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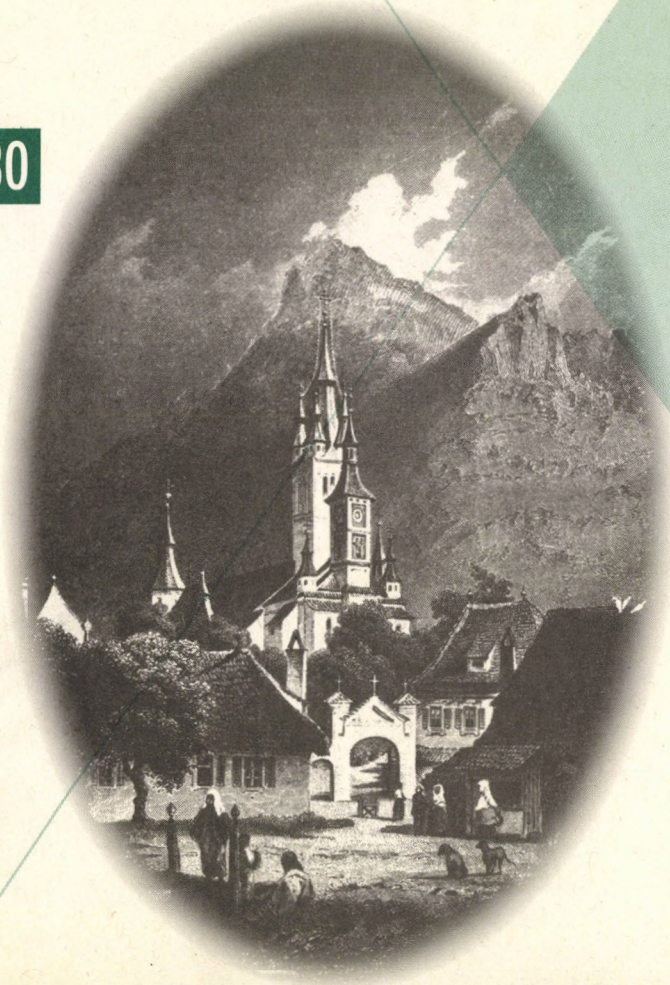

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Géza Jeszenszky

Hungary's Foreign Policy Dilemmas

Looking at the eleven centuries of Hungarian history in the Carpathian Basin, can one say that misfortunes inflicted upon us from above, from outside were an almost constant, or at least a decisive feature? Or is it more pertinent to point out the multitude of our own mistakes, misjudgments, often induced by false prophets? This is a question I frequently put to myself when I was still delving into the documents of our history at my desk in an alcove by the window, behind the catalogue cabinets of the old National Széchényi Library building in Múzeum körút.

When I thought of Ranke's theory on the supremacy of foreign policy, the obvious answer seemed to be that the fate of smaller nations depends fundamentally on their outside environment, above all on the interests and wishes of the great powers. This theory certainly seems to be supported by an examination of the last two centuries: though this nation of ours was not really passive or apathetic, though it often set about overcoming the backwardness arising out of its inherited situation and resisted the great powers and alliances that bound it hand and foot, it can easily be said not merely about the "Magyar Messiahs", but also about the millions of ordinary Hungarians, to quote the great poet, Endre Ady, that "They, alas, could do nothing". Is this really the case, or just a comforting way of reassuring ourselves?

In connection with a lecture I gave at Indiana University, I discussed this subject—the untravellable road that Hungarian foreign policy had faced in the 20th century—with Aladár Szegedy-Maszák, in Washington in the summer of 1985. He was the Hungarian envoy in Washington who resigned in 1947 in order to protest at the first signs of misrule, when the non-communist Prime Minister of the country was forced into exile. Szegedy-Maszák warned against illusions that he too considered typical of us: let us not imagine that our tragedies are simply the work of Fate, let us not excuse ourselves lightly. Remembering the admonitions of Széchenyi, I accept his advice.

Géza Jeszenszky,
a historian, is the Foreign Minister of the Republic of Hungary. This text is the translation of a slightly edited version of his Eötvös Memorial Address, delivered at the Europe Institute, Budapest, on March 16, 1993.

Let us seek the causes of the tragedies in our history in a combination of misfortune and misjudgment, above all if we accept the old-fashioned assumption—neither supported nor refuted by events—that there are lessons to be drawn from history.

As a university lecturer, I have shared my ideas on this topic with my students since 1977, and as a practicing politician I have tried, since 1990, to assist in preventing misfortune from returning, and to use foreign policy in promoting the rebirth of Hungary and its integration into the new post-communist Europe without the impediment of misjudgments.

It was not this government that first described Hungarian foreign policy as one of the most successful branches of the administration. But regardless of when and to what extent the description is true, the baneful influence of the stars on our history clearly seemed to change for the better at the end of the 1980s, when history at last gave Hungary a chance. The turn of events is especially conspicuous when compared with the previous decades, for Hungarian foreign policy in the 20th century (and Hungary's whole history) can certainly not be called a success story. Some people have likened it to a crime story, but I do not think the comparison can be substantiated as a reproach to ourselves. If a literary form is needed to describe the history of Hungarian foreign policy, I would prefer to call it a drama or, more specifically, a tragedy. The classical definition of tragedy is a dramatic work that portrays a deep human struggle and most frequently ends with the death of the hero. Aristotle goes on to say that the fall of a tragic hero is not brought on by his sins or wickedness, but by his decisions, his misjudgments of the situation. The drama of Hungarian history is made greater because the debacles were so often preceded by major successes. Before the fatal Battle of Mohács against the Ottoman Empire in 1526, there had been the glorious reign of the 15th century King Matthias. Before the capitulation to the Habsburg-Russian allied forces at Világos in 1849, there had been a victorious spring campaign liberating the whole country from foreign invaders. Before the collapse at the end of the Great War, the Hungarians had been an increasingly influential factor in an economically and culturally prosperous great power. Prior to the Hungarian Holocaust, in March 1944, when Nazi Germany invaded and occupied Hungary and brought about the deportations, the reign of mob terror and the destruction of the country by war, ending in Soviet occupation in 1945, Hungary between 1938 and 1941 saw the recovery of a third of the territories she had lost under the 1920 Peace Treaty, and furthermore had just about managed to prove to the world her fidelity to her humanist traditions by giving refuge to almost a million Jews, to Poles and also to POWs escaping from Germany, in the midst of an inhuman Hitlerite world. Similarly, the Soviet intervention on November 4, 1956 occurred at a time when the majority of the nation already believed that a free, democratic Hungary had been born again. The Hungarian public was always caught unawares by its defeats, and the greater the height from which it fell, the greater the paralysis it suffered by the fall.

Ever since the adoption of Christianity, the Hungarians have followed a Western alignment, in the knowledge that this is the only path to survival and progress. Within this alignment, they were able and obliged to seek a balance, initially within the triangle of the Eastern and Western Empires and the Papacy, and later on the perimeter of the ambitions of the European great powers, and at times on the line of intersection between them. Independently of the extent to which the sympathy and respect of the Hungarians for particular European peoples was requited, regardless of the fact that a counterweight or support had to be sought from time to time in the South or the East, Hungarian politicians who thought in terms of the nation's prospects never believed that *ex Oriente lux*.

There were choices open to Hungarian foreign policy primarily in the first part of the period stretching from 1849 to 1920, from the surrender at Világos to the Peace Treaty of Trianon. The argument that the Compromise of 1867 was responsible for the collapse taking place fifty years later is scarcely defensible. Without partners and allies, and turned by the afflictions of history into a minority in the country named after them, the Hungarians did not have much chance of retaining their historical territory in whole. The alternatives in theory were a confederation with the neighbouring small nations—the national minorities of Hungary and their relatives beyond the borders—or a compromise with the Habsburg Empire, but neither the international situation nor the behaviour of our neighbours left them a real choice. Where I see the responsibility of the Hungarians lie is in the fact that they made no attempts between 1859 and 1867, and still more when they had attained a position of power after 1867, to forge a multilingual, multicultural *Hungaria* and, simultaneously, to arrive at a sincere, generous reconciliation with the other Danubian peoples. Since there are few similar instances in world history, it merits special attention that such a reconciliation was urged by László Teleki in 1849 and by Kossuth in exile. The 1868 Law on Minorities pointed in the same direction, but Eötvös did not receive sufficient support from the political public to carry it out faithfully in practice, and Lajos Mocsáry himself felt that he was a rare exception to be working along these lines. In the same context, the governments after the 1867 Compromise were unable and unwilling to keep the country plainly on the liberal, enlightened and democratic political course which had gained attention and admiration from most of the world in 1849.

The oft-quoted argument that the Hungarians had no say in the foreign policy worked out at the Ballhausplatz in Vienna (or in the Hofburg, that is by the sovereign) is false and too convenient. The Hungarian Prime Minister had a statutory right to influence the running of foreign affairs. The common foreign minister had to report regularly on his activities to the delegations of the Parliaments, and the Hungarians, through their aristocracy, were strongly represented on the diplomatic staff. Nor is it worth pleading that the people themselves had no say in foreign policy, as the same could be said of practically every state at the time, and there is precious little sign in the incidentally quite free press of the day that

Hungarian society was notably opposed to the common foreign policy of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. Moreover, the rare alternative proposals put forward by the opposition, the Independence Party, hardly offered a better course, and their rhetoric turned the neighbouring peoples even more firmly against the Hungarians.

Although it was Gyula Andrássy, a Hungarian, who concluded the Dual Alliance with Germany, his real purpose was to create a "liberal alliance" with the West (England and France) against the Russian autocracy which had suppressed Polish, Hungarian and Romanian liberty. However, this was frustrated in 1878 and 1884 by the conservative forces in Austria. By the end of the century France was committed to supporting Russia and England had given up trying to keep its Russian rival out of the Balkans and the Straits. But all Hungarians considered it advantageous when the Triple Alliance was formed with the addition of liberal Italy, the country which had granted Kossuth a home and long remained grateful for the significant Hungarian assistance given to her struggle for unification. Indeed, the Triple Alliance secured for the Hungarians a good thirty years of peace, and thereby the chance of economic prosperity.

From the point of view of Hungarian foreign policy interests, which it was certainly possible to assert within the frames of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy in the 20th century, the trouble was caused not by the Dual and Triple Alliance, but by the Anglo-German discord that broke out at the beginning of the century and the consequent division of Europe into two blocs of allies. Despite the conscious Anglophilia of the Hungarian political elite (ever so sensitive to foreign affairs) and the spontaneous Francophilia of the intellectual elite, Hungary simply had no chance of either staying out of the conflict that was brewing or taking the side of the Entente. This predicament was termed "manifest destiny" by one wise observer, Esmé Howard, the British Consul-General in Budapest. The essence of the Western messages coming to Budapest in various forms was that the Monarchy should stay together, that it should stick by the German alliance, but try to curb Germany's ambitions. Apart from that, the Hungarians were expected to remain the most stable part of the Monarchy, act as a counterweight to the "Cis-Leithanian", i.e. Austrian, conservative and ultramontane trends, and reach agreement with Hungary's non-Hungarian minorities without sacrificing the country's integrity.

It would take a long line of argument, and so I will merely state the proposition, that all the great powers bear responsibility, to differing degrees, for the outbreak of the First World War, and that the most the Hungarian government could have done would have been to veto the declaration of war.

During the war, or at least during its initial stage, all the belligerents directed their resources and diplomacy at attaining victory, and there were no essential differences between parties in this respect. As for the failure of the efforts to conclude a separate peace, which gained momentum when Emperor-King Charles ascended to the throne, it cannot be blamed either on the sovereign or on the Hungarians. Nor was it a result of Hungarian foreign or domestic policy that

Hungary featured in the Entente's peace plans simply as spoils to be thrown to its lesser allies or the prospective member-states of the grand alliance against Germany planned for the post-war period.

In the autumn of 1918 and in 1919, Hungary's foreign policy options were purely theoretical and practically non-existing. To a decisive extent it can be ascribed to the short-term political interests of the victors that the Western great powers, in the spring of 1918, abandoned their age-old doctrine of the need for a great power in Central Europe, offering the peoples living here the chance of independence, and some of them the chance of joining the winning side. It can be described as a misfortune that no such choice was open to the Hungarians, and still more that, despite the many arguments in favour of establishing a multinational democratic federation in Central Europe, the concept of a "United States of the Danube", devised by Oszkár Jászi, including the idea of a Swiss type Hungary formed out of autonomous cantons, in the event excited very little response from our neighbours, who had been given a way of making easy territorial conquests. So the birthday of national independence in Central Europe also became the date on which the internecine quarrels of the peoples living here started to become very serious.

It was a misjudgment on Hungary's part or, rather, a fatuous illusion, to imagine that President Wilson's entry onto the international stage would replace power politics with the rule of law and justice. This error was committed by Mihály Károlyi, a well-intentioned man, but inferior in his ideas and talents to the contemporary Hungarian political establishment, and quite unsuited to playing the particularly difficult role of leader in one of the most critical periods of the history of Hungary. He wanted to prove his good intentions by refraining for months from using military force to try and block the patent intentions of the neighbouring states to make conquests. It may be that the country, exhausted after four and a half years of war, and weak in terms of social cohesion (in the first place due to etatism), really had no strength to do so at the very time when the state was collapsing. But the policy of passive protest was a total failure against the policy of *fait accompli* pursued by the voracious neighbours. The rude awakening came too late. It was largely despair that led to the proclamation of the Hungarian Soviet Republic and an Eastern alignment that proved even more illusory than the previous hopes placed on the West. It had no chance either militarily or politically, but it was a gift to the nationalism of the neighbouring countries and turned the victorious great powers even more against the Hungarians. Yet it is not true to say that the Treaty of Trianon was a punishment inflicted on us for the experiment with Bolshevism. The borders would have been drawn even more disadvantageously if the peace conference had fulfilled the maximum demands of the neighbouring countries.

The three years between 1918 and 1921 were a period of misfortune and of misjudgment, of successive humiliations and of blunders and extremist sentiments that reinforced each other. It is seemingly inevitable that the Hungarians, really struggling "against a whole world" (as Károlyi put it), should not have been dealt

even one winning card. The occupation, followed by the hopeless "peace talks" in Paris, were compounded by a dictated peace. In that Hungary lost two thirds of her territory, the regions which were emotionally and economically most important. Even after the treaty was signed, the constant outside intervention persisted, extending even to interference in the form of government. The peace gave rise to the irredentist foreign policy of the implacable Hungarians, but Trianon had tragic consequences not only for the losers, but for the winners, bringing them misfortune as well, as later events showed.

So was there an alternative, after the signing of the Treaty of Trianon, to a programme of promoting peaceful territorial revision? In view of the indisputable fact that the borders were drawn with extreme partiality and following policies pursued against Hungarian minorities of three and a half million, it must be apparent that it would scarcely have been conceivable for any Hungarian Parliament to support a government which proclaimed any other programme. But if the borders had been drawn more fairly and a mutually tolerant policy had been pursued towards the minorities that inevitably would have remained on either side of the borders, there might then have been a good chance of a reconciliation of the kind reached, for instance, in this century by the peoples of Scandinavia, who have likewise clashed with each other several times in their history.

However disillusioned Hungarian society was after 1920 with the victorious powers (all of which they had learnt to identify as supporters of the cause of Hungarian liberty in and after 1849), Hungary's foreign policy, when it came to its senses, looked to the West once again. An attempt was made in 1920 to persuade France to take a leading, organizing role in Central Europe and build this upon Hungary, which was centrally placed strategically as well. Admiral Horthy, who in 1920 was elected Regent, would have liked, both on political and sentimental grounds, to rest the new Hungarian foreign policy on the great maritime powers. Prime Minister Bethlen, as a realist, knew this was not directly possible, but through the League of Nations he managed to stabilize the economy by raising substantial Western loans. His sole intention with the Italian alignment, established in 1927, was to break out of the isolation and find a path towards France and Britain. Only the most desperate adventurers in the 1920s thought there should be an alliance with the extremist, nationalist circles in Europe, primarily in Germany, in order to pursue a revanchist policy.

The generation of Hungarian diplomats raised in the school of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy perhaps tended to look down on the diplomacy of the Little Entente, but they did not underestimate it. They were aware of the real power relations and the sixteen-fold military supremacy on the other side, and they sought a way of escaping from the chains that bound Hungary. This led first of all to feeble isolated attempts to reach agreement with the Czechoslovak Foreign Minister, Benes, and the Romanian King Ferdinand, and after Horthy's speech at Mohács in 1926, to a rapprochement with Yugoslavia. In the early 1930s it was mainly

Hungarian business and the friendship society run by Elemér Hantos that attempted to lessen the political tensions with our neighbours through closer economic cooperation and some kind of customs union.

The consequences of the peace settlement based on blind nationalism proved more serious than the most pessimistic forecasters could have predicted. As Hugh Seton-Watson wrote, "In each of the new states there prevailed a narrow official nationalism", and the oppressive policy pursued against the national, religious and political minorities led to internal and external tensions and conflicts. "This state of generalized and mutual hostility provided opportunities for any great power intent on disturbing the peace." Instead of the new Central European countries, which Hinsley, the Cambridge professor, termed "small, unstable caricatures of modern states", waking up to their community of interests, they chased after great-power support for their endeavours to sustain or overthrow the new order. After two decades of existence, the new Central Europe, created by British and American initiatives, and then by the ideas and decisions of the French, collapsed as a consequence of the brutal intervention by Nazi Germany and abandonment by its Western patrons.

Not even under the shadow of a German expansion that threatened all the peoples of Central Europe could Hungary come to any material agreement with the Little Entente, as the governments of the neighbouring countries were unwilling to fulfill Hungary's one condition of substance: an end to the policy of discrimination against the Hungarian minorities. The agreement reached at Bled in August 1938 contained too little and came too late. Nonetheless, it played a part in the still insufficiently appreciated gesture by Horthy and Kánya, when they firmly rejected Hitler's proposal that Hungary should attack Czechoslovakia. The last attempts to save Central Europe included the "horizontal" Warsaw-Budapest-Belgrade-Rome axis, suggested at the end of 1937. Although this was not specifically anti-German, it was designed to halt the expansion of both German and Soviet influence. Hungarian diplomatic attempts at the end of the 1930s received no kind of assistance whatever from the Western democracies. In fact these democracies gave no real support even to their own allies, Poland and the Little Entente. The explanation for this was not some kind of cynicism or hypocrisy, but the so-called *Realpolitik*, resulting from their limited resources and lack of direct interests in Central Europe. All that compelled Britain and France to pursue a policy of appeasing Hitler and refraining even from condemning him verbally, despite all the sincere sentiments of outrage over his actions.

I will refrain here from dealing with the foreign policy of the Teleki government and the foreign-policy attempts made by Hungary during the Second World War. The subject is intricate, it requires much space.(The historian György Ránki, during the last few years of his life, produced some truly lasting work on this subject, and I would gladly see in print his American lectures, which aroused no little argument.) It can no longer be disputed that Hungary really was an unwilling ally. The real conundrum faced by Hungarian foreign policy in this tragic period was what George

Kennan described as the oldest and toughest dilemma facing mankind: How far is it permissible to connive with evil in order to mitigate its harmful effects? When must it be opposed, even if that means the strongest resisters will be weakened or even annihilated in the process?

The absence of options facing Hungarian foreign policy after 1945 was not initially apparent, but it was quite plain by 1947. The line of domestic and foreign policy that the Hungarian nation wished to pursue was perfectly clear from the results of the 1945 general elections. Regrettably it proved impossible even to adopt a Finnish type of stance that involved a conscious limitation of sovereignty and far-reaching regard for Soviet endeavours in order to salvage broad domestic and more limited foreign political room for manoeuvre.

When I delivered a lecture at Indiana University in 1985, entitled "The Untravellable Road", I ended my line of argument on the one hand by saying that the absence of options was no excuse either for omitting to seize the faint opportunities or for the grave mistakes clearly committed in domestic policy, whose evasion or redress would certainly have strengthened the country and at least improved our reputation abroad. My other concluding remark was that everyone, particularly the new generation that would succeed us, should be prepared for a period when Hungary would again have a chance to pursue an active foreign policy and be free to weigh the alternatives. That chance came sooner than anyone imagined.

The government programme, elaborated after the free elections of 1990, outlined the main foreign-policy objectives of a democratic Hungary: resumption of relations with the Western democracies and development of a relationship of trust with them, involvement in the institutions of European integration, and a negotiated termination of the Warsaw Pact, or if that could not be accomplished, a unilateral withdrawal from it by Hungary. We declared a policy of extending the hand of friendship to our neighbours, in the hope that we could establish amicable cooperation with all of them in the basis of the common suffering under the dictatorships, the common acceptance of the Western system of values, and the obvious community of interests.

It can hardly be disputed that this government's achievements in foreign policy—in the knowledge that it had the agreement and support of the entire nation—have been greater and faster than anyone at home or abroad could have imagined in the spring of 1990. Apart from our decisions based upon our interests, the course of history, with the internal erosion and subsequent collapse of the Soviet system, has been of great assistance in this. But I do not think my job now is to sum up our achievements. That can await the election campaign or, rather, the historians.

I do not think that Hungarian foreign policy has to weigh up any kind of choices on basic issues in the radically new historical situation. But there are plenty of dilemmas and questions to decide.

Luckily we need not face earlier dilemmas such as whether to follow a German, British, French, or possibly American, alignment. NATO and the European

Communities continue to bind together the Western world, which faces a new assignment since the end of the Soviet threat: to extend the frontiers of freedom, democracy and prosperity eastward, unless it wants to remain a kind of Neo-Carolingian Empire, leaving the greater part of Eurasia to its fate.

Nor do we need to choose between the European Communities and the United States, because the Atlantic concept has also survived the collapse of the Soviet Union. Hungary was the first country in the region to come out in favour of it, and it did so in the most decided way. The future Prime Minister, József Antall, while still in opposition in January 1990, surprised the Americans themselves. After all the truculence from the Western Europeans, there came such determined statements on the subject from the potential leader of a country that was only just freeing itself from communism. From the summer of 1990 onwards, Poland also moved steadily in the same direction, followed by Czecho-Slovakia. This is what led up to the development of cooperation among the Visegrád Group, not outside encouragement of some kind.

Nor is it a problem for us to decide which of our neighbours to make friends with or to what extent. We are open to all who reciprocate, and believe in regional cooperation, European integration, the steady dismantling of frontiers, and the democratic system of values.

There is no question, however, of making friends over the heads of the Hungarian minorities of three and a half million, let alone at their expense. Nowadays it can hardly be considered an antiquated idea any more to view the settlement of the situation of the minority ethnic groups as one of the key questions of European stability. Hungary's special attention to this issue might have seemed like a Hungarian obsession until the recent past, but the Yugoslav crisis and the conflicts in Nagorno-Karabakh and the Trans-Dniestr region have shown the question is deadly earnest. This was expressed very clearly by József Eötvös in his *Dominant Ideas in the Nineteenth Century* (1853) and in another work, written in 1865, where he points out that "the national-minority movement is not the consequence of artificially induced agitation or a battle against theoretical principles or imagined insults, but a needful outcome of our whole development so far... Such a movement cannot be suppressed by force, nor can it be assuaged by making concessions, but only by satisfying the needs for which it has emerged."

So this policy is not dictated by selfishness, still less by ulterior motives, and not simply by the responsibility felt (and laid down in our Constitution) for our fellow Hungarians divided from us by our borders. The existence of peaceful and harmonious cohabitation among the peoples living side by side, overlapping and mixed with one another, or in ethnic enclaves, throughout the Central and Eastern half of Europe, is one of the basic requisites for European peace and security. In the light of this, there can be no doubt that we must try to explain to the world by every means at our disposal, and above all convince our European partners, that the demands

of the minorities and individual ethnic groups to organize, govern and administer themselves is not a destabilizing factor at all, but a way of reducing tensions and preventing explosions. Oszkár Jászi's thesis that "the national-minority question is democracy's centre of gravity" remains valid today, but this is not primarily our dilemma, but our neighbours'. Ours is merely to decide how to promote a situation in which the minorities no longer see flight from their native land as their only way out. Since ethnically homogeneous states could only be created in this part of Europe by forcible deportation and re-settlement and by mass murder, there is no other choice but to create the conditions and institutions that can secure the future of all Central and Eastern European peoples, even those who live in ethnic enclaves or as dispersed communities. This entails reviving in a modernized form the international mechanism already established once in 1919 to guarantee this. That is the only means of achieving lasting peace and stability in the new Europe. Even after the tragic ethnic conflicts of the recent past, it remains a hard task to gain international acceptance for this argument, but not an insoluble one, so long as all Hungarian citizens, the Hungarian communities living in Western democratic societies, and as many politicians and citizens as possible, cooperate on it with the requisite sense of responsibility and recognition of the sensitivities of others.

So the real question is not which of our neighbours we conclude agreements with or when we do so, nor what form we should use to express the undertakings we made in the 1947 peace treaty, the Helsinki Final Act and the Paris Charter. It concerns when and which of our neighbours recognize the need to abandon the policy of oppressing and applying petty restrictions on Hungarian and non-Hungarian minorities and of trying to create homogeneous nation-states (which is a kind of "ethnic cleansing"), because it contravenes the spirit and letter of European integration and constitutional statehood, and because they cannot win by such a policy in the long term, so that it basically conflicts with their own national interests as well.

Since integration into Europe is the fundamental objective of Hungarian foreign policy, it determines our relations with the various European groupings. Our entry into the European Communities will resolve the question of our relations with NATO and the West European Union. In fact the closest relations with the latter two organizations could develop before Hungary gains full EC membership. I do not view either the Visegrád grouping or the Central European Initiative as an alternative to such integration. They are not rivals to each other; both are complementary to the building up of our relations with the European Communities. I also consider as initiatives promoting European integration such cooperation between border regions as the Alps-Adriatic grouping, or the Carpathian Euro-Region just formed through local initiative. The latter has drawn some critical reactions from certain countries, but in my view for exclusively domestic reasons.

There is, however, a genuine dilemma about what Hungary can do to prevent the severing of the eastern half of Europe, to stop a new economic, human-rights and possibly political dividing line developing, or becoming more pronounced east of

our borders, which would also segregate certain Hungarian minorities not only from us, but from European integration. The key to averting this danger is not in our hands, but with our opinions, advice and actions we can be of assistance to the West in developing the appropriate response.

There is no question about the road Hungarian foreign policy should take. It is of course the Hungarian road, "the famed road of Verecke" (Ady) that led from our ancestral home to the Western Empire and the Bible, the road that took our students to the universities of Oxford, Paris and Italy and brought here the Renaissance, Humanism, the Reformation, Enlightenment, and Liberalism—all the stems that bore fruit having a special flavour when grafted onto the Hungarian tree. On this road as the novelist Sándor Márai puts it, "the power of intellect and solidarity is mightier than the terror of instincts". For anyone in the region to stray onto another road evokes the danger of the Bosnian atrocities being repeated. On this road we are accompanied by all Hungarians, by all who follow Széchenyi, Kossuth, Deák, Eötvös, the Telekis, and the Tiszas and Bethlen as well, and by all who follow Bibó and the many ordinary Hungarians.

No alignment dilemmas face Hungarian foreign policy today. The question is simply what means we can use to achieve our objectives, how to overcome or avoid the traps laid by opponents, rivals, the narrow-minded, and the obstacles erected by our own defeatism and impatience. It looks as if 1993 will be a difficult year, and there are further years of human trials ahead of us, but our great men of the past urge us to act "steadfastly", and, as Endre Ady wrote:

Brace yourself,
Fate, Life and Time are free,
The richest now is he who waits, who bides his time.

To know when and how long to bide one's time and when to act is the eternal dilemma of politics, and whether we can respond to it well depends on whether the remaining decade of this century and the new millenium before us will bring happier times for us and our descendants. ❧

Lóránt Kabdebó

Heroines of Self-Salvation

The Novels of Magda Szabó

Magda Szabó first wrote poetry, she is a successful playwright, her essays have opened up new horizons on the Hungarian literary tradition, her travel memoirs are a fortunate combination of personal experience and topographical knowledge. She is, moreover, an astute and elegant translator of Shakespeare *(Two Gentlemen of Verona)* and Galsworthy, but she has really made her name as a writer of fiction. Many of her novels have been translated into a range of languages that includes English, German, Russian, French, Dutch, Italian, Danish, Polish, Spanish, Greek and Finnish—some in more than one version, such as *Az ajtó* (The Door) in German. According to readers' surveys in Hungary, she is one of the most frequently read of Hungarian writers.

Szabó has continued a tradition that regards writing as an act of moral resolve; what is observed and experienced summons a moral response in the writer, turning her rage into narrative. In her early works, written for her desk drawer at the time of the Rákosi dictatorship, *Freskó* (Fresco), published only in 1958, and *Az őz* (The Fawn) only in 1959, it is the moral impulse that is at the centre. Over the decades she has been writing novels, her traditional, realistic rendering of the world has turned into a self-examination of varying orientations, as in *The Door* (1987) and, especially, in *A pillanat* (The Moment, 1990), in which she relies on a postmodern box of tools to do away with history itself.

She belonged to a group of writers who began writing during the Second World War, to find each other in the first days of peace after the war, and who took the Bloomsbury writers as their exemplar. Despite the German and Russian occupations of Hungary, and the concomitant violence, these writers claimed Europe and world literature as their spiritual home. The group was named after a literary journal of the late 1940s that barely lasted a couple of issues, *Újhold* (New Moon). Indeed, this word, and all it stood for, symbolized a

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secret bond implied by their internal exile during the years of Stalinist dictatorship; it also, however, became the target of attacks against them. Among those who belonged to this loosely-knit circle were Ágnes Nemes Nagy, János Pilinszky, Géza Ottlik, Iván Mándy, and Miklós Mészöly, all of whom have achieved an international reputation. As their first volumes appeared they were to sweep the more prestigious of the prewar literary awards that still remained in existence for a time. Their elders, and such literary critics whose judgments have stood the test of time, praised them. In 1948, however, there came the political turn that swept away prize-givers and recipients. Today, most of these writers have once again been recognized by way of prominent awards. Magda Szabó has received the highest literary honour in Hungary, the Kossuth Prize, is a member of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, and has won an award (in 1992) from the Getz Corporation of the United States for services to Hungarian writing. Owing to the upheavals they lived through, their careers can hardly be said to be typical; for they did not—or rather, did not *only*—have to struggle to express their talent, but had to persuade others to accept their distinctiveness, and they had to preserve their integrity in a political atmosphere which promoted a contrary set of expectations—and which also made use of violence to enforce them.

To this day, Szabó conscientiously associates herself with her origins, with the images of family and native town that define her own moral countenance.

Debrecen: an old town of citizen peasants right in the centre of the Hungarian plain, the Alföld, without the protective surroundings of marsh, mountains, or city walls—which, during the century and a half of Turkish domination, had to pay tribute by turns to the Prince of Transylvania, to the Habsburg king, and again to the Turkish sultan—to escape that state of political acclimatization, which today is called "Balkanization". Conservative, Calvinist burghers guarded their rich Eurocentric culture and the liberties of a community with a sense of duty. "It was an honour to be a citizen of Debrecen. One had to take an oath as a citizen, the law demanded that, and those accepted as citizens could have 'Citizen of Debrecen' inscribed on their coffins. They had rights, but duties as well," writes Magda Szabó. The city has a monument to Hungarian Calvinist preachers who were sent to the galleys in the 17th century by the Habsburgs, the Catholic kings of Hungary. In 1991 Pope John Paul II laid a wreath of appeasement on it. Indeed, one of Magda Szabó's ancestors was among those so condemned. She herself is an elder of her church; this year on her seventy-fifth birthday she was awarded an honorary doctorate by Debrecen's Calvinist Theological Seminary.

It was in this city, in the first half of the twentieth century, that the alderman in charge of the theatre and the arts conversed in Latin at mealtimes with his daughter; when her parents, rightly or wrongly, forbade the girl to go to the cinema she, familiar with stills of the film, would compensate by writing down the story of the film as she imagined it. In the course of this childhood Szabó was to learn the regimen by which she and her husband, once the Iron Curtain had descended, were

to spend the week: a day speaking German, then English, then French. This was of value not only in terms of practice but in affirming their intellectual freedom.

Debrecen, "The City of Durability"—this university town, with a population of 200,000, is today both praised and mocked by the phrase. This durability, however, may have sustained Szabó when, as a student, she witnessed Hitler's occupation of Vienna, and later when, as a young teacher, she lived through both the Nazi and the Soviet occupation of Hungary.

She started writing poetry and took to writing novels only in the "reticent years", for her desk drawer. Indeed, it was the poet who taught the novelist how to write. She endowed the future novelist with the experience essential to her craft—personal involvement in her themes—and the awareness that the individual fate has to be put in perspective. Everyone's personal history is at one and the same time a repetition of that of others, Magda Szabó maintains: "It is a general mistake, I think, to regard any one of us as original, as a hitherto never seen, unique phenomenon; the most that can be said is that we don't know our predecessors, that we haven't yet come across documentation of the relationship. We have all appeared previously, whether in our details or in our manifestation, or in the themes voiced by certain artists of centuries past—it is simply that we do not know our grandfathers."

Just as the poet recorded her wartime experiences in two volumes, *Bárány* (Lamb, 1947) and *Vissza az emberig* (Return to Man, 1949), the novelist was to continue in this vein when reflecting upon the countless and often hellish situations posed by life.

Magda Szabó as a novelist appears to stand in a literary tradition whose members include Thomas Hardy, François Mauriac, László Németh, and perhaps Nikos Kazantzakis, as immediate precursors or as fellows, related not in their style but rather in that they express a common view of the relationship between the author and the work. Szabó steps out of history and, in analyzing her own stories, conveys both to herself and to the reader the message that what is happening has happened before. On a first reading, her novels seem off-the-cuff—not in form, which is always precise and bound by classicism, but in terms of the enthusiasm with which the author appears to approach the given theme. It is as though she has come across her subjects while writing and cast them while still fresh onto paper so as to record and understand them. A reading of her life work, by contrast, leaves one with the impression that every novel has fallen into preordained place, as if *this* writing life had been predestined at the moment of Magda Szabó's birth. Equally characteristic are her virtually random choice of theme and archetypal certainty as regards the twists and turns of a novel. It is an idiosyncratic—almost capricious—"direct hit," as it were, a hit with inevitable results. One critic has referred to the "ancient formula" of the Magda Szabó novel which, like the Oedipus tale, moves to progressively deeper and more complicated mysteries, focusing its attention onto progressively more frightening traps. Her novels develop like clockwork: each word uttered, each gesture enacted, is a necessary part of the whole.

Magda Szabó is a tough writer expecting retribution, in whose novels sin enfolds the transgressor and elicits a compulsion to admit to sinning. Rather than await justice from the outside world, she lays her trust in the power of inner accountability within the soul. She is essentially Calvinist. It is not the liberating sensation of a good confession made by a Roman Catholic that resounds in her novels, but rather the sombre catharsis entailed in accounting to a congregation, in public confession, and in self-incrimination.

Her novels are the drawing up of accounts of distorted individuals; all around her, at the time of various dictatorships, generations were compelled to act without regard to what their hearts, their beings told them. A great deal of hurt and self-destructive passion surges within her characters, who are nourished less and less by their own beings, and more and more by motives embedded in the collective subconscious.

The novels describe the various states of malevolence between individuals. They are full of mutual fear, furtive mutual observation, accumulated injuries, and premeditated injury (such as in *Fresco*). Eventually there comes the moment when the characters open up; confessions flow out like lava, individuals try to redress what can no longer be salvaged, to put an end to their years of reticence (*The Fawn,* the ending of *Pilatus*, 1963). In *Katalin utca* (Katalin Street, 1969), Szabó reflects on the passing of the years, on adulthood, with the consequent loss of the island of childhood and the happiness that was once to be had in togetherness. Nonetheless, as *Mózes egy, huszonkettő* (Moses One, Twenty-two, 1967) underscores, the members of each new generation yearn for this island, where they can live without fear, alongside one another, in mutual respect. But relationships can neither be rationally planned nor behaviour towards each other programmed; such is the theme of *A Danaida* (1964) and *Pilatus*.

All the same, her novels ultimately acknowledge the need for intimate relationships; it is precisely the absence of such relationships that led to tragedy. This conviction, too, nourishes the ideal whereby the past is revived to new life. The past, however, retains and avows its *pastness*. Such is the case with the re-enacted past portrayed in *Katalin Street* and with the memoirs she has written, *Ókút* (Ancient Well, 1970), *Régimódi történet* (An Old-Fashioned Story, 1977), and *Megmaradt Szobotkának* (He Remained Szobotka, 1983). Indeed, this is also true of *Abigél* (1970), a novel she undertook to write for a younger audience.

Mutual attraction and even a sexual bond is not enough to sustain a relationship; the breakdown of the relationship between the Western diplomat and the cultured, humanist Central-European woman in *A szemlélők* (The Spectators, 1973) is evidence of this. The miracle occurs when two individuals do break through the wall between them and go back and forth into each other's worlds as in *An Old-Fashioned Story*, *He Remained Szobotka*, and *The Door*. The tragic motif, however, is that not even then can they really help each other—whether the causes be external or inner differences—and they finish up tying each other's helping hands. In the end, the individual is still left to his own devices. The question that lingers is whether this, too, is inevitable.

The Only Way of Setting Myself Free

I have given up writing poetry because, you know, if my arm is aching then I don't bang it against the wall. It hurts, writing poetry, so I have given it up. But I do write prose.

Why does writing poetry hurt?

Because it hurts. Really. It makes me suffer. Emotions and all the things I have lived through I always carry with me, holding them, they are closed inside my heart and mind. They are hidden and after a time they are at rest. But in writing poetry, these things open themselves up again, they arrive, they greet you in dreams, they step inside the door and say "Hey, your mother is dead." If I don't write a poem about it then sometimes I can forget that my mother isn't alive anymore. But if I reflect upon the poem I wrote after her funeral, then it is as if I am present at the funeral again and again. Why? Isn't life hard enough?

Yet your novel, An Old-Fashioned Story, *is about your mother.*

Of course. It was the only way of setting myself free. It was the way I could say to my mother "thank you", and to say to my family thank you for life, for everything I got.

And writing the novel wasn't as painful?

No. You know, when I lost my mother it was something... as if it were not true. I felt as if I could not live anymore. She should have been, should have become a very great author or writer. She was as talented... more talented than I can ever be. But she became a mother and a wife, and my brother and I took all the time from her life. It was another society back then concerning money and the ways of a woman at the end of the last century and the beginning of this one. It was Hungary, not England where *Wuthering Heights* was written in 1847. For a gentry girl without any money, without any capital, closed in a

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Even in distilling individual histories from biographical events, mosaics of memories—indeed, documentable events—and turning them into narrative, as in *An Old-Fashioned Story*, her mother's history, and *He Remained Szobotka,* her husband's, Szabó sees to it that behind the thrill of discovery there is always to be found a historical model or archetype. That which happens has happened before. Even the titles of her novels allude to this: *Pilatus* (Pilate), *A Danaida* (The Danaid), and *Moses One, Twenty-two*. Beyond its literal meaning, *The Ancient Well* is an allusion to Thomas Man's "infinitely deep" well, the idea that history as it progresses repeats

small town like Debrecen, of course she had no opportunities. My mother was married very young and had neither money nor liberty to develop into the glorious genius she could have been. But I always felt who she was and who she could have been and I loved her. She was really my best friend. I had an extraordinary, a wonderful marriage with my husband, but I will always miss my mother. When she died I couldn't understand how I could make it without her. She was always here and she wasn't here. It was such a funny feeling, feeling her presence but not seeing her. So I tried to create a miracle. I told my husband that I would try to reconstruct her personality and her past. This is the history of my family. She gave birth to me and I wanted to give life to her again. Death took my mother from me and now I wanted to take her from the churchyard. She will live again. So I composed, in four years, *An Old-Fashioned Story* for her.

Your works have been translated into thirty languages.

Hungary is a very poor country, without a real currency. So we try to sell anything we can. The communists were always eager to sell something. We had a publishing house for translations, Corvina. When my first novel, *Fresco*, was published, Corvina tried to find a West German publishing house to buy *Fresco* from Corvina. At the Frankfurt Book Fair, they bought my entire life work... everything I would write in the future. It was Herman Hesse who gave his opinion to the literary world in the West. He said, "She is a goldfish, buy her." That's what he wrote to the woman who translated me into German. After it was published in one western language, then it was okay, you know? Because then the French saw what I could do and so on. This spring one of my novels was published in Greece, in Greek. But it was pure chance you know... Herman Hesse.

(From an interview given in August 1990 to John J. Gonczy, an American Fulbright research scholar, then in Hungary.)

itself even on the individual level. In the titles of her other novels, one finds the possibility of repetition and, as a consequence, of comparison.

Magda Szabó's most distinguished novels may well include two early ones, the two apotheoses of otherness, *Fresco* and *The Fawn*; the pillar of her midcareer, *An Old-Fashioned Story*, in which she retrieves, as it were, the individual living entirely in the confines of family and history; and her two most recent works, *The Door* and *The Moment*. The first two novels recount torrid personal vengeance,

involving two heroines simultaneously ostracized due to two types of circumstance. In one case, this is due to middle-class pretensions, the gap between a family's well-to-do past and the reality of poverty; in the other, in "socialism", precisely because of one's gentlemanly past. The two women break with their respective families and move into the distinctive province of art. Corinna, in *Fresco*, is a painter, and Eszter Encsy in *The Fawn,* triumphs as well, as an actress. Corinna's triumph is exclusively of a moral nature. Her art has value only in her own eyes; her art was disowned by the cultural policy of the dictatorship. Her triumph in the face of her disintegrating, indolent, conformist family is indeed real. Eszter Encsy, meanwhile, has seen success as an artist and with the appearance of her autobiography, a pack of lies rewritten in keeping with the formula prescribed by the system, but it is her triumph which destroys her inner world, including her love. The demon of destruction possesses her and, in spite of herself, she unravels everything that she wants to tie. *An Old-Fashioned Story* , by contrast, represents a retrieval of the past that Corinna and Eszter have discarded; here, the individual cannot live without the past of her family and community. This book presents the resurrection of the Hungarian professional middle-class, its very existence denied under socialism; this is true also of the play based on the book, as well as of the series now being produced for Hungarian television. It is not, however, the uncritical creation of something heroic, it is simply the documented discovery of a lost social ambience. Perhaps it was in translating John Galsworthy's *The Forsyte Saga* into Hungarian with her husband, that she realized the virtual absence of the middle-class family in Hungarian fiction. She does the same in *Abigél*, her "novel for young people," that describes the apotheosis of a Calvinist secondary school during the German occupation of the Second World War. As a television series it was to educate generations of Hungarian viewers as a cautionary tale.

A short précis of *The Door* would make it look meaningless. As against the heroines of her previous novels, it is a servant who has the lead role here, as if Szabó has chosen to redirect the spotlight from Hamlet to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. The novel relates the confidential relationship between a successful woman author and Emerenc, her charwoman. Emerenc earnestly hopes that the lady writer is worthy of her trust, so that she can reveal to her more and more about her past and present life. The writer is on the defensive, however and is increasingly inclined to isolate herself—even though curiosity overcomes her as well. Emerenc's secret is that none may enter her home. Both began their lives in surroundings where mutual responsibility was something given, pure and simple. This memory yields the tact with which the writer-protagonist, after all rebuffs, misgivings, and attempts at retaining distance, nonetheless returns, as it were, to Emerenc's confidence—indeed, to an ever more inner circle of trust.

By this time, Emerenc has become a maid of all work and advisor to those living on a well-to-do street. Yet she increasingly withdraws from the outside world. She allows no one into her home, into which she gathers the cats she has taken in out

of pity. All in immaculate cleanliness. It is actually here that the novel begins. What would happen, however, if Emerenc were to become ill, perhaps terminally, and could no longer look after herself? She wants to die alone in her spotless lair, even if it means rotting away; for her symbolic secret—the cats she has cared for out of compassion—is not to be seen by anyone while she is still alive. It is a zenith of trust that leads her to share her secret, to let the writer see her sanctuary.

Emerenc even serves as an example of sorts for the writer to follow. She has allowed a wretched, vain old maid, whom she has taken under her wing, to die; indeed, she has helped her prepare for suicide. She too expects to be treated this way. She wants to live only as long as there is meaning to her life, not in miserable humiliation at another's mercy. And here is her real secret: Emerenc wishes to live in the sight of others only as long as she can retain her dignity. She does not want to be tormented while half-dead. Her relationship with the outside world continues only while every one of her words—rare though they are—actions and gestures are resolute acts, while each and every manifestation of her being is a meaningful and useful complement to her surroundings. Then others can demonstrate their real concern—by leaving her alone.This is what she wants, and she has entrusted the writer with the responsibility of seeing that her wish is granted.

What happens once Emerenc does become ill, shuts herself in and is incapable even of moving? Her spotless home is infested with stench and filth. Her neighbours want to rescue her. The writer joins in the effort. It is at the writer's request that Emerenc finally opens the door, they storm her lair, take her to be disinfected and then to hospital. The writer doesn't even have the time to keep track of further developments; she's busy with a TV appearance, a presentation of awards, an official journey to Greece. As for Emerenc's home, that too is fumigated and the furniture burned, the cats scatter in all directions. All that she has feared has come to pass: she has been humiliated. The writer nonetheless acts out one more torturous comedy. She calms Emerence down in hospital by telling her that nothing has happened—that her home awaits her safe and sound. Emerenc, however, recovers and prepares to go home. She must be told the truth. The writer dares not do so, and entrusts a helpful acquaintance with the job. Emerenc cannot and does not survive this breach of faith.

All the trials the writer has come through successfully count for nothing, for she fails the real test. Because she has feared to let another person live and die according to her own maxims, her triumphs are annulled. She is left with a recurrent dream, that of the opening door, which is to be her eternal punishment and suffering—the fate of a traitor.

The Door describes the linking of two different personalities. The first, that of the writer, is explosive and passionate but nonetheless in need of understanding; the other, that of the servant, is introspective and doggedly insistent on sticking to her own decisions. It might also be said that the novel measures up two types of intellect: civilized humanism and ancient-archaic integrity.

Ultimately, however, this is more than the struggle of two individuals to understand each other; the conflict veiled by the plot actually amounts to an *inner* struggle. Emerenc is a moral genius—in the Kantian sense—who is part of us all. She has been through the hells of human experience, recollects the barbaric and tragic events of fate, is capable of essential movements only, is generous, and in her every relationship she seeks to defend and develop her own dignity. It is as if Luther's words, "Here I stand, for I can do no other," echo about her.

The novel is more than the struggle of two types of persons for mutual understanding. The duel, which is part of the action, is really an inner struggle. Emerenc and the fictional writer are then two sides of the same person. A human being fragmented into roles uses it as a search for the self, for the Emerenc that lives in all of us. How often we too smash down the door of our Emerenc being, yet we know the Open Sesame: human dignity. Both our own dignity and that of others, for the two are one and the same—inseparable. Emerenc is at once the *other*—she who entrusts herself to us—and ourselves. We are equally responsible for both.

With *The Door*, Magda Szabó took a thematic step away from heroines wrestling with history to the articulation of a moral phenomenon that exists outside history. Prior to this novel, there was a historical precedent to be found *behind* each of her narratives. Emerenc, however, is archaic morality herself, her story is of necessity pathos. Yet Magda Szabó has had enough of history; for it has trampled over her more than once. It has brought her no consolation. Therefore she breaks her relationship with history; the absence of history means that every story can be told in as many ways as there are characters. Her historical plays are essentially such new interpretations. The creation of the Hungarian nation-state and the conversion to Christianity have been previously written about heroically or with pathos. Szabó simply creates frivolous stories: her situations must be accepted because nothing else can be done.

Her novel, *The Moment*, confronts every kind of stylized history. Szabó, turning the story of Aeneas inside out, takes merciless revenge on every kind of power, she gives the reader occasion to roar with laughter. In playful mien, but with unyielding hatred, Szabó looks back upon a mendacious world.

Upon *a* mendacious world, however, or *the* mendacious world? Considering Szabó's ethical and poetic orientation, one may observe that she has validly articulated every sort of lie, as well as the inner and outer force behind the humiliation of human dignity. The poetic radiance of the work, and the enlivening beauty evident as the writer formulates her thoughts, all attest to this.

Her *Creusa*—contrary to legend—does not die in Troy, but rather it is she who kills her husband, Aeneas, and it is she who lives through adventures in her husband's name. She is a woman in the role of a womanizing hero. Indeed, she becomes a merciless and methodical adventurer, a triumphant cheat given to resolute action—and an unhappy woman. The moment referred to by the novel's

title is that in which destiny offers a human being something other than the status quo—the chance to turn a schematically preordained, doomed life into a success. Owing to the circumstances, however, this moment offers not completeness and self-fulfillment but a triumph that is merely a path of escape. In return, Creusa must drag about her own unhappiness; she can realize this success only by patronizing and taking advantage of others, by regarding them as objects to be used. She, a woman seeking love, finds herself doing not what she wants but is bound for the rest of her days to play the role of a man who can offer no love. The ultimate consequence is that she scorns the means of her success and, likewise, herself. Hell is not the underworld where Aeneas sought her, but lives within the liberated Creusa. Her successes are merely illusion; each new success is simultaneously a new defeat.

With this novel, Magda Szabó has liberated herself from all that bound her art during her career. In it, history ceases to be; heroes and heroines are inessential, and as a result pathos also disappears. There remains a bitter disillusionment, of such basic force that it resounds with optimism—with the ecstasy implied by the freedom of play, the deconstruction of history, and the riddance from the story. The author whose impulse toward vengeance had until now compelled her to write classical works in a particular national tradition, has cast away every forced constraint. If earlier Magda Szabó donned the realist mask of the mythical heroine in her struggle for individual freedom, now she has concealed her despair behind the ardour of postmodern playfulness. ❧

Magda Szabó

An Old-Fashioned Story

(Excerpt)

Apart from the basic differences between the sexes my mother knew nothing about her own body or about marital relations until she was married. She considered the biological changes in her body a nasty disease which she would have kept secret had she been able to, but the signs gave her away at once. All Melinda told her was that this something would appear every month and she should make sure that it did, because otherwise she would be swiftly turned out of the house and banished from human society to the swamps like Emma Gacsáry. My mother was almost fatally anaemic; no one had bothered about what she ate when she was small, and until Mrs Bartók started to feed her, it sometimes happened that her natural cycle broke down, especially in the early days. Those were terrible times for her, she felt as if she had committed a sin without being aware of it, and she waited to be turned out of the house, and worried about where she could go. Junior lived in Debrecen, but she scarcely ever saw him so that was no solution, and she lived in fear until her body solved the problem for her. That she had got married without any enlightenment whatsoever she told me before my own wedding when, tortuously searching for words, she tried charitably to help me through the horror which awaited me. She was relieved when I told her not to worry on my account, there was honestly no need. The news didn't exactly thrill her, but she calmed down, and it was then she revealed the total ignorance—all she had by way of advice was the memory of cats mating—with which they let her take leave of Kismester utca and go to her new life. "They were worried I'd take after mother or father," she said, making excuses even then for her grandmother. I didn't argue with her, I had my own opinion on the subject.

The slender girl who had been taught to look on the opposite sex with horror, and who, until she was married, thought officers only had a stripe on one leg of their trousers because she'd never dared to look properly at their uniform; the girl who notices with alarm that she is being watched, stared at and followed by young men, preserves two pictures about love. The first is a shapeless picture comprising the cat, the night caterwauling of the animals, and the fate and disappearance of her own mother, the second she only knows from books, noble songs, and the bride's prayer in the prayer book. Both pictures are unrealistic; one disgusts her, the other

An Old-Fashioned Story

A century comes alive in this narrative. Against the intentions of the writer's parents: it was their desire that she should cut off every thread that led back into the past, that she should live her own life, keeping her eyes firmly on the future. At first she accepted this advice, but, long after her mother's death, she made a start on finding her past again.

Two worlds clashed in her family's story: that of burghers and that of the lesser nobility. Hard-working merchants handed on their sense of duty and their property from generation to generation, playing their part in the politics and social life of their town. The nobility were well-educated but knew no moderation. In search of constant amusement, they ran through huge fortunes, flourishing estates, in a short period of time.

It was a love of rare passion that, in the writer's family, coupled the wealthy heiress to a merchant fortune to a wealthy young noble. The love imbued with unusual sexuality between the great-grandparents, Mária, the daughter of the middle-class Rickls, and the elder Kálmán, hero of the 1848 Revolution, the pride of the noble Jablonczays, initiated a line of family tragedies. Sexuality is defeated by the clash of differing traditions. The burgher great-grandmother—bidding farewell to a fortune lost at the card-table, all passion spent—wants her descendants for generations ahead to lead a dutiful, hard-working middle-class life. But her son, the spoilt younger Kálmán, is, even in his marriage, the personified nobility in revolt. The daughter of that marriage, Lenke Jablonczay, Mária Rickl's granddaughter, has to be brought up by her grandmother. What will happen to her? How does the writer herself come to be born, at the time of the Great War, as the fruit of Lenke's second marriage? How does she suppress her own dreams of art in order to pass on the middle-class virtues to her daughter, the future writer? Can the two traditions thus united enrich the personality, rather than blow it apart? The manners and morals and the ambience of a hundred years come to life in the course of the writer's research.

When it was written it was really just an old-fashioned tale, an evocation of a vanished world. Today, however, a reviving Hungary once again confronts the question of how different traditions can be lived in a way that enriches them mutually. —L. K.—

impresses her, but she can't identify with either of them; although she watches the weddings in the church of Saint Anna, she never sees herself in her imagination as a bride. The body which comes in for so much praise from the boys who stand and gaze outside the club is silent. She doesn't know how her mother got into the same situation as the cats, she doesn't know how a girl differs from a married woman, nor does the protected and pampered Bella, who is kept away from anything alarming or "ugly". The eldest Bartók girl has children now, but she didn't ask and no one ever explained to her what happened between Emil Wilhelms and Ilona Bartók as a consequence of which Nóra, Pali and Ilike came into the world. They just appeared, God sent them, that's how babies came all of a sudden when people got married. Lenke and Bella never spoke about these questions to each other, they just agreed that young men were dangerous and it was better to steer clear of them and make fun of them: there could be no trouble then either at home or in the convent.

The dancing school she was entered for and where she had such sensational success, became a happy pastime because of the dancing. Lenke, who at one time danced for sweets, sailed from arm to arm, enjoying the rhythmical movement; she was surprisingly good at dancing as she was at so many things. And what if she would be a dancer?, she asks herself as she floats on and on. "Pianist, dancer or writer?" She always draws away slightly from whoever is holding her because she only enjoys the movement, the contact alarms her. Her head held back, and leaning away slightly in the dance was how the young man, who would later introduce himself to her and take her off for a waltz, caught sight of her in the entrance to the dance hall that belonged to Károly Müller's heirs. The moment freezes, registered not just in the memories of those present, but in Bella's diary, and in my mother's diary too. Lenke Jablonczay met József in the Károly Müller Dancing School.

I was given pictures of József, the never forgotten, from Bella Bartók's album; the photos in mother's possession were torn up by my father, Elek Szabó.

Bella's album preserved two faces of the man. In the first he is a young married man, standing with arms crossed and looking with proud self-assurance into the lens, elegant and slightly more serious than you would expect for his age. József lives in the world of finance, in the picture he looks as secure as a creditworthy public company. In the second picture he is still a young, almost vulnerable youth, under his high collar the knot of his silk tie has slipped a little; his body too is boyish, his moustache silky, an endearing musical comedy leading man moustache over his well-formed lip, the eyes which have been captured in the photo are gentle and brown. In this picture József looks somewhat like Charles IV, the last king of Hungary; he has no pretentious ideas as yet, his ambition only extends as far as passing his finals. I did, as a matter of fact, meet him in his old age, but it wasn't a fortunate meeting. My mother wanted to show off her 22 year old Ph. D. and secondary school teacher daughter—me—to her former love, obviously wanting to convey to him that this would have been his daughter had he decided differently then, in their youth. At that time József held an important position at the National

Bank: the imposing doorman, shining brass, marble and revolving glass doors were all meant to impress me. József himself sat at his desk like Mussolini. We stared at each other; he obviously thought I wasn't the slightest bit like my slim, blond, green-eyed mother, I look too independent, too emancipated. For my part I saw a well-dressed, portly, ageing man, whose appearance wasn't unpleasant, but to whom I took an instant dislike. It probably wouldn't have made any difference if he'd been a Knight of the Holy Grail: I couldn't forgive my mother for never having been in love with my father as she was at one time with József.

I had him beaten within half an hour with my sly, pointed little questions on cultural things. I proved to him that he didn't read, didn't see, didn't hear, had no feeling for art, didn't understand the theatre; and he didn't have the sense to counter my impudence by starting to question me about his own field, about economics, about the world of banking, or about that branch of the arts in which he was really well-informed, and with which he could have got the better of me in no time, chamber music. He invited me to lunch and we set out in his car. We had a quarrel about something right away; we hated each other. He probably saw in me Elek Szabó's daughter; I saw in him the unshiftable idol which, apart from itself, was identifiable with youth and what is forever past, and someone who couldn't obscure the image of father's Roman profile, recalling the ancient silver denarius, his deep and amazing culture, the playful flashes of his intellect. József took me to Gundel's and ordered lunch of various dishes to be eaten in the most complicated ways, and then watched to see whether I would be able to cope with the task or would I be hopelessly provincial. I sat beside him and let him test me. I had learnt how to behave at table from Rózsa Kalocsa, and four summers spent in foreign boarding schools had accustomed me to unfamiliar tastes. By the end of lunch we had exhausted all possible subjects, so we sat in silence. In the meantime people came and went in the garden at Gundel's. József gave a loud greeting to several men and couples who passed our table without taking any notice of us, and they pretended they'd only just seen us, took a good look, and greeted both of us in a very friendly way. When this had been repeated for the third time, I laughed and showed that I had grasped what was happening. "They think you've taken your mistress sunbathing," I said to him. At which he hissed at me and went red in the face: where had I learnt such filthy thoughts and filthy notions. I looked at him as if he were an ancient bison in a game reserve. I told him he should come to his senses, it wasn't Lenke Jablonczay he'd invited for lunch, but me, and if he didn't like my manners then I wouldn't bother to go to his recital that evening. He shouldn't think I was overjoyed by his invitation, I'd much rather go to the theatre than listen to his *Kammermusik*. He pulled himself together and we somehow got back to normal, but by then he wanted to get rid of me and I got out of his car in Andrássy út. I was furious that I'd let myself be talked into this meeting at which two former lovers were sending messages to each other. One of them sends a delegate in her place, and shows off with her child's diploma and doctorate, conveying that this girl will be able to get

through life on her own, and her opportunities will depend on her abilities. While the other throws his money around, drags me off to Gundel's, and brags about his wealth. How dare they use me as a pawn in their game. That evening, however, I went round to his place, a three storey house near the Hotel Astoria, and I did all I could to look attractive so as not to disgrace my mother. I was received by a frail little figure, the woman whom he had eventually married instead of my mother. She could barely take her clever, sad eyes off me; I could sense her glance on my face almost the whole evening. All the invited guests had had something to do with Debrecen at some time, and the phrase: "Lenke Jablonczay's daughter" meant something to all of them. I must have been a general disappointment: I was short, dark-haired, dark eyed and, in spite of all my previous resolves to the contrary, I was again impudent. I couldn't restrain myself when József started drawing my attention to the valuables and works of art to be found in his home, proving to me how far he'd got in the world, how rich he was, and he tried to test me on various furniture styles. He made no headway whatsoever with that; he didn't know that my father had taken me regularly to the museum, and had cut out and stuck in a book the reproductions of world famous statues, paintings, buildings and works of art from the Sunday newspaper supplements ever since I was a little girl. Before the ethereal chamber music had even begun, József's voice had gone falsetto I had irritated him so much. Not a single of his fireworks had gone off though he had thrown in the value of his land and house too. Not once did he have the pleasure of feeling that Lenke Jablonczay's daughter was daydreaming about the tangible, perceptible wealth, and would return to her mother stunned by what she had seen and tell her that Uncle József was a real nabob. "May I have a look at your books!", I asked him. At that stage he was almost twittering in his nervousness, and his wife rushed to his aid. She showed me her own library which was full of German, English and French classics, making excuses for her busy husband who had very little time to read. Then the musical evening began, and to the accompaniment of the angelic tunes the drama of the three of us, four of us, or rather five of us, was enacted. In József's salon, the musicians played behind the luxuriant indoor plants and the inlaid art nouveau bouquets in the folding glass doors which could be opened to form a wall, and through which the lit wall brackets in the dining room shone. József looked at me and at his wife. The woman's eyes held the same helpless sorrow which I saw occasionally in my father's eyes. I gazed at them, but I sensed far away Debrecen and my father who knew about this meeting and was probably supporting me with all his thoughts at that moment and wondering whether, at least as far as I was concerned, he would stand up to all that comparison. And I felt the nervous anxiety of my mother too, who hadn't really wanted to step over this threshold, but who couldn't resist showing me to József and finding out where, how and with whom the fairy-tale prince was living.

My family got two versions of this meeting, the first from me right away; as I arrived home I quickly unloaded my opinion about the unforgettable knight who

only just refrained from handing me his bank book so that I could report to the nearest *fillér* the state of his bank balance, who didn't read, and was a boastful, prudish, unpleasant fellow, conceited and rude. Mother didn't defend him, she didn't even protest, she just grew sad. Then she got József's report from Bella Bartók's letter. Phrasing her letter in a delicate and mild way, she tried to mollify József's opinion, but despite all her stylistic prowess it was clear that József had never met a more loathsome, arrogant and bad-mannered brat in his life, and he had no desire to see her ever again. There was a sentence in the letter which hurt my mother: Bella wrote that József had been surprised that his wife, on the other hand, had liked the insolent kid and ever more amazing, the girl had been friendly with Jenny because with her she behaved normally. "Were you drawn to that woman?", asked my mother. "Did you find her pretty? Clever?" I knew she was asking me whether Jenny was prettier or cleverer than she was. I knew she was jealous of the affection which, to my surprise, I genuinely felt towards József's wife. "That woman sits there in a house like a museum and is unhappy all day and all night," I informed her. "József may have been bought for her at one time, but she has no joy in him, believe me. I just felt sorry for her." "You're cruel because you're young," my mother said. "I thought it would be good if you met. You might understand something that you can't grasp, but it didn't work. I'm sorry I wanted you to get to know each other. It was unnecessary, a mistake perhaps." I never saw József again. My mother and my brother Béla saw him once or twice more, but as far as my father and I were concerned he had rolled off the horizon. Father in fact lived to see how József's existence, which had seemed so secure, crumbled beneath him; how the three storey house, the position, the opportunities, disappeared into thin air; he lived to see the day they were forcibly relocated. My mother wrote Bella's name as the sender of food parcels she sent to József so that her one-time Prince Charming should have a sliver of paprika bacon.

All this, however, is a long way from the moment when József, in the company of a girl and an elderly couple, crosses the threshold of the Károly Müller's Heirs Dance Hall, particularly brilliantly lit for the happy moments of the annual ball. József is a 20 year old law student; the chaperons put their heads together when he enters. József is the most golden of goldfish, son of a bank manager, a rich, handsome boy, before whom the door of every salon opens. But who can entice him in? József is always in Budapest or abroad; he only goes to the university to take exams, and although he used to have an eye for the girls in his schooldays, for the last two years he hasn't visited the usual haunts, and he can't even be lured to parties. Excited and interested glances accompany him when he occasionally does turn up somewhere, mainly at mass on Sundays, but even then he doesn't stay to the end; for years no one's seen him take communion with the members of his family as is fit and proper. The Bartóks know his family well, Ilonka's husband is a bank official, the Bartóks and József's parents move in the same circles, and anyway Mrs Bartók and József's mother are great talkers and talk readily to each other.

The shadow of early death is there on Margit Bartók's clever, pretty face; whereas József's younger sister Ninon is ugly. The family knows she is ugly. Ninon knows it too. The mothers reassure each other: Ninon will grow out of herself, her eyes and her hair are attractive anyway, and Margit's condition can easily improve. Maybe marriage will change everything for the better. They try to help each other: József's family owns a big vineyard and orchard, and the air there is probably better than in Nyomtató utca. József's mother invites Margit to their place to rest, "to stretch her legs", and she offers to fatten her up in the Old Garden. Margit is unwilling, she loathes strangers and only likes to be with members of her family or, if she's feeling particularly strong, with the other painters in Nagybánya. Instead, so as not to offend József's family, Ilonka and Bella go with their parents to the Old Garden. The Bartóks, on the other hand, invite Ninon and her brother to their parties, but to no avail. Ninon is shy; despite her parents assuring her that she is liked and respected in the Bartók household, she stays at home, and József is loyal to his sister.

Since February 20, 1897, when he escorted his sister to the lawyers' and officials' fancy dress ball, József himself has a grudge against everyone, and he repays the insult suffered by Ninon by taking no notice of any of the girls and saying that he would never get married, but even if he did he wouldn't marry anyone from this town. My mother was thirteen that year and József, though nobody was aware of it, had already had an indirect influence on her formative years. The scar which made Miklós Otth's face so ugly that my mother avoided him, not just out of offended modesty, but also on account of the unattractive sight, was caused by a clumsy cut of József's sabre. This had occurred in a ham-fisted duel—which was postponed till after their matriculation, and fought immediately after—between József and the challenged Otth. The inexperienced József, with a couple of fencing lessons to his name, by a stroke of exceptional luck, managed to wound Otth at the first crossing of swords, so that only after a series of operations did his face become just about acceptable again. At the ball given by the association of lawyers and civil servants, the dance card of which has naturally been preserved at the Bartóks, József's father and Ágoston Bartók were part of the organizing committee, as was the future mayor, the best man at my mother's second wedding, Endre Márk. All the Fates were there, Melinda's girlfriends, and their husbands-to-be Károly Gaszner and Dávidházy; Jenő Ericz, who appears in the SQUIRES AND GENTLEMEN column of Bella Bartók's visitors' book, is there as one of the patrons; also old Hutiray, the father of mother's future family doctor; among the celebrities is the historian of literature Albert Kardos, and who would ever suspect that decades later, when many members of that company were still alive, and quite a number of them held important positions, they would let him go on his way from the Debrecen brick yard to Hitler's death camp without raising a finger. Also dancing there is Doctor Kenézy, who would help Lenke Jablonczay's daughter into the world with great difficulty; there too is the second husband of Margit Bartók's godmother, Vilma, Mihály Majerszky, the Magoses, the Weszprémys, the Vécseys, the Kölcseys, and one of Lenke Jablonczay's future

brothers-in-law, who very nearly became the father-in-law of her older sister, Lajos Roncsik; Gyula Than the journalist, the Tüdőses, and Melinda's future taroc partners, György Kubek and Sándor Orosz. It is a fancy dress ball. The anonymity and facelessness of it make it attractive to Ninon. Her parents are happy that at last she wants to go somewhere. After the dance there is a lot of talk in the Kismester utca house, too, about how, at the moment when the masks were lifted, Ninon and her family disappeared, and how there at the ball József hit Miklós Otth when he was dancing with Ninon who was dressed as the sultan's daughter. It was an embarrassing affair, it couldn't be kept secret because a lot of people witnessed it and those present were disgusted by the slightly drunk young man's shout: "Good God, is that you, Ninon? Why don't you always wear a mask?" Later on it was people's exaggerated tenderness which offended the girl who could never again be lured anywhere. She tended her plants, read and drew all day long, and as if she would want to take revenge on her mother and father because their love hadn't produced a similar lovely creature to their son, she rejected any attempt to go anywhere where she might meet the Debrecen set. József supported his sister whole-heartedly, he made terrible remarks about the insolence of the gentry; he announced on several occasions that by offending Ninon they had offended him, and until they had received a full apology he wasn't prepared to meet anyone either.

József's father was a wise banker, clear-headed and pragmatic. Although he loved his daughter just as much as his handsome son, he didn't take Ninon's case too tragically, he didn't force her into anything, he had his own ideas about the future, and if his son didn't hang around the club watching for the students of the Dóczi college or the convent, all the better: let him act the Eugene Onegin, it was still far better than mooning over the actresses from the local theatre. József and Ninon lived in the awareness of Debrecen society as a paragon of brotherly loyalty and solidarity. The families shamefully took note of the fact that József didn't accept their invitations, and the fathers who had daughters to marry off mentioned the Otth case in irritation, as if all those who had attended the ball were personally responsible for the nasty episode. Later, much later, when my mother was already Mrs Majthényi, Lenke Jablonczay and Ninon talked about the fancy dress ball and the romance between József and Lenke Jablonczay. "D'you know why he became Onegin at that time?", Ninon confided to my mother. "It wasn't me they offended at that fancy dress ball, Lenke. But *his* sister. *His* kin, who was in fact identical with him, in other words it was *him*. Apart from that he'd always hated Otth with his three predicates of nobility, and the whole company, because you were all nobility, even your great-grandfather Anzelmus who packed herrings with his own hands. All we had was money at that time, and József was happy that he could sulk. You didn't know my brother; you should be glad he didn't marry you. Józsi punishes and rewards, Józsi dispenses justice, Józsi makes pronouncements. Józsi's not fit for a bank, even though he's a good economist—as a matter of fact, Józsi is the ideal executioner." Ninon's words were preserved in Bella Bartók's diary with suitably shocked comments.

In 1900, the year of the memorable community ball, Lenke Jablonczay turned fifteen. On the evening of the ball, although the youngest were taking exams at the time, everyone who was anyone of importance in the town was there at the hall belonging to the heirs of Károly Müller. The wall was black with chaperons; the men were at the buffet table tasting all the delicious things which had been brought to the ball, there was no lack of drink either. If someone had wanted to drop a bomb that carnival season in Debrecen, they would've had to choose this hall and this occasion: all the influential circles in the town were to be found here, in one place. It was an old tradition at Müller's that with the permission of the parents who had organized the dancing classes, other people could be invited. Those who had already been introduced into society, who had attended in previous years always took stock with their husbands or wives of the new flock leaving the nest and were amused by the earnestness of the girls and the young men. József had at one time learnt to dance here with Ninon, so in fact the arrival of their family shouldn't have been greeted with so much surprise and excitement. After all what's so special about their coming: the "whole of Debrecen" is here. Except that this is the first time in years that József and Ninon have turned up anywhere. Lenke Jablonczay knows everyone by sight, even József himself. On the basis of the Bartók family's remarks, she had identified every face long ago while out on walks or at mass. There's only one person she is unsure about: the young man walking arm in arm with Ninon. At the age of eighty Lenke Jablonczay still remembered the blond hair and dreamy eyes of Ninon's fiancé. József's future brother-in-law was like a Lermontov hero; no one would have been surprised if he had suddenly started to speak in French and not Hungarian. In the greatest secrecy, József's father has linked his daughter's future with one of the most good-looking, one of the poorest and one of the highest-born young men in Budapest. In marriage the husband has about as much freedom as Ninon's parrot in the conservatory. Ninon's father liked clean situations; he didn't want to be the father of a girl who, having been played false by nature and wounded socially, had been fleeced financially as well.

No operetta-like entrance would have been able to compete with the appearance of the family, so Otth, who was also present, and who had naturally kept up outward appearances with József since the duel, left immediately. My mother sensed the tension, she saw Melinda whispering in agitation to her sisters, but my mother wasn't interested in anything else but the dancing. József's mother sought out Mrs Bartók who had always liked and wanted to help Ninon, and Mrs Bartók was the only person in the hall who considered what had happened to be natural: after all Ninon was a sweet creature, her big day had to come sometime. The girl, in a gorgeous dress, looked triumphantly happy, her ugly face was lit with the light of joy. József and his father got settled, his father sat down beside Ágoston Bartók, József stood in front of the musicians, his arms crossed, and studied the girls. He knew all the older ones, but not the youngsters who were waltzing ecstatically in their naive dresses. Whenever Melinda talked about that evening, she always said that the

mothers were hoping against hope that Ninon would come back to the company one day because they knew that Ninon meant József as well. "All that adjusting of dresses and arranging of ringlets," Melinda recalled, "it was fun to watch. The ladies were like the stall-keepers in the poultry market. József was devilishly clever, he must have noticed it, and the sight probably amused him." That evening Melinda and József were the closest to each other. Melinda knew that József would act exactly as she would act if life would ever allow her to take revenge for what she had to bear. Ninon was now out of the game and far too happy to have room in her heart for any anger. But József hadn't yet paid back the guests of the earlier fancy dress ball. For a long time he didn't move, Melinda related, then all at once he beckoned Müller's heir to him.The latter nodded, and took him over to László Sámy. Sámy and József had a few words, Sámy was astounded, you could see it on his face. Then they just stood there and waited for the dance to end. Before the beginning of the next dance, in the short interval, József got László Sámy to introduce him to Lenke Jablonczay and then asked her to dance.

It can happen at the races or in fairy stories that a totally unknown little horse leaves the favourite standing to be first past the post, or that the prince wants to marry the goosegirl and not the neighbouring king's daughter. Lenke Jablonczay, who was brought up out of mercy in the Kismester utca house, had about as little chance as a goosegirl to make her way in that Debrecen society where every girl was backed up at any rate by a secure, if not very considerable, fortune, the Bartók girls included. In the circle, the sons and daughters of whom were at the community ball, everyone knew that my mother could, at the most, produce her predicates of nobility as a dowry. The respect for Mária Rickl and the Anzelmuses, the light which at one time radiated from Senior, Mrs Bartók's patronage, the mother superior's supportive love, all left their mark on Junior's one time loves, the former Debrecen girls who were now the mothers of the debutante girls: they accepted Lenke Jablonczay, and they liked her, it was just that no one thought of her as a factor in social life. If she was invited somewhere her total lack of fortune and prospects underscored the financial security of the daughter of the house.

The people of Debrecen had often talked about József and the Byronic attitude he had taken since the evening of the fancy dress ball. They speculated on whom he would choose eventually as his partner and what in fact would be his first step once he returned, his passion and ardour having hibernated for such a long time. What actually happened couldn't have been foretold even with a crystal ball.

At the community ball my mother wore the most insignificant of dresses, a cast off from Melinda's younger years, a *tarlatane* dress which really only looks good once. Melinda herself had more or less worn it out before it even got to mother: its glittering fabric looked more like the wings of a drowned dragonfly at this stage. Her contemporaries, who were also stepping out into the world at that time, had been given suitably girlish dresses for the big occasion, sewn by the best dressmakers, and the young married women who were allowed more licence now—lower cut

dresses, more daring hairstyles—had dressed with special care this evening to make the young ones aware of the distance between this side and the far side of the marriage line which divides a girl from a married woman. During the big event mother was completely cool and down-to-earth, and that was her good fortune, otherwise the general mood would have turned against her in an instant. But my mother, who knew József's story and had even met his parents in Ilona Bartók's drawing room, didn't feel it was such a sensation that he asked her to dance: after all she had swept from arm to arm all evening. She danced right down the hall with József and then went back to the merchant's daughter, who waved to her with her fan.

Mária Rickl was torn between two feelings that evening. There was something unsettling about the fact that the girl who was appearing for the first time in public at this childish dance had got straight into a situation where all attention was focused on her. But there was also something pleasing about it: the people of Debrecen must have been just as astonished when she turned up for the first time as a bride on Senior's arm among the very people who, just like her, had been taught that Imre Jablonczay's son was an unreliable, wasteful, card-player. Yet in spite of that they had all been desperately in love with Senior. At the same time the merchant's daughter was resentful because she certainly didn't believe either in fairy stories or in miracles, and she regarded József's choice more of a snub than a compliment. This is the company that offended Ninon, so József has no wish to put his arm round the waist of any of them, and out of spite he chooses someone he's never set eyes on before, whose *tarlatane* dress hangs limply around her tiny waist, and who hasn't even got a demure velvet band around her neck. She's like Cinderella, and with her József can show that the whip is in his hand. If they made his sister cry on that occasion, he would break the pride of the girls and young wives, and since he couldn't take his revenge in a more grandiose way, he would choose as his partner instead of them the girl who, judging by her dress, was obviously a poor relation, confined to the sewing room at home. That evening Mária Rickl decided to give away the green hunting dress she had had made on the instructions of Stillmungus two years ago when my mother started her training as a teacher. Stillmungus had insisted that my mother should take part in some sort of charity event. My mother had worn it solidly from autumn till spring ever since—her classmates had named her Lenke the forest ranger, because of it. My mother was enjoying herself, she smiled. József was dancing with Ninon by this time, and later too, the whole time he was there, he only danced with his sister, and he wouldn't let anyone else dance with her except her blond fiancé. Then, as suddenly as they had come, they left, leaving restlessness and a pleasing excitement behind them. All those present sensed that this was the evening of reckoning, and if all the punishment they got for Otth's insult—for which the girls and young wives were really not to blame—was that that arrogant boy danced with poor little forest-ranger Lenke, then nothing had in fact happened; next time he was bound to behave in the way expected of him, like the other young men.

Mother told me that she hardly looked at József, she was so engrossed with the dance. She had more to say about Béla Majthényi to Gizella on the way home. She complained that the boy panted while dancing, that his hand was clammy and he gasped for breath. "Typical," said Melinda, "the fact that he's well-mannered and handsome doesn't occur to you. Only that he pants. Have you seen anyone who doesn't pant when he dances?" "Yes, I have," claimed my mother. "He starts panting right at the beginning, other people only do it at the end of the dance." Melinda shrugged: Béla Majthényi's gentle calm had attracted even her; she felt that this Majthényi could never hurt anyone. She gave another dig to the exhilarated girl by telling her that she would be ashamed to death if she'd caused such a stir at any time in *her* life. Mária Rickl, for the first time since she had adopted Junior's child, didn't switch to German or French to scold her daughter, but, to keep her respect in front of little Lenke, she said what she thought in Hungarian: "Yet it would have done you good, my girl, I might have got you off my hands then." Mother, who was anyway stirred up by the happy experience, couldn't restrain herself and burst out laughing. Two tiny episodes from the journey home by carriage return once more in the lives of Gizella and Lenke Jablonczay: Melinda laughs like that when Mrs Bartók whispers over her cup of tea with affectionate anxiety that her heart is full of worry because there's something wrong with Lenke's marriage. It's as if that kind, honest poor Majthényi wouldn't be his old self; what could possibly be the reason for the estrangement. And Lenke shouts out in alarm to her good friend and doctor, József Hutiray, as she leans over the bed of her husband, Béla Majthényi: "My God, how he pants!"

In that calendar year when mother stopped wearing the green hunting-dress and in the newly made grown-up dress she was as slim and beautiful as a golden candle; when twenty-four exhausted oxen before Ladysmith drew out Long Tom, the Boers' legendary cannon, which the women caressed and made triumphal wreaths for in vain on the roads to Carolina and Ermelo;

that calendar year when a British reconnaissance train with all on board is captured, including a war correspondent called Churchill, whose name will later be known to Adolf Hitler and every statesman in five continents; in that year when there is a catastrophic rice harvest in China, Prince Tuan becomes the head of the Foreign Office, and Admiral Seymour, who marches on the Chinese capital to crush the movement started by the young Chinese to destroy Europeans and European institutions, is unable to guarantee the lives of the whites; while the Austro-Hungarian Empire itself is so insecure that the appearance of the armed forces is gradually becoming a common thing in public life and the everyday life of the country because either hussars are breaking up demonstrating crowds outside the Austrian parliament, or dragoons are being let loose on the Czechs in Wenceslas Square, or Hungarian gendarmes are cleaning out undesirable elements from polling stations and the returning officers smuggle onto the list of candidates

fictitious names resembling those of the opposition, so that they can guarantee an absolute majority in parliament for the government party by invalidating the votes given to the false names;

in that calendar year, when Lueger in Vienna does everything to make the compromise between king and country a mere word, and a separate Hungarian army and customs area is once again just a dream, and the population of the country declines to a worrying extent, though the works of Dickens, Thackeray and Balzac are completed and there is a Hungarian translation of *Crime and Punishment* and the early works of Turgenev, Lenke Jablonczay and Bella Bartók are discussing what a miracle it would be if Mária Margit Stillmungus were not to choose something like a J. Petz musical scene: *Stayer School in the Middle of the Last Century or the Suspicious Pie,* or the comic scene from *A Farmhouse Concert* as a play to perform for once, but *The Gyurkovics Girls.* In that calendar year when the two convent schoolgirls listen with bated breath to Margit reading about the noble masculinity of Philipe Derblay, and they are moved whenever Ilonka plays Huszka's song about the two little sparrows who can only rest side by side on the telegraph pole, they pass through that decisive literary experience which, without their being aware of it, has a greater influence on the formation of their concept of the world than Stillmungus, their family upbringing or even their later practical experience. The money Bella has saved up for the purpose mounts up, and the Bartók's family library gains a new book, Helen Mathers' *Coming through the Rye.*

The author, born in Misterton in 1853, the wife of an English surgeon, had no idea at the age of twenty-two when she wrote her first novel, *Coming through the Rye,* and published it under her maiden name, how damaging a book it would turn out to be. This bestseller—available in 1878 in Hungary in a translation by Emilia Zichy, three years after its appearance in England—which evinces excellent powers of observation and description and is built up on autobiographical elements, and which caused wild enthusiasm, bitter tears and emotion among its readers, is an apotheosis of the love which lasts till death and is not of course sullied by physical contact. The mothers, schools and nannies couldn't have screened with more care the reading material available to girls than they did around 1900, yet *Coming through the Rye* passed the most rigorous examination and took its place on the bookshelves. When I was preparing to write *An Old-Fashioned Story*, this was the second book I got hold of after The *Way of the Golden Country*, and I read it from the first line to the last with great aversion. Like some sort of wicked spell, it started with an epitaph which named the type of death my mother was to have and its preliminaries, and, at the very end, Wattie's death once again recalled the way in which she eventually left us. When I was collecting facts about my mother's life, I was hit by her morbid toying with drowning in the Szikszays' swimming pool. The epitaph of *Coming through the Rye* was no light reading either: in its poorly translated simplicity it listed the symptoms of heart and lung asthma and the three fractures of the neck of the femur. Helen Adair's story didn't move me, it angered me. Helen Mathers died in 1920 when

my mother had already been married to her second husband, my father, for four years, and by then not only did she have a son from her marriage to Majthényi, but I too had come into the world, and the book in some way influenced all of our lives, that of Béla Majthényi senior, of Elek Szabó, my mother's, the life of my brother Béla and my own—even Melinda's up to a point. Only in rare cases can a writer measure what he or she builds up or destroys; Helen Mathers, who was only thirty years older than my mother, would no doubt have had a shock if she'd been told that in Debrecen, Hungary, she had convinced a young girl for ever that she shouldn't expect the fulfilment of happy love from terrestial beings; she got her out of the habit of imagining that hopes could be realized, she instilled in her a consciousness that all infidelity and male roughness was natural, and a sin forgiveable in the name of love; she taught her that it wasn't worth fighting against dishonesty or deceit, and that pride could lead to thin ice and unhappiness, but never into the mire. Apart from that she made her aware that people can only be really active doing bad things, good people are all clumsy, unsuspecting and vulnerable.

Barely six years after this book gets into my mother's hands, London is ringing with the shouts of suffragettes, and the author can watch the crowds from her surgeon husband's Harley Street house; barely six years and the prudery and mania of an era is borne away in the coffin of Queen Victoria. Even so, the book, the most important reading of my mother's convent years, happened, like an accident, like a train crash. My mother was a born Women's Liberation type without ever being aware of it. She was militantly feminist, and she dreamt not about equal rights, but about some sort of peculiar matriarchy, in which men had no role at all. Mother lived Helen Adair's imaginary English life, she ran through the field of rye and dreaded the time the beautiful and wicked Sylvia would come into her life to upset her and make her unhappy. Later, much later, anyone who stood in her way would be Sylvia in mother's eyes. Even Lajos Zádor's daughter, little Cenci, who died so young, and must have been the gentlest, most innocent creature to have come into József's ambit. But the same was true of every girl József had, including both his wives, and in a strange way even his own mother, Emma Gacsáry. As a young girl mother weaves a garland of flowers for herself, puts it on her head and runs through the forest to the clearing just in case she too, as in the novel, stumbles into her own Paul Washer. She doesn't meet anyone. Lenke Jablonczay is sitting bareheaded in the drawing room of the Bartók house reading aloud to Bella, when the event she has imagined a thousand times takes place: there stands Washer on the threshold. He's got very dark hair and very dark eyes just as the boy in the novel: József.

József and Lenke Jablonczay's story starts there, at the Bartóks, not at the community ball. When József, who was visiting Ilonka in the other wing, looks in on the Bartóks too at Ilonka's request, he finds the two girls together, Bella, who is doing some rather complicated needlework, and the other girl, whom he recognizes straight away, though he has only seen her on that one evening. Now he looks at her for the first time with no ulterior motive. She is sitting on an embroidered stool

beside her girlfriend reading to her. She's reading some sort of rubbish. It's not an ugly sight; Ninon never could be so enraptured, she was always old for her years, mistrustful. This hoyden from the community ball, who is now wearing a pretty spotted dress, is almost carried away by the words she is reading.

"Nelly," said Paul looking down at me, "How cheerfully and heartily you can laugh. Anyone would think that you'd never lost yourself, that you'd never been in love," he said in a strange, halting tone, which sounded even odder because up till now he'd always been so conceited, proud and cold.

"I turned my head away so he couldn't see how quickly my face changed colour. It made me happy that he thought me so calm. A woman shouldn't wear her heart on her sleeve for everyone to see into it."

When they noticed the visitor, the book was put back on the shelf. It was an afternoon, the same as any other at the Bartóks. Mrs Bartók called everyone for tea, and because this was József's first visit, she took especial care to treat him well. József looked approvingly at the pictures decorating the walls, painted by Margit. This artist Bartók girl, as always whenever there was a stranger in their home, was quiet; she wanted to be alone with the members of her family and Lenke as soon as possible. The two young girls had more fun; the lavish tea put my mother in especially high spirits. Melinda only liked to eat titbits; she was as thin as a thread, she never had a real appetite. Mother was frightened off eating when she was small, at first by having to keep books under her arm and by Rózsa Kalocsa's constant reprimands, then later by Mária Rickl making her do things in the pauses between courses. After finishing the soup and before the next course had been brought to the table from the kitchen, she had to do needlework because idle hands do the devil's work. Apart from that the cooking was a bit elderly, in keeping with Aunt Klári's elderly stomach. So mother only ate well at the Bartóks. Now she ate so much that she was ashamed; when she sensed someone was looking at her she glanced up. József was watching her with unconcealed approval. "He's staring like Paul Washer stared at Helen Adair," thought my mother, "Except that I'm not eighteen, I'm only sixteen, and I'm still allowed to like plum, strawberry and ginger cake." "How I envy you your appetite!" said József. Love, which in József's case lasted for almost twenty years and stayed with my mother all her life, couldn't have begun with a more prosaic sentence. ❧

Translated by Elizabeth Szász

Elemér Horváth

Poems

Translated by William Jay Smith

Ecce Homo

I am now almost the one I'll be
not especially guilty and not inhumanly
innocent either long-suffering
older wiser more patient

I still tend to overvalue poetry
while drawn out diplomatically
on each quotidian cross

Otherwise have nothing to hide
don't mind being an elegant pampered
traveller in transit with magic preserving my love
while acknowledging that one dies
don't lose my temper when quite serenely
I break out laughing
though laughter comes as a nasty surprise

Elemér Horváth

left Hungary in 1956 and has been living in up-state New York ever since. He has published four volumes of his poems in exile (in Hungarian); his selected poems appeared in Budapest in 1990. His poem "Orpheus Redivivus" won the 1992 Robert Graves Prize for Best Hungarian Poem of the Year.

A Hungarian Poet in America Thinks of His Country

Magyar költő a hazájára gondol Amerikában

I was not born here where I live
and would not feel alien in the least
were it not for my poetry Nothing
neither time nor circumstance could change that
neither my English-speaking woman (the love
my childhood playmate took forever into forbidden Eden)
My daily bread is all I need and I am free
many a man would trade places with me
if only the clever play of intellect
made for the happiness that we desire
I gaze from my window on the summer garden
have no reason to complain and am not doing so
The apple trees of the rain are catching fire

Death in New York

Halál New Yorkban

Ever since her wretched tenement had been pulled down
she had lived in Central Park
at the very heart of the city
all her valuables in a bag
a pillow by night a burden by day
here she got killed by four black
teenagers for the pleasure
her fifty-year-old lap
once a paradise was able to provide
She had come from Hungary
and could have been a human
had freedom not proved so unfathomable
all powerful and cruel
I would lie if I said
there's nothing but the serpent gone wild

no dewy temptation
only quick dark gratification
a few feet away the rose garden
pours forth its Edenic indifference
under ever so many eyelids
the pure dream no one's

Woman Among the Violets

Asszony az ibolyák közt

Only because I knew you
and loved you was it worth living
you were the law when there was no law
and the root it was you who wrote my poems

It was not just myself I loved in you
but the entire poisoned Eden
the legend of my homeland on the map
and yes even my exile

where youth came to an end
where nerves wore thin
where fate allotted me one week
to legalize my life

Oh, life-consuming melody
are you eternal or just history?

Daily Pacing

Lépkedvén naponta

I missed the past I missed the future
and now no longer counting time
years petrified in my exile
I cannot force myself to breathe

Within the silence such sweet pain
the sounds of different sky and earth
the wind released in the courtyard
is heard again and then again

I never will go home I know
never find your gentle presence
weary in sleep I kill my dreams
and every morning bears my shadow

I daily pace these nameless stones
amid the crowds on fallen leaves
forever circling round and round
and these you have my homeless home

The tortured dust from which I came
and which irrevocably I'll be
until above it forms a mound
which then in time is worn away

Orpheus Redivivus

He hadn't seen it yet but something
was burning something promised
all of Hades was burning
and the wings of the phoenix
the end-of-the-world baby chicks
the early within the late
and he surfaced to stop
the perpetuum mobile

The designated night held his attention
he didn't notice when the stamp of sandals
ebbed away he just kept kneeding
the infinity of matter with the indifference of matter
until the strong light pierced his eye
and then beneath the burning beams
of the bush's blazing arch
like one who died and argues for his life

He has moved up out of dark
the blinding stones of constant night
in their stunning quest for life
past the forest's writhing dance
greening forth its final bloom
back up bravely into dust
snatches of death-defying tunes
and of wretched cradle songs
man now bathed in perfect sunlight
as he sets himself on fire
becoming all-consuming light
he has moved up out of dark

In this glitter that poured on me
I see nothing but the sun
for seeing it in perfect night
blinded I am a perfect eye
have turned and others after me have turned
"Did you know him?" "What did he do?" "Where did he live?"
I am deaf I now have perfect hearing
a perfect tongue and I keep quiet

Love-dance now on razor-edge
of equal zero width and length
steps fleeting on a field of light
face vigilant on a field of light
waiting waiting at perfect noon
for stone and flower to burst forth
"I turned back and was too late"
now only silence which I hear I hear

From the Diary of a White Negro

Egy fehér néger naplójából

What do you care what do you all care nine times did I keep it bottled up when in charity you were amazed at my revolt my brethren in the assembly of the blessed but not at Csorna not in Győr not in the bogs of Bősárkány where my father lives where my mother lives where my siblings with the miasmic slime of terror on their mouths with the froth of revolt on their mouths with God's consolation on their mouths with God's consolation with God's consolation I remember the eighth day of creation when the angel drew the sword against our shiny innocence I can see my father's enormous tenderness when he strokes me and the blue lightning of his nerves bluer than an electric discharge what do you care my mother went out of her mind thinking I was in Siberia I was in Rome I was in Virginia I was in Siberia I was not at home ready for her gentle hand it's not electricity not television not bread not drink not movies not clothes not the electric hairdryer not candy not oil not the portable radio not the streetcar but freedom that interests me what do you care cities gravid with light beautiful harlot-cities banana-skin-littered cities blessed with freedom all of Stalin Street Railway Street Pázmány Street Erzsébet Street Kis Street Vak Bottyán Street Árpád Square all used to fetch their water from a single pump oh thirst under the eaves resounding with the rain rusty-yellow thirst thirst consuming my swollen tongue what do you care in what prism shall I deflect my fiery pupils for you to understand it's not poverty not riches but freedom dark little fragile freedom what do you care what a silence in the evening at the pump what a silence about the mysterious anxieties of the heart what a silence in words exchanged glumly like a desolate sky no birds no stars what a silence with the buckets swinging along the slumbering gardens while the late-night barking of the dogs follows one from house to house what a sky-sized silence that I should build a house at the same degree of darkness it was not enough not the acacias not the brook not the forget-me-nots not the love not the hope what do you care that on the threshold flooding our glittering eyeballs you open up the horizon of freedom freedom the most popular sacrifice in all the darkness... ❧

Lajos Parti Nagy

Balaton Bars

(Short story)

Talent is something that comes from very deep within, and for quite a long time it grows better than the body, bigger and bigger; they say it is a gift. The body grows too, sure it does, the tissues thrive, the skin expands all the time, no place for it to wrinkle, perhaps it will marble. All this constant work has its results, it yields interest like money in a bank.

Lately I've been thinking a lot about these things, I have enough time, I can rest as I will, I stare out of the window, take only whatever agrees with me, I note it down neatly for myself, I hardly show it to anybody, true, there's nobody to be interested.

The Balaton, lake or chocolate bar, accompanies me all through life in one way or another, now it shines silvery, now it is naked, I'm listening as the reed cracks rhythmically between my teeth, its mirror rustling. I should go and see, the club promised a caravan once, but then it was cancelled, there is an order that only European champions and up can get one, fuck you all, I thought, stupid bullies.

My mum was a kitchen-maid in a snack-bar, so I had the chance to practice from very early on, on straight pasta or bread. You'll get fat in the end and the cats will eat you, she used to say, but once she showed me to the cook.

"This is little Kálmán, look. He's in first grade but he will eat up a whole kilo of lard."

"Come on, kid, show us then!"

The cook he was a man with a face of a bulldog, he portioned it out, will I try if he times it? I will, I said. My mother stood there, shifting from foot to foot, giggling and feeling ashamed. I made it in two minutes zero eight, of this sticky industrial lard, this man didn't say a word, he gave me a bottle of apple juice as a gift plus two forints for ice cream. So far I had eaten only fifty fillér ones. He said that I can come another time to practice on the leftovers and that I should chew a lot of rubber, erasers, anything, so that my jaws would get stronger. And he asked if I wanted to come to the training sessions. Sure! Adults had training sessions twice a week and contests at the Slaughterhouse on

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Lajos Parti Nagy,
author of several volumes of verse, was awarded the 1991 Robert Graves Prize for Best Hungarian Poem of the Year. He is on the staff of the literary monthly Jelenkor.

Sundays. I was in the second grade, still he took me to the teenagers. Such a little chum among those big lads. For sure, my weight was sufficient, but that's all. Those guys were competing in heads then, industrial bacon, pork cheese, never lard. The stuffing meat had to be chewed on quite a bit, of course I lagged behind in the speed contest with my tiny jaws. But in the quantity contest I placed quite high in several events.

In the beginning I didn't cultivate sweets, I considered it as a schooling for girls, little non-professionals, you know. I was a mediocre pupil, I got twos and threes, five in arithmetic though. At school they saw that I am thriving and becoming strong, but they didn't inquire too much. It was an autumn when we went on this field trip to the Sweets Factory. The factory guy said that we were allowed to eat as much as we could, but nothing into the pockets and the bags. Really? We were standing there in front of the 'Inota' chocolate, or rather its bulk mixture, neither formed nor cut. And still warm. I'll give it a try, I thought. There was this girl called Ibolya, I was trying to impress her. Will you give me a spoon and soda water? I will, she said. I didn't have a watch, I was counting it to myself, I managed to get to some two kilo twenty in the first round. Our teacher fainted when I was still at one point ten. I asked for time at two eighty, I threw up, at that time we didn't have all these drugs, no spray, no nothing, so I did it simply with my fingers or with the corner of the handkerchief. 'Baby chick', I said to myself; and it was out. That guy went absolutely pale, he was kind of sick too, he said that was enough, he didn't feel like calling an ambulance.

This was the first time that this rapture seized me. A kind of trembling emotion that you have more room than your size, everything is wider and wider inside, unknown deep chambers are opening up and you push death out. Such a small child, how come he can still feel it. I wanted to bet in two hundred rum cherries, that was a rarity, even at Christmas we didn't see any. But he kept on saying that that was it, we had to go. You mother fucker liar, I said. He didn't dare hit me, me who hardly reached up to his belly, he called the security people.

Well, that guy arranged everything with one or two words, then he called me aside and asked if I was training anywhere regularly. Sure, with the Meat people. I should leave them, he said, they were only after getting fat, no technique, he would sign me on, money for a tram ticket after each training session, after a contest a little supper, salami roll, soft drinks, whatever they could afford, they were not a big club either. That is how Sweet Industry signed me up. There I had real training, theory, schooling, peristalsis, all that stuff. I started to develop considerably. After a few years I won the Budapest championship in 'Balaton' chocolate bars. But later they started all this modernization, they merged the clubs, associations, one-course dish contests were cancelled, non-professionals could compete only in set meals.

I was never really good at that, it's a different world, you have to divide your attention, like in the penthathlon, you must have a different kind of mindset for that. Not to mention that it wasn't realy well-established in Hungary, the Bulgarians and the Soviets took it all. The soup especially was a problem. For the adults, ten

decilitres was the basic level, or hot bacon marinade, and my kidneys were very tough, you know, they didn't let it through quickly enough, and this was of course a disadvantage. The doctor told me that I would never become a champ. But show me one eighteen-year-old that will believe this kind of stuff. I started taking diuretics, it was forbidden, still I insisted, and then my heart started to give me problems. In lipid, you know, that's how we call the meat part, the second course event, anyway in lipid I was not bad, in lean bacon I could make four seventy. And in sweets I was positively the first in my section: in wafers, chocolate-coated wafers, to be precise. It was the only event that was measured in cubic metres, two cubic metres nine was my personal record, and just to make that clear, Igor Vokstogonov became a European champion in Sofia with 3.2, in '69. When speed contests started again, I tried that to see if maybe I'll have more to gain there. That is when I was drafted, and the army club signed me up. This one was also problematic because my jaw muscles were not flexible enough and I had problems with the food-pipe, of course they didn't do cross-section surgery at that time in our country, only in Halle and Leningrad.

In Kecskemét, at the Championship of Friendly Armies, I almost died. At the request of the Soviets, we competed in horse sausage and we were very scared of that, we knew exactly what it meant, you know. Of course, a piece of cottonwool got stuck in the food-pipe. Sort of gauze or what. Laryngotomy at once, I had to stop for half a year, military hospital, that kind of stuff, a real torture. But at that time, I still believed in myself, no matter what the doctors said. I got better, I started to practice with infusion during the second week, which was strictly forbidden, but what else could I do, what with lying in bed all day? It leaked out, the major came, he was shouting at me you want to die, don't you? No I don't, I signalled with my head, but I must practice. So they let me practice on special orders from the minister. Still I became very weak, especially my nerves. After a short while I had an aggravated asthmatic lockjaw in Katowice, this fucked me right up. I got scared and somehow everything slipped in me. I wasn't written off, but you feel exactly how high you are taken. I wasn't supported politically either, I will join the party I thought, but they just made a sour face, so I didn't push it. I was chosen for the second team a few times, but that's all. Well, I said, I ought to give up. I was a qualified mechanic, I could earn my living, I thought.

A few months later I got married, it was a kind of sports love affair, my woman was a first-class Canned Food sportswoman, they brought her from a village, a well-built country girl. She was quite well in with the movement too, so she even got to the World Youth Festival in Havana, you know, they made a show there, a special military plane brought the material, so there, she came out first in Tinned Beans and Sausage. They wrote about it even in the party paper, and how that Fidel Castro was applauding, he almost fell off the stage. Only that Gizi was short, so she had capacity problems all the time, and later I didn't want her to go any more, you know, it takes up a lot of time and then the house is running, no cooking, no washing. But then

she didn't insist too much either, she was scared of the operation, and she couldn't put up with the continuous expanding because of the plaster. So after the first, and the only, kid, she stopped. Little Lajos was born at one eighty, premature birth, lack of vitamins, that's what they said, well, that might be right, but Vegetables was only second class, so even pregnant women would not sign on for them, even though there was an internal decree for that, but it's quite clear, for they didn't pay calory money, that did make a difference for women who had a family. Well, anyway, we were losing touch slowly but surely, though still we managed to get hold of a flat and furniture because of my wife, and we were living like anybody else. I was working as a demonstrator for Northern Pest Catering. Sometimes I dropped in at the Meat People, but you know, only this old boy stuff, some tripe, without referee or anything, we had fun, zeroed down, then fooled around under the shower and that was it. Afterwards we sat down to eat somewhere, these were, so to say, beer matches.

Gizi was always nagging, and we had to anyway, so we started these offerings like party congress, november-the-seventh and the liberation of Hungary, that stuff. Once even Comrade Biszku watched us, it was on TV you know, thirtieth anniversary, they told the wife at the district department that it would be nice to come up with something. Then with some help from the company, and the district party committee was pushing it a bit too, we got a hundred kilos of red caviar, we couldn't get black, but red was OK. It was April the third, I remember well, the eve of the holiday, nice sunny weather, time for a light coat, the Centre all decorated, big hall, Young Communists, workers' militia, everything. The agreement was without bread, the wife was really scared, man, we won't make it, remember Ili Fibinger, and then what a shame it would be on us. Don't worry, I said, we will make it with four voidings, well the district was quite against that in the beginning, but then they checked it up specially with higher authorities and said OK, but we would have to go behind the scenes to zero down, in the meantime some poems will be recited and then we would continue. To sum it all up, four breaks, sodium bicarbonate optional, and only the net time is counted, the breaks are not.

We enter, huge applause, the announcer announces that we will offer this and that, half of the stage is occupied by the honorary presidium, Comrade Biszku, Soviet generals and veterans. The two national anthems are over, the pioneers rush in with the flowers, they give us some too, we throw them to the audience as agreed, then sit down. On the opposite side of the stage, there is the table-tennis table roped off and a bit aslant so that everbody could see it well. And in the middle the big number 30, we put it there early in the morning, two decorators and the cook, it looked really nice. Fifty kilos of red caviar, we had to practice the other fifty away. Between every five kilos we put a thin rasher of bacon, you know, a sort of bacon-scale so that we would know during the round where we were standing. We would start precisely at half past nine, after the general, to a horn signal. They told us that, when we needed time, the wife should wave her handkerchief and then we could go

behind the scenes, in the meantime the choir would sing Red Gravestones and the programme proper would take place. We were through with twenty-six kilos by the second break. So, we are sitting there, puffing and blowing, me dressed as an industrial worker, Gizi in folk costume, as a peasant, you know. Suddenly the wife whispers to me that she doesn't know what's going on but her stomach is upside down. How else would it be after throwing up, I say to her. We had just finished with the peristalsis. But she keeps on that she's sweating too much. All right, so you continue from the top of the zero, it seemed to me more juicy, maybe it's a bit less heavy down there. And leave the bicarbonate for as late as you can. We burped away, as burping, of course, was allowed. In the last break she felt sick, she cried, she was as pale as my shirt. When the doctor went out, I hugged her and said, what, you, crying? The one from Canned Food? How was that in front of Fidel with the beans? Remember? Well, her eyes cheer up a bit, but still she's hanging her head. Well then, health is more important, you know the rule, I go and call the doctor. Oh no, not that, he will tell the referees, they will call it off, and no trip to the Black Sea in the Soviet Union, 'cause that's what was promised on condition we make it. OK then, pull up your socks, we have eight kilos left, we'll make it, standing on our head. I am holding her waist, we go onto the stage like that, but nothing to do, the end of it was just messing around, poor woman finished less than two kilos, so finally we made four point nine tenths, which is a pity, 'cause we wanted 4.5, you know, because of '45 and in honour of the heroes. Still, it was OK. We are bowing there, huge applause, cheering, the agreement was that in the end we run around the stage, but in the end we just walked a bit, because of her. We hardly arrive at the dressing-room, when the deputy head of the cultural department comes, shakes hands with us, kisses us twice on the cheek, quite touched. She invites us to stay for the gala dinner, Comrade Svigadurin wants to congratulate us personally. I look at my wife, her head is hanging, but she gestures, of course we should go, we cannot say no. We zero down, clean our mouth to have fresh breath, and I tell the doctor to give her a shot. It doesn't help. We just manage to arrive in time for the dinner. Drink some brandy, Gizi, I whisper to her. She sips a bit, but it's even worse. They just brought the second glass when she faints. Straight onto the schnitzel, I didn't even manage to catch her. This hasn't happened to me since I was a teenager, says she, and falls forward like a sack. The ambulance came, by that time we were already at the gate, so that there wouldn't be too much fuss. What did you eat, asked the doctor, such a fat woman with heart problems, she probably ate more than she should have. She didn't eat more than I did, doctor. Yes, but what? Caviar, I said. Well, it was surely off. I didn't argue. I didn't tell him what our offering was for the great day. Anyway, my wife almost died then.

Two years afterwards we divorced, she hitched up with a coach from the baking industry, they emigrated to Nuyork, they work in all sorts of night-clubs. I was told that they have a hit, Gizi kneads the dough, forms little balls and throws them into the mouth of the guy, who eats them raw. But this is somehow disgusting. To mock

bread in such a way. Once she wrote to me, asking me to forgive her, she is not mad at me, but she has one life and she wants to spend it in love. As for them, they are fine, they bathe a lot in the sea, she sends a million kisses to little Lajoska, she would like to bring him over to study there. I didn't bother to answer.

So slowly slowly everything faded away, I don't even mind, I am enough for myself, I lock myself in here, I demolish and build. My son says that he wants to fix the entrance, it would be enough to pull down a few walls in the kitchen, but there is no lift in the building anyway. But the main thing is that I don't feel like going out. I live inwardly, infinity is rippling inside me. And now I compete only with myself, or how should I put it, it's not even a contest: it's a demonstration. I am at peace inside me, expectation. And my body is still expanding, when it snaps, when I notice that it snaps, I will still open the door for Gizi after all. The old factory guard, the coach from Sweets Industry, when he brings the material, he cooks food enough for a week, takes the tackle to the laundry and brings the fresh stuff. Sometimes he helps me with the peristalsis, especially ever since I've been doing it with the wrapping and all. Nobody believes me that aluminium foil will be incorporated. I made up this Balaton Choc-Bar Championship, I invent all kinds of names for myself, Gordon de Balaton, Buffalo Joe, Ratata the Italian, stuff like that, and every Sunday afternoon I try my strength against myself. It doesn't matter after all, but I keep my books precisely: I can make four hundred bars an hour, four hundred and seventy if I don't take the silver-foil off. They are sitting there in a queue like dominos, I turn the standard lamp towards them, that is how the lake view from Tihany must look like on a sunny day, at least that's what old Jeno says. Light is crumbling on the water like the scales of a fish. I just push the first one a bit and the whole thing starts to ripple.

And I feed my cats. I've got one, Gizella, one hundred and seven kilos, fifty-three centimetres tall. A tabby. This one will be a real something one day. She will eat up ten kilos of margarine, of the cheaper kind. I make her chew two hours a day, there is this Chechoslovak rubber brick, mainly that. But she will only spit to the Balaton bar. From time to time these new ones come to my mind, will there be anybody around to take them for a field trip to the Sweets Factory? Lajoska, who became an experienced hunter, cannot even look at cats. He screws up his lips, doesn't say a word, airs the rooms and brings venison chitterlings and rose-hips. I don't like it when he comes, we are afraid of him. Gizella, on the other hand, doesn't like me, the more she grows, the less. I had to have bars made to separate us, 'cause she bites. I don't want her to take to meat, she has time to start that in a few more years, when she becomes a teenager. I also started with lard, back in those years. Don't rush me, Gizike, I keep telling her, first we have to mature by hard work, you go your way, I go mine, but no use. She's a big fool, this little one. ❧

Translated by Ágnes Orzói

Péter Nádas

Work Song

Thoughts from the Ditch

I was rebuilding my house with a tradesman my own age. I thought him a nice person, and he didn't seem to dislike me either. Naturally, we talked while working. Our conversation was based on the principle of free association. He thought of something, then expressed it between two movements of the hand, casually, and I acted similarly. Our attention was shared by the work and objects of thought that came up independently of the work. After all, conversations of this kind do not differ to any degree from a decent work song. Monotonous physical effort seeks a spiritual complement in the word; and harmony of the two clearly reinforces the feeling of peaceful community between two persons.

The basis of peaceful community is balance. However, balance is not something that can be achieved once and for all, it has to be striven for continuously. In this respect both of us had what to search for. He had an advantage over me in the smooth and easy carrying out of operations that needed the minimum possible effort, but he would have been a stupid man if he had tried to show off his expertise and skill. He was in advance, he had an advantage I could not hope to make up for, he was the master, me the apprentice, and, at that, only a casual one. He not only had to take care to impart his knowledge cautiously to me, but he was compelled to perform some operations that —according to the unwritten law of the trade—did not form an intrinsic part of his duties. Of course, a person who is really smart will not be motivated simply by a good will to be obliging, it is a personal interest to choose an option which entails future advantages in the long run, rather than one that offers a momentary advantage or convenience. If he hadn't helped me to bridge the inestimable gap that was between us in professional skill, I would probably have worked even more clumsily, and he would have had to put up with an additional unpleasant tension between us.

Péter Nádas's
Egy családregény vége *(The End of a Family Saga) has appeared in nine languages. After its great success in Germany, another of his novels,* Book of Memoirs, *will soon be published in French by Plon. Ivan Sanders is currently at work on the English translation.*

As for the work song, my position was more advantageous. Not that I would be happy to share immediately, and with anybody, the thoughts that arose unexpectedly and uncontrollably, on the contrary, the advantage of my position consisted in not liking, indeed, spiritually despising such things. Fear is cautious, sometimes it even makes you pick and choose timidly. Therefore I have acquired some practice in the processes of systematizing, relating or separating thoughts that emerge involuntarily. If I had abused the advantage this skill provides me with, then I would have been compelled to find several of his associations ridiculous or repulsive, would have rebuffed him, would have denounced him with strong words; however, I found more pleasure in trying to grasp the deeper significance of his involuntarily chanted thoughts, in defining their origin, rather than saying something that would cause unnecessary tension between us. We were looking out for each other, and just as I began to respect this capability of his to look out for the other person's integrity, he had no reason—I suppose—to complain that I was damaging this most important thing. We were respecting each other's ability to respect the other person. As if we said that we can only respect qualities of ours as our own until we have discovered them in the other person.

After a few weeks had passed, the moment arrived when two people, now alone, admit that they feel the warmth of friendship. We were digging a ditch in the harsh summer light. The ditch had to be almost twenty metres long and nearly two metres deep. We were standing and bending over among yellow clay walls cut smooth as marble, up to our ears, the sky above us. He was working with a pick and a spade, I followed him with a shovel. I had to throw out the heavy clods of loosened soil in a way that even the crumbles would not fall back down from the mound that was growing higher and higher. At such a depth, the smell is different, and so are the words that are spoken. As if you were standing in the wounded, secret primordial life of the earth, not to mention the fact that you are spending your day in the place where you will finally end up. This was the moment he chose to say that he hated Jews because they disgusted him. I asked him immediately if he meant all of them. Without exception, he said. I inferred from his determined answer that, hardly surprisingly, his hatred must be aroused by his disgust and his disgust was imprisoned by his hatred. Now if a feeling clutches, tooth and nail, to a strong emotion, the mind will have no room left; in particular the arguments of another person will surely remain unheeded. The only way to ensnare his hatred would be to tell him that this time he made an exception, therefore he commits the same mistake against his firm conviction each time he hates a half-Jew completely or half-hates someone who is not a Jew at all.

There's no denying that the declaration caught me unawares, although I do not claim that I didn't expect it. I boast to myself that not only am I able to tell if anybody feels the need for such an intimacy-desiring and intimacy-offering confession, but I can even tell in advance when they would feel the urge to make it. It is a matter of experience and knowledge. Once, for example, I travelled two hundred and fifty

lulling kilometres with a driver and, estimating the substance of his mind, I spent my time on the way back calculating whether he would choose to manifest his sympathy for me in this form at the moment we reach the city or else when, close to our final destination, we turn from Fehérvári út into Andor út. I did not miscalculate, since I evaluated the temperature of his friendly affection correctly. Neither was it the lack of calculation that caused my unpreparedness in this case, it was mutual affection that muffled my alertness. Mostly I let myself be involved in these games rather curiously, and my curiosity is seldom troubled by my personal hurt pride. My starting-point is that you cannot argue with feelings. At most you can ask the other whether the outburst and what gave rise to it were proportionate. This can be thoroughly proved. It is, of course, a cunning thing to do, since what a hot and cherished emotion loathes most is questions addressed to it. Now if sheer questioning will make it lose some of its force, then the feeling cannot go on clutching to it all that safely any more. The teeth and nails will have to look for a new handhold. Another question is of course where and how the person in question will find new purchase in his own character.

The next day we stood in the same ditch. Every movement was the same, the sky was the same blue, the smell was the same, and the freely associated words did not sound different either. What he chose to say at that moment was that he hated Gypsies and he would love to exterminate them all. Blood rose to my head and I started to yell. However, between the darkening of the world and my yelling a lot of things went through my mind. For if I hadn't felt friendly towards him before, if I hadn't registered it as a success the day before that his hatred can be shaken with questions, then I surely would not have taken this new declaration so personally. For the very cause of my friendly feelings towards him was my trust in his intellect and his moral judgment. Consequently, the object of my disappointment was not him, but myself; my knowledge of men had suffered a serious defeat. Yesterday not completely, today completely. That is what hurts so much. I cannot put up with such a man for another moment, because then I won't be able to put up with myself. Not because if he cannot hate the Jews, he will hate the Gypsies, but because my own disappointment hurts me, and I cannot argue against that with him. Disappointment and impotence, hence the emotion. My mouth was ready to yell, but my mind still had some time to make some sober calculations. If I start to yell now, I will not be able to find an artisan like him, and the—in any case pointless—ideological argument will put a stop to the rebuilding. Still, he must leave. And I could hear that my feelings were louder than my reason. At that point, I was yelling. What I yelled was something like this: that he who wanted to kill was a murderer and if he wanted blood, blood would flow. And if in ten years it would again flow in rivers, then he should remember that it was flowing because of this kind of talk, such words and nothing else. He didn't stop work. Probably, he had problems like mine. If he leaves, he has to admit that he was disappointed in a feeling, he did not find a common voice

where he was seeking one, he had to be dissatisfied with himself, his knowledge of men will not do. For a long time our silence was quite unbearable. Then between two movements he said that I could feel free to yell at him any time, you could not offend him by shouting, when somebody yelled, he could only laugh. His answer did not lack a certain elegance.

We did not say a word to each other for days, let alone laugh. Then, as things usually turn out, we had so much trouble with the work that we had to exchange a few words. We returned to the usual working songs. But before a week had passed, he came up with the declaration that he really hated queers. They should all be caught and castrated, one by one. With a pocket-knife. I had deprived him of the Jews by asking questions, he cannot feel free with me to hate the Gypsies, because I start to yell, all the same, the question of what to do with these poor queers was still there. As if he offered the last opportunity to me. And as for him, he takes a pretty big risk when he tries me like this, since the authenticity of his own hatred can be checked only through my feelings. I looked up. As if I was expecting to see an innocent and foolish child rather than a grown-up man. He was bending over for something, with his back turned to me. Had I seen his face, I would not have found the explanation. I would have loved to kick his backside to make him fall on his face. I didn't utter a word. I decided to be an opportunist, I won't defend queers, let him have those at least. Let him peddle with his hatred, push it to and fro just as he can and just as he feels like. However, my silence must have puzzled him. Or maybe he was so mad at queers that he felt compelled to fill the air with his scourging of them. He kept retelling his banal experiences, I was absolutely fed up, having heard them a hundred times. He also kept asking me questions, but he received no answer. I occupied myself with my work, so the dialogue was between him and himself. He was recounting his notions and fantasies which did not deviate an inch from those in common use. I was not annoyed, but rather pitying while listening to him. Whatever he had to say on the subject, I did not find worthy of an answer. He insisted on hatred, therefore he insisted on the subject. I had no comment on that either. He insisted on his hatred so much that he talked it to death or, rather, he insisted on it until he talked it to pieces, and this, after all, is healthy. He did it all by himself, which he could not have done better even if I hadn't shut up. From the castrating pocket-knife he arrived at the grandiose realization that people are different.

However, the great turning-point of our story is yet to come. For one day there were at least six artisans working on my house, with all their labourers. Carpenters on the open roof, plumbers on the ladder, pipe-fitters in the ditch, joiners in the window-frame, electricians and so on. The working noise and the working song was appropriate. Everybody was saying what he had to say and everyone else was answering with what he had to say. My man organized them into a team and he was also the one who directed the work. At that time we hadn't been talking and hadn't even seen each other for hours, for I was sitting out of sight behind the house, earnestly dressing used bricks. He probably had no idea that I was there close to

him. From time to time, the voices of the intelligible cacophony found a common channel, but then either their job distracted them from the exchange of opinions, or they distracted themselves with the job as a pretext, lest they should engage in futile debates. Now a choir, now ambitious solos, from time to time a canon. Increasing, weakening, and the intensity of the instrumental accompaniment was also changing all the time.

Suddenly, they were talking about the crime that was keeping the neighbourhood in great excitement. The crime, in which blood and sperm had flowed together, had been committed by two Gypsy youths. The workers interrupted each other in the middle, the argument grew red hot, each brushed in according to the vividness of his imagination how the two youths should be punished. The fantasies were mostly similar, none were particularly inventive, only that blood was steaming more and more abundantly. They enumerated what they would do with these, coloured it, bid for more, slopped about in the horrors they recalled. My ears could hear that as far as my man was concerned, he ceased the work song, his silence was growing larger and larger. In the meantime, the choir was voicing its conviction that no torture would be enough, and a lot would still be little. I sat and dressed my bricks. On the other hand, they also sang the song of hatred for law and order, since in the eyes of these brave creatures, the predictable sentence of the court would be nothing but sheer infamy. I had no idea what the cadenza of such a chorus could be. I was cleaning my bricks apathetically. I felt that we were approaching the concluding cadenza, when my friend's voice of thunder sounded. Calmly and majestically. His emotion could have been measured only by the volume of his voice, for the impulse of the tremor was hidden there. What he thundered was this: that those who wanted to kill were murderers and if they wanted blood, blood would flow. That is what he was thundering, word by word. And that if in ten years it would flow in rivers again, then they should remember that it was this kind of talk that made it flow, these words and nothing else.

Silence fell, even the instruments stopped. It was the silence of perplexity. And then, after a while, a cautious saw, a polishing disc, the shrieking of the thread-cutter, clattering, buzzing, hammering, but for long, very long, not a word under the blue sky. Then: give me this, put that there, words started to creep back quietly into the song. ❧

Translated by Ágnes Orzói

Éva Cs. Gyimesi

The Ethnic Excuse

History has taught us to be wary of those who have a dangerously certain grasp of the realities of the world. That self-assurance has been at the root of every ideology which—claiming its own vision of reality for that of society as a whole—demands a monopoly of political power. One of the reasons why the closed societies of Eastern Europe collapsed was that the gap between the oversimplified and distorted, purportedly uniform image of reality advertised by the totalitarian state and the genuine complexity of society was too wide to be tolerable.

There was a time in the past three years when it seemed that in Romania, too, there was a chance for a pluralistic discussion among groups with various visions—freely expressed—of reality, and that progress towards an open society might be possible. It seemed that the way was clear towards liberal democracy, the only social system in which no single vision is imposed on all others. Social communication would no longer be a one-way road; various visions of reality would be expressed publicly, their mutual effect ensuring a dynamic social equilibrium.

It did not happen that way, the transition was halted when it had hardly begun. Once again the entire area is loud with the pronouncements of people claiming to know the one and only path to salvation. The vision of reality of those who speak on behalf of an entire community demands criticism even if those who express it are a long way from actually exercising political power, even if—perhaps unconsciously—all they claim is symbolic power.

I do not pretend to have a complete knowledge of even what we are wont to call the Hungarian reality in Romania. I shall try not to take my own experience for the image of reality. All I would like to point out is that the exclusive circulation of a single and therefore unavoidably one-sided vision of reality (which, of course, may actually influence the evolution of reality itself), runs the danger of halting the progress of democracy in Eastern

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Europe once again. The way to an open society in Serbia, Slovakia and Romania is blocked today by nationalist opinions and practices, lending new force to illusions of a state-constituting nation; that, in turn, provokes a defensive reaction on the part of the minorities in which they begin to make their own national interest absolute.

I am unfortunately much more familiar with a one-sided vision of reality, manifest in the media and the public discussions of the Hungarian minority, than with the Romanian reality in its full complexity, and the position of Hungarians within it. To all extents and purposes, it is the only vision on the scene. I wish I could refer to current demographic and sociological work on the present situation of ethnic Hungarians in Romania. Vitally important though this would be, it simply does not exist. (Or if it does exist, it has not been published.) What I would be interested in would be not only data on emigration (statistics on that are available), but also on the life and problems of those who stay behind, and on the way those engaged in agriculture or industry, the professionals, the students, pensioners and housewives think about themselves and the options open to them.

The press, however, provides no information on such matters, not even in passing, let alone hard facts or reportage. It would appear that any kind of journalism that tries to reflect the life and vision of reality of various sections of society has been branded as essentially "leftist", a relic of the evil communist past.

Reportage, for instance, seems simply to have vanished from the press. The problems of the two million strong Hungarian population in Romania appear in the newspapers only in highly selective versions or purely as ethnic minority matters. Urban readers, people permanently subjected to food shortages of one kind or another, have no way of knowing what those who produce that food expect, whether they will be able to sow at all this year. Has anything been done to allow them to cooperate in buying or leasing the equipment they need, is something happening locally that seems successful enough to be recommended to others? It is pointless for the readers of newspapers to look for information on the development of private enterprise, on jobs offered by the new small businesses, on how artisans see their future, and whether any of these can spare the money to support cultural institutions. And most important of all, how do those of whom least is known live: the simple clerks or industrial workers; how are they affected by unemployment when factories are liquidated, and what are their chances for retraining or, indeed, surviving?

No factual reports, no hard facts on all this, find their way into print. On real problems and anxieties, all we get are generalities, notes and comments that contain more emotion than fact.

The people to whom the Hungarian press in Romania gives any space at all to express their views are all intellectuals and especially those intellectuals active in politics. The result is that the press is dominated by a relatively homogeneous political discourse. The greatest emphasis is on national interest, since that is what

politicians have to represent primarily vis à vis the Romanian authorities, and that is what they have to account for to their constituents.

These political statements reflect the position of Hungarians as a homogeneous community and, mainly, their grievances. That is what we find on the front pages of the Hungarian newspapers in Romania.

Rarely do we read about peasants who have just had the land of their ancestors returned to them. The press is silent about the shortage of teachers and libraries in the fortunately growing number of Hungarian classes and schools. There is nothing about the businessmen able to offer jobs to people who have just been made redundant, no word about doctors opening private clinics, and there is absolute silence about the people who now work in Hungary for miserable wages, often illegally, who then send those Hungarian forints back home to Transylvania, to build houses or open shops. We do not read about people who want to study in Oxford but intend to return as soon as new institutes catering to their interests are available. Yet there are such people. Every branch of an institutionalized culture in the native language is stretching its wings, yet there appears to be no space for them in the media.

The fear lurking behind this kind of thinking probably is that a differentiated, complex picture, in which Hungarians in Romania would appear along with their characteristic problems, would merely disturb the simple, stereotype image in which they appear only as members of an ethnic community. It might actually turn out that certain problems and phenomena are typical of all citizens of Romania. Hungarians and Romanians are confronted by the same economic and social problems; areas of agreement could be found here.

For those who restrict their vision, however, Hungarians seem to have nothing but frustrations and justified political ambitions stemming from their minority status, pitting them unequivocally against the Romanians. If their minority problems were resolved, it is implied, then all their other difficulties would be resolved too.

The wreckage left behind by the failed Eastern European totalitarian regimes frequently appears today to be reduced to ethnic conflicts. Those regimes deprived their subjects of private property, reducing the overwhelming majority to employee status. Civil and moral values of personal freedom and responsibility were not allowed. Living in deprivation and humiliation, people were denied the possibility to express their opinion freely, and they were forced, simply in order to live, to make compromises with the authorities.

This strategy of the one-party state worked quite effectively for decades; it successfully destroyed traditions and values even in countries where, as in Czechoslovakia or Hungary, the institutions of civil society had been relatively strong before the Second World War. The damage done in Romania was even greater since, with the exception of Transylvania, the overwhelming majority of Romanians simply moved from feudal serfdom into another form of serfdom: they became the villeins of the state. Responsible Romanian sociologists agree that before the war

there had been no conscious or organized working-class to speak of. Socialism, with its arbitrary choice of industrial sites employing great numbers of unskilled workers of rural origin, only increased the numbers of the *lumpenproletariat* and helped develop the mentality that went with it. The middle classes which could have preserved the pre-war civil traditions became virtually extinct. During the great emigration wave that began in the sixties artisans and professional people left the country in especially large numbers, which—mainly with respect to Transylvania—also resulted in changing the ratio of the various ethnic groups. Hungarians, Germans and Jews left first. The several million who settled in Transylvania with the assistance of the central authorities were of Romanian ethnicity, largely from the villages of Moldavia, people whose thinking was—and is likely to remain—anything but urban. The artificial changes brought about in the composition of the population also affected the development of the traditional Transylvanian townscapes: their standards of civilization declined visibly.

The reason why the majority in Romania gave a sweeping election victory to the former communists is to be sought probably in an underdeveloped mentality which did not allow members of society to recognize their true interests either as individuals or as members of specific groups. Indeed, democracy was only really desired by those who had already endorsed certain bourgeois values, if only in intellectual matters, well before the change of system and by those who, due to their minority status, had an instinctive though strong interest in the development of a pluralistic system.

Those, however, who had been trained by the previous regime never to think for themselves were unable to vote for party programmes committed to reforms.

The National Salvation Front came to power, but the Front was not the real victor. The real victors were ignorance, authoritarianism, the spirit of the herd and paternalism.

The reason why nationalist ideologies enjoy such popularity today is always the same: the lack of civil awareness. Instead, there is a tribal mentality that is easily manipulated.

It was owing to this that the overwhelming majority of Romanians reacted to the dramatic though ambiguous changes (freedom of expression and the press, foundation of parties, a real political arena) somewhat like the inmates of liberated concentration camps. They rushed the things that should have been taken piecemeal, in a sober, responsible way. A society that was sick, instead of opting for the slow pace of gradual recovery, was overcome with aggression, hysteria and chaos—all of which only made the illness worse.

Instead of a healthy process of restoring civil society, which would have raised the status of personal freedom and initiative, and the voluntary creation of communities, the viruses of various nationalisms were released; the epidemic is now raging all over Eastern Europe, and will once again impede the development of civil society for a long time to come.

After the changes the same reactions, however, were characteristic of Hungarians as well as of Romanians. Although the institutions of civil society had far stronger roots in Transylvania, the deprived peasants, older people who stayed in their villages and the young who settled in towns but never became genuinely urbanized, and urban workers most of whom are poorly trained—in other words, the overwhelming majority of the Hungarians—are equally ignorant. There is a great deal of evidence that they are just as unable as their Romanian counterparts to take advantage of the real liberties, however relative they may be, that exist in the new situation. This is not explained simply by pauperization, a lack of capital and inflation. The lack of an inner drive toward seeking solutions independently for one's own problems (rather than expecting instructions from above), the inability to make use of opportunities, whatever they may be, are equally important reasons.

A considerable proportion of the peasants whose land was restored to them are unable to cultivate it because, midst the euphoria of abolishing cooperative farms, they also allowed the equipment stock to deteriorate, declared agronomists and veterinarians unnecessary, and do not seem to realize the advantages of joining forces with neighbours in order to buy a tractor or some other piece of machinery. Their children live in the city, and are unwilling to forsake relative comforts for the hard and responsible life individual farming demands. It is easy to see why: they have never had the opportunity to find out what it means to harvest the fruit of our own work. The sons and daughters of farmers—the first non-peasant generation—no longer want to return to tend animals, and the parents are now too old to endure the problems stemming from individual farming on their own. The veterinarian and the agronomist have vanished from the village, since the rural community has proved unable to sustain them. The doctor, if he was clever enough, has moved to Hungary. Many stories could be told about the waste evident all over Transylvania, about the low esteem in which professional skills are held, or about the absence of a practical sense of duty in the schools restored to the Hungarian communities.

With few exceptions, Hungarians in Romania display the same passivity, impotence or self-consuming emotion that characterize Romanian society in general. This is not said in a judgmental way—that is far from my intention—but a simple observation of fact.

How, after such a long brainwashing, can one expect civil society to be restored? How can the state be seen by its citizens not as a provider but as an instrument? The great majority of people have no conscious political will. Political will is something mainly confined to intellectuals who, as a consequence of their dissident past or in answer to current challenges, take on political roles and believe themselves to represent (or wish to represent) the interests of certain sections of society. They found parties and pursue political activities which, for want of proper experience, most of them do in an amateurish way.

The relationship of politically active intellectuals to society is, however, a problematic one. In that sense there is some similarity between the intellectual

members of the parties in power and those in opposition; neither have a visible, differentiated picture of reality, precisely mapped out from a demographic, sociological and economic point of view, behind their programmes. Nor do they seem to be aware of the absence of a civic mentality.

Conditioned to being at the mercy of external powers and to paternalism, people expect politicians to be fathers to them. When they are told that the nation, this holiest of holies, is in danger, they accept this. And they also believe that the solution of the national question will solve every other problem as well. That this rather odd form of democracy does produce some positive results here and there, that it takes hard work to multiply them, is easily forgotten when compared to the many injuries that the nation has undoubtedly suffered