arises: what will be the *average macro price–level* at which supply and demand will reach equilibrum? I am afraid no one can tell for certain what it would be. There is no way to calculate precisely the overall effect of the complicated circular price and cost spill–overs.[5] The package of measures I propose bears no resemblance to the one which has repeatedly been put into practice in the Soviet Union and once or twice in the smaller socialist countries of Eastern Europe. Those packages boiled down to an effort to work out in advance all the simultaneous price and cost effects. In our case there is no need for prior determination of millions of prices in the offices of the price authorites, as they will duly emerge by themselves out on the market.

[5]Meanwhile, we must still do our best to predict the processes that can be expected during and after the operation by applying up to date scientific means. Here the models of modern macroeconomics can be utilised.

In all likelihood the operation would finally bring about a considerable rise in the average price level as compared to the current level. This, however, could well remain a non–recurrent development, provided that from the very beginning the government sticks to a steadfast anti–inflationary policy. The price rises accompanying the operation will not necessarily lead to inflation. Should the rise in the price level exceed the average this would still not have to result in accelerating inflation later. We have to understand clearly that inflation is a *dynamic* process; it is but the spiral of increases in prices, wages, and other cost factors. If this spiral were cut and the reproduction of macro excess demand was done away with, there would be a good chance to eliminate inflation. This is what we must accomplish.

Why simultaneity?

All the measures described in the previous sections are well–known individually. Quite a number of them have already been implemented partially, or are about to be implemented. There have been frequent promises to slow down the pace of inflation. Steps are taken time and again to reduce budgetary expenditures and boost revenues. The so–called monetary restriction is proceeding at full steam, and some of the prices are already free.

The problem lies in the fact that the implementation of these changes is inconsistent and sluggish. The ambiguity that prevails in one set of measures reduces the efficiency of another set. The sum total of ten different kinds of half–results is not five full successes but five full fiascos. All of the above–named measures are conditional upon one another. Stopping inflation requires a balanced budget. Balancing the budget, in turn, can be achieved only, if the tax system is placed on a radically new basis. The budget cannot be balanced in the midst of inflation, since revenues are always delayed by comparison with expenses, so that inflation makes itself felt more strongly on the income side than on the expenditure side. Stopping the subsidization of loss–making firms is conditional upon the introduction of a new tax system and also on the possibility of finding out which firms are genuine profit or loss–makers through the use of market–clearing equilibrum prices. Genuine market prices cannot emerge, however, admidst accelerated inflation. While the partial price adjustments do not converge to a rational system of prices, they themselves speed up the inflationary spiral. The list of these concentric and interdependent problems could well be extended by a dozen more examples. Taken together, they provide an economic explanation for the need to execute the operation at one stroke.

For the sake of emphasis, it is worth making the *negative* statement: most of the measures beneficial as parts of the stabilization package would be dangerous and damaging if taken singly, without the other measures being implemented at the same time. For instance, total freeing of prices can cause damage in the absence of wage discipline. Harm can come of full convertibility if demand from the state sector is not firmly controlled. The examples could be continued. These dangers are not imagined, but very real indeed. The stabilization measures up to now have failed one after the other just because there was not the right economic environment and the authorities tried to introduce them hastily, picking up targets torn out of their economic context.

I would like to add two further arguments to this *economic* reasoning.

The first is an economic–psychological one. If we want to stop inflation, we must radically alter inflationary expectations. This point has already been addressed above. The more each employer and employee, businessman and money–holder counts on a 20 per cent rise in the rate of inflation, the more likely that he will adjust to this by at least 20 per cent the prices and wages asked and offered on the market. A stabilization operation could cut the self–fulfilling vicious circle of inflation expectations, provided that the promises to this effect come from a dependable and respectable government.

The second argument is primarily a humanitarian one. The population of Hungary suffers considerably as a result of the current economic ills. It is the prime obligation of political organizations, parties and all governmental institutions to alleviate people's misery. The rehabilitation of the economy entails serious sacrifices, but the sacrificial period should not drag on endlessly. If the only cure for a person is to cut of his leg, it is still more humane to perform a single amputation with the necessary anesthesiazation than to schedule a long–lasting operation and to cut a thin slice off every week or month. István Széchenyi, the great 19th century reform politican and one of the first Hungarian economists, used the metaphor of a tooth extraction in his volume *Credit*: "The tooth extractor or surgeon is cruel if he keeps pulling slowly and faintly on account of senseless soft–heartedness, and performs his job with only minor cuts and for a long time." [6]

People have every reason to become indignant at the almost weekly infringement on their well–being. We have reached a point where it was possible to call workers to strike on account of an increase in the prices of certain meat products, but where at the same time millions of households are subject to continuous but imperceptible losses amounting to a much larger sum without any protests. It is my firm belief that

[6] István Széchenyi (1979), p. 214. The passage was brought to my attention by Katalin Szabó.

people would by far prefer to face a single, radical shock and the ensuing trauma if they were really convinced that the situation would improve as a result rather then suffer the hopeless torture, the slow but steady economic deterioration and the economic and social spasms we are now undergoing.

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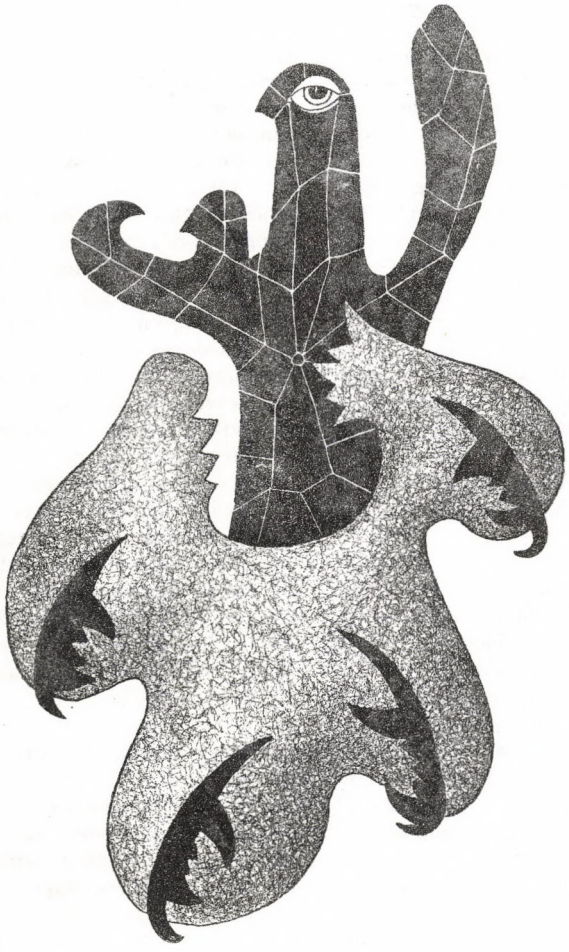

Last breath

A roundtable on privatization

Reform on ownership is one of the most important elements of the process directed at changing the political and economic system in Hungary. Approximately 90 per cent of the country's economy is state–owned; in order to create a market economy the bulk of this must pass into private ownership. The process of privatization—or rather reprivatization—has begun, even if with difficulties and in a protracted way. It is likely that present day methods will be modified to a certain extent after the elections to be held in March 1990. But it is also likely that the compelling effect of economic circumstances, much of what had already been started will continue. Participants of the *NHQ* roundtable on the subject held on October 26, 1989, were János Martonyi, government commissioner for reprivatization, Professor of International Economic Relations at Eötvös Loránd University; István Csillag, deputy director of Financial Research Ltd., a lawyer and senior lecturer in industrial Organization at the University of Economics in Budapest; György Matolcsy, economist, senior researcher; Péter Ákos Bod, economist and senior lecturer at the Budapest University of Economics, head of section in the Economic Planning Institute. *NHQ* was represented by Zoltán Halász, then acting editor, now retired.

Martonyi: The process of ownership change is an indispensable condition and central element for the creation of a genuine market economy. We agree in what the final point of this process of ownership change, or, if you like: ownership reformshould be. We believe that in the end, in the competitive sphere private ownership, as well as forms of community ownership like properties of municipal self-governments, foundations, should be preponderant over state ownership. This means that the ratio of state ownership must be reduced radically. At present, approximately 90 per cent of national assets are state–owned, and this should be reduced to a low ratio, one of a timely minor proportion. The question is how this final goal, which can presumably be achieved only through a longer process, should be realized and by what means. The fact is that the realization of this final goal is nothing but privatization. The privatization policy of the state is to help this process, coordinate its conditions and framework, and to guide the economy in a direction where this process of ownership change occurs. Where the arguments begin is how this process should occur. There are now two basic ways, and in fact both have already been started, one to a larger and the other to a smaller extent. The first is spontaneous privatization, which I would not call even privatization in the classical sense of the word, since it is not the state or the government that privatizes, but the economy becomes privatized from within itself. This is the phenomenon when the enterprises themselves establish companies, sell their real assets. They transfer the real assets owned by the state and entrusted to them to these companies, or to others. in this way the real assets gradually leave state ownership and enter into a private or mixed ownership formation. The second way is central privatization, when the government itself privatizes, sells state–owned assets, enterprises. It is this latter form of privatization that the western and the developing world already know. Such a form of privatization process has occured, or is occuring, at present in eighty–five to ninety countries. This has its method, its legal statues and frameworks, it has its guarantees. Whether privatization occurs spontaneously or guided and implemented by the government, it is not the owner, not a person who sells his property, but he has to sell somebody else's. And this is where the problems start.

Matolcsy: Although it is true that everywhere the form of privatization directed by the state is typical, the Hungarian situation considerably differs. The first large difference is that the situation is fundamentally different in quantitive terms, since in Hungary, as we have said, at least 90 per cent of national assets, which are not personal property, is state–owned. Consequently, the British government's policy of privatization, i.e., to privatize four or five giant companies annually, is not possible, since here, to get

somewhere, even in ten years, 200–300 large companies should be privatized annually. Thus any privatization conceived within a central privatization programme has quantitative limits, difficulties, or obstacles. The second consideration is one of quality. International experience of privatization shows that such action is usually successful if an already well–restructured, profitable company is sold. In Hungary, on the other hand, due to the shortage of capital and the lack of expertise, it is not conceivable that we should sell en masse companies which have already been restructured with good management and, if it is a stock company, its share quotation is high, etc.

Consequently, we have to achieve restructuring somehow at the same time as privatization. The third fundamental difference is that, in Hungary, what is missing is the economic and social institutions that may act as checks on the privatization process. For instance, the most important, the stock exchange, is still missing, there is no capital market, the legal institutions are lacking, so too is a set of publications which informs the public effectively. Finally, I should mention a factor, it is linked to quantity, namely that purchasing power is in fact missing. For any radical privatization conceived, if we consider the type of ownership called private ownership as the final goal, purchasing power would be needed. But today, the Hungarian domestic players, whether they are banks, enterprises, institutions or private persons, dispose of only a fragment of the necessary purchasing power. On the other hand, foreign purchasing power will appear only if domestic purchasing power is clearly rare. And it is always more difficult to find foreign partners if there is no well–functioning domestic system. I have thought it important to emphasize the differences which I consider important, because although we can speak everywhere in the world about privatization guided by the state (and almost exclusively by the state), in Hungary we have to follow some other way, or at least we have to try other ways, because here the situation is fundamentally special.

Martonyi: The most important Hungarian peculiarity, which makes spontaneous privatization inevitable and necessary in my opinion too, is that in Hungary, in 1984 a very peculiar situation was brought about and this may be called semi–privatization, the essence of which is that where the majority of enterprises are concerned, the state—while maintaining an abstract right of ownership—entrusted the huge majority, virtually all, entitlements derived from this ownership to the enterprises. The result has been that since then these enterprises have owned themselves. The state believed that this ownership right would be practised by self–governing enterprise councils. This was not what happened: the practice of ownership slipped from the very first moment into the hands of the management. Managements own the enterprises and at present managements are spontaneously privatizing the state assets entrusted to them, together with the ownership rights that have been entrusted to it. This is what is giving rise to problems, and this is what is specific to Hungary. It is very difficult to make interested foreigners understand this, since they believe that because 90 per cent of property is in the hands of the state, the beginning of privatization is a very simple task. A program has to be set up, and the 90 per cent can be privatized, under appropriate conditions, in five, ten or twenty years. But the matter is much more complicated, because in fact, for the majority of the enterprises, the state or the government is unable to practise ownership rights.

Bod: What is involved here is that the West has believed the ideological claim that the East European state was strong. Yet the situation described above demonstrates that the all–powerful state is not a strong state. What we see today is a policy which could be described as benign neglect. The measure of 1984 was of such a nature. If the state is unable to handle its assets, it entrusts them to those who in fact hold them in their hands. Dr Matolcsy takes no exception to this, because he considers privatization through strong state intervention to be the worst alternative. If state ownership is too extensive, I see as one of the situations the policy of the benign neglect mentioned. If the state cannot, and does not, want to manage its huge assets, it is better if privatization occurs spontaneously than if stagnation sets in. Unfortunately, it has not been thought through that in fact it is not personal, natural owners that sell enterprises, but typically a "principal agent model" is involved; there is a boss, who is not necessarily the owner, and there are agents who use the assets. Consequently rules have to be developed between the two which are economically rational. A discussion of this has not taken place in Hungary and, consequently, we are in the midst of this process. According to Dr Matolcsy, the enterprises have to be transformed in the course of privatization, since in the West it is usually improved companies that are privatized, as that makes sense. But if in Hungary the state was unable to improve its enterprises, there would never be privatization if we now waited for this. I see the main economic disadvantage of spontaneous privatization in the fact that for a considerable proportion of cases the transformation of the structure, technology and management is omitted. The preponderance of the proportion of the state sector is only one of the basic problems is Hungary. Another basic problem is the structure model of the fifties. Then it was not rationality but controllability that was the aim, and this controllability predicated large enterprises. The ideology was "big is beautiful." An enterprise was to be considered socialist if at

least three thousand people worked there. But if today's spontaneous privatization means that these Stalinist monsters are transformed into monopolies within an economy which is becoming a market economy, a multitude of private monopolies will arise in place of the state monopolies. And it is more difficult to attack—in the economic sense—a firm which has already been transformed, than one which has not yet been transformed, because for the one which has not been transformed the possibility exists in principle that it could be broken up by state, by the state's exercise of its ownership rights, through privatizing it in parcels. But how can a monster be attacked, which has salvaged itself into the new system? Some of the privatizations which occurred recently have caused great anxiety both economically and politically, not only because they involved great losses, but also because they offered opportunities for the coarse assertion of private interests. If the manager of a state enterprise himself selects the future owner and himself sets the price, then there is a potential hotbed of corruption, but in my view this is a question of detail compared to the fact that the necessary change towards increasing economic efficiency does not take place. A situation arises whereby the manager of the state enterprise shifts to the side of his negotiating partner, especially if he is to be appointed, for instance, chief executive of the new asset managing formation that has been sold. His interests put him over to the other side in the course of the negotiations.

Csillag: In my view it is no coincidence that the name of the office of the government commissioner has been changed from "privatization" to "reprivatization commisioner." I would not draw far–reaching conclusions from this, but it is worth mentioning on account of the following. We have to set out from the consideration that the economic system in which we would like to conduct a privatization policy was *in fact* the most acutely privatized system. We faced an atomized economy, in whoever just happened to hold the marshal's baton, not recieved on the grounds of ability but handed down from above, was the master of the enterprise, privatized the given assets, the given institutions. If we speak of reprivization, which differs in a certain sense in essence from the West European reprivatizations, then we can speak of reprivatization inasmuch as that the economic institutional system which existed here, and everywhere in Eastern Europe, in fact turned into private property the enterprises, and into property which was uncontrollable from the aspect of the processes which occured. These have to be reprivatized, so that in the meantime institutions can be built up which link the enterprises and society, so that they should be able to be brought into an institutional system where the enterprises can be fitted to each other, performances can be measured, and the system of selection from above is replaced by selection by the market. If such an institutional system is developed, we shall be able to say that private interests manifest themselves in a coordinated way in a certain sense, reconciled with each other, that is in a socialized way. I believe that there are a great many ways of privatization, and it is very important that it should be possible to rebuild institutions which render the existing processes, which are at present centralized and isolated from each other, comparable, and at the same time controllable and transparent. If uniformization was the characteristic of the existing unwholesome socialist social system, then the reprivatization of the system is hardly possible by legal instruments alone. Each case has to be investigated, whether there are applicants for a firm to be privatized, on what conditions they are ready to take it over, and what solution should be used. From this it is obvious that so far we have spoken little of the practical solutions, providing rather only the framework of legal statutes and then setting the process free. The other paradox is whether the desirable structural changes occur if economic entities become the initiators of the process of reprivatization, entites which were brought about contrary to every kind of logic, not only to market logic, but also to the logic of state control. Does a structural change, a healthier structure come about? If it is true that the main beneficiary of the structure which contradicts any kind of logic has become, for various reasons, the managerial stratum, and if this stratum itself wants to rid itself of this structure, out of fear for its power, or because it has lost the ground from under its feet, if the manager notices that the present structure does not provide him with adequate elbowroom, then I have no doubt that there will be some structural modifications here.

Bod: The moment of truth has not yet come. The moment will come when a democratically elected parliament empowers the new government to handle the national assets, which has not yet happened. A comment in paranthesis: I am here as an expert, but I am also a member of the Hungarian Democratic Forum. When I express my views, the answer immediately is that "you want to protect the state assets until the beginning of next year, because then the Hungarian Democratic Forum wins the elections and you will manage these assets." In this context I may declare that I can also think in terms of a FIDESZ (Association of Young Democrats) government, because if FIDESZ forms the government and the Hungarian Democratic Forum is in opposition, the Forum will pound the table if FIDESZ manages these enterprises badly. I believe in democracy, in a strong oposition, in a free press, and I am not as sceptical concerning ownership by the state as are those who have spoken before me.

Martonyi: Soviet society has also gone through a process of change. What happened first was that the *nomenclatura,* some tens of thousand of persons, formed a purely Stalinist model, expropriated all the national assets, so to say privatized them. Seeing later that this model was totally unworkable, they began to delegate ownership to the "officers in the field", i.e., enterprise management. If we want to make a comparison, to my mind the second model is more workable than the first, because it is more decentralized and has delegated some powers of decision-making. The essence of change in ownership is that property is passed to to persons who require it, their associations, their communites. The question now is how we should realize this change in ownership. I am convinced that a dual process is necessary, in which the two processes are interlinked and assist each other. First, a spontaneous privatization, of course under the supervision of the owner, and the possibility for his intervention. The bill concerned is ready and I hope that Parliament will soon adopt it. Strong opposition can be expected, I must add, because neo–liberal neophytes have appeared, who, interestingly, are often identical with the old statists; they have now become neo–liberals and oppose every kind of intervention. The other way is what we call centralized privatization guided by the govenment. A short–term package is being prepared for this too, which will withdraw more and more sections from the range of spontaneous privatization. It is not supervision that is involved but withdrawal. Why? Because we cannot accept the position that after a system has for over forty years ruined the economy and society, now this, a spontaneous cure, should take place so as to correspond to the neoliberal tenets. The government must accept responsibility for what has happened, and it must assist the cure by the appropriate means.

Halász: If such a centralized privatization, to use your expression, takes place, will there be an organ, or will there be individuals, with whom a foreign concern or interested party can make contact?

Martonyi: These exist now. On the one side, there are sectoral ministries, which provisionally exercise some rights until a state assets management organization, or assets fund, whatever it is to be called, is established. The government commissioner himself also tries to receive and to forward inquiries. This is, of course, not a solution. The solution here is if an assets management organization is established which is directly responsible to Parliament, and which—based on an assets policy adopted by Parliament, and this is the esence of the matter—controls and implements the process. This does not, of course, mean that some action of renationalization is involved here, the asset managing organization, or assets fund, would receive entitlements in some areas. I may mention as an example, retail trade, or factory units in the countryside, their becoming independent in a decentralized way, both being things in which, in my opinion, one can count with a rather broad social concensus. In some areas the assets managing organization would seize the rights, and after this would control and implement the privatization policy. For this an organization will shortly be established.

Bod: It would be welcome if on this occasion the government commissioner told us (and in the parliamentary roundtable negotiations we asked the designated commisioner of the assets fund this) how many enterprises have already been affected by spontaneous privatization? What is the size of the national assets concerned? *Then,* after being asked five times, he said five times that he did not know. So let me now put this question again to the government commisioner!

Martonyi: My answer to the question is that I too am unable to tell how large the total of assets is which have been transfered to companies in the course of the phenomenon called spontaneous privatization.

Csillag: This can be established: a survey is now being made on the basis of the company registers kept by the registry courts, although the figures do not provide a complete image. That much is certain: spontaneous privatization that has occurred so far is not large in the context of the economy as a whole. But there were some cases which attracted the attention of the public and caused political turmoil, yet the process continues. The recent process has a great number of unhealthy outgrowths. It is beyond doubt that spontaneous privatization should be placed under some state control.

Matolcsy: Let me add some figures. Out of 1600 state enterprises so far approximately sixty have been affected by privatization called spontaneous. There are a further thirty or forty in the course of doing so of which we are aware. These are all large enterprises, but let me add that most of the 1600 state enterprises are large. In the past two years, in 1988 and 1989, assets worth approximately fifty to sixty billion forints have been privatized. This is the asset shown in the balance sheets.

Bod: I agree with Dr Martonyi's comment that we should proceed along two lines. There are many reasons for this. On the one hand, spontaneous privatization is not fast enough under today's pressure, and this is true if consternation is justified on account of some details which have been exposed here. This process is not fast enough to create by itself, within five to eight years, the desirable structure which we

are talking of. The other reason is that it does not even cover all state assets, e.g., the enterprises which are still under direct state control, the enterprises under reorganization, etc. There are some enterprises which this process cannot cover. But let me add that I would put the emphasis on the process called spontaneous, mainly because I consider it more efficient and controllable if a market type control, for instance a stock exchange control, is built into it, and legality is asserted through the registry courts.

Csillag: In connection with the questions mentioned by Dr Martonyi: this large recording would take us back to the economic control of the bolshevik type, which assumed that even the last worker would know what was happening in the country if the statistics were good. I believe that it is not possible to set out from this.

Matolcsy: In my opinion the economy has a healthy absorption capacity, which can absorb the new capital, the new company forms, the new manpower, the new control systems and technologies. In my view it is an illusion that by one stroke we should be able to change the economy over into a new mixed market economy, that we should be able to bring about the functioning of the new system by new technological structures and new injections of capital. The process of spontaneous privatization is capable of handling this absorption capacity if we accelerate it through basic financial and economic instruments, and control it basically by legal instruments and open access to information.

Martonyi: In recent months considerable interest has been expressed abroad towards the Hungarian economy. While earlier we spoke of one, two, ten, twenty million dollars, I can confirm that day after day large American and West European investment companies and banks with billions of dollars of working capital are turning up. Somebody must respond to this interest. There must be a responsible government policy which absorbs and responds to it. We can no longer spread this spontaneously in the sea of enterprise councils. This is why we are preparing a package. Its first element is state control of spontaneous privatization, which will be a very loose and flexible control, its main purpose being to provide a certain amount of protection for those taking part. We are now beginning to sell large enterprises which are under direct state control. Where legal competence is present, there is no problem. We have drawn up a list of 44 enterprises, the first step being their transformation into joint stock companies, which simultaneously involves the sale of some of this stock. A second list is also being drawn up, which covers those enterprises which the government recommends to Parliament to be taken under state administrative supervision. We are thinking here, for instance, of those large hollow holdings, which have no longer any kind of management function, but fill a function of capital ownership; Yet society is there to be the owner. Consequently, we want to take these under state administrative supervision, transform them into joint stock companies and sell them. Other areas of the economy are also discussed. For instance, where the consequences of Stalinist overnationalization are at their most absurd: retailing, catering and tertiary services. We shall immediately offer to the public for purchase the enterprises operating in these areas; the state sells them and this is privatization in the purest sense of the word. We also hand over into private ownership, without exception, those plants which belong to a conglomerate but can operate on their own. There had been a rage for centralization, in the course of which industrial conglomerates were created out of unconnected plants as large as possible. We have to break these up, if for no other reason because there will be no competition while these monopolies persist. How are we going to sell them? Some to foreigners, and for some, and here I do not know what fraction, perhaps a fifth of my package, we shall shall have to work out the financial, economic and legal conditions for share ownership by employees. I consider this crucial because if we were able to bring about a workable construction by adapting the American ISOP model, this would both meet with general agreement and would give some kind of answer also to the doubts concerning purchasing power.

Matolcsy: Obviously, in order to function, as it should in a democratic state, this assets fund will be under the control of Parliament?

Martonyi: It will come directly under Parliament, its president will be appointed or elected by Parliament, so too will the members of the board, and the board will be responsible directly to Parliament, under parliamentary control and even the assets policy they recommend will be approved annually by Parliament.

Bod: Billions have been mentioned here, but the figures for the first six months of 1989 show something completely different, since the figure for the average participation of foreign capital in newly registered joint ventures is only twenty thousand dollars. A relatively small amount of capital is coming, mainly into the service sector. One has the impression that wandering capital came to the country, serious equity capital has not arrived, and will not arrive, until the necessary legal institutions have been outlined. The government commissioner has presented a number of state measures which are being prepared. These may be divided into two

groups. There is one group of measures which is to stimulate and accelerate the supply side, and there are measures to stimulate the demand side. Since we are in an inflationary situation, it is very important that the government's measures should be more or less in harmony on the demand and on the supply side. Privatization should be speeded up. However, my view is this can only be achieved through *spontaneous* privatization, nor through state intervention. The reason why I raise this is that the state has not been able, up to now, even in recent months, and will not be able in the near future either, to take the measures which are just as important from the aspect of the privatization process as for the stimulation of enterprise, or which would speed up the entire process. For instance, the implementation of strict financial controls in monetary policy is unrealizable in practice, because the application of bankruptcy to banks, which the banks should fear, has not been elaborated in an institutional way: the deposit system of the banks, providing insurance for each other and which would protect depositors, does not function, and consequently we are facing a simulated two–tier banking system, functioning within the limits of a monobank, which does not enforce genuine acceleration in the rebuilding of the ownership structure.

Csillag: There will certainly be free elections, but it will take time before a secure government is formed, one which can decide what it actually wants in the last resort. Who does it want to be dependent on? Because a government can base its functioning on the fact that it has been elected by the majority of voters; but two things have to be clarified in advance, whom does it want to penalize and whom does it want to favour? These questions also include ownership reform. The government must decide which are the steps which can be speeded up. And in whose interest.

Bod: I should like to differ from the views of István Csillag. I am also of the opinion that an economic debate has not yet taken place which would have clarified the institutions and principles of state assets management, the institutions and principles of privatization. In other words, I am not setting out from the assumption that the state *ab ovo* is unable to regulate these, to bring them under social control, but from the circumstance that the present state is not doing it. But from this I would not draw the conclusion that privatization should then preferably occur in a spontaneous way, but that the state and society should take the necessary measures and exercise control. Wherever I go in the country, eight questions in ten refer to the change in ownership. People are afraid that those who failed as politicians will appear as "parachutists" among the managers of the new companies. We also support privatization and even urge it. But it has to be seen that every process has some political feasibility. And if it does not fit into the political conditions, it is in vain that this is economically good in itself—because it will simply fail. People remember faces very well, and if they see the same faces after a peaceful revolutionary change, they will say that this is the same policy and the same game, only under a different name. So I would warn of this!

Csillag: Here I have two comments. I would not like to represent here a neo–conservative, Marxist stand. However, I shall refer to Marx, according to whom a single step of a genuine movement is more important than a dozen programs. I do not believe that it would be possible to put up a halt sign which stops the process which has been started, until the economists, constitutional lawyers and politicians write a scenario which is mutually acceptable. In my view it is completely justified and important to direct the debate at the question of ownership, because this forms the foundation of the entire programme, but on the other hand, in my view, this question is being manipulated to a large extent. If it is true that one of the mainsprings of this entire economic reform and political reform was that they tried to turn around the world by strengthening enterprise autonomy against party and state influence, then—although the process was manipulated—it was carried out, since we now set its result, namely that nobody can put enterprise managements before their cart. In this process there was much contraselection, but the possibility can nevertheless not be excluded that among the above mentioned, well–known and detested faces there are some which were put there not exclusively through the grace of the master and the king, although it is beyond doubt that this latter was also essential in it.

Matonyi: Let me make two short comments. Péter Bod is absolutely right in saying that it is not certain that an efficient economic program can be represented politically. But it is also true that if a policy fails because it did not represent an efficient economic programme, then those political groups will have even less chance for a new authenticity. We do not conceive the Hungarian ownership reform as an action guided basically by the state, but a process which is much more colourful and functions in several stages. This programme relying on economic efficiency will be represented, out of their own interests, by the political parties. Of course, societal control and public openess have to be present—all that forms part of the normal functioning of the rule of law.

Zoltán Halász

Lined up and shot

I was born in 1942, early in the war, in a park at the fringe of Budapest called the Népliget. It is hard to describe how different a world it was. A real world of comedians. At the age of three I had played my part in a lion act: I had to put my head in a lion's mouth. My mother was a knife–thrower, my father a clown. I had a wonderful childhood... Later the Műszínkör Arena was nationalised. It had belonged to us. And then the magic spell, that wonderful childhood, was gone. As compensation for our Arena we were given a flat in Izabella utca. It was miserable. Like when an Indian is brought out of the jungle into a city. Shut up in a cramped dwelling in a narrow street, I was deprived of my freedom. I died a little. Even to this day my mother has not recovered from it. We got a janitor's flat, my father worked in a printing shop. Later my parents divorced. My mother brought up four children, very decently, all alone. Well, yes, these are the little breaks that you get in life. My father was always very frank with me. When that Rákosi circus was on, he always told me, son, this man is a buffoon, you should not take seriously what is happening now. So I wondered, as a child, how grown–ups could come to terms with that, to use a common idiom, "how they could swallow the pastry." Dreadful! Clearly that was an instictive reaction on the part of my father — he was a social democrat.

When the revolution broke out, on October 23, 1956, my father and I went out to demonstrate. We were close together, we were hugely enthusiastic about the whole thing. Later victory seemed to be ours and something new would be born. At the time everyone believed that it was possible to do something here. Then came the 4th of November. At daybreak we woke up to the thunder of guns. I knew what it was. I listened to Imre Nagy's appeal and went out into the street. I found myself at the corner of Szövetség utca and Rákóczi út. I don't know what the name of that department store was before 1956 (now it is called the Otthon Áruház), and got mixed up in a group of people there. Tanks came in from the direction of the Keleti Railway Station and that section was a centre of very stout resistance. I don't know how long it held out for I was wounded on the 5th. I got there, a tommy–gun was put in my hand. I was shown how to use it; to be honest, I did not even have time to try it out. As a matter of fact, we were attacked so fiercly that we soon had to surrender. We were captured, some 26 or 27 of us. Soviet armoured troops and infantry. They made us stand in front of the cinema at the corner of Szövetség utca and opened fire with submachine guns on us. The first burst hit me; you can see a big scar here. It cut so deep into my neck that the skin covered all my face and I felt as if I were burning all over. Then I saw that many more were lying there around me, but in fact I couldn't grasp what was going on. I was only a child.

Suddenly I caught sight of a soldier with a briquette in his hand; I was still wondering why he had the briquette in his hand when he threw it at us, so the egg–grenade went off on the man in front of me and cut my head here at the back. There are still two large splinters embedded there, which hurt dreadfully and give me constant headaches. If any one listening to this found a fair–haired fourteen–year–old kid there and took him into the Szövetség utca hospital, I'm still very grateful to him today as well. I don't know how I got there. For months on end, almost two years, I did not really recover consciousness. I was so out of it for about two or three months that I now remember lots of things as if I had dreamt them. My father came in, embraced me, weeping and sobbing, in my recollection this is all like a dream. I was taken to Mosonyi utca to the police station. I suppose that qualified persons carried me there from Szövetség utca. In the place there were policemen, of course. Plain–clothes men and police officers. And more than once they kicked me with their boots — here on the wound you can see on my neck — to force me to give the names of the people who were with me. And there is an interesting psychological aspect to my ordeal.

From an interview by **Erika Fried,** *broadcast on September 17, 1989, by Radio Kossuth*

I said, listen, I know who they were, but I won't tell you. You must go ahead and kick off my head! And so they did, more than once, it still looks terrible because it was kicked about week after week. I kept on saying that I knew but would not tell who they were. Though I did not know. In the end I got out of this thanks to a doctor who took pity on me. True, he was a Communist, but he said he had never seen such a dare–devil boy as me. Quite plainly he felt sorry for me and had me taken to the Szabolcs utca Hospital for Postgraduate Students. Indeeed he had a reason to do so, since I had fallen ill with meningitis. In the hospital a surgeon, Mednyászky by name, performed an operation on me. I had a relapse which lasted for years.

If you look at these wounds, you can see how ghastly they are even today.

Once a doctor told me that only one man in a hundred thousand would have survived. This is a medical miracle, living with two splinters in the brain, it is incredible! In fact, I have the X–rays here. And my death was registered. Eventually I got away with it. I heard rumours that they waited till the accused turned 18, then he was executed. Actually I was lucky. If the doctor who did that for me is still alive let him accept my heartfelt thanks.

The surprises came when I was admitted to the Academy. I wanted to be an actor, a comedian. Not really an actor, but a clown like my father. But it was unthinkable, since three years had slipped out of my life, I had not been to *gimnázium*, nor had I been able to do any studying. I worked in a liqueur factory, at the post office, everywhere. At that time the Rózsavölgyi School of Dramatic Art still existed, and I could not even expect to come near that institute; but then the Rózsavölgyi School was closed down. And the roll of the Rózsavölgyi students was passed on to Academy of Dramatic Art, in case some of them might be admitted. Then to my great surprise, I was invited to take the entrance examination. I gained admission quite easily: it was the happiest moment of my life when I was informed that I could be enrolled in the Academy. But at the same time I felt that it was impossible because I had not completed secondary school. Then I called on the studies department and the whole thing was settled.

I am often asked how come I always get stuck somewhere. That something always seems to intervene in my life. Because it appeared then that they knew everything. That they wanted to prevent me from commencing my studies at the Academy. They found fault with my not finishing secondary school, and then Ottó Ádám—I owe thanks to him—and Zoltán Várkonyi stood up for me. With their help I finished my academic studies. Somehow or other something always got started which could perhaps be called a career, and it always stopped all of a sudden. Some people have intervened in my life more than once. The question of nominating me has cropped up and I have been recommended for the Jászai Prize a million times but I have never been given it.

It would be unfair if I accused anybody (I don't mention names) of anything. It may not have happened this way but all I want to do is to give an indication that my life had always been interfered with in some way. What is true is that Péter Szász directed *Of Mice and Men* in the Játékszín in such a way that I am not shot with a pistol but machine–gunned by George. This has always been awful. And it is interesting every time that the whole audience is in shock; a burst of machine–gun fire, even though with blank cartridges, is frightful. The spectators jump up, so to speak. And I have never heard, I never hear, the bang.

Years later we were shooting the film "Hold on to the Clouds" with Péter Szász in Leningrad. I am convinced that I have already met the man who was door–keeper at the hotel we were staying in. I looked him closely in the eye and aked him if he had been to Hungary. Right away he cheerfully said yeah. Suddenly I saw him growing stiff. I was convinced that it was him. If there is any clear image I have retained during my life, then the face of this man—who must have been twenty odd at that time—is strongly imprinted in my mind. And the frightening thing is that it is a sympathetic face.

He said yes, he had been to Hungary. But he had not taken part in the fighting. Straining every nerve, I indentified him: he was that man. And I am afraid that one may be fated to meet one's own killer. Perceptibly a huge tension was straining in him. In me, too. We were aware of it. Both of us were.

An interesting thing is, by the way, that I also met the man who had put me through the rack. Today he is a car–park attendant. I asked him what he had managed to achieve, whether he had hoped to grow rich doing what he did and why he had done it at all. I should add that I hadn't brought to that meeting the wisdom I have today. It took place about fifteen years after the events. I felt no kind of animosity, no anger, rather a sort of curiosity. An unexplainable feeling that this must be a confrontation... Still I was wondering whether to say anything at all, after so long a time. I considered the affair to be unimportant. I can imagine that my view is shared by many companions who had been sentenced to death and somehow escaped with their lives: after all they bear no resentment against their hangmen. It may be rather that the hangmen feel resentment against us.

László Dózsa

GÁBOR RÉVAI

1956—from the compound

The request that I write down my memories of 1956 took me by surprise and my immediate, instinctive reaction was to say no. To begin with, I was a child at the time — perhaps more childish than most of my coevals. Secondly, by dint of my position I was on the other side, on the furthest side, if one can say so. In the whole process my father, József Révai, was already a subsidiary figure, who retaliated "appropriately" for the revolution against him and he made sure to forget it and make others forget it too.

As for my boyhood, '56 brought a change in my life too, strange as that may sound. What this change meant psychologically in my spiritual and intellectual development is something I have never tried to create ideology around. But that it did take place, that shock effect the events had on the boy I was, is shown by the fact that I can recollect fairly well what happened to me and when ever since November 4th 1956, the day of our flight. That is why I can rightly say I was a member of the last generation to have Hungarian history in their life. Those coming after us will have to supply somehow or other their lack of history, of a historical consciousness.

However, my instinctive repugnance to public recollection was caused in the first place by the fate of my name, one that attends and haunts me to this day. In spite of my defiance I have had to recognize — and I still have an uneasy relationship with this recognition — that whatever I do or say, everything becomes distorted, at times reversed, in the ludicrous context of my name. That I am responding to the request all the same is explained, apart from the defiance I have mentioned, by the hope that the silent revolution of the present and the new chapter in our history might change the distorted — although very understandably distorted — acoustics. Beyond the forgetting — namely the fact that fewer and fewer people remember the name Révai, thank God — perhaps today's laborious renewal will create the atmosphere in which the reception of words may approximate the speaker's intentions.

I was 9 years old at the time. I had only just begun the second form of the elite Russian language school maintained for the children of leading cadres (since one was admitted, if one was at all, to the Gorky School after finishing the second form of an ordinary general school) when the revolution broke out.

We lived on the hill called Szabadság–hegy, in one of the only finished buildings of the complex called D–100. It resembled a miniaturized Museum of Fine Arts, complete with colums and tympanum. Originally this D–100 complex was designed sometime in the early fifties as a residential estate for the Party's Central Committee but the construction had run into scandalous difficulties several times. On this vast estate impressive Castles of Wonder were erected for the "teachers of our people". Each had a separate garden or park to itself and no sooner had they been finished, the buildings started to crumble. I do not know what exactly the root of the evil was, whether it was the inadequate professionalism on the part of the Party's design and construction staff or the revolutionary technology used in those days, or perhaps the agents of imperialism. At any rate, the villas, painted in different colours — pink, blue, green and others — and named accordingly, began to crumble before their time (that is to say, before their owners had a chance to move in). I can only suppose that these pathetic developments were followed by a series of quick measures: the contractors must have had a few decades of prison meted out to them and the Party put a new team of builders into action. However, by the time the estate was completed at the second go, the wise leaders had recognized the erroneous, even treacherous, nature of the whole concept. For if the entire group of party chiefs were to live in the one place, they would expose themselves

Gábor Révai, *a free–lance translator, is the son of József Révai, chief ideologue and Minister for Culture of the Stalinist period.*

to a concentrated strike by the enemy; even if they had not to worry about living space, that was quite something to worry about. In a word, common sense fear got the better of them, although I do not think that this fact offers the slightest compensation for all the internees and deportees, kulaks or those sent to the extermination camp at Recsk, or for those many others who managed to come through that period of general terror. So the top leaders did not live where they wanted to live but the Party, from time to time, assigned them to an "enforced domicile". This had something to do with my having to finish my first eight years of schooling in five different schools.

In the end, having moved earlier into the only older building of the D–100 complex, we were the sole occupants of the estate; the newer buildings were separated from ours by a fence (and a telephone warning system all around to be used by the security guards).After 1956, if my information is correct, our house was attached to the new compound, and still later the whole complex became (and perhaps still is) the guest quarters for leading party and state visitors from the socialist countries.

The porticoed main building was connected by a covered corridor with the two–storeyed annex which contained the kitchen, the servants' quarters and the children's rooms. I, the youngest boy, lived throughout this period in this huge house with my parents if my memory serves me well, but my elder brothers lived in the annex. There, on the first floor was a playroom with a wonderful electric train set, a present from my uncle, and a huge Märklin box. My uncle Zoltán Szántó, who replaced Mihály Károlyi, after the latter had chosen exile in the post of Hungarian Ambassador in Paris, was one of the Six during the revolution and was later granted political asylum and the Rumanian comrades' hospitality, and it turned out, he was the only one of these bona fide exiles who accepted the role of witness for the prosecution in the Imre Nagy trial. Emma, my father's younger sister, who, especially since her husband's death, has been manically conspiring to rectify history, that is, to have Zoltán Szántó's immortal and unparalleled qualities and merits recognized, rather strangely never mentioned this "glorious" episode.

A little further off from the two buildings connected by a corridor was a long single–storey house, not unlike a peasant cottage, which accomodated the drivers, the "heavies" (all officers of the Ministry of the Interior), as well as the ordinary security gorillas assigned to guard my father. I spent the better part of my boyhood in these back quarters, and not quite without profit, since I had learnt to play *ulti* (a Hungarian card game) tolerably well long before I was initiated into the art of reading and writing. In the same place there was a pig–sty attached to the end of the house, and there, at the time of the killing of pigs, all the peasant cadres (servants and security guards) were seen to busy themselves, led by Uncle Víg, my mother's driver–and–pig–sticker rolled into one, a jovial man with a short–clipped moustache, who drove me to the "Rákosi nursery" on Rózsadomb hill, and later to Ady Endre general school, in a modest Vauxhall.

In the nutshell of my memories of '56, sits a shrivelled little kernel, I am afraid.

For a time after October 23rd I did not notice anything particular. Well, obviously I did notice that I didn't have to go to school, and that my father was at home even less than usual, and the atmosphere in the house too must have been tenser than usual but, as I say, I cannot recall every incident. I have one vivid memory of the time immediately preceding our flight: the strange behaviour of Mackó, my much loved dog (naturally, an Alsatian). The "deplorable events" had not yet made themselves felt up on the hill at the time.

Mackó, however, had not budged across the threshold for days, refused to play, and only whined and whimpered. I could not explain this in any way and received no explanation to my inquiries either.

Then my mother began packing hurriedly with the servants. Suddenly, I recall, when my father was at home too, the security guards, a dozen young men with frightened faces, were lined up in the room. My father opened the wardrobe and distributed everything in it one by one, from his smartest lounge suits to his track suits. As I was to learn a good deal later, the ÁVÓ (the State Security Authority) had been disbanded with a final laconic order, which simply said that everyone should run for their lives. Naturally it would have been inadvisable to go home, each to his native village, in their uniforms. Later, when we were home again, I heard that "our guards" had all got off scot–free.

Then, finally, I was given a brief word of explanation of a sort: "We're leaving!" — "Can I take Mackó with me?", I asked, and was disconsolate when I was told no. In the spring of '57 — for not long after my elder brother, I too came home — my first journey took me to the old, now empty, house, and I called Mackó. Soon enough he did appear from somewhere, and seemed pleased after a fashion but when, sometime later, we took him to our new flat in Virányos utca, he sneaked back one night. This he repeated a few times until I had to resign myself to Mackó's uncompromising stubbornness.

With only the most essential things packed, we waited. Around midnight —it was November 4th — an open pick–up truck rolled into the yard. There were two benches on either side along the back and a machinegun was mounted on top of the armoured

driver's cabin. The four of us boarded this Russian military vehicle, which raced through the deserted city at breakneck speed, or so it seemed to me. Down Népköztársaság utja, or whatever it was called then, somewhere around Bajza utca, the barrel of the machinegun became snagged on what was either a fallen power cable or a trolleybus overhead cable, and the jolt sent us flying around each other's necks, while the truck reared up. Then we continued our journey and soon reached the Russian military airfield at Tököl. I do not rember now whether it was that night or the next that we boarded a Russian military plane, which then flew us to Munkács in the Ukraine, carrying presumably the last politicians to leave the country in an easterly direction.

The rest was an endgame. Together with a sorry lot, all ignominious Hungarian leaders and their families, we stayed in the local hotel for about a week, then we resumed our journey to a green belt suburb of Moscow, Serebjanij Bor. Here there were quite a few Hungarians too, though Mátyás Rákosi and Ernő Gerő were not of the company. Most of them, I think, stayed there until they returned home, while we were transferred to a distinguished party sanatorium called Sosni, because of my father's serious heart condition. I attended the Russian village school nearby for a few months, then towards the end of March or the beginning of April, I returned to Budapest, perhaps a month after my brother. My parents stayed on for a couple of months more. During this time I lived with my uncle Dezső and began attending the neighbourhood primary school. No one having forewarned me about the anachronism, on the first day I turned up in the school yard wearning a red silk tie, de rigueur in the Gorky School, out of mere habit (the class consciousness to accompany it I only developed later). Within seconds I was surrounded by a threatening mob. Soon I caught sight of Laci Molnár, my ex–classmate in the Gorky, who after some hesitation took my side with a few of his pals. I stood uneasily in the centre of the circle, uncomprehending as ever but with an awakening defiance. The unequal class fight was put an end to by the reluctant intervention of our teachers. In the classroom I boxed the ears of one of my classmates, a squat boy with a round chubby face, called Imre Nagy, who made the most vociferous demands for the immediate removal of the "Stalin nappy". Later on more and more of my mates took my side, out of time serving rather than class consciousness, to help the pioneer movement, resuscitated recently from the dead, lead the inglorious class struggle to victory. I didn't get back even that box on the ear I deserved so much. For almost another ten years I toed my father's line unswervingly only to make a definitive end with a series of steps in the Left Alternative Movement (BAL) that crowned my boyhood and youth.

But that is another story.

Translated by László T. András

FROM OUR NEXT ISSUES

FORTY–THREE YEARS OF COMMUNISM:

PROLOGUE AND EPILOGUE

JÁNOS KÁDÁR'S SAFE CONDUCT FOR IMRE NAGY

1956 DOCUMENTS FROM THE YUGOSLAV ARCHIVES

THE HUNGARIAN MINORITY IN SLOVAKIA

The writer and his new freedom

Lajos Márton Varga talks to the poet Sándor Csoóri

There are several signs indicating growing uncertainty and confusion in literary life. What do you think is at the back of this confusion?

I cannot point to a single reason. But I could mention a few. First of all, the pangs of conscience and remorse felt due to past sins of omission. For thirty years writers had been grumbling because of the restrictions. Most of them, however, were just *riposte de l'escalier* rebels, polite and tractable revolutionaries, who at the most achieved the freedom of irony or small freedoms, but never dared to claim the whole hog. And now, when the growing liberty of thought and letters has increased our hopes, doubts, and tensions, many of us, appalled by our own shame, have been shocked into a recognition of how fate and politics dealt with us. Many understand now, in retrospect, that being afraid means always arriving too late, missing the bus of life. Could a more oppressive feeling gnaw away at a writer? I hardly think so. But this is only one of the reasons for the confusion. Here is another, the question of talent and character. The power politics of recent decades, instead of welding the two, separated them further by using cunning and shifty methods. Indisputably, those in power also looked for supporters among the gifted: economists, lawyers, artists, writers, scholars, but whenever they chanced upon people whose character proved as strong as their talent, they promptly did without them. They accepted brains but never character. Where morality, backbone, and character prevail, dictatorship is the loser. I would go as far as saying that only a man of character can be a free man.

I think this holds true for literature as well. At the same time I find it shocking that literature is unsure of its identity precisely when action is needed.

Sándor Csoóri *is a poet, essayist and author of many film scripts, a founding member of the Hungarian Democratic Forum, the first and largest of the opposition organisations that emerged in the late 1980s.*

There is nothing extraordinary about this. As long as there was no room for political action for some forty years in Hungary, it was almost natural for political ideas to move over into literature. This process was helped by a centuries old tradition and by recurring constraints. It would be worth drawing up an inventory of the many more and more exciting political essays than short fiction we have written. It was due to these compulsions that the Hungarian Writers' Association from time to time turned itself into a debating forum, and the bridgehead of the opposition. But from the moment that political ideas no longer had to escape into literature, as they gained an independent field of their own, writers' reflexes have become somewhat jumbled. They slowly had to give up something which they were once reluctant to undertake but which now they find hard to abandon. I feel this in my own life too. I have mastered tolerably well the language of politics within literature, the indirect idiom of metaphors in political argument, but this has become insufficient. Political intentions want to prevail in a direct manner as well, they do not necessarily need the wings of Pegasus. I must admit I am very happy about this growing independence. The more independent and the more adult politics becomes, the more independent literature itself can be. The merits and shortcomings of the two can more clearly appear. Politics, particularly since the Second World War, has usually entered the scene wearing the mask of universality, as the only factor that determines history. But we know politics can only fill a narrow zone of a man's life and personality. The rest is taken up by love and work, the struggle to make a living, pleasure–seeking, and the urgings of the sense of duty. That is to say, all the things that belong to the whole man. Literature must deal more intensively with these neglected areas in Hungary as well. A nation cannot exist without culture. How could it otherwise undergo renewal? On March 14th I attended a mass meeting, a passionate and intense rally. From there we rushed straight to the Academy of Music to listen to Mozart's *Requiem*. The first excited me and satisfied my sense of justice,

while Mozart elevated my spirits. He initiated me into matters of life and death. Instead of a citizen of a state I turned into a citizen who had a part of the universal, who is in the need of, and has the right to, much more than justice. Music linked me with the chrysanthemum petals floating in the wind and with young dead, it awakened my grief and the Easter sun that penetrates to the bone. I could, of course, substitute poetry for music.

If it comes to this, let me share my anxieties with you. As I see it, time does not really favour literature. You have spoken of a tired revolution to describe the process that is taking place. The same concept might perhaps be applied to literature, since one can clearly see that it has not kept up with developments, although in the past, at least as borne out by the history of Hungarian literature, it was always synchronous with them, or indeed ahead of events.

First of all I should like to clarify something. I always use the term tired revolution in the favourable sense, and never disparagingly. What I have in mind is the weary victories of mountaineers, who show no violent enthusiasm and who are nevertheless unequivocally conquerors. Our current changes are not coloured by violent outbursts either. Perhaps precisely because of a weariness, as all that which is now taking place is something that should have happened long ago. In 1956, or soon afterwards. It is as if the revolutionary happenings of our times were directed not by the present but by a remembrance that has become disintegrated abroad: a remembrance of a past experience. Such exprience can feed literature at most in the case of long fiction. Poetry, drama, short stories, or poetic prose call for new experiences. Experiences which the writers themselves have right now .

So I would speak of a confusion of situations rather than the exhaustion of literature. We ought to exchange our very brain cells — and rethink everything: our subjects, the language and the functioning of our conditioned reflexes. I have just remembered a thought of Emerson's. If I am not mistaken, Saul Bellow quotes it in *Herzog*. Something about a man's private life having to be better than that of the best monarchy, or any kingdom. If we writers, who have turned to politics out of necessity, would not have accepted this view so far, we may be compelled to accept it starting tomorrow. This sentence urges us to conquer new fields: the unexplored fields of the soul, and the recognition of more subjective realms.

If I get you correctly, you think writers should withdraw into literature.

Yes. The time has come to do so.

And they should deal with politics only through their trade, at a great remove.

The way Babits did, and László Németh, Gyula Illyés, Cs. Szabó and others. And even Pilinszky, with his apocalyptical alarm or a childlike faith seeking salvation. With the intellectual forms which have crystallised not out of politics but out of faith and culture.

I agree that a desirable, democratic Hungary cannot develop without the intensive presence of culture. But in order to possess culture, more precisely, the arts, and even more precisely, literature as present in the mental and intellectual life of Hungarians, and indeed with a shaping influence on it —this calls for certain conditions and a long time.

Yes, it will lake a long time. Still I think we already have a few means at our disposal to realise it, and even to speed up time. Here is, for example, the journal *Hitel*, which was launched after a delay of ten years. I am fully aware that for the time being it is not yet the journal we would like it to be.

Let me interject that due to its very circumstances, Hitel *cannot yet perform what would be most important and that is to organise a type of literature and its leading personalities, and at the same time make it possible for the rising new writers to fit into the intellectual scene.*

That is true. The troubled spring flood of politics still sweeps everything away. I admit that before launching the journal, I was hoping to be able to start a paper of a higher standard, both as art and intellectually. Even if not an élite journal, but a blend that would include the reconcilable activities of philosophical and historical thinking. In the early months I had to realise that for the time being that won't work and that for a good while the space of mature literary texts would still be taken up by political argument. This is the early period of the freedom of periodicals. It is the period one can best describe by a line from Attila József: "It is hard enough to admit to the past." But I am sure that in one or two years' time literature will regain its status and role. There are profound human things which unfold much more clearly in the light of literature and poetry than in that of science or sociology. After all, one can be aware of a hundred thousand things, and understand them in one's mind, but if, from time to time, one is not able to live one's fate in an inspired wayone does not live in the true sense of the word.

I'd only like to add that if the proposition that no reform can be imagined without a reform of souls is true, it must also be true that minds cannot transgress their yesterdays without poems, novels, and plays.

Emerging from the rubble

A BBC roundtable

Hardly a day has gone by in recent months without Hungary making headline news in West European newspapers. The pace of political and social change alongside that in Poland will be remembered as one of the highlights of the late 1980s. For the past forty years, Hungary has had both an official and an unofficial culture. But with democracy looming, such distinctions may soon become redundant. How will Hungarian culture fare? With me to discuss the impact of the extraordinary political changes on Hungary's culture are three prominent representatives of the country's literary life: Miklós Haraszti, writer, dissident and political activist and leading light in one of most radical opposition groups, the Federation of Free Democrats; Gyula Kodolányi, poet, translator and active in a second opposition group, the Hungarian Democratic Forum; and Ottó Orbán, poet and one of the editors of the officially sanctioned journal *Kortárs*.

A simple question to start with: Miklós Haraszti, have I been fair in my description of you?

Haraszti: I have certainly been political all my life and politics has also been the subject of my writing. Me in politics, politics in me—politics has been a substitute for art for me, and art has been a substitute for politics. So I happen to be a split personality. Right for this conversation, I hope.

Ottó Orbán, you have worked for the literary journal, Kortárs, *since 1981. You are a poet. How have you been able to reconcile your job with your writing of verse?*

Orbán: I am also a split personality. But first of all I am a poet. But as a poet I was, and I had to be, involved in politics, the Second World War and the siege of Budapest having been my basic experience. Everything I have written is therefore connected with politics.

Gyula Kodolányi, are you a split personality?

Kodolányi: No. I am not. There is a split, but there is a fusion also, I think. I am a poet and I was not part of the establishment, and I wrote love poems which were about politics. We live in a time of transition and if you just look at writers as individuals whose central problem is how to write and what to write about, many of us probably are at a loss at this moment. Many of us have to revaluate, even those who addressed political issues have to think things through again. We have to accept the fact that for some time now literature will not be so much in the foreground. This is something that we have to accept as part of those very good changes which are taking place here. Some of the resistance we have been writing against has disappeared. In other words, the writer now has to seek out new kinds of resistance, and of course these will be problems for the new society. We are not heading for Paradise, we are heading for a society which will be much more acceptable, but which will still have its problems. Writing is always political in a sense. Dante was a political exile, and Blake and Shakespeare too had many political problems. In other words, in good writing things are fused.

Orbán: I think here we must make an important distinction. Culture as such is a slow creature, a diverse one, which moves very slowly, and all that we are talking about is what is happening on the surface. It's vitally important, of course, that we have no censorship of any kind at present. But I guess these political changes have not much of an impact on culture as such, on the quality of novels and film, and other works of art. I disagree with Gyula Kodolányi's view that literature as such is not important. I think

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Edited and abbreviated version of a discussion, conducted in English and recorded in Budapest on October 17 1989, for Third Ear, BBC Radio 3. The interviewer was **Imre Karacs**, Budapest correspondent of *The Independent*.

that it happens to be no more than a popular slogan. Political literature and memoirs are the most interesting publications at present. But I guess that behind them there is a secret continuity of really important literature. Strangely enough, in this disturbed and confused country, just a year or two ago, one of the best novels ever written in Hungarian was published. A huge work by Péter Nádas, *Book of Memoirs* is a 19th century type of novel, something like *The Thibault Family* and, of course, in a way it was influenced by this slow *and* rapid change which has been taking place in Hungary. On the other hand, it was an absolutely free product created by a sovereign writer.

That is one example. My general impression is that this past year I have seen almost nothing but political statements. Don't you feel there is a danger that in your new freedom you will just be making statements? Some of the best Hungarian literature of the past two hundred years has been produced under very strict censorship, indeed under dictatorships. Where do you think literature is going now?

Orbán: I think it's a pot full of simmering soup. And you must wait for a little while for the scum and the fat to boil out of it.

And what will you be writing about when you won't be able to write about oppression, when you won't be able to write about national values?

Haraszti: Thank you for trying to keep us in animal farm aesthetics, but I hope we are happily out of that and back to normal. I think the changes that are going on in Hungary are the definite switch to the constraints and problems of a normal society. I would not say back to happiness but back to normalcy. The quality of literature itself will not be damaged by this change. The social reputation, the reception of literature, are harmed by this change on the surface, I would say that is another side of it. One of the things that appealed in state socialism was the high standing enjoyed by artists. Western visitors who came to Hungary were always wondering about the love that poured out to poets in this country, the secure and highly visible life of those who made literature. I believe that was part of a trap for culture, people in culture were part of the elite, of the establishment, and the real problem that derived from this was that what mattered about literature was accommodation. I wouldn't agree with Gyula Kodolányi that literature has been fighting against resistance. It has been fighting against accomodation, against self–censorship, and this is what is over, I hope. I don't think, that the main problem of Hungarian literature in the past thirty years was censorship. The main problem was how to find the limits within my own perception of what the limits are. This is dangerous for any literature.

But don't you think that also created some great literature?

Haraszti: I don't think so.
Kodolányi: I disagree with you, I am sorry.

Writers like Déry had to use all their subtlety to express themselves.

Haraszti: I definitely think that in spite of these constraints you can create literature but not because of them.
Kodolányi: The high status of the artist in state socialism was due to the fact that Bolshevik ideology paid lip service to culture. Artists were in a niche; state socialism needed cultural achievements to exhibit and to boast about. And what happened was really that the better artists exploited this to create examples of the authentic and autonomous person in a society which opposes authenticity and autonomy. It was important that someone carried on symbol making and story telling activity for a society which could not express itself explicitly. There were examples of great writers in the last forty years and there certainly was a choice for all of us. For Miklós, for me, for Ottó. And we made different choices. You could choose to be in diagonal opposition, as Miklós did. You could choose to be marginal, as I did, you know. You could choose being a relatively minor part of the establishment, but still—if I interpret Ottó's position well—attained autonomy and authenticity.
Haraszti: I don't deny the variety of accomodation. My diagonal opposition to power was a kind of accommodation as well. The autonomy of literature or art is for its own sake, and the very moment it has to stand for something else it does damage to the quality.
Kodolányi: I'm not thinking of the autonomy of art. I'm thinking of the autonomy of the person. The artists were in the best position to harbour and perfectly serve the autonomy of the person. This was the situation given to us and we tried to work in this situation for better or worse.
Orbán: I think there is no such direct connection between political autonomy and artistic quality. Let's take Sándor Weöres who, to my mind, is one of the great poets of the century. He was a childlike little man. But he had a great spirit and enormous creative power. He was absolutely free of this everyday mess of our life. And there are some others, two.

For two hundred years you have been the spokesmen of the people. You were there at every political

struggle, you virtually started revolutions. Surely, in a democracy your role will be diminished. You will, perhaps in ten years' time, not be recognised in the streets by people, you will not be applauded. How do you cope with that?

Orbán: We do not need that. It was unfortunate. We were crippled by it. I think it's one of the real achievements of this society that this situation has gradually changed. I can cope with that. I'm happy to cope with that.

Haraszti: Yes, you are happy to cope with that because you are one of those few autonomous people in this literature, in spite of the privileged status of literature in general. But let's not forget that the bulk of our literature, of our culture, was people, living persons who simply couldn't separate these two aspects of state socialism, one being the highly subsidized nature of culture and the other the unavoidable political purpose which was praise, and support for the regime. I think that the whole cultural context is changing and whether you wanted it or not your autonomy was conceived in this context. We must be happy that this context is changing. Losing subsidies and losing status are great gains for culture because of the change of context.

Kodolányi: Those two hundred years in Hungary were not homogeneous. For instance, we had a prolonged period of relative independence and democracy between 1867 and the Great War. We had major writers then. I'm thinking of Mikszáth, of Ady, and I could mention others too. It is important to have major writing at a time of peace and democracy, and that's why we writers continue to be important. One of the problems, for me, of Western European democracies, of most of them, but certainly of England is, that, apart from drama, they have no major writers. In other words, it's very bad for a country if the only people who comment on politics are politicians and journalists. In the United States the situation is different. In America you have writing of high quality which is not directly political but which comments on what takes place in the country. I think that we have a chance in Hungary to continue our tradition of literature just being there. Continuing to be there, under whatever conditions. The present opposition will be the goverment in the spring. This government will obviously establish a kind of socialist subsidising of culture of the kind there is in the Scandinavian countries.

What will you write about, Miklós Haraszti, in the years to come, will you still be writing about politics or about flowers and love and birds?

Haraszti: I will remain a political essayist. My intention will be to write about my own life. I think I will first have to finish this autobiographical book that describes the last ten years, the opposition milieu, the death of my mother, and this fatal split, a schizophrenia that is the driving force of my life, and its organising focus. In that respect I will remain political.

Gyula Kodolányi, you have also interwoven your poems with political allegories. Will you still be able to write such poems or will you have to change course?

Kodolányi: That's gone obviously. But I think that there remains enough absurdity and suffering in the world to write about, and love, of course. I have written political essays. And this is the great new thing. Now it is possible to write a kind of political essay which is not primarily political, and I am very happy that I can do it. Third thing, I have been working on a long poem which is about the Human Situation and about love, about suffering, about misery and I don't think there is anything political in that, except where I think of the miserable faces that you see in Budapest underground trains, faces that are still carrying the marks of the past twenty or thirty years.

Ottó Orbán, will you be writing poems in a different way or will you just continue as before?

Orbán: I guess this question does not really apply to me because I was born in Hungary and so many things happened to me in Hungary that I became a millionaire of subjects. I think what's happening now is that the whole system of the earlier cultural life has collapsed. We are now emerging from the rubble and coughing because of the dust. But as in '45, when our city was in ruins, we visualize some kind of bright weather, with the sun shining.

Imre Karacs

Letter from California

One of the memorable scenes in the film version of Milan Kundera's *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* revolves around the subject of who stays behind in the West and who returns to his native country. One of the arguments in favour of returning is that Eastern Europe is for the weak, and it is only worthwhile for the strong to stay in the West.

These are timely words in days when East European history is at a turning point, when the social and political system designed for the strong is about to engulf the millions of the weak.

Freedom is a frightful burden: it crushes the weak, and the strong can never be quite certain that they will always remain such. Just as the ever restless sea washes, wears and erodes the rocks of the coastline, so freedom oppresses, grinds and works havoc in people. The only solution seems to be to put up a fight from within, to build internal barriers, so that destructive energies may take a constructive course and creation may take the place of destruction.

Socialism took this burden off people's shoulders, and this is in all probablity the great secret of its long-lasting dominance. On the other side, however, it has piled up such a burden, and made existence based on the lack of freedom so hard, that it has become unbearable. Equality has become the equality of dispossession, of the loss of perspective, of hopelessness. Thus sooner or later the revolt for freedom was bound to come.

California is a wonderful testing ground. Here can be seen, experienced and studied in the fullness of its development, what we in Hungary are at present striving for. What freedom based on the negation of equality means, can be seen here in the neatness of a thesis. There is, it seems, no compromise: whether you rise or maintain your level, whether you are down, in the middle or up, whether you are going down, you have only yourself to blame. Anything outside you, history, politics, economy, culture, and ideology, has its own mysterious astral existence.

What is most striking is the silence. The opportunities that appear boundless in the individual's life cast so powerful a spell that it leaves no time for speech, for the search for mystery. All is simplified to professional praxis, the intellectual's role in an East–European sense is regarded as pathological, deviant. To sell and buy, come and go, get things done are a must, and if someone doesn't know something, it is a mere technical matter of obtaining information. It is best to keep silent about anything concerning which no information is obtainable. California has no metaphysics.

Public speech has two major paradigms at present, one being that of conservatism, the other that of liberalism. But here too it is not principles, not matters of substance that are in confilict; the argument always turns on the specific answer to be given to some specific issue or other. One polemic, characteristic of the situation, concerns whether the federal government should or should not give budgetary support for abortions intended to terminate those unwanted pregnancies that have occured through rape or incest. The conservatives, invoking "sanctity of life", think that it is

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sinful to allocate money for that purpose, since terminating conceived life deliberately, with malice aforethought, is *murder*. The liberals, on the other hand, are of the opinion that everybody has the right to dispose of their body and the embryo is part of the body.

Currently the conservatives are on the offensive, the liberals are on the losing side on almost every issue.

I am pondering much on what will happen in Hungary now that the socialist ideological paradigm, prescribed or imposed and controlled from outside, has lost credit with the public at large. Will the liberal paradigm, a good deal milder but, from a conservative perspective, equivalent to the socialist paradigm, be strong enough to defend what can be, and ought to be, salvaged from the socialist regime? The question is all the more relevant since our conservatives in Hungary are expected to be harsher, sterner and more vehement than their American counterparts.

Abortion, divorce, women, crime, drug addiction, homosexuality, speculation, minority differences, homelessness—all these are classifiable into one and the same category which is given the name of anti–nationalism or the absence of patriotic feeling (*nemzetietlenség*), the threat to the collective individual.

Whether this will be so or not is still an abstract possibility. What is the order of the day at present is the establishment of a constitutional state based on law, of a market economy and the setting of liberty. The tasks of tomorrow.

California provides a good lesson because it is the day after tomorrow there. One must reflect on what lends conservatism such a terribly strong sway over the souls. Why is a life not yet born of more interest than a life already born? Whence this great attachment to freedom, if it evidently also tramples it down?

Liberty as a rallying call is invincible. It is simple, readily comprehensible, it needs no further explanation. One of the strengths of conservatism is this slogan itself. But no more than the slogan. For a peculiarity of conservatism is that it refrains from explanation, exposition, it refuses to complicate things. It offers a genuine life programme at a small investment of thought, with high dividends in enjoyment. No one has the moral right to dispute the justification of those interests. On the other hand, it is wrong to tell people that what they see, know, feel, want is "really" not theirs, is alien to them.

But how should one argue if one identifies with liberal thought and not because one thinks the success and well–being stemming from the conservative mentality too much or unnecessary, let alone envies them? Well, the first that springs to mind is the barrenness and tedium of conservatism. It is as if one were listening to a prayer–mill. A couple of captivating specious slogans, platitudes, preconceptions, cashing in on the sympathies of the many, a few stereotypes and the conservative answer is ready cooked, whatever is at issue. The well–being, happiness, idyll of others are of no account, for although mine could be, but I can never be anything but the other. The consequence is isolation.

It is perhaps a luxury if I contrast all this with the tension, curiosity, and openness that go together with the avoidance of the slothfulness of thinking. After all, why shouldn't anyone have the right to sloth, narrow–mindedness, and falling into line with uncomplicated principles?

What seems to be a more important point is that conservative thinking is fraught with bankruptcy. These bankruptcies of course are always to happen in the future, so it may be asked if it is worth dealing with them until they do happen. But they are to come inexorably, and in retrospect it becomes evident that they would not have been so momentous, nor have such serious consequences, if they had been attended to in time. One obvious case in point is the pollution of the environment which has in a very real as well as a metaphorical sense holed mankind's cosmic ship called Earth. Nor does it need great acumen either, other than changing the framework of conservative thinking, to realize the future consequences and repercussions of AIDS, aggressiveness, and poverty.

Weighed on the balance of the future, conservatism is neither empirical nor pragmatic. Yet one should first of all always learn from one's opponents. Liberalism will only stand a chance, particularly for us in Hungary, if it takes from conservatism the passionate and unconditional love

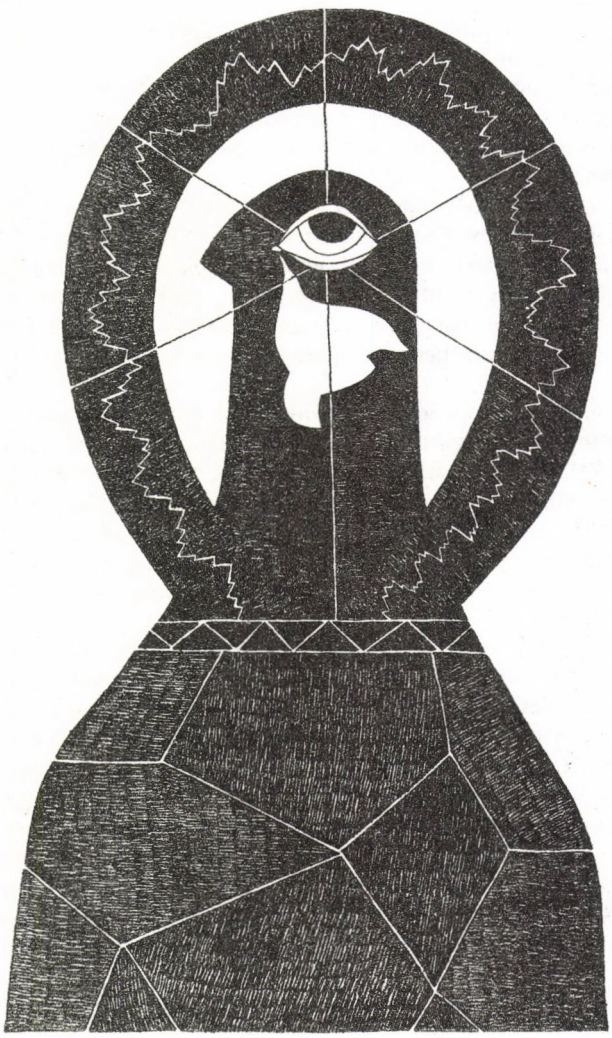
of freedom, while it speaks not only of the right to individuality but also of all of us having to share this individuality equally.

What is so attractive about California is that there are countless ways in which the individual can grapple with the unbearable lightness of being. Life itself offers innumerable ways, ends and means to ensure that this adventure of individuality may go on undisturbed.

Before all else this should, if possible, be learnt in Hungary. The absence of restrictions, the minimum of prescription, the wide range of activity.

Can it be that thoughtlessness and silence are ingredients of this new everyday existence emancipated from politics, ideology and economic operation? Is it possible that in California they have put an end to history, which is still very much in progress everywhere in Eastern Europe?

December 1989, Los Angeles **György Csepeli**



Silence

Letter from Pécs

A pestless Mini-Buda: September 1989

How far is Pécs from the metropolis? A good question —not because the literal distance in kilometres reveals all, but precisely for the opposite reason. Not even an aeroplane would necessarily fly like the proverbial crow. Motorists are obliged to proceed by parabola; and railway devotees are consigned to a metaphorical fishhook—provided they are content to patronise an express. I was, and onto the actual distance general and particular circumstances and my personal proclivities imposed profound modifications. Everything made for elongation. Trianon Hungary accordingly grew larger, and ideas of a 'waterhead' capital overly proximate to the national boundaries became obliterated. All the more shocking then to realise upon arrival in Pécs that the people of Baranya county were all too actually frontiersmen.

To an Englishman the South Station in Buda is a combination of 'Victoria' and 'Waterloo'. Appropriately too, as the former is the 'genus' of which the latter is a species. Trundling through centres and suburbs can be an age. Not so this time. Only the small town and countryside paces were not truly express. Rurality appeared to have studied and thrived upon La Fontaine; the bucolic frogs were attempting to transmogrify square metres into great spaces, and thereby to assume the form of towering bullocks. Faulkner himself would have been duly proud of Tolna county. There a world of sudden brakings, mysterious and ultimately inexplicable slowings down, seemingly endless stops at Pincehely and Kurd, and to top it all, the winning card of the junction at Dombóvár, where smart expresses and impressive freight trains appeared as out of nowhere and headed out determinedly to places equally improbable—all were triumphs for mental separation from Budapest. A very early departure had betokened distinctly distant places. Even the advent of sunshine just before Kurd imposed another barrier between myself and a by now much blurred north. Hill country sprang up all round as the train sped over the border of Baranya county. Tunnels, short and sharp, came on fast and furious. The express at last became fully itself. We hurtled along through a fresh *pays*, reduced (the Kaposvár coaches had been detached at Dombóvár) yet jubilant. Involuntarily, I was flung back psychologically into Sussex. Dombóvár had almost been 'Great Western'; I had pondered on lines from 'Adlestrop'. Now things were 'Southern'—a second Sussex and the Kiplingesque were at hand, and most suitable too for someone on a train from the "Déli Pályaudvar". Suddenly, when the line turned eastward almost at right angles and into the station of Szentlőrinc, a journey I had once taken from Tunbridge Wells, via Hailsham, to Bexhill sprang to mind. A bend of the same sort existed at Polegate. If Polegate was Szentlőrinc, Bexhill was Pécs. And further on. Beyond Bexhill was Hastings—beyond Pécs was Mohács, the 'Hastings' of Magyardom.

The approach to Pécs dispelled the depths of the 'shires'. Brer Rabbit, Peter Rabbit and Puck of Pook's Hill all vanished. All main interest lay to the left, where the drumlins, wolds and ridges of the Mecsek rolled up towards a sky of brilliant optimism. Warmth lent power to the landscape. Habits and reflections of them die hard. Clusters of small houses sprinkled on the slopes looked for all the world like sets of nomad war tents—as if some magic urge drove on the modern

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Hungarians to flee the tightly packed streets of the nearby city and seek solace by viewing the southern landscape from above. Warehouses and works took over beside the line. We had entered urbanness and urbanity. Groups of buildings, mostly prewar, glinted in a generous southern sunshine, the pace slackened, and then came Pécs station; a thoroughly Bexhill affair, full of cheerful souls feeling the heat on their backs. The eastern extremity of the main south platform was where the northern one began. A wooden way, spliced by railway lines, joined them. At the nearer edge I was recognised and met by my guide to be—a young medieval historian from the university, a countryman, and exuding a quiet pleasantness boding well for trustworthiness and efficiency alike. He whisked me out into the station approach—to the bus stop, where lithe buses drew up encouragingly, labelled with big friendly numerals. We boarded one rapidly, as my guide, let us call him Lajos, told me that the university law faculty house, where I was to stay, was some distance away. The moment I saw the long northward hill, with the road gathering greater steepness the further it went, I was reminded of Amersham Hill in High Wycombe; the climate dominated, melting away topographical detail and substituting atmosphere. I knew at once that for me at least this city would be a place of happiness. That idea digested, I was obliged to alight. Clearly my walking capacity (or willingness) had been badly underestimated. The ride had lasted less than four minutes.

Equipped with a powerful new sense of acceptance and belonging, I obediently allowed myself to be taken onwards and upwards from my lodging to the History Department of the University—formerly a church orphanage and set in its own grounds towards the top of the city above the level of the cathedral. Business had to be constructed, my lecture times fixed and colleagues met. That attended to, I eagerly sought to take soundings into the state of national politics at this local level. Friends put me in touch with the city 'Magyar Demokrata Fórum' branch. Its committee was expecting me. The same had been the case in Debrecen ten days before. I had learned a lot very quickly. The editor of *Úton* had shown himself a splendid master instructor, and I an apt pupil. In Budapest it was easy enough to garner key information about what was happening at the top—about which Minister had requested which liberal democrat to revamp what. Overall democratisation timetables and how they had been arrived at were things on offer to conversationalists about 'town'. Exactly what were the driving forces, major, medium and minor, which had obliged so many to make a virtue of necessity and embrace total rather than partial change, could not be gleaned on the banks of metropolitan stretches of the Danube. In the inner and outer suburbs, had any visitor commanded numerous felicitous entrées, the going would have been good. In Pécs it turned out be better. Not only was the city a closely knit entity, albeit far flung and able to sport both uranium and coal mines within the municipal limits, but it enjoyed close multifarious links with the surrounding small towns and ruralities. Anonymity and alienation were largely foreign to its being. Everybody knew everyone, at a certain level that is. Whether as a county or diocesan centre, Pécs contrived a canny two–way movement of ideas of steel–like durability. At Debrecen the 'People Power' had become apparent in a flash. Here too—but with the vital difference that went into its very heart and saw its soul. In the interstices between lectures, consultations and academic discussions, I was taken inside the main local democratic grouping. I met its leaders and its led; I met its old, middle–aged and young. Before the working day began, I made several thoroughgoing forays into the crucial places—into the cathedral and its setting, where a Catholic version of Barchester is there for the asking; into the grand sad synagogue (complete with station clock) with its atmosphere of dignity and suffering; into the distinguished music and book shop and its glorious bookshelves of finest–grained wood; and into the ex–mosque parish church plucked as a brand from the burning. Not to mention the cafés and restaurants, the various types of shop, the restored city hall, the unplucked mosque of Hassen Yakovali Pasha, the barbican, the gardens—and the mysterious side streets. The microcosm I was living in had begun to permeate my being as I entered upon my Forum activities.

The first sustained occasion was a long evening of discussion with a gifted ethnographer and his three sons. After an hour or two I was looking at Pécs as one does at a great French clock beneath a large glass dome. And it was working. My head, crystal clear and cerebrally whirring, rapidly became packed with data about mines, factories, the Workers' Militia, minatory and thuggish police, Forum organisation, and court proceedings—a libel suit, in fact, being brought by the managers of the uranium mine against my ethnographer, who had alleged they cared little for the welfare of their workers. None of the discussion revealed any of the four Hungarians as discrete romantic chauvinists, Christian Democrats, or liberals—the three categories the category–mad handful of know–all windbags had foisted upon the Forum. Nationalism there was, but imbued with liberal democratic ideals and Christian restraints. Homing in on Transylvania produced no hotting up of the mood. Talk continued as before on a strictly even keel. My efforts to encourage Hungarian moves towards territorial claims on Rumania fell on immensely cautious ears. And on the morrow another excellent Forum man, questioning me at the end of my university lecture: 'Fascism Defined', revealed himself fearful of a Ceausescu invasion. A possibility aired simultaneously in the Budapest parliament in the wake of Rumanian border violations. Effective protection for Magyar minorities, not national boundary changes was the goal in this quarter.

The anxious questioner was the one who took to what was and must necessarily remain among my most valuable experiences in Hungary. He is in the faculty of Hungarian Literature at Pécs University, has a very good command of English, and sees politics fully in the round. The imperceptive might miss the quiet persistent courage springing from his very core—a courage imperative in all who formed the driving force of a democratic political party in Hungary, at the outset and for many many moons thereafter. Apprehension was natural enough—victory over it the triumph of the strong. With the most sensitive requiring in turn steeliest characters. 'Lajos Two' was no 'Grand Old Duke of York'. En route to the 'experience' (a meeting in committee of the Pécs and district M.D.F.) we plunged right down the hill for coffee and collection of the ethnographer, shot up the hill and more (both done in a midget car), and arrived at the Forum headquarters set in a brand new (indeed unfinished) building situated on the right–hand side of the main road. The owner was a party member and the ground floor room involved looked not onto the road, but faced a strip of grass facing south, upon the end of which a specially commissioned monument commemorating the 1956 Revolution was shortly to be erected. We arrived feeling like "10,000 Men" and lighted upon others convinced they were 10,000 more. The atmosphere was relaxed— sundry old persons were in receipt of legal aid from the gaggle of attending lawyers; every now and again small groups of three or so would drop in and join the party, sign a petition or leave a letter; wise men huddle together in high talk; and others gloried in the obvious importance of being earnest. News was hot foot from this place and that—the coming together slowly developed, and the moment for starting the proceedings was no child of the arbitrary—it simply emerged.

Like the Swiss democracy I know so well, the Hungarian brand went on its way with an informality and calm down here. The frenetic had no place. Seven committee members, chaired by a quiet lawyer who acted for a large collective near the Yugoslav frontier, ploughed their way through the long furrow of an agenda with an attitude as casual as it was precise. The items flowed fast and furious into our view. There they were duly canalised and put, where necessary, through the pertinent locks. Besides the chairman, the ethnographer and our literary man, four others were committee members—one more lawyer, two medical doctors (one urban, one rural), and a high–tech engineer factory manager. All appeared to combine Deák–Kossuth characteristics in varying degrees—an apt reminder of the high quality of the new meritocrats of present day Hungary and of the great uncelebrated religious doctrine of 'Original Virtue'. A timely reminder too that of the leaderships of revolution in 1848 the Hungarian was the best. The Tsarists downed it. In France reformers won place and then largely downed themselves. With Louis Napoleon as President and the less than genius Lamartine as Foreign Minister, disaster gained fine helping hands. The Frankfurt Parliament could talk. Magyars could talk to effect, organise and fight.

First local things came first—namely mines, be they for uranium or coal. Cancer incidence at frightening levels sprang from the first. Meeting them by closure meant heavy unemployment,

especially in a country used to falsely maintained full–employment. Coal costs solved by closure would bring chronic unemployment. What should be done? Men from the mines came to the Forum. Ways and means were there and then discussed, face to face. Social solidarity and mutual regard quietly ruled the scene. Down to earth technical and marketing knowledge, comprenhension were aired. Statements for publication were signed. Struggles with a local Communist M.P. writhing under operation of the recall rules, menacing threats from the Workers' Militia and a thuggish police official, housing problems, the 1956 memorial and its cost, new constituency boundaries being won against the anti–democrats, parliamentary candidates adoption, and public meetings in different parts to effect it—here was the stuff of the new politics. Plus a plan to stage a large gathering to mark 1956. Who should speak? Must the bishop be invited? How many would turn out? Questions like these came and went—with practical answers. Otto von Habsburg, seemingly attempting usurpation, if not of the Holy Roman, then of the Holy Ghost role by another bid for all–pervasion, had sent a letter explaining his unfaltering availability for public engagements. Except for one quarter, Deák would have been well–pleased with the response from these seven men. They were not dwarves and needed no 'Snow White'. Four hours passed before the end came to the general mind. It then arrived gently yet clearly. All and every one of us understood that. Conversation then continued at large, inside and outside this new lay church. Outside, darkness, but no longer did any of its princes rule supreme. The "nervous questioner", now by no means so nervous, bore me downhill to the twinkling lights of a city now over the brink of freedom. Amidst the chatter of a well–stocked restaurant our exhaustion passed. Yet it was late. Only by ringing the late bell did I regain my room at the guest house.

I slept fitfully. Seeing through a window into the future is well enough. To be beyond a window and fully into the present is a vastly more exhilarating thing. My feelings were of two kinds—general and personal. For any one, but most of all I suspect for a historian, the realisation that the disaster of Mohács in 1526, so proximate geographically but so far back (nearly half a millennium) in time, was going to be absolutely reversed in the profoundest ways, came as a thrill. As an individual I felt grateful to that committee for having admitted me so confidently to their midst and having reciprocated my friendship so very sincerely. When my kindly medievalist saw me off next morning there was no sunshine visible. Some at least was still operative—inside me. I glided back to Budapest in what seemed a much shorter journey, reflecting that in the Pestless Mini–Buda I had just left, the new Magyar democracy would be led by persons of meaningful stature. Their cry against any return to the past would be: *Nem, Nem, Soha!* (No, No Never!) Would Bexhill deserve such a place as its twin?

Michael Hurst

BALÁZS LENGYEL

Talents confirmed

Zsuzsa Takács: *Sötét és fény kora* (The Age of Darkness and Light). Magvető, 1988, 176 pp.; Géza Szőcs: *A sirálybőr cipő* (The Gull–Skin Shoe). Magvető, 1989, 124 pp.

The maturing of a poet is always pleasant and impressive to watch. It is heartening to witness if, after a first volume, his path leads upwards step by step towards completion, if he mixes tones and portrays a world of his own, making himself more visible, so that he succeeds in making the edifice of his poetry clearer and more lucid even in retrospect, and if his use of words becomes credible and characteristic as well, with the range of motifs crystallized from his inner reflexes acquiring justification and a specific flavour.

This is indeed a narrow path for the poet, most often with many steep ascents that take the breath, sometimes demanding climbing techniques, particularly for dissembling individualities. And particularly for those who, rejecting all lyrical outburst, prefer deliberate under–formulations, a sparsity of attributes. For those who intend to conceal, rather than express themselves unreservedly, the more so as they wish to convey something that has no name.

Zsuzsa Takács is such a poet. But as "such", in my usage and applied to English type characters, the efficiency of clarificaton will always remain more uncertain than for instinctive lyric poets. If, however, success is achieved, this efficiency usually reaches greater depths, and is more enduring, than that achieved by the instinctive lyric poet.

This is why Zsuzsa Takács's latest volume *(The Age of Darkness and Light)* at first leaves the reader uncertain as to her intention and efficiency. This is so even though the poems do not appear in chronological order and even though some of the clearer pieces unambiguously reveal not only the theme of the poem (such as childbirth or love), but the specific, ambivalent frame of mind that goes with them, as well as the real object of the poem.This is true, but at the same time the poet's sensuality is not always as strong as, for instance, it is in *About a Foolish Hope—After the Rain*, where she writes: "the blind branches see again with their buds", or "foolish hope makes the sun shine". Yet, at same time, one also encounters fairly atypical formulations, or some too familiar from expressionism, such as: "the torn lines string together, somebody pounds on the locked door... drum–beat rataplans on the pavement, the houses are throbbing".

However, it would be more just to cite from the successes of the volume. Some of these are indeed masterful. The following is a monologue, an ode or an elegy, to imagination:

I speak
to you like to a wrinkled rag–doll
my dearest, listen
I keep vigil in a window room,
lowered on a rope into darkness,
with my mouth stopped, my hands tied,
kidnapped for ever, I recite
poems to myself, and play–act
stories—play along with me!

(Letter of Advice)

It is not difficult to realize that is about the most personal matter, the bonds with writing, with vocation. The poem at the end of the volume, *Expectation*, also tries to unravel the same hopelessly entangled questions: here the poet is not "lowered on a rope", rather she must get into a room, she has to approach something closed, something dark, something beyond the everyday appearance of reality—fatality. Indeed, Zsuzsa Takács's poems are always about such attempts. It is futile for the surrounding world, the external situation to "come in"; her poetry seeks an internal scope for movement, freedom, but not in terms of a social issue, rather as a question concerning the personality. The situation portrayed in the *Letter of Advice* virtually reappears in *Dark Brightness*, whose title conjures up Pilinszky:"It is pitch dark here. I am writing in this darkness." And since

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"God has left here", writing remains the only possible way of emitting light.

It is a fairly restricted possibility, just as attaining that inner freedom in the face of all that is contingent or determined. But, and herein lies the conflict, the light, the glow, the spark and the flame which mark the presence of this freedom in the poems, come from the world, the darkness of everyday life. This is the reason why the poetry is swathed in a tragic substance, even if the poems themselves are not in the same sense as those of Pilinszky. Rather they acknowledge fate in a more resigned manner. But at some moments Takács is still able to suggest the tragedy of existence, not only in despair, but, occasionally, counterpoised by irony or grotesquerie. (For instance, in *Meanwhile Walking in the Park.*) Still, at the highest poetic points one has the feeling of reading the continuation of *The Apocrypha* (the great Pilinszky poem):

Bitter, bitter, bitter.
What a noise a leaf can make!
An easy morning entangled in the boughs.
Because it will end, I have known it from the outset.
They will pierce the wood with a shrieking nail.
As in the depth of the cellar you set out with faltering steps.
They bathe the sponge in vinegar.

(Lamps, Birds)

The above passage should be adequate proof; here the poet sets out towards some no–one–knows–what annihilation, towards the "gate of the only freedom", following a system of codes and arguing through more specific situations of existence. And, as she tells us, this gate is the last gate, stained with blood shed by terrifying iron clamps.

This bitter consciousness of existence is outlined against a background of being female, of being linked with a family, and of daily experience; as the title of the volume also indicates, it is created out of the interplay of darkness and light, with more fully modulated contours and chiselling, that appears to be in proportion to the maturing of her poetry. Creating a harmonic unity between the specific experience snatched from the vanishing moment, and that of existence itself, an impulsive lyrical result of firm validity is achieved. It is among the cream of contemporary Hungarian poetry.

Géza Szőcs's poems can be difficult for all they make easy reading. What he says is difficult, as he often makes use of bold post–modern associations, sometimes contrived frames of reference; yet he pulls all this off in a playful, melting and easy manner, through a plethora of linguistic pranks, like a breezy poet of former times intoxicated with words. I only wish that such tormenting and crushing things were not concealed in his poetry.

As Rimbaud once put it, before Romanticism the poem had been simply prose set into rhyme and rhythm. Whether or not there is any truth in this, we will know that in the modern poem even the most boldly and foolishly connected words suggest, by their very nature, some meaning, and their nonce sequence ripens into some message in the reader. Thus the possibilities of poetic communication have become expanded—almost excessively—into infinity.

Szőcs avails himself of this possibility or, rather, he also avails himself of this.

Dezső Kosztolányi, a 20th century classic of Hungarian poetry, often played on words. He unleashed a flood of linguistic bravura, manipulation of rhymes. Yet for all their light and light–rhymed flashes of wit, most of his great poems are gall and wormwood. Szőcs also plays much with rhyme and verbal quibbles. (There are scores of examples, but his sparkle is in most cases untranslatable.) For the Hungarian reader, however, it is clear that Szőcs's playfulness is only a distant descendant of Kosztolányi's. Szőcs's poem, *For My Birthday*, is likewise distantly related to Attila József's famous poem of 1937 of the same title, in the same way as József's *For My Birthday* is related to the famous and dolefully beautiful Kosztolányi poem, beginning, *Now I Am Thirty–two*. In Szőcs it is not only the content of the poems—if one can speak of content at all—that strongly differs from what marks his precursors, but the structure and expression as well. The conscious purpose which was so characteristic in the works by the four generations of the periodical *Nyugat* (1908–1941) (West), proceeds in Szőcs's poetry, but as is usual in avant–garde, by seemingly random detours, with tacked on and scarcely fitting details. In reading them it takes some time before what the poem in question is about becomes clear. Strangely enough, however, when one reads the first poem in *The Gull–Skin Shoe*, entitled *The Writer and the Judge*, and subtitled "Particulars on Some Finno–Ugrian Peoples", one is able to correlate both the gloomy background, contrasting playfulness, and the almost illogical, present–day phrasing. This introduction to the volume makes use of linguistics and relates how the speakers of Livonian, Vepse, Vote, Lude, Inkeri, and Erzya (languages of small Finno–Ungarian peoples who are kin to the Magyars) have crumbled away to extinction. The poet himself has recently emigrated from Transylvania and settled in Switzerland; at present he is Budapest correspondent of Radio Free Europe. His awareness is analogous with that of these doomed peoples. The core of his message can be sensed in this analogy. And this also explains the things which in his poems seem to appear as detours, and which, because of censorship

and the all too real police menace in Rumania, are deliberately obscure. Despite this transference or dissembling employed to outwit censorship, Szőcs in most cases is fairly outspoken. Once his basic message makes itself felt behind all the parapharase, light, and even long–winded germs of ideas, it often finds expression in concrete formulation, and indeed, even in near classical concision:

Our Father, the teeth of destruction
snap shut on us every moment,
but, resurrecting us perpetually,
You again and again button up on us
our lives, likes warm, red shirts.

(Evening Prayer)

How graphic is this warm, red shirt that buttons up our lives, and how well it forms a positive match to the unforgettable Pilinszky lines : "I put on my shirt and clothes—and button up my death."

But one should not believe that destruction, the oppression of the two million Hungarians in Rumania, is for Szőcs the only subject. Of course, when your house is on fire you first of all write on your desperate horror. But a theme that occupies one's conciousness, a bare central theme, by itself is never enough in poetry. The social and national message in poetry can be genuine only if it is expresed by a true lyric writer, in a tone and motifs all his own. Szőcs's poetic personality is woven out of many more strands, and it is much more colourful and original for it to be reduced to his basic themes. The principal subject rises up in his poetry out of an integral human personality, like an underground stream, as a basic element that gives colour to the unfolding motifs and springs from a lyrical personality's search for perfection.

There is no denying that Szőcs's volume is poetry of the highest standard, creates a set of poetic symbols and mythologies of exemplary quality and also relies on tradition. This volume by a poet driven from Rumania by crude police harrassment adds considerably to contemporary Hungarian poetry and opens up new directions for it.

MIKLÓS GYÖRFFY

Veteran players

György Konrád: *A cinkos* (The Loser). Magvető, 1989, 460 pp.
Iván Mándy: *Önéletrajz* (Autobiography). Magvető, 1989, 304 pp.

It was just over twenty years ago that György Konrád's first novel, *A látogató* (The Visitor) was published, followed in 1977 by *A városalapító* (The Builder). Since then—apart from some sporadic articles, regarded by the authorities as remarkable concessions—nothing of his was published in Hungary, down to this year when a whole series of Konrád's work, written earlier, began to appear in the company of countless other banned books. In this category is Konrád's third novel, *A cinkos* (The Loser, written between 1975 and 1978), which, after publication in several other languages and an underground appearance and limited circulation at home, is now available in a number of copies only a real best–seller can achieve.

As a closely woven, difficult novel, *The Loser* has turned out to be anything but easily digestible popular reading matter for the general public. It has also become clear why it had been banned till now; however, what was regarded as dangerous or delicate political stuff, political taboo, has since been served up much more damagingly and at greater length in other publications: memoirs and historical documents. The "sensation" of *The Loser* lies much more in its shrewdness, depth and its attempt at synthesis, as well as in its literary quality; after all, it is a novel, a peculiarly Konrádesque species of it, in which various regions and frontiers of the genre create a personal, occasional union.

Basically *The Loser* is a Bildungsroman. The protagonist, an unnamed "accomplice", tells his life story in the first person singular, through an extended meditation, putting together episodes, fragments and memories, commenting on them from a certain sceptical perspective. This kind of contemplative and explorative stocktaking produces a remarkably compact text, both visually and metaphorically saturated, the reading of which gives the feeling of drinking a fine old wine. The compactness of the text is paralleled by the density of the events recalled: a magnified evocation of the period and the context. The historical scenes and focal points that are interwoven with the central figures' life are paradigmatic, thus making the life itself paradigmatic in a condensed and heightened way. One critic compared the novel to the compilations of chroniclers and minstrels, adding that the reader is apt to forget this quality, does not notice it at all, for Konrád gathered his material directly from the protagonists of the episodes, rather than from oral tradition. For it is well to bear in mind that Konrád wrote *The Loser* on the basis of extensive research. As he writes in the dedication to the novel:

"The book is not an autobiography but fiction. Homage to my older friends who had to live history the hard way, harder than my generation. This distance from their past has enabled me to write their story. Let all those accept my thanks who recognize some episode or other they have related to me."

The many stories of these older friends have all been amalgamated into the story of one man, or arranged around him, without the individual elements losing their concrete and authentic qualities in this process of hyperbolic summation. What still acts against the overall impression is the improbable piling up of incidents, each telling and effective in itself, that is, the density and compression of the paradigm.

The novel unravels the accomplice's life backwards, framed by a description of the mental hospital where the protagonist finds asylum at the conclusion of his adventures in history, and by his voluntary discharge to make a final attempt at finding his place, if only at the side of the two persons nearest to him, his wife and his brother. In reality, this is a leave–taking from them too, and it is in this farewell that this historical novel of adventure, political picaresque and documentary is inserted—in a word, the peculiarly Konrádesque model.

The first part speaks of the family and the childhood of the main character. He is brought up in a small town in the twenties as the son of a forest

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Miklós Györffy *is* NHQ's *regular reviewer of fiction. His novel,* A férfikor nyara *(The Prime of Life) is reviewed in this issue by Imre Szász.*

proprietor (violent and uncontrollable) and an unhappy mother. His maternal grandfather is a respectable and well–to–do Jewish merchant. His dignity and self–assurance, the respect that he commands, and the imperturbability of business make a deep impression on the grandchild. The parents' world is incalculable and rhapsodic, insecure: the two boys can no longer expect support, guidance and example from them. Just like the mental hospital, the parental house is a closed, self–contained world, which has only an indirect connection with the political relations described in the sections called "War", "Politics", and "Farewell". The impressively accurate and evocative tableau of the mental hospital portrays a world which is at once a punishment camp and the ultimate asylum of lives destroyed by the war and politics. The 'accomplice' is exiled here by his former comrades but, at the same time, offered refuge here by them. It is as if in some form of compensation that they allow him to hide here, on condition that he is willing to take on at least a resemblance of derangement. The world of the family and the parental home represent in contrast the milieu where the protagonist's destiny is not yet decided, he can still become anybody or anything. Between these two extremes fall the historical role, the communist vocation that degrades him into an accomplice.

Why and how the hero becomes an underground communist is of little interest to the author. This is as though he is saying: let's take a professional communist revolutionary who happens to come from such a background—from a middle–class background, which is in no way an accident, because it was characteristic. The man is soon to be arrested, for that too was characteristic, then he is drafted into the forced labour service and sent to the Russian front. From that moment on almost to the end *The Loser* becomes the chronicle of a series of horrors, yet each palpably of documentary authenticity. What is particularly blood–chilling is that Konrád's sources are still capable of providing incidents, some of them "novelties", one more horrible than the next, considering that the subject may seem to have been well–covered: war, trumped–up charges, torture, prison, revolts and riots, etc. Often it is of little account what happens to the protagonist and what happens to others in his environment or what is only reported to him, the point is that those things simply took place, the things that were bound to take place as a terrible, fateful consequence of historical necessity. The hero himself is at one with these necessities, these events, and he only comes to life as a person, page after page, by dint of his aloof, sceptical narrative style.

The long series of appalling picaresque adventures meanders from his going over to the Red Army, through the show trials and the events of the 1956 uprising, down to the "national compromise" of the Kádár regime in the early seventies. In the meantime the protagonist is twice arrested and gradually, from the determined functionary of the communist take–over of the late forties, he turns into a disaffected and disgruntled dissident intellectual. He becomes in effect a conniving accomplice by the end of the story, when he knows everything about everything and everybody in power, and they know about him too: they can calculate each other's steps and they tolerate each other in this "grand compromise", sharing the favours and privileges. By the end of the novel the hero's personality is more than narrative mode and historical perspective; it is not just Konrád's shrewdness and command of his sources; it is no longer just the carrier of the material, but a complex of problems that can be experienced and must be judged. As the story of the accomplice approaches the time of its writing, so the hero is transformed into the representative of his cronies, the generation of communists much buffeted and now disappointed, into one who flirts with the dissident thinking of Konrád's generation, even with his intellectual circles, while clinging to the system, he is an integral part of it, a man whom Konrád wanted to transcend in the last resort by the act of writing the novel. This transformation is not conveyed without literary flaws, but from the point of view of historical process it is justifiable. It compresses certain intellectual and moral tensions into one of those figures which were important elements of the Hungarian reform process.

István Mándy, one of the major Hungarian short–story writers of this century, now in his seventies, has published a collection of stories called *Önéletrajz* (Autobiography). It is no more autobiographical than any of his earlier collections; as in these, here too, he writes on the incidents, characters, atmosphere, moods and dreams from his own life and environment. To what extent, and in what way these stories are autobiographical, is demonstrated by the title story, which is an old man's mumbling monologue just before sleep or, rather, a grumbling dialogue with himself by the author's depersonalized, anonymous *alter ego*, distanced into the first person singular. Names, characters, memories, pictures emerge, fossils of a bygone world which have become stylized into a genuine personal mythology for the writer; in his life, submerged coffee houses, editorial offices, football grounds appear, as though the author wanted to say goodbye to them, grumbling a little, indignant and despondent. The story runs to just ten pages. He feels he has lost the match. "Don't let's fool ourselves. Let's face reality, We've lost the match. The player can now leave the pitch. The player has grown old. He has no place on the field. Politics... political excitements. That's in. That's the in–thing. And at most some cheap amusement. But then they can expect *that* of me in vain!"

The whole volume is imbued with this stubborn immobility, this reluctance. The subject of the best stories is this reluctance, aversion or the anxiety that overcomes the author before his trip to England. The *Éjszaka utazás előtt* (The night before the journey), just like *Önéletrajz* (Autobiography), is a rolling procession of dreams, visions, memories, spreading a sense of anxiety and incomprehension. Some official voices from the misty clouds above ask, "Where do you come from? What country? When the dreamer gives Hungary as his response: "There was silence again. Deep, heavy silence. Then barely audibly, astonished laughter. Low voices. Whispers, sniggering. Something was discussed. All this while the word Hungary was heard several times."

Mándy feels that *his* Hungary (for that matter, he himself), seen through a foreigner's eyes, is a laughable absurdity. Something that doesn't exist, perhaps. Of course, he knows very well that it does exist, but it exists so much enclosed in itself that it is incomprehensible to a foreigner. That is why there are apprehensions about the trip. He feels he has nothing to do abroad, all he can do is make a fool of himself, lose the ground from under his feet, be out of his depth. He even thinks that the act of movement is unnatural, for it means upsetting the immutablity that is the ultimate refuge and haven for him in a world in the grip of hysterical and destructive changes.

Mándy's immobility is a defiant clinging to values doomed to mutability. There is no pathos or heroism in this abidance; on the contrary, the narrator feels uneasy and ashamed, not just before his wife but before himself too, about his reluctance, awkwardness, clumsiness. He portrays with a winning self–irony his own awkwardness in *Reggel utazás előtt* (The morning before the journey)—but for his wife, he couldn't get as far as packing his things, for the objects constantly remind him of memories in the mood of the farewell, and the memories belong to a life, a milieu, a waning world that keeps him captive and which must be cherished.This paradoxical fate of captivity and cherising makes one understand why Mándy rings the changes on the same motifs: he cannot do else, he is attached to his private world, while this same world fills him completely. The stories in *Autobiography* may add a new colour to the already known and admired spectrum in Mándy's works: running through them is a grotesquely Sisyphusian dignity, a childish or elderly stubborn persistence, gestures of resignation, acquiescence, and withdrawnness, at once ashamed and defiant, amusing and touching. Mándy appears in these "autobiographical" short stories as a foreign but most affable companion to all of us, deceptively resembling the misfits and losers of his own creation.

IMRE SZÁSZ

Another lost generation

Miklós Györffy: *A férfikor nyara* (The Prime of Life). Szépirodalmi Kiadó, 1987, 496 pp.

The day of reckoning is approaching: Hungarian fiction has begun to conjure up and portray those forty years we have been living through. This had not really been possible earlier; Hungarian literature was faced with many taboos, prohibited subjects and areas strictly fenced off by the authorities, which granted no admittance to any real writer and, if the writer still managed to sneak in, the publication of his work was banned. Even if now we are able to learn more and more about this bitter, dramatic and bloody period, it is perhaps still not enough for the historian. However, the novelist (and in Hungary the film director as well) is ahead of what historians are doing, since he can draw not only on documents but on his own experiences as well.

So, although a portrayal of society as a whole has not yet been undertaken by any Hungarian novelist, that of parts of it, as for instance intellectuals, can now virtually be pieced together. Placing a few novels side by side in chronological order of their settings may suffice for a fairly clear idea of what happened to these intellectuals over the years of this period. Today, when militant modernism is scornfully rejecting realistic novels, this still implies some stubborn, persistent, and heartening compulsions towards presentation.

For even if fiction is not obliged to write history, it is obliged to face up to that we have become.

The latest volume in this stream of novels from several hands is by Miklós Györffy, who was born in 1942.

The historian around whom the novel revolves is of the generation which, mainly because of a film by Ferenc András, is usually called the "great generation". These were young people at a time when, after many years, the young could set out in a climate where a slight chance of breaking down the fences of dogmatism was possible, and could be irregular, heretical and, even if furtively, perhaps rebellious. This generation is a poor distant relative of the student movements of Paris: although with less scope for action, they at least did not have to disguise their unrest within their own circle; they could shape the intellect and emotions through Western philosophies, Maoist teachings, rock music, the then prohibited and anathematised writers and poets, and the films of the French New Wave.

This generation nurtured a nostalgia almost as strong as that of those who had grown into adulthood in 1945, believing for two or three years in the possibility of building a new, democratic, and European Hungary.

The "great generation" may also have entertained similar thoughts. What they did believe was that — even if in a rebellious, exorbitant way, confronting official taste and notions—they could at least realise themselves. In point of fact this generation has produced noted writers, artists, filmmakers and independent thinkers. Today most of them recall their feverish preparations with a wry scepticism and nostalgia.

This is true of Miklós Györffy as well, if his protagonist, the history teacher getting on for forty, is to be taken as representing his own feelings and views. In all probability he does. The novel's narrative line, presented in the first person singular, is hardly just a traditional form of presentation, it also signifies that author and protagonist are not very far from each other.

The protagonist digs out his old diary, in itself a sure sign of his quest for his own self. He is seeking the young man who was once himself and who, although promising something different from what has come to pass, was then paving the way through his flustered, rebellious, lost and violent self, for his own present unhappiness. Or was it the age and the society that was preparing this unhappiness? Despite reading through the novel twice, I can still find no definite answer to this. One of literature's constant topics is the way in which the world tames and defiles

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youthful vigour and zest into day–to–day compromise. I think that here in Hungary, conditions have tamed even the "great generation" much more violently than in the more democratic countries; even in the democratic countries, the former student leaders, the great rebels, have found a way to fit in once their prime of life was reached.

Györffy presents this process not as the outcome of a social crisis, an ideological disillusionment, a specific Eastern European anoxia, but rather as a personal misdemeanour, a personal crisis—a very powerful one at that.

The extracts from the journal abound with youthfulness. In them too is to be found intellectual greed, a gang spirit which actuates a strong sense of affinity, distrust, jealousy, and heart–ache; the depths of this intensely lived life almost always include sexuality, from flashes of desire to love–making in all possible contexts. This perhaps is the strongest thread in Györffy's novel, the strongest expression of the desire for freedom, since sexual promiscuity was a symbol of that generation's desire to break loose, just as their intellectual promiscuity was; all the sexual relationships and encounters conceal some non–amorous sentiment: betrayal, rage, inability to fit in, subservience.

This is what the teacher, now in the prime of his life and only partly broken in, remembers most sharply. He is still ready to rebel, to explode, to play a provocative prank at any moment, but by now only within the drab order of day–to–day life. This is perhaps why he feels nostalgic and tries to conjure up the old, painful loves, most of which ended because of his own restlessness.

Life in the present time is so utterly humdrum. Petty intrigues for a vice–principal's post, a marriage deteriorated into cheerless monotony, for all its acceptability—the dismal prime of life.

I think Györffy the conscious, sensible, and intelligent writer wanted to stress this counterpoint. He has succeeded in doing so far too well. Here, the prime of life has become depressing and boring not only for the protagonist, but after a time—and precisely because of its elaborate finish—for the reader as well. It is not sufficient for a novel to thread so many strands into the stereotyped intrigues of a vice–principal's post, assigning so many names and characters to this. It is also extremely difficult to find some adequately dramatic conclusion for dreariness; nor has Györffy really succeeded in so doing. The scene in which the protagonist is nearly (or actually?) kicked to death on a tram by the brutal modern young comes as a punk ex machina. It does not follow functionally from the novel. However, it is also possible that I am inordinately distrustful of novels that end in a suicide or with the slaying of the protagonist. Too often I feel this as an act of accountancy or of public hygiene rather than a literary solution.

FROM OUR NEXT ISSUES

THE BARTÓK—KODÁLY CONNECTION

Benjamin Suchoff

BÉLA BALÁZS'S LIBRETTO FOR BARTÓK'S PRINCE BLUEBEARD'S CASTLE

translated by Thomas Orszag–Land

DOHNÁNYI RECORDS

Paul Griffiths

ALAN WALKER

A fireside Liszt

Serge Gut: Franz Liszt. Edition de Fallois. L'Age d'Homme. Imp. Delmas. Artigues-près-Bordeaux, 1989. 665 pp.

Of all living artists, I am the the only one who can proudly exhibit a proud Fatherland. While the others paddle about miserably in the shallow waters of a mere public, I sail forward freely on the open sea of a great nation. My North Star constantly shows that Hungary will one day point proudly towards me.

Liszt

During the past twenty years or so, there has been a worldwide resurgence of interest in the life and work of Liszt. Books and articles about the man and his music abound. There are more gramophone records of his music available today than ever before, some of them of the "monumental" variety which involve complete performances of major segments of his output. Piano competitions across the world now make performances of Liszt's compositons one of their top requirements. Scholarly journals, which formerly did not consider Liszt particularly worthy of serious study, now compete with one another to issue a steady stream of articles about the man and his music. The daunting task of publishing the Complete Edition of Liszt's compositions in sixty or more volumes, under the distinguished editorship of Zoltán Gárdonyi, István Szelényi, and Imre Mező, is now well under way in Hungary. Forty years ago all this activity would have been unthinkable. Today, a great wind of change is sweeping across the field. Liszt is seen as the central character in the romantic movement in music, Berlioz and Wagner notwithstanding. Whether or not one likes his music is irrelevant. He was the greatest musical force of the age. To paraphrase Voltaire, if Liszt did not exist, it would be necessary to invent him.

All this imposes a heavy burden on Liszt's biographers. Just to keep pace with the ever-expanding field of knowledge is a full time occupation. Time was when one could write a "new" Liszt biography from the comfort of one's own fireside, simply by joining two or three old ones together. The only requirements were scissors and paste, a bit of paraphrasing, and the job was done. Today all that has changed. In order to justify its existence at all, a new book on Liszt must *really* be new; that is, it must contain new documents, it must give evidence of original research, and it must make an effort to contribute something fundamental to the field. In short, it must make a difference. Nothing less will do.

In recent years there have been several attempts to tell the story of Liszt's life and work in a clear and reliable manner, books which *do* make a difference. Mária Eckhardt, Klára Hamburger, Charles Suttoni, and Dezső Legány are just a few of the writers who have added some new and important dimensions to the topic. The latest arrival on the scene is the long-awaited *Liszt* by Professor

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Alan Walker *is Professor of Music at McMaster University, in Hamilton, (Ont. Canada). The second volume of his biography of Liszt,* The Weimar Years, 1848—1861 *was published by Alfred A. Knopf, New York in 1989.*

Serge Gut of the Sorbonne University in Paris. How does he fare? If size and weight were the criteria he would fare very well indeed. The book runs to 665 pages, and it weighs more than 2 lbs. Unfortunately, the contents leave so much to be desired that this will be a very difficult review to write. But we must do our duty — first to Liszt, secondly to all those readers who may come across the book and think that it represents the last word in Liszt scholarship, and finally to Professor Gut himself.

II

From the outset, Gut falls into an historical error. He tells us that Liszt was born in the Austrian Burgenland. But the Burgenland did not even exist until 1921. The village of Raiding (Doborján) in which Liszt was born was *always* in Hungary and *never* in Austria until after World War I. The fact that this part of the world is called the Austrian Burgenland today is irrelevant. If we were to follow Gut's method we would stand musical history on its head. Overnight, Bartók would become a Rumanian, Dohnányi would become a Czechoslovakian and Joachim would become an Austrian. At one stroke Hungary would lose three of its greatest musicians. Nor would it end there. Tchaikovsky would become a citizen of the Soviet Union. And in logic we would have to refer to J. S. Bach as "the greatest composer of the Deutsche Demokratische Republik". France was fortunate. Its borders emerged intact after the upheavals of the past seventy years. But what if the Basques were one day to achieve national independence? Would Maurice Ravel cease to be French? To be consistent, Professor Gut would have to say yes. The trouble with such a view is not only that it is wrong, it is also offensive. It robs composers of their natural birthright. And so it is with Liszt.[1]

It may seem churlish to make such heavy weather of Gut's view of Liszt's national origins, but it is symptomatic of deeper problems within this book. For Gut seems anxious to play down Liszt's Hungarian connections. Thus, in the chapter *Liszt pédagogue,* he talks at length about Liszt's Weimar pupils, but the Hungarian ones are virtually ignored. Yet they included some remarkable talents — among them István Thomán, Raphael Joseffy, Károly Aggházy, Árpád Szendy, Aladár Juhász, and Robert Freund.[2].

Perhaps Gut's most audacious claim, however, is that Liszt was not very enthusiastic about becoming the first President of the newly-formed Academy of Music, in the mid 1870's (which today bears Liszt's name), and that a deciding factor was the annual pension of 4000 forints that the Hungarian government was now paying him, which would have made it difficult for him to withdraw from this commitment without embarrassment (p. 180). It is true that Liszt had once referred to the Academy as "a rope around my neck", but that was a momentary *cri de coeur* of the sort that administrators have made from time immemorial when the pressures become too much for them. The true facts are radically different, and we invite Professor Gut to consider them. Liszt would never have assumed such an administrative burden in his old age unless he had been motivated by a love of his country and a desire to see its artistic life flourish. From 1869 until his death in 1886, Liszt divided his time mainly among Weimar, Rome, and Budapest. There were years when he sometimes missed visiting Weimar and sometimes Rome; but he never once missed Budapest. In fact, if one adds up the months he spent in his native land during the last seventeen years of his life, one arrives at the astonishing total of nearly five years. That is a remarkable

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[1] Gut's book actually begins with the headline: "L'Enfance au Burgenland." And his first sentence begins: "It was at Raiding, forty-five kilometers from Eisenstadt, capital of the Burgenland, and ninety from Vienna, on the borders of Austria and Hungary, that Franz Liszt was born on October 21, 1811." And further down we are informed that Adam Liszt, his father, was born in Edelsthal in the Burgenland, in 1776. These historical anomalies are woven so tightly into the fabric of Gut's narrative that they are impossible to disentangle. The innocent reader would have to conclude from these pages that Liszt was an Austrian. Moreover, Gut's Concordance Table of names of towns and cities (pp. 653—54) reveals some dazzling omissions. Raiding (Doborján), Eisenstadt (Kismarton), and Edelsthal (Nemesvölgy), are all absent; yet all three places were always in Hungary and were always known to Hungarians by their Hungarian names.

[2] The reader who is interested in pursuing this topic will find the name of nearly one hundred of Liszt's Hungarian pupils given in Viktor Papp's *Liszt tanítványai* (Budapest, 1936, pp. 24—28).

statistic, and it cannot be explained by saying, in effect, that Liszt's attendance in Hungary was "bought" by the government. For Liszt not only fulfilled his duties at the Academy, but he associated himself with musical enterprises across the country, and he was proud to do so. The proof of all this is really very simple. Liszt's pension was paid from 1871; the Academy did not open its doors until 1875. There is absolutely no connection between these two events. And there is no evidence that had Liszt declined the presidency, his pension would have been forfeit. That pension was paid to him directly by the Emperor Franz Joseph (in his capacity as King of Hungary) because of Liszt's appointment to the rank of Royal Hungarian Counsellor, in 1871.[3]

But Gut does not stop there. He goes on to deny that there is anything particularly Hungarian about Liszt's music at all. This is sure to cause unnecessary controversy. Hungarian scholars such as Zoltán Gárdonyi, Dezső Legány, Mária Eckhardt, Bálint Sárosi, and Klára Hamburger have devoted much of their lives to disclosing the Hungarian elements in Liszt's musical language. For Gut, however, it is as if their work did not exist. The topic is complex, and we cannot do it justice here.[4] But it has to be stressed that when scholars refer to "Liszt's Hungarian style" they do not merely mean those overt and obvious nationalistic contributions to his oeuvre, such as the Hungarian Rhapsodies. They also mean the basic elements of his musical expression. Bence Szabolcsi expressed it like this:

> "The *Funérailles* and the *Héroide funèbre,* the *Hungaria* and the *Coronation Mass* —nay, the *Faust* Symphony, the oratorio *St. Elisabeth* and the *Danse macabre,* the *Tasso* and the *Mountain* Symphony, the Sonata in B minor and the BACH variations, had already pointed to what, through Liszt's creative genius, might have unfolded itself as a "Hungarian world style...
>
> What if we point out that the fanfare of *Les Préludes* is the echo of a march of the *honvéd* (Hungarian soldiers in the War of Independence), that Hungarian motifs play a predominant role in the *Hamlet* and *Tasso,* that the most significant shape of the introductory theme of the Sonata in B minor appears in the 'Gypsy scale'?"[5]

Other scholars have put it differently, but few have said it better. There are many melodic and harmonic elements in Liszt's style which we conventionally call "Lisztian". But on closer inspection they turn out to be Hungarian after all.

III

One of the most vexed questions in the Liszt literature concerns the young Liszt's "farewell" concert in Vienna, on April 13, 1823. The legend already arose in Liszt's lifetime that Beethoven had attended this concert, and that at the conclusion he had mounted the platform and kissed the young boy on the forehead. The most famous account of this story will be found in the first volume of Liszt's official biographer, Lina Ramann.[6] Liszt treasured this "kiss of consecration" all his life, and spoke of it to a number of friends and disciples. However, all the contemporary evidence points to the fact that Beethoven never attended the concert. By the year 1823 the master was completely deaf and he never went to such functions. There are three documents that are vital to this argument.

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[3] These matters have been very well documented by Dezső Legány in his "Liszt's and Erkel's relations and students" *Studia Musicologica Scientiarum Hungaricae,* 18, Budapest, 1976, pp. 19—50.

On the matter of the Hungarian pension of 4000 forints, see especially pp. 39—40: "The title and honorarium did not mean that Liszt was indebted to [the emperor] Franz Joseph, but rather it was a symbol that Hungary was indebted to Liszt." It is clear that Gut has been misled by August Stradal in this matter, a thoroughly unreliable witness. Stradal: *Erinnerungen an Franz Liszt.* Bern, 1929, pp. 42, 45—46.

[4] One of the best introductions to the subject is Gárdonyi's *Le Style Hongrois de Liszt,* (Budapest 1936).

[5] Szabolcsi, Bence: *The Twilight of Liszt,* pp. 59—61. It is known that Liszt embarked on a profound study of Hungarian folkmusic in the early 1850s, and he actually bought a part of the valuable manuscript-collection of Count István Fáy. The story is told in detail in Volume Two of my life of Liszt, *The Weimar Years, 1848—1861* (New York, 1989, pp. 384—85).

[6] *Franz Liszt als Künstler und Mensch,* vol. 1, pp. 45—47, 1880.

(a) Beethoven's "Conversation Book" for April 1823 contains an exchange between Beethoven and his nephew Karl. Replying to his uncle, who has asked about Liszt's concert, Karl reports that the hall was not full. Again, at the end of April, Karl wrote, "Someone from the Institute[7] was recently at the concert of the young List [*sic*], and said that he made many mistakes." The context makes it clear that Beethoven is asking about a concert that neither he nor his nephew had attended. In short, Karl is reporting hearsay. Why would Beethoven need to be told that the hall was not full if he himself had been present?[8]

(b) The detailed review of the concert which appeared in *Der Sammler*, on April 29, 1823, gives many facts about Liszt's concert, but it makes no mention of the presence of Beethoven. It is unthinkable that the reviewer would have failed to mention the presence of the world's greatest composer at the eleven-year-old boy's concert.[9] Had Beethoven really walked onto the platform to bestow on the young Liszt his "kiss of consecration" it would have made headline news in Vienna the next day.

By not drawing a firm conclusion from such evidence, Gut puts back Liszt scholarship by fifty years. Instead, he introduces a statement by Liszt's pupil August Göllerich, published in 1908, in which Liszt is quoted as saying that Beethoven *did* attend the concert.[10] He tells us that Göllerich is a reliable witness, that he was Liszt's "faithful secretary" and recorded everything that the master said with scrupulous exactness. But we know that this is not so. Göllerich made many mistakes in his book.Why should we believe him in this case? It is very important to remember that Liszt *himself* never claimed that Beethoven had attended his "farewell" concert. Others always made that claim for him. But what of the *Weihekuss* that Liszt always insisted he had received from Beethoven? This brings us to our third document.

(c) In a letter to Carl Alexander, the Grand Duke of Weimar, dated November 1, 1862, Liszt recalls that Beethoven had, on one occasion, "consecrated my brow with a kiss".[11] It is the only known document in which Liszt himself claims to have received a *Weihekuss*. He does not tell us where the *Weihekuss* took place, however. It most likely occurred during Liszt's private visit to Beethoven's lodgings. But it could *not* have occurred at Liszt's "farewell" concert if the first two documents (a) and (b) are accepted.

IV

It is when Gut turns his attention to the music that we have a right to expect him to produce something exceptional. After all, his earlier book *Franz Liszt: Les Éléments du langage musical* was a path-breaking publication that gave us some useful insights into the workings of Liszt's musical mind. Alas, admirers of that earlier work are going to be disappointed. Most of Gut's views are imported from other writers, and some of his music examples are jaded. Many of them seem to be taken bar-for-bar from the writings of Searle, Raabe, and my own books on Liszt, and the author rarely has anthing new to say about them. Thus, his chapter *L'Oeuvre Pianistique* is illustrated with fifty-one music examples, of which no fewer than thirty-eight will be found in my symposium *Franz Liszt: the Man and his Music* (which is cited many times in Gut's book, but not

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[7] The Blöchinger Institute in Vienna, where Karl was then a student.

[8] *Ludwig van Beethovens Konversationshefte (Band 3, Hefte 23—37).* Herausgegeben im Auftrag der Deutschen Staatsbibliothek Berlin von Karl-Heinz Köhler und Dagmar Beck unter Mitwirkung von Günter Brosche. Leipzig 1983. The entries concerning Liszt's visit to Beethoven will be found on p. 168 and pp. 186—88. It is well known that Anton Schindler, who was Beethoven's secretary at this time, tampered with the Conversation Books after the master's death, and that he sometimes inserted entries for selfserving ends. He did so on this occasion. But none of his changes affect the basic context.

[9] This article is reproduced by Michael Saffle on page 279 of his article "Liszt Research since 1936: a bibliographic survey", *Acta Musicologica*, vol. 58, 1986, pp. 231—281. Beethoven's name is likewise nowhere to be found in the review of the *Wiener Allgemeine Musikalische Zeitung* (issue no 34, 1823) which is reproduced in Dezső Legány's *Franz Liszt:Unbekannte Presse und Briefe aus Wien*, 1984, p. 19.

[10] Göllerich: *Franz Liszt*, Berlin 1908, p. 160.

[11] *Briefwechsel zwischen Franz Liszt und Carl Alexander*, edited by La Mara, Leipzig, 1909, p. 160.

listed in his bibliography). His discussion of the "Paganini" Study, no. 4, is taken almost verbatim from my chapter "Liszt's Musical Background", together with the matching music examples. (The interested reader is invited to compare Gut, pp. 292—94 and Walker, pp. 48—50.) It might be argued that Liszt's music is in the public domain, that every author is free to quote from it at will, that if you talk about the same works you will end up quoting the same music examples. That is perfectly true. But the point I am making is different. When the above books are compared, the reader must conclude that much of Professor Gut's work was already done for him.

V

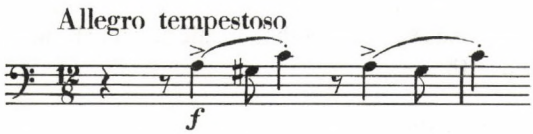
It is good to have a section of the book devoted to the literary texts that inspired the composition of the Symphonic Poems ("Textes concernant les poèmes symphoniques"), for scholars are bound to find this material useful. Even so, there are some strange inconsistencies. For example, Victor Hugo's poem *Après une lecture de Dante* is included (p. 445), although it has nothing to do with the symphonic poems or even with the "Dante" Sonata. (The title of Liszt's "Dante" Sonata, incidentally, is "Après une lecture *du* Dante", an inscription which tells us that the work has nothing to do with Hugo[12]). Doubtless this inclusion is to compensate us for the text of "Mazeppa" which is not provided at all — even though Liszt himself quotes large portions of Hugo's poem in his Preface to the symphonic poem of that name. Gut *does* include the whole of Lamartine's *Les Préludes,* however, (which Liszt himself does *not* do in the preface to his orchestral score!), but without telling us very much about the debate that still rages around the question of whether Lamartine has anything to do with this work. Indeed, Gut takes it for granted that *Les Préludes* was the inspirational source for Liszt's symphonic poem, for he sets up a concordance table (p. 126) showing how the music reflects every stanza of the poem.

If Gut is to be believed, then, Liszt's L*es Préludes* could not exist in its present form without Lamartine's poem. The music, that is to say, is but a reflection of the words. Three years ago, Andrew Bonner effectively demolished such a simplistic approach to Liszt's score by demonstrating that most of the music had been composed before it was ever linked to Lamartine, and that the complex exegesis of the manuscript (across a period of 12 years) makes it impossible for a truly creative connection with the French poet ever to have existed.[13]

The point is not so much whether Professor Gut is wrong to think the opposite, but that he does not make his readers aware that there is an opposite to consider.

We also have a purely musical objection to Gut's treatment of this work. In his description of its structure (p. 360) which he views very much as a sonata form, he tells us that the Development section begins with the following theme, at measure 131.

Ex. 1



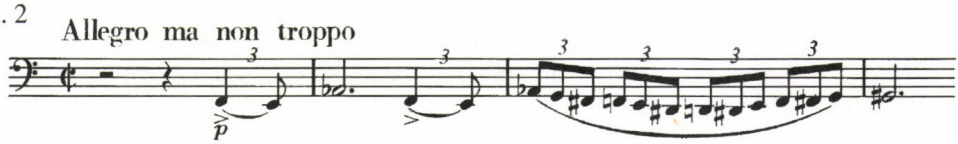
[12] Hugo's poem was first published on June 26, 1837. We have no doubt that Liszt had already read it by the time he commenced work on his "Dante" Sonata, in 1839. Logically, then, we may assume that Liszt borrowed Hugo's title for the purpose of showing that he, like Hugo, had gone to Dante for his inspiration.

[13] See Andrew Bonner: "Liszt's *Les Préludes* and *Les Quatre Éléments:* A Reinvestigation." *19th Century Music,* Vol. X, number 2, 1986, pp. 95—107; in particular the Chronological Chart on p. 68.

POÈME (Lamartine)		MUSIQUE (Liszt)	
Vers	Sections	Mesures	Sections
1—20	*Introduction:* Le poète sollicite l'inspiration qui apparait sous la forme d'un Génie. Se subdivise en: 1—16: Invocation du Génie 17—20: Arrivée du Génie	1—46	*Introduction* Se subdivise en: 1—34: Andante = a 35—46: Andante maestoso = a'
21—85	*Thème amoureux:* en forme d'élégie où se melent douceur et mélancolie.	47—89	*Présentation des deux thèmes d'amour:* 47—69: Th. 1 = A 70—89: Th. 2 = B
86—101	*Transition:* renonçant à chanter l'amour avec des paroles humaines, il invoque une inspiration plus grave. Se subdivise en: 86— 97: Désir de se détacher de l'amour 98—101: La voix qui gronde et l'onde qui frissonne	90—118	*Transition* Se subdivise en: 90—108: Rupture pour se ressaisir. 109—118: Chromatisme grondant et ondulant.
102—153	*Thème douloureux:* plainte philosophique sur la destinée de l'homme se subdivise en: 102—108: orage sur la mer 109—137: Protestation devant la douleur 138—153: Ressaisissement.	119—181	Fin de la transition musicale et *thème de la Destinée.* se subdivise en: 119—130: succession chromatique de septièmes diminuées. 131—159: Thème de la destinée = th. 1 déformé = A". 160—181: Th. 1 transformé en thème de défi.
275—299	*Transition:* Recherche d'une inspiration plus douce et pacifique.	182—199	*Transition* basée sur le retour du thème d'amour 1.
300—371	*Thème bucolique:* retour au foyer paternel et accueil de la nature amie.	200—343	*Theme pastoral* en forme de scherzo avec d'arrivée d'un thème nouveau = C.
154—158	*Transition:* il faut échapper à l'ennui par l'action virile et hasardeuse: «C'est le cri du clairon, c'est la voix du coursier»	344—369	Retour du thème 1 transformé en *thème de guerre* = A'.
159—274	*Thème belliqueux:* description sur le mode épique d'un combat moderne.	370—404	Retour du thème 2 transformé en *2e thème de guerre* = B'.
372—375	*Conclusion:* l'inspiration quitte le poète.	405—419	Coda avec retour de l'andante maestoso = a'.

But this cannot be true. All the evidence, both thematic and tonal, suggests that the Development begins earlier, at measure 109:

Ex. 2



This is not a matter of personal opinion, but of concrete musical reality, which can readily be confirmed. I have submitted these examples to three different musicians of widely differing backgrounds, and all are agreed that if one must talk of development sections at all, this one has to begin at measure 109.

Of graver concern is Professot Gut's highly idiosyncratic analysis of Liszt's Sonata in B minor, a work which he himself describes as the composer's "incontestible pianistic masterpiece". No other work of Liszt has attracted anything like the same amount of scholarly attention as this composition. Not the least interesting thing about the piece is the number of divergent theories it has provoked from those of its admirers who feel constrained to search for hidden meanings. It has been variously described as (a) a musical portrait of the "Faust" legend, (b) a depiction of Milton's *Paradise Lost,* (c) an allegory set in the Garden of Eden, with "God", "Lucifer", etc. etc. "Serpent", and "Adam and Eve" themes, and (d) a piece of abstract instrumental music with no programmatic allusions whatsoever. Professor Gut opts for the first of these interpretations, following Peter Raabe, and sees in the Sonata a musical portrait of "Faust". We do not quarrel with this approach, although we have to point out that it is not sanctioned by Liszt himself, who told us nothing about the "meaning" of his pianistic masterpiece. Liszt was content to call his work "Sonata", and leave it at that. Even so, we have to question the validity of Gut's "Formal Plan" of the work which we reproduce here for ease of inspection.

INTRODUCTION (mes. 1—8)
Thème d'introduction

EXPOSITION (mes. 8—170)
Th. 1 = A (a+b) aussitot développé (mes. 8—81). Th. d'introduction (mes. 82—104). Th. annexe = B (mes. 105—120). Transition sur le Th 1 (mes. 120—152). Th. 2 = Ab' (mes. 153—170)

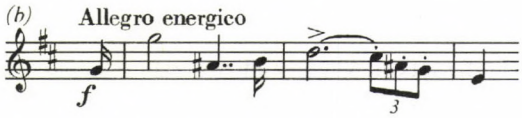
DÉVELOPPEMENT (mes. 171—532)
1. *Développement proprement dit* (mes. 171—330)
Lutte modulante entre les Th. 1 = A (A+b) et 2 = Ab' (mes. 171—296).
Th. annexe = B (mes. 297—305). Th. 1 = Ab (mes. 306—330).
2. *Andante formant une section intercalée* (mes. 331—459)
Thème nouveau = C (mes. 331—348). T. 2 = Ab' (mes. 349—355). Th. 1 = Aa (mes. 356—362). Th. annexe = B (mes. 363—385). Th. 1 = Aa (mes. 385—394). Th. nouveau = C (mes. 395—432). Th. 2 = Ab' (mes. 433—452). Th. d'introduction (mes. 453—459).
3. F*ugue* (mes. 460—532)
Basée sur le Th. 1 = Aa, d'expression diabolique. Sujet (mes. 460—469). Réponse (mes. 470—478). Divertissement-développement (mes. 479—532).

RÉEXPOSITION (mes. 533—710)
Th. 1 = A (a+b) (mes. 533—555). Th. d'introduction (mes. 555—568). Th. 1 = Aa alternant avec le Th. d'introduction (mes 569—599). Th. annexe = B (mes. 600—615). Th. 2 = Ab' au ton principal majorisé (mes. 616—633). Lutte modulante entre th. 2 = Ab' et le th. 1 = Aa (mes 634—649).
Progression sur le th. 2 = Ab' (mes. 650—672). Th. d'introduction en valeurs rapides (mes. 673—681). Th. 1 = Aa [mes. 682—699). Th. annexe = B (mes. 700—710).

CODA (mes. 711—760)
Th. nouveau = C (mes. 711—728). Th. 1 = Ab (mes. 729—736).
Th. 1 = Aa (mes. 737—748). Th. d'introduction (mes. 769—760).

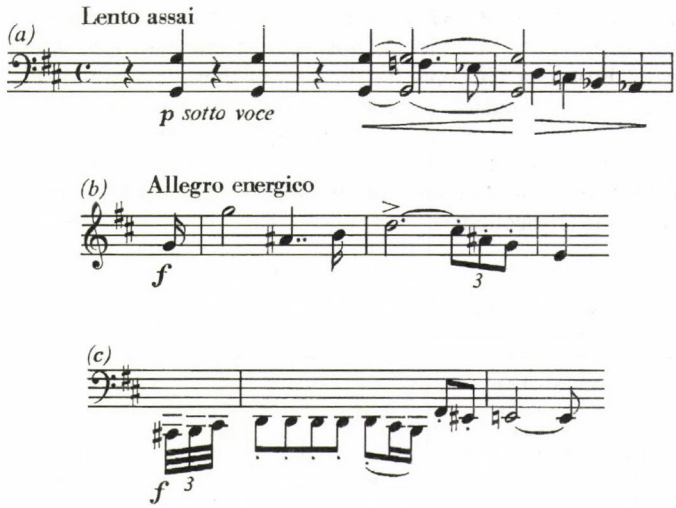
Those who are familiar with this musical structure must look askance at Professor Gut's view of it, which is little short of amazing, and they will doubtless want to take him to task in their own way. For our part we wish to draw attention to two basic misunderstandings on his part. The first concerns the beginning of the Exposition. Gut claims that it commences in measure 8, with the following theme:

Ex. 3



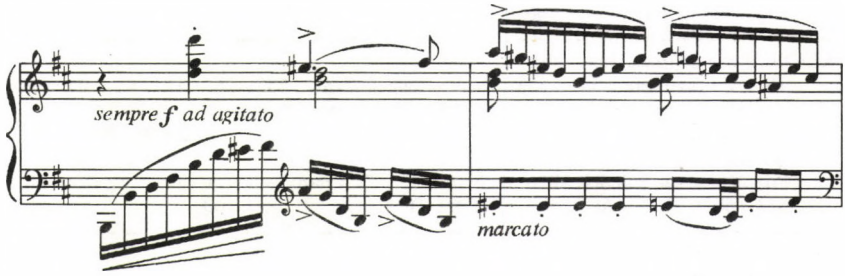
But this is surely still a part of the Introduction in which Liszt unfolds the work's basic ideas, (a), (b), and (c):

Ex. 4



Is it possible that this misunderstanding rests on the simplistic notion that Introductions are supposed to go slow while Expositions are supposed to go fast? The Exposition actually gets underway in measure 32, with the arrival of the home tonic in B minor, a crucial structural juncture which Gut ignores.

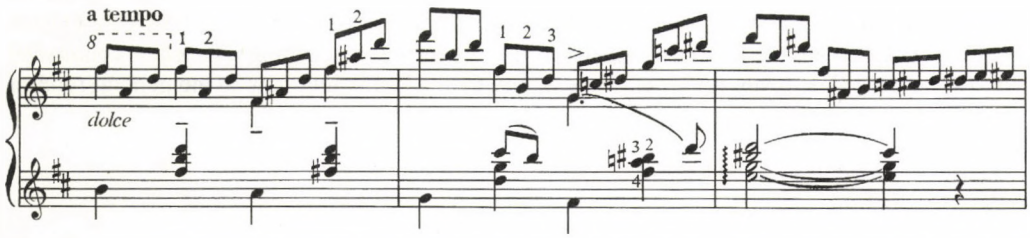
Ex. 5



What makes this musical blunder all the more puzzling is that Gut identifies this very passage as beginning the Recapitulation, in measure 533. But how can a theme that bears the brunt of the Recapitulation *not be present in the Exposition?* It is not for me to resolve this paradox.

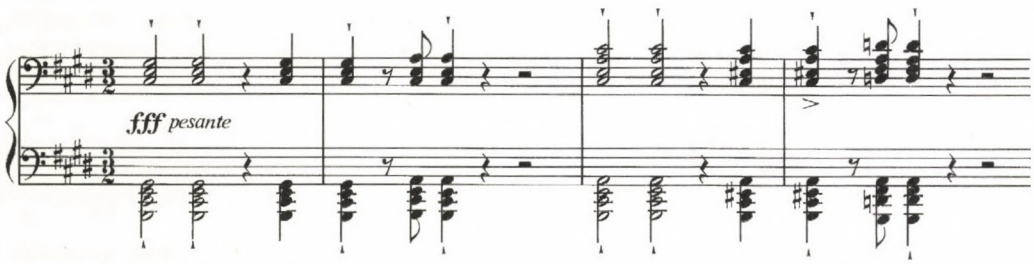
The other matter is still more fundamental. Where does the Development section begin? Gut claims that it begins at measure 171 with the following passage.

Ex. 6



But this is merely an elaboration of the Second Subject which eventually leads into the Closing Theme of the Exposition. (This is not the only time in his book that Gut confuses the *process* of development with Development Sections, which, paradoxically, need not have any development in them at all.) The clue to the problem lies in the so-called "curtain theme" (see Ex. 4 (a)) which Liszt always uses to mark off the important moments in his sonata structure.[14] Follow it through measures 278ff. and the solution becomes clear. If there is one bar where the development section can be said to begin, it is surely here:

Ex. 7



Among the many recent analyses which confirm these views the most thorough is that of Sharon Winklhofer whose foundation study Professor Gut does not seem to know, although it was published ten years ago.[15]

VII

It is a pity that Professor Gut's book was already written before the discovery of the Vatican documents which tell the story of Carolyne's thirteen-year struggle to obtain an annulment of her marriage to Prince Nicholas, and her thwarted wedding to Liszt.[16] As it is, he has had to fall back on a number of legends, including the one that it was Cardinal Antonelli who sent an emissary to San Carlo al Corso, on the eve of Liszt's wedding to Carolyne, and ordered a postponement of the

[14] Theme (a) has often been likened to the descent of a curtain which serves to separate the acts of a drama. It occurs before the second subject and also before the development, and it separates the slow movement from the fugato. Its most notable appearances, of course, are at the very beginning and the very end of the sonata.

[15] Liszt's Sonata *in B minor. A Study of Autograph Sources and Documents.* UMI Research Press, Michigan, 1980.

[16] About fity of these documents were brought to light by me in 1984. Meanwhile more than a hundred others have emerged from the Secret Archive of the Vatican. As announced in previous issues of the Journal of the American Liszt Society, they will all be published by me and my colleague Professor Gabriele Erasmi under the title: "Liszt, Carolyne, and the Vatican documents", in the first half of 1990. Seven of the more important docuements have already appeared in volume Two of my ongoing life of Franz Liszt, "The Weimar Years, 1848—1861", New York and London, 1989, pp. 566—82.

marriage service. We now know that this order came from Cardinal Caterini, head of the Sacred Congregation of Cardinals that had issued Carolyne's annulment in January 1861. Caterini had no choice in this matter. He was forced to act after receiving a crucial letter from Monsignor Gustav Hohenlohe, dated October 18, 1861 — that is, four days before the wedding. The letter is published here for the first time (even reviewers have a duty to add something new to the general fund of knowledge about Liszt).

To the Most Eminent Lord Cardinal
[Prospero] Caterini

The Vatican, October 18, 1861

Most Eminent Prince:

My conscience and sense of duty compel me to ask Your Most Reverend Eminence to deign to grant an audience to the bearers of this letter, the Most Reverend Father Semenenko from St. Claudius in Poland and His Lordship Count Potoczki, who are both known in Poland, as well as in Rome, for their piety and integrity.

They are to speak about a very troublesome marriage case concerning a Princess Wittgenstein Iwanowska and they wish to forestall a great scandal. While I am sure that you will consent to do this favour, I have the great honour of signing myself, as I bend with the greatest respect to kiss Your Most Reverend Eminence's holy purple,

Your humblest, most devoted and obedient servant,
Gustav von Hohenlohe
Archbishop of Edessa[17]

The fact that Gustav Hohenlohe meddled in Carolyne's marriage plans has long been suspected, but the depths of his intrigue here stands revealed.

VIII

From large matters we move to small. There are many factual errors in Professor Gut's book. Individually they do not amount to much, and some of them are no larger than a grain of sand. But taken together they form a massive landslide into error and confusion, and they shake our confidence in his prose. What follows is only a brief selection from the whole.

Thus, Liszt was not present at Tausig's deathbed (p. 212). Nor was Cosima present when the Tonkünstler Versammlung met in Weimar in August 1861 (p. 159). She had been a patient at the Reichenhall sanatorium since June, where she was being treated for tuberculosis. Also, the statement that Cosima never left her mother from her birth is not true. Cosima was placed in the care of a wet-nurse in Genoa, shortly after her birth in December 1837, and she was not picked up again by Marie d'Agoult until October 1839.[18] Marie d'Agoult did not look after any of her three children by Liszt during their infancy.

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[17] Secret Archive of the Vatican Library. English translation by Gabriele Erasmi.

[18] See *Correspondance de Liszt et de Marie d'Agoult*, Vol. I, pp. 262—63, edited by Daniel Ollivier, 2 vols. Paris, 1933, 1934. This letter makes it clear that Marie D'Agoult had journeyed to Genoa, after a long absence from her twenty-two-month-old daughter, for the express purpose of taking her back to Paris.

The account of the meeting of the Tonkünstler Versammlung, which was held in Weimar, in August 1861, is garbled (p. 261). Hans von Bülow conducted the *Faust* Symphony on August 7, not May 6; and Wagner, who was present, left the city on August 10, 1861, not August 9, 1961 [*sic*]. Even allowing for some careless proofreading, this is an unusual muddle for the innocent reader to have to sort out. Carolyne's father died on October 4, 1844, and not in 1843 (p. 123), and her husband, Prince Nicholas already held the rank of captain in the Russian army at the time of his marriage to Carolyne in 1837, and was not promoted to that position in 1842.[19] Moreover, Nicholas was the *fourth* son of Field Marshal Ludwig von Sayn-Wittgenstein, not the fifth, a fact that may be gleaned from the published Wittgenstein genealogy.[20] Pierre Erard died in 1855, not 1865, an error that allows Prof. Gut to bring Erard and Liszt together in Paris for a non-existent social visit in October 1864 (p. 193; see Gut's Index for proof that it is Pierre he has in mind). The name of the Metropolitan Archbishop of St Petersburg who opposed Carolyne's annulment was Ignaz Holowinsky, (1807—1855), not Hotoniewsky (p. 125), an error that Gut appears to have inherited from Raabe. Gut also occasionally misquotes from some of the sources he reproduces. For example, when Liszt and Berlioz were reunited in the latter's home in Paris, in 1861, Gut makes Liszt write: "J'ai diné chez lui avec d'Ortigue, Mme Berlioz et la mére de Berlioz." (p. 45). But the mother of Berlioz had died in 1838. Liszt actually writes "la mère de *Mme* Berlioz" — that is, the Spanish mother of Berlioz's second wife, Marie Recio. And speaking of Berlioz, he did not visit Weimar in 1856, as Gut maintains: in fact it was in 1855 that Berlioz visited the city (for the second "Berlioz week") and discussed with Princess Carolyne the feasibility of an opera on *Les Troyens* (p. 249).

There are a number of observations about the music that also require comment. Gut tells us that the whole-tone ending of the D flat major Concert Study recalls the "mystic atmosphere" of the ending of the "Dante" Sonata (p 296). But the "Dante" Sonata ends very noisily and its whole-tone ending is incomplete. Gut must mean the ending of the Magnificat in the Dante *Symphony*. Likewise he asserts that Doppler's orchestrations of six of the Hungarian Rhapsodies were essentially the work of Liszt himself (p. 304). But can he be sure? In his Last Will and Testament, which Gut reproduces in one of his appendices, Liszt left instructions that "The name Doppler must not be omitted from the title-page, for he has done the work marvellously." If words mean anything at all, Liszt is here telling us that Doppler himself orchestrated these Rhapsodies. If Gut thinks that Liszt is wrong, he must tell us why.

IX

The text is marred throughout by careless proof-reading. Count du Moulin Eckart's name is misspelled (p. 600), as are those of Cornelia Knotik (p. 590), Thalberg (p. 252), Lennart Rabes (p. 213), Oskar Wolff (p. 103), and Count Kálmán Tisza {p. 194). Even the name of Liszt is misspelled four times on one page (the frontispiece). A careful scrutiny of the index reveals the remarkable fact that the number of entries for Gut himself is greater that those of Schumann, Chopin, and Berlioz combined, greater even than that of Richard Wagner.

There is a notable exception to this litany ofwoes, however. By far the best and most accurate section of the book is the Detailed Chronology of the Life (pp. 476—538). It is almost as if it had been compiled by a different hand (sometimes it contradicts the main text), and is beyond question the most useful Chronology to appear in a Liszt biography. In sheer size it amounts to more than

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[19] See La Mara (ed.). *An der Schwelle des Jenseits: Letzte Erinnerungen an die Fürstin Carolyne Sayn Wittgenstein, die Freundin Liszts,* Leipzig, 1925, p. 12; also, La Mara (ed.): *Aus der Glanzzeit der Weimarer Altenburg,* Leipzig, 1906, p. 29.

[20] *Ludwig Adolf Peter, Fürst zu Sayn und Wittgenstein, Kaiserlich Russischer General-Feldmarschal, 1768/69—1843.* Aus seinem Leben von seinem Enkel Alexander Graf von Hachenburg, Prinz zu Sayn und Wittgenstein. Hanover, 1934.

a third of the Life itself (pp. 13—192). Simply to read these pages gives one a remarkable overview of Liszt's extraordinary career. Is it really true, however, that Liszt conducted *Les Préludes* in Vienna on March 6, 1857? All the evidence suggests that he was ill, suffering from boils on his legs and torso, and confined to his bed in the Altenburg. We also take leave to doubt that Eduard Lassen had "just won" a composition prize in Brussels, in 1858; in fact, he won that prize in 1852 (p. 508). As for the *Neue Weimar Verein,* it was founded in November 1854, its first full meeting being called in the Weimar Town Hall on November 27. [21] But these mistakes are exceptions. On the whole the Chronology is remarkably free from error, and it can be recommended to all scholars of the composer's life.

In his bibliography, Gut has provided some personal comments on many of the sources he has used, pointing out to the reader that some books are good, others misguided, and yet others unreliable. This is a dangerous practice, for it invites the question: what will they say of Professor Gut's own book in ten years' time? It is impossible to say, of course. But as a temporary expedient we may invoke Samuel Johnson's famour riposte to a writer who had handed him his manuscript for appraisal: "Your book is both good and original. Unfortunately, what is good is not very original, and what is original is not very good."

X

Today Liszt scholarship stands at the crossroads. Its future never looked brighter. Dozens of gifted young scholars are entering the field (particularly from the Ph.D. programmes at the larger American Universities) and they are exploring the *minutiae* of Liszt's life and work in unheard-of detail. Their contributions will add greatly to our understanding of Liszt and his times. Of course, there is a danger that the field may become unmanageable, so much new information is pouring into it every day. Liszt forsaw this problem as early as 1881 when he warned his first biographer Lina Ramann "Do not entangle yourself in too many details". But even he could not have guessed that a hundred years later the thicket would have turned into a dense jungle. And here is the chief problem facing the modern biographer, the problem with which we began this review: how to remain true to the facts while writing a readable narrative.

Apart from the ongoing Complete Edition of Liszt's works, which we have already mentioned, there are two other great tasks which still require to be accomplished. The first is a Complete Thematic Catalogue, giving historical, biographical, and analytical information about each manuscript source. The second is a Complete Edition of Liszt's letters, free from the editorial censorship that has marred his published correspondence in the past. Both these projects are now at the planning stage, with committees made up of scholars from several different countries. We wish these projects well, for they will undoubtedly carry Liszt scholarship into the twenty-first century. Let us hope that they will be willingly supported by everyone, free from the in-fighting and struggles for national priorities that have marred similar enterprises in the past.

[21] An account of the proceedings will be found in Adelheid von Schorn's *Das Nachklassische Weimar,* vol. 2, p. 40, Weimar, 1912. See also Hoffmann von Fallersleben's *Mein Leben: Aufzeichnungen und Erinnerungen,* vol. 6, pp. 32—33, Hanover, 1868.

ANDRÁS FODOR

Bartók's years of exile

Tibor Tallián: Bartók fogadtatása Amerikában 1940–45 (Bartók's Reception in America 1940–45). Editio Musica, Budapest, 1988. 271 pp.

"...he has even received a degree *honoris causa* from Columbia University, like the employment of Stravinsky at Harvard or Schoenberg at University of California Los Angeles, a rare example of the tentative appreciation of music by educators." These hopeful lines are from an article Peter Yates, one of Bartók's well–intentioned propagandists, wrote in the spring of 1941.

For quite some time we lived under the illusion that the United States, having fortunately weathered the Second World War, not only served as a Noah's Ark for the intellectual élite of Europe who were forced to emigrate, but, through its varied and generous system of institutions, also ensured a proper standard of life for them. Meanwhile we have discovered even the lives of the three composeres Yates mentioned were not easy, though it was they who exerted the profoundest influence on 20th century music. Each of them had to fight in his own way to assert himself under changing, often oppressive and bitter, conditions of exile. In the spring of 1941, the time of the above quotation, Bartók, for instance, wrote to his elder son in Budapest, referring to his 60th birthday: "Apart from five telegraphic greetings, nobody cared about the 25th."

In 1940, the audience in Carnegie Hall gave a stormy ovation, rising to the white–haired, frail man, but it took no more than four years for Bartók, just recovering after an illness to fulminate: "I have to pay tax on the ASCAP pittance; I was not prepared for such an ugly trick. Just let anyone come to me in this cursed country, wanting to have me treated at his own expense, I'll kick him out... They ought to know what I have known ever since the autumn of 1941, that I am unable to live in this country. In this country... *lasciate ogni speranza.*"

It is time to familiarise ourselves with these five years, full of contradictions and burdened with a fatal disease. So far our knowledge has been confined to the published correspondance, contemporary reminiscences, a novellistic account by Agatha Fassett, a friend of the Bartóks, *The Naked Face of Genius,* 1958, and a work by the Belgian Yves Lenior, *Vie et oeuvre de Béla Bartók aux États–Unis d'Amerique (1940–1945),* 1986. Bartók's Harvard lectures and the introductions he wrote to his ethnomusicological work in America will be included in the series planned to run into eight volumes and launched in 1989, *Bartók Béla írásai* (Béla Bartók's Writings).

Tallián, the author of the most recent important book *Béla Bartók,* (1981), has now undertaken to scour the last five years of the composer. He writes on the reception Bartók the composer and performer was given in America,

Tallián in fact continues the work of János Demény, whom he styles "Bartók's lone prophet". Demény collected and published more than a thousand of Bartók's letters, and, between 1954 and 1962, issued, on some 1,500 close–spaced pages of the large–format volumes of *Zenetudományi Tanulmányok,* practically all the concert reviews and polemic writings concerning Bartók the composer which had appeared in Hungary and abroad.

Tallián continues the list of Bartók's works, presenting the written documents about the American reception of Bartók the composer: 300 reviews and 100 other articles, including record and score reviews of the time.

Although the collection of the publications cannot be taken as complete it has achieved its goal in essence. Unburdened by superfluos data and linking comments, the texts provide a detailed overall picture of Bartók's years in America, of which we only had sketchy knowledge, and should any further reviews or reflections emerge these are not likely to modify this picture in any major way.

Tallián arranges his material into separate accounts that can be projected on each other. Bartók's personal appearances, the programmes of these events, and the reviews of them, supplemented with the

András Fodor, *a poet, has published widely on 20th century music, including books on Bartók and Stravinsky.*

names of the other artists having appeared at the concerts, and their location, are classified in a first group. This he follows up with reviews of the relevant records and scores, articles in the press, and, in conclusion, he sums up the reception given to Bartók's orchestral and chamber music works performed by musicians other than the composer himself.

János Breuer, one of Tallián's critics, argues that in the possession of such a quantity of material Tallián could have easly written a sizeable book on the subject. Tallián, however, in all probability was determined to stick to the discipline of scholarly documentation when he concentrated into an introduction of fifty pages all his newly gained knowledge about the final period of "this struggle against poverty, indifference and illness", which adds much to the already known facts of Bartók's life. But he is here as objective as in his book, eschewing all prejudice, comparing a multiplicity of points of view, starkly pinpointing the dramatic crises.

Tallián arrives at some shocking conclusions. Bartók, who had previously lived in security and sufficiency, was never engaged in America on longer than six month contracts; in early years there, his income from royalites was trivial; between 1939 and 1943 he composed nothing; after the Coolidge Foundation's Festival in the spring of 1940, he had no opportunity for any appearance on a reputable concert platform; his fee for an appearance was often no more than a mere $ 150 to 200, and by the beginning of 1942, his performing career had bottomed. "Just as if we were the last of the last pianists," he wrote to his pupil, Wilhelmine Creel, about a joint appearance with his wife. We also learn that after its first performance in November 1940, and a radio performance that followed, his Sonata for Two Pianos, which he performed with his wife Ditta Pásztory, was not publicly performed for many a year, and that the concerto version of the piece, with orchestral accompaniment, was a failure after the first performance. ("The work is an ode to futility," wrote the critic of *The New York Herald Tribune*.)

It is common knowledge that Bartók the ethnomusicologist was given a commission by Columbia University to last two years, to arrange Parry's Serbian folk song collection. Tallián sees this as an opening towards Eastern Europe, as a "symbolic way out". And he adds that, after the expiration of this commission, Bartók would have had an opportunity for Amerindian folk–music research at Washington University in Seattle. He would have received support for this if only he had abandoned his Eastern–Europe–centred approach. Bartók, however, appeared to prefer a fatal escape into illness.

His deteriorating state of health forced Bartók to abandon his lectures at Harvard. Tallián gives a dramatically concise summary of the well–organized rallying of his friends, which brought him back once again from the threatening final physical collapse and saved the wasting genius. His admirers circulated a letter calling for donations from American patrons of art. He establishes that Koussevitzky commissioned the Concerto thanks to József Szigeti's urgent entreaties.

Starting with the autumn of 1943, there was an improvement in Bartók's standing as a composer and even in his financial circumstances, but Tallián points out that in actual fact he still lived on charity. "The surviving members of his family were in need of charity." He bluntly states, avoiding all euphemisms, about the circumstances of his death that "they were as unworthy of his genuis as Mozart's."

The reader learns of many more distressing facts, as for example the ironical rejection by *Musical America* of an article by the musicologist Ottó Gombosi, who wrote on Bartók in an analytical but over–enthusiastic manner. It is also true, despite the post–1943 friendlier atmosphere, that no serious writing on Bartók appeared anywhere in America. The *Musical Quarterly* carried articles on Sibelius, Shostakovich, Schoenberg, Hindemith, Milhaud, and Martinu, and even on composers such as Revueltas or Grechaninov, but left Bartók's oeuvre unmentioned.

Between 1940 and 1945, *Music for Stringed Instruments, Percussion and Celesta* was performed just once and it attracted no real attention. Being a work of an epochal significance, he wonders what explains this incomprehension vis à vis a seminal work? Tallián finds a witty answer to this: American orchestras were reluctant to perform a work that disposed with the services of half their members, and that it "lacks spectacular romanticism (both externally and internally), that flaring rhetoric which lulls the music lover hurrying to the cloak–room in such a comfortable daze."

The recovery of Bartók's creative force, his encounter with Yehudi Menuhin, and the successes of his Violin Concerto and the Concerto appear as positive features in this distressing picture. The Violin Concerto had seven performances, while the Concerto was discussed in 26 reviews, quoted in the last chapter of the book.

Even in the grip of indifference and his fatal illness, Bartók was fully aware of his own importance. His account to Wilhelmine Creel at the end of 1942, betrays overtones of pride: "my career as a composer is as much as finished: the quasi boycott of my works by the leading orchestras continues, no performances either of old work(s) or of new ones. It is a shame—not for me, of course." Tallián refers to letters by Bartók to Wilhelmine Creel and József Szigeti to persuade the reader how sensitively the

composer was affected by press criticism. All in all, the documents in this volume tell much about the conditions of his creative attitude. It is well worth to study them according to certain symptoms and works. "Austrian Musicians Present Violin–Piano Recital There" is the title of an article in the *Pittsburgh Press,* about Béla Bartók's and Ferenc Arányi's sonata recitals on April 18th 1940. Bartók's homeland is mistaken in Chicago as well, where he is said to be a fellow countryman of Mestrovic, who had died recently. Reed Hynds, a critic from St Louis, feels that the adagio of the *Divertimento* is "dour with Slavic melancholy".

In his book, *Bartók stílusa* (Bartók's Style), Ernő Lendvai discussed the intellectual content of the Sonata for two pianos. He describes the Basle first performance of the work in 1938 as a major musical event in the Europe of the day. And indeed, the Bartók couple performed it in Budapest, London, Amsterdam, Zurich, Lausanne, Geneva, Venice, and Paris, as well as during their last European concert season of 1938–9. János Gergely, who attended the Paris performance, writes about "prolonged thunderous applause". And this was not Hungarian prejudice. Florent Schmitt had this to say about the performance in Gaveau Hall: "This work bears the token of rhythm. This, however, does not exclude the exquisiteness of this music. It is music of passionate inspiration, tragic in its self–imposed restlessness; its crescendoes being always feverish and never leading to satisfaction, with the dizziness of their crudity carrying us, in fright and rapture, towards beauty, to abandon us at last breathless and exhausted. Before we surrender, we are granted by life's last quiver to express our gratitude to the great musician for having torn us to shreds in such a wonderful, heavenly manner." The Hungarian translation of this review, which appeared in *Le Temps,* about the first Paris performance of the work on February 27, 1939, features among the documents published by János Demény.

Yet scarcely a year and a half later, critics listening to the same music overseas, wrote some disparaging reviews: "Mr Bartók is a clever musician but his self-imposed barriers against emotional expression became a trying handicap after a few minutes. One began to hanker after melody, after passion, reflection and even after charm. And when it comes to ingenuity in rhythms, our own jazz boys can turn a trick or two which the serious modern composers of our day cannot think up." (*New York Post,* Samuel Chotzinoff). "Mr Bartók eschews a tune like a blight" (*New York World–Telegram*). "The sonata, sounded like a piano conservatory trickling sweetly above the din of a well–oiled, distant boiler works." (*Time*). Louis Biancolli, the critic of the *New York World–Telegram,* was also prompted to sneering wisecracks about the Sonata's orchestral version, conducted by Fritz Reiner: "Béla Bartók, mild–mannered mogul of Magyar rhythms, joined his demure young wife, Ditta, in rattling off the barbaric strains of his own Concerto for Two Pianos and Orchestra. The use of percussion is uncanny in scope, the whole piece at times sounding like a grim ode in giant drum beats." And if some simple souls were to consider that *Contrast* (which had its first performance in America in 1938), performed by highly popular interpreters, had fared better, they would be greatly mistaken. "Keyed up by the announcement that a monarch of swing, Benny Goodman, was to play "classical" music, and perhaps also by the prospect of hearing the well–known Hungarian composer, Béla Bartók, perform his own works, Mr Richmond's subscribers thronged Gordon Hall last night for a concert which must have given them a rude shock. They heard probably the driest program that has been presented in Gordon Hall this season." (*Boston Evening Transcript,* Edward Downes). Tallián is understandably surprised why it did not occour to anybody, except the Boston impressario, to present this trio of Szigeti, Goodman and Bartók again. Boosey and Hawkes had published the score and it was also available on a Columbia record already in 1940. The critics, however, struck a different note. "Sour–puss music, which sounds to the musically unsophisticated like a disillusioned portrait of the day after the world is bombed out of existence." (Henry W. Simon). "I cannot share the opinion held in some quarters that Bartók is a composer of first importance. Some of his works in the smaller forms are of momentary interest, but his ideas are not of sufficient weight to vitalise his large–scale efforts." (*New York Herald Tribune,* Jerome D. Bohm). But Colin McPhee, who also featured at one of Bartók's concerts as a composer, with one of his own works, and who had some reservations to make in connection with the score of *Contrasts,* was unequivocally enthusiastic about the recording: "He is extremely interested in the quality of his music. His search after these most refined highly individual timbres inevitably succeeds. His form is ingenious and perfect as a bird–cage made by a Chinese craftsman." In October 1944, an anonymous reviewer made amends in the periodical, *Listen* : "It is a shame that the major companies have not gotten around to an extensive recording of both Bartók, the pianist, and Bartók, the composer."

The performances of the Divertimento, the Violin Concerto, played by Spivakovsky and Yehudi Menuhin, of the Sonata for Solo Violin, commissioned by Menuhin, and the Concerto had a much better press. Alfred Frankenstein, who in Tallián's judgement came closest to understanding Bartók's genius, reviewed the Bartók recital of Mikrocosmos

in Oakland with really profound arguments for "the concentrated beauty and intensity" of the composer's music, was not left alone in his well–meant campaigning. "The most distinguished new work of the season," wrote Henry Pleasant on the Divertimento and, in another article on the work, he added that "the work is so compact and logical and so devoid of any of the obvious tricks of public ear–tickling that a cetain delay may be anticipated for the popularity it is bound to achieve eventually. American audiences are not accustomed to this sort of thing. They have been brought up on Brahms, Wagner and Strauss..."

Some of the reviews describe the Violin Concerto as being a near–masterpiece. But while one of them praises the "beautiful cantabile sound", the other speaks of "brain music", the "wild tam–tam of ancient Hungarian folk music". In San Francisco the Solo Sonata was considered magnificent, while in Chicago they thought that even Menuhin could not raise the performance to any sort of impressive experience. Disparaging views were expressed about the performance in Carnegie Hall as well. Virgil Thomson spoke of "the modern music of yesteryear". Nonetheless, praise had become louder: "Extraordinary...", "modernity and perfection hand in hand", "delightful". The radiation of Menuhin's power can be felt behind all this.

Of the chorus of praise for the Concerto let me mention Jerome D. Bohm, who in earlier writings, quoted above, disagreed with those who thought of Bartók as a composer of importance. This is what he wrote on January 11 1945: "The Elegy with its affectingly plangent content and luminously flickering scoring, are among the most poignant pages in present–day music, and moved me more than anything I have heard since Alban Berg's *Wozzeck*." He sadly noted the cold reception the outstanding work was given by the public. Of the Boston critics, who had earlier spoken of "cruel disappointment", Rudolf Elie now almost asked the composer that he should not despair if audiences, unfamiliar with his music, do not take him to their bosom. The concerto proved to be a breakthrough. Tallián refers to the Boosey and Hawkes catalogue, according to which in 1948 the Concerto was performed on 49 occasions throughout the world.

The last concerts in America, whose notices Bartók could be familiar with in principle, were the Chicago performances of the Violin Concerto by violinists John Weicher and Desiré Defauw. It is not really surprising to find two reviews side by side, one going into raptures and the other starting out by saying that the orchestra disintegrated. "There was little if any cumulative interest. Each theme, of which there was variety enough, stood in its tracks, turning more or less aimlessly around its axis." Three years later, I heard some self–important music lovers expressing similar sniffing views in the foyer of the Városi Színház in Budapest during the intermission of the first Bartók Festival held in Hungary: "Eighteen violin concertos could have been written out of this material..."

Strangely enough, a Chicago critic made some supercilious remarks already at the performance of the Sonata No. 1 for violin and piano (of which John Cage later said "it makes for dreams and visions") saying that Bartók joins the composers who, after the Great War, deliberately write unbearable music.

This book, which has much to tell us in every way, rather bears out (even in the interviews it includes) how Bartók, having crossed the Atlantic, became more and more reticent and timid to the point of rudeness. But if one pays proper attention, it also turns out that nevertheless America did not turn into a fatal waste land for the composer dying in the awareness of exile. After all, one could hardly find in Europe any expression of such a far–sighted confidence in him as formulated in 1942 by Peter Yates, whom I quoted early on in this article. "His music requires a close understanding, preparation. It does not wear out: this genius... He will stand for our century, for the best and for the dread in it, caught between nature and the precise machine."

And it may even be taken as symbolic that, on March 19th 1944, the day the *Wehrmacht* marched into Hungary, there was somebody, the anonymous critic of *Musical America* who, listening to the repeated laments of farewell to the homeland in the String Quartet No. 6 at a New York concert by the Kolisch Quartet (to whom the work had been dedicated), wrote in his brief notice: "With the passage of years, this composer will grow higher and higher, because he has written his music for eternity and not for the fashion of the moment."

TAMÁS KOLTAI

The taming of reality

Shakespeare productions

Shakespeare productions in recent years have often incorporated political messages, even more often they have raised questions of historical philosophy, something encouraged by Jan Kott's theory of the Great Mechanism. With a slight exaggeration it might even be said that directors have entrusted to Shakespeare the messages which contemporary plays could not, or did not dare, to transmit.

Now that political openness has reached the theatre as well, those messages do not need to be wrapped up into classical drama. This does not mean, however, that Shakespeare has ceased to be our contemporary, merely that the perspective becomes wider. *The Comedy of Errors,* in the studio theatre of the Csiky Gergely company of Kaposvár, bears all the marks of a political parable and a pamphlet; it sharply differs from the customary treatment of dramatic material. The title of the production directed by János Mohácsi is a "postmodern" parapharase of the title proper, which does not lend itself to translation. The production is a kind of montage, with borrowed texts, insertions and other dramaturgical cheek, which are built on the original Shakespearean logic of the lost personality, but with a basic difference in view–point: they substitute the farcical situation with a socially determined tragic situation. Here Ephesus appears as a computerized police state, where personal data are fed in and continously checked by the authorities. A few years ago, this would have been treated as an allegory, overburdened with symbols, now it has become a delirious vision, a profane frenzy, a satire of social disorder based on absurd logic. The black box of the tiny stage is peopled with shady characters, whose identity and status remains uncertain throughout, they are at the mercy of—to use a term of the Russian satirical playwright Suhovo–Kobilin—the untraceable laws of "mechanization". What happens when underworld Grand Guignol is raised to the rank of legalized social norm—this is what the tragic–grotesque play is about.

Many considered the production of The *Comedy of Errors* in the Budapest Madách Theatre as an error. This is, like the Kaposvár version, also a paraphrase and a gesture towards a world outlook, it is, one might say, a *musical* comedy of errors, in accordance with the fashionable requirements of that genre. One can object only to the production and not the genre. Of course, the production in the Madách lacks that cheek which has managed to create a bizarre distance from the classic original in Kaposvár. The Kaposvár production presents an ostensively provincial, East Central European Ephesus. In Tamás Szirtes's production at the Madách, the cosmopolitan Szentendre–Ephesus (Szentendre is a small picturesque town on the Danube north of Budapest) lacks irony. It presents a world of up–market boutiques, which would be justified only if quality were present not only in Shakespeare's text but also in the material into which it had been embedded—the borrowed poetry, the songs, the scenery, and the acting. Successful Shakespeare musicals once blended cheerful disrespect for the author with a new, quality genre; usually both had some sharp comments to make. The musical Shakespeare adaptations of the 1950s and 1960s stated generation conflicts, adopted the spirit of the students's movements, from *West Side Story* to *Two Gentlemen of Verona,* and with the passage of these movements no major adaptations have appeared any more. The Shakespeare boutique at the Madách Theatre does what most private boutiques in Hungary do: it sticks the original British label onto mediocre Hungarian goods.

Hungarian reality leaks through the production of *Julius Caesar* in the Radnóti Theatre in Budapest. Indeed not only present–day reality, but that of the past century as well. The director, Péter Valló, has tried his hand at something truly post–modern and it has nearly come off. He took a major risk in superimposing different ages and stylistic layers. The performance can serve as a model on which to assess the

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change in approach to staging Shakespeare. *Julius Caesar* is a political drama par excellence, about the making and breaking of temporary alliances of interests, in an explosive situation of tension threatening civil war. Brutus, an idealist insisting on fair play, becomes involved in a political coup, of which he becomes the leader before disintegrating between the pincers of honourable fellow combatants, slick self–asserters and those out for what they can get. Should Valló have staged the play with a direct purpose in mufti, perhaps within the walls of an office, he would have won his case. But he also used in the production the heat of Mihály Vörösmarty's 150–year–old translation, and drew a parallel between the pre–revolution mood of the past century and today's danger of explosion. By so doing, he projected no less than four dimensions upon each other: ancient Rome, Shakespeare's Renaissance, the 19th century Reform Age in Hungary, and the present. This has proved irresolvable both stylistically and conceptually.

Paradoxically, a Julius Caesar in modern dress and directly modernised, which conservative taste would have condemned no end, would be much closer to Shakespeare's original, which knows no historical approach, than this approach based on a system of mirrors of historical parallels. Of course, the treatment would not have been without interest had it been realized. But Valló loaded a good many further burdens on the brittle construction: double casts, actresses in boys' parts, and various stage devices. Nonetheless, one is left with a pronounced impression of sudden outbursts of typically Hungarian enthusiasm, a group of conspiratiors lurking in the dark, the members of which—just as in *Bánk Bán,* the classical Hungarian national drama—do not know what they ought to do. If one wants to sum up the production, the conceptual strand snaps, the chain of scenes breaks, and all that remains is a stage effect: the metaphor of collapse.

If one looks for a political model, there is *Antony and Cleopatra,* which formulates the loathing for political manipulations as well. The drama of Antony's escape from public into private life, continues the drama of Brutus. Placing the two tragedies side by side provides a graphic example for Jan Kott's theory of the Great Mechanism. The Antony who buries Caesar, marshalling all the resources of political manipulation through sleek demagogy, appears in *Antony and Cleopatra* as a weary, disillusioned statesman. But György Lengyel's production in the Pécs National Theatre does not start out from this, it starts from the two principals. Both of them represent a somewhat high–flown style, heated from within. They present aging, romantic lovers, inflammable wolves of Rome. It is just as hard to visualize such an Antony as a great statesman as it is to see such a Cleopatra as a great queen. Still, a production might be based on such a concept. In that case it would have to underline the contrast between a dissolute private life in Egypt and the rigorous public life of Rome. But this solution would call for more than a revolving stage, with white sets in Rome and striped ones in Egypt. It would require more resolution from the director, more scenic power and more vitality to burn the production into one that allows some interpretation instead of leaving the audience at the mercy of a recitation of blank verse.

Under–interpretation also marks the *As You Like It* in the Hevesi Sándor Theatre of Zalaegerszeg. Imre Halasi's production cannot be blamed for using an analysis that differs from the traditions, much rather for a complete lack of analysis. It is difficult to stage this play without presenting in it, in some way or other, the inversion, or at least the interchangeability of sexual roles. From this point of view it is worth compairing the Zalaegerszeg production with the *Twelfth Night, or What You Will* at the Katona József Theatre in Budapest, diretred by Gábor Zsámbéki. Both comedies are built on the same basic situation, the upsetting of the psychological and biological homeostasis of a girl disguised as a boy, the confusion of sense. In *As You Like It,* this analysis, which radically expands the potentials inherent in the roles, can in principle be eschewed, and a traditional, comedy–centred aproach may content itself with the exploitation of the humorus situation, in which Orlando enters into the game and passes time by courting Rosalind in her boy's clothes. In this interpretation, sexuality can be eliminated from the relationship of Orlando and Rosalind. In the case of *Twelfth Night,* this is inconceivable, since Olivia falls in love with Viola, who acts as a page to Duke Orsino.

Jan Kott's essay analyses both plays by approaching the roles from an androgynous view of sex. Accordingly, Rosalind and Viola are mannish girls who in their disguise look like girl–like boys, which leads to the misleading of their partners. It seems, however, that the directors of the two plays in question have found this ambiguity of Kott's much too unambiguous to base their approach on it. Halasi has not only swept sexuality from *As You Like It,* but even the breeches part, itself either as a possibility for comic acting or as a factor leading to sexual inhibition. Zsámbéki essentially does the same, with the difference that Halasi does not give anything instead; at least not until the closing scene, when it turns out that, instead of the interchangeability of the sexual roles, he has been interested in the interchangeability of the power roles. To arrive at this conclusion, some five sixths of *As You Like It* seems to have been superfluous.

Viola in the *Twefth Night* of the Katona József Company does not live through the uncertainty of her

sexual role, and, consequently, the biological disorder that would concern most of the actors, does not run through the production. Here the uncertainty is more deeply rooted: it is a question of uncertainty of existence. It concerns more hidden and secret paths in the search for one's self, which cannot be described as a from of sexual or a social crisis. One can feel in this production that the staging of Shakespeare, and theatre in general, would like to go beyond the demand for moral usefulness or political outspokennes. This is most topical right now when the euphoria of the unexpected freedom of speech has swept over the Hungarian theatre, bringing along rough and ready successes and political allegories that have survived in the repertoire from the past. In such a situation, all that can be done is to return to more general human questions which will not be left behind by day–by–day changes in reality.

Twelfth Night is such a production, even if it is hard to analyse it. Uncertainties, desires and amorphous sentiments seeth away in the characters. As if all of us were yearning for things good and fair but *are* full of fear, anguish and doubt, and do not even know whether we really want what we want. The plot repeats this situation of stalemate on several planes, just to leave us with all the more opportunities for meditating on it. The production does not try to dissolve our feeling of uncertainty, and even overclouds somewhat the union of Viola and Orsino, and of Olivia and Sebastian. At the end Olivia looks back with sorrow upon her lost Viola, and Orsino also bids a nostalgic farewell to Olivia, whom he has already become accustomed to as object of his hapless desire.

A similar thought is raised in the Nyiregyháza production of *The Merry Wives of Windsor*. Tibor Csizmadia's production has met a rather meagre response. This is no wonder since it contradicts the audience's conditioned expectations. Audiences are accustomed to, and expect the humorous mockery of old pot–bellied, dissolute Sir John Falstaff. They expect him to be crammed into a laundry basket, see him in the tavern scene with wine trickling down his moustance, they expect termagants, chase and, in the last act, a mountain of fat ornamented with stag horns, pinched by a host of children. But here they get nothing of the kind. Instead of Renaissance interiors, stage–hands shift loathsome wooden appliances, as if one were attending a morning rehearsal. The costumes have not been completed, only indicating what they will look like. Everything is semi–finished, uncertain and unsettled. This holds true for the human psyche as well.

In the case of most Shakespeare comedies, one is no longer surprised to find that gaiety turns to gloom, and a measure of gloomy philosophy is settling on the plot. *The Merry Wives of Windsor* seems to be less suited for such a tragi–comic refraction. Csizmadia does not force a "concept" on the story, but his wry idea keeps back some of Falstaff's exaggerated physical capacity and opposes the normal vital forces of a healthy physique with the lurking experiences of failure of most of the characters. Frustration is evident not only in the comic characters, but in Ford's degenerate jealousy, Page's asexuality, and the eventless marriages of both. In a moment of exposure, the bored Mistress Ford and Mistress Page have themselves scorched in their provocative game with Falstaff. They have not reckoned with this, as so far they had no part in this kind of virility. So Falstaff's rebuke turns into a lesson on love for the wiley women, at the end of which the pot–bellied philanderer, against his wishes, leads them back to their husbands. The "family photo" that closes the production, with the young, romantic duo of Anna and Fenton also joining in, catches an inspired moment of the life of the instincts restored.

Othello, as directed by János Ács in Kaposvár, takes audiences into the suspicious labyrinth of instincts. Contrary to the Windsor night, resolved in harmony, here disharmony prevails. Male rivalry, fanned by racist prejudice, and male friendship turn into mutual hatred, at one point even giving way to homoerotic instinct. And here too, frustration seems to be a decisive factor. In this Othello intellectual superiority only serves as a compensation for his inferiority complex. It is not to know whether his conjugal relationship, in which eroticism does not fire a single moment of the time he spends in Desdemona's company, does not conceal a hidden failure. Having been passed over for promotion, Iago's life is a downright failure. So who would not suspect a sexual repression, when witnessing the sence in which Iago and Desdemona, both in the paroxysm of their seperate, private passions, embrace in an aggressive kiss.

The three protagonists of the Kaposvár *Othello* could well attend Freudian psychoanalysis sessions. Presumably all three suffer acute neurosis. Cassio alone is healthy. But who would dream of writing a play about Cassio?

Heidegger's future timeliness

Between November 2 and 4 1989, a German–Hungarian philosophy symposium was held at the Hungarian Academy of Sciences on the occasion of the 100th anniversary of the birth of Martin Heidegger. I took the opportunity to discuss Heidegger's contribution to philosophy with some of the participants: Hans–Georg Gadamer, Heidegger's disciple, at close to ninety, the doyen amongst German philosophers; Otto Pöggeler, director of the Hegel Archives in Bochum, editor of *Hegel–Studien,* and Wilhelm von Herrmann, editor of Heidegger's collected works and of *Heidegger–Studien.*

I.M.F.: *Heidegger is considered one of the greatest thinkers of our century, or perhaps even the greatest. What in your opinion is the importance of Heidegger's thinking? Heidegger has not left behind a closed system, and not infrequently he is accused of having devoted himself to the "destruction" of traditional philosophy.*

GADAMER: The century itself has answered the question of Heidegger's importance. It is certain that there has not been a German thinker since Nietzsche who attracted so much attention and who at the same time represented such a big challenge as Heidegger did. How can this influence be explained? By Heidegger's entirely unusual relationship to language, I should say. You are justified in asking whether his whole oeuvre is on the destruction of concepts. This is certainly not so; this only makes sense if it serves a definite purpose. For Heidegger "destruction" did not mean destruction proper, but a winding down, a dismantling—a dismantling of what had become rigid, petrified, scabby, that which was no longer alive.

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PÖGGELER: The phenomenology founded by Husserl exercises a decisive influence upon today's philosophy the world over. This philosophy became destiny for Heidegger, inasmuch as he fundamentally transformed this philosophy. He was also receptive to questions which were raised by the other schools — mainly to questions concerning time. In connection with world history, Hegel was still satisfied with 6000 years, which he referred teleologically to eternity. This old interpretation of time was destroyed in its foundations by the cosmology and historiography of the 19th century. Could philosophy still speak of an essentiality of universal validity amidst the relativity of history and time? This question was put differently by Dilthey and Bergson, and it was their attempts that Heidegger developed into his own question concerning Being and Time. Thus he linked the most timely to the most ancient by the concentration of philosophy on the question of Being — and he did so in an entirely systemic sense, intending to establish a new starting point and a new logic for philosophy.

VON HERRMANN: Heidegger is undoubtedly one of the most important thinkers of our century. His name must be mentioned beside those of Husserl, Scheler, Jaspers, and Wittgenstein. The critical notice of Heidegger's thinking is world wide. In the year of the 100th anniversary of his birth, symposia are held all over the world, some 70 to 100. But his greatness can only be judged by studying the ideas themselves. Heidegger was not merely able to formulate the questions of European philosophy (the questions concerning man, the world, space, time, justice) in a new form, but he was able to surpass the traditional field of philosophy in a dimension allowing the traditional question to be formulated and answered more originally. Heidegger differs from Husserl, Jaspers or Wittgenstein inasmuch as he took philosophy into a new dimension, which he opened up. This entitles us in the last resort to compare his greatness to that of Descartes, Kant or Hegel. What

Heidegger calls"destruction" in *Sein und Zeit*, does not mean the destruction or rejection of tradition, it implies a positive critique, in the sense of a phenomenological approach to those original experiences from which traditional thinkers had taken their objectiual insights and conceptual definitions. This critique has made possible an entirely new approach to the tradition. Heidegger did not establish a system in a strict modern sense of the term. It was precisely because the system of reason characteristic of the modern age was also an object of his critique that he was not to conceive one. Nevertheless, although his thinking does not constitute a system, it is fundamentally systematic.

PÖGGELER: Heidegger gave a decisive impetus, but his views need not be adopted as a whole. Heidegger often discussed things with the physicist Werner Heisenberg. Nevertheless, Heisenberg clearly and decisively rejected Heidegger's alleged destruction of Platonic ideas, pointing out that a physicist was certainly not in search of a metaphysical key to the world, as Heidegger had assumed. He rather seeks only to conceive some aspects of reality in a picture–writing in which the Platonic ideal is continued, but which is also near to works of art and must not be reduced to a pragmatic appraisal. I myself believe that this criticism by Heisenberg is sound, even if it does not touch on Heidegger's essence.

I.M.F.: *What is it that is basically involved in Heidegger's thinking: Being, or perhaps the homelessness of modern man? What is it that we can learn from him in the last resort? A certain doctrine concerning Being, or the different ways of raising the question of Being—perhaps a new kind of rigour in thinking?*

GADAMER: What can we learn from Heidegger? Not what Being is, nor which roads lead to it, but first of all and primarily: to think. That when we use words and create concepts, we should see before our eyes what is involved. Heidegger's thoughts again and again lead to concreteness. In this respect there was some similarity between him and Wittengstein's metaphors, or Lao–tse and Chinese discourse: here one is able to see something even in a short text, without being able to tell exactly what it is.

VON HERMANN: Heidegger elaborated the question of Being in a systematic form in two ways: first in a fundamentaly ontological way in *Sein und Zeit*, and in his 1927 related university lecture, and in the posthumosly published *Beiträge zur Philosophie*, which has just appeared but which was written between 1936 and 1938. Both approaches involved the same thing: the meaning of Being. Through the first elaboration this meaning appears as time, and in the second as the historic essence of being, as an *Ereignis* (event). The homelessness of modern man, manifesting itself in the age of the unlimited domination of technology, is contemplated by Heidegger in connection with the epochal occuring of Being, as the *Seinsverlassenheit des Seienden* (the abandonment of Being by that which is).

I.M.F.: The relationship of Heidegger to national socialism is today again the object of keen controversy. If we speak about the link between the philosopher and politics, then it is of course natural to view it against a broader context and think also of the Marxist philosophers.

PÖGGELER: In our century various revolutions have occured, which finally led to the murder of millions of people. The darkest and most unsucessful role — which was accompanied also by the basest crimes — was played by Hitler. That Heidegger, at least for a short time, indentified Hitler as a future which would bring redemption, indeed compromises his philosophy. But those compromise themselves no less who nowadays only warm up the old ideological conflicts, and wish to discredit other philosophers. It is indeed true that György Lukács was involved in politics more deeply, and over a longer period of time, than Heidegger, and Adorno's praise of Göbbels's realism, published in 1934, is also a good indication of the situation at the time, which many were unable to judge properly. But Lukács's errors, or Adorno's political blindness, are taboos for present discussion. That this is unnecessary, is shown by an article by Ernst Bloch's son, which discusses his father's political involvements. Apology or accusation are not the issue. It is, rather, to come to terms with the past by knowing how it all came about for this alone allows us to learn from past errors and remain unaffected by them.

I.M.F.: *"The timeliness of Heidegger's philosophy." This was the title of a conference held in Bonn this year. How can this timeliness be interpreted, especially in the light of what the old Heidegger said about the end of philosophy? What is left for philosophy after the end, and what is the task of thinking? The way Heidegger put it in one place was that thinking could only look for narrow paths. At the same time, philosophy has, in Western culture and society, maintained its appropriate role. It appears that it did not lose its continuity, not even in Nazi Germany.*

VON HERRMANN: In Heidegger the end of philosophy does not mean that philosophy ceases to exist, or that it no longer has any importance. The end of philosophy means that the form of philosophy which has existed so far, i.e., metaphysics, has come

to an end. At the same time, this has nothing to do with the anti–metaphysics of positivism, which rejects metaphysical trends without giving it any thought at all. The end Heidegger speaks of is the end of the first — the Greek — beginning of philosophy, anticipating a new begining of the history of Being. What matters is not to us to give a new answers to the old question, but to ask about Being more originally than at the first beginning. It is only in this perspective that the question concerning the homelessness of modern man can also be put, and the overcoming of homelessness can be prepared. The philosophical tools of the tradition are insufficient for this purpose. If the homelessness of contemporary man forms part of the end of the first beginning, then the possible transition to a new beginning, and to the interrelated overcoming of homelessness, can occur only on narrow paths. A contribution to such is part of the present German–Hungarian symposium.

PÖGGELER: National Socialism in Germany lasted only twelve years. At the start it wanted to subject the universities to its own ideology, but later it gave higher priority to world domination. Thus they were unable to deprive both the universities and the church of their independence, and as a result philosophy was also able to maintain its continuity. But another aspect proved decisive: after 1945, the teachers of the victorious powers had to realize that it was precisely the children, who had grown up in the time of National Socialism, who most completely rejected this ideology. The same discovery is overdue today in other countries. It is this capacity of man to rediscover freedom and the striving for justice in himself that philosophy can most profit from.

GADAMER: The end of philosophy, of which Heidegger spoke, has to be seen in conjuction with his other thesis, which he repeated just as frequently, and that is that we are in a state of transition. The end of philosophy is an eschatological concept. In this conversation, I can perhaps formulate it thus: the future and hope belong together. The timeliness of Heidegger is a future timeliness. It will come when the vision which he depicted in his own way — for instance, the oblivion of being and calculating thinking —will be present in public awareness with such strength that setting out from these problems we shall create on this earth a new equilibrium of human existence. That will be the new beginning of which Heidegger spoke. Whether this arrives in the shape of a new god—as Heidegger put in—or whether this expression can at all be understood in this way, and does not simply mean that it is not by establishment of committees that we will save ourselves—of this I am not certain. In any case, to make survival possible we need—and from that aspect perhaps I have contributed something as well—powers that go well beyond mere improvements of existing technologies.

István M. Fehér

Schools—Anything but reform

Teachers in Hungary twitch at the very mention of the term school reform, the past decades have brought a great number of them; these, however, have done nothing to make schools more attractive and bring them closer to life.

A visitor from Western Europe would be surprised at the rigid, authoritarian atmosphere that prevails both in the classrooms and the curriculum. In most schools pupils even in the lowest classes are taught according to the same methods as those used a century ago: some thirty to forty children sitting at desks arranged in rigid lines, in front of them stands the teacher explaining the lesson. They are not supposed to leave their places and can only speak when given permission to do so.

After 1945, the curriculum was repeatedly reshaped to fit the relevant ideological dogma; however, the school system, which had been drawn up along Prussian educational lines, has not changed. Progressive, child–centred educational methods were disapproved of by both socialist and educational leaders and pre–war educational authorities. Until quite recently, the rigid regulations in the curriculum were broken down to each lesson; a swarm of school inspectors watched sharply for strict adherence to it and to a uniform educational outlook.

No to school reforms—a possible yes for reformed schools: this is how this writer summarizes the sentiments of the teachers. After a number of reforms of evil memory, initiated from above and intended to reshape the school system as a whole, both teachers and society in general would now like to see local initiative in play, with reformed schools offering various alternatives.

In recent times, educational authorities have no longer raised objections to those who wish to deviate from tradition. A whole range of bold initiatives have emerged in a short time, some of which even receive direct state support from central innovation funds. But these have still not struck firm root in the country and to date only two educational projects have been able to have an impact on the style of elementary education.

In the late 1960s an experiment was launched which then counted as a real sensation. Backed by the central authorities, a teacher by the name of László Gáspár was given the opportunity to set up an experimental school in the village of Szentlőrinc in southern Hungary. Gáspár started out from the theses of Marxist philosophy on social reproduction. He held the view that the school had to trace, on a small scale, the social and economic universe as a whole, and he re–organized the intramural life of his school accordingly. He drew up a curriculum for the various subjects, so that the subject should fall in with the logic of the children wishing to learn about the world instead of following the logic of sciences. He made productive work part of school life, and organized self–governing forums to develop social sensitivity.

For more than a decade this experiment was the only officially sanctioned deviation from established practice. Thousands of visitors went to see Gáspár's Marxist theory in practice, his attempt to bring about a child–centred, reform–styled school. The experiment has often met with the appreciation of those who refused to accept Gáspár's philosophy. To the admiration of some and the indignation of others, children in this school were allowed to interrupt the teacher by putting questions or, instead of listening in silence to a 'lecture', to form small groups to work on a particular problem, busily delving into hosts of reference books.

The other significant departure from official regulations has been the Zsolnai experiment, launched in the early 'seventies, involving the teaching of literature, language and communication. József Zsolnai considers the development of communicative abilities as his most important task. He worked out a linguistic and literary course and teaching methods to go with it; it encourages students to build up active forms of communication.

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The curriculum and methodology involved in this experiment generate constant intellectual activity in each and every student. And this precisely has been Zsolnai's aim: to develop intellectual skills by stimulating activity and reasoning, and by keeping the drive for intercommunication alive. Zsolnai avails himself of every possible method to develop their faculties, even by using new subjects, such as teaching children to play chess.

For a long time the educational authorities watched Zsolnai's methods with distrust. They alleged he was overburdening children, burdening them with knowledge not suited for them, overtly emphasizing cognitive elements and turning the school into a "workshop of learning". By now, however, it has become an officially accepted alternative curriculum which schools can freely opt for, providing they shoulder the additional expenses that arise from the method. In fact, the Zsolnai method has been gaining popularity throughout the country. In some places it is the parents who, looking for a higher quality of education, fight for its introduction; in other instances it is the teachers who do so, because they expect an improvement in school results from deprived children coming from underprivileged families.

Testing has borne out that school experiments, whatever methods they involve, almost always have a beneficial effect on school achievements and on the progress of students. According to a widely accepted view, for several decades the greatest problem of Hungarian schools has been not so much the obsolete teaching methods but a lack of freedom and opportunity for individual initiative. Experimenting, the liberty of deviating from accustomed forms, the fact that teachers are now free to use methods they feel to be their very own, have an extraordinary effect in themselves on what their teaching achieves.

This also explains the attraction of the two experimental projects. Teachers like to work in the Gáspár and Zsolnai Schools even though they have much more work than in other institutions.

Children, too, enjoy attending these schools, because they feel they learn more—even in play—than they would elsewhere. As a student put it who recently changed over to a Gáspár school, "It was more difficult to learn there, here it is easier. And I feel I know more than my old schoolmates."

Gábor Halász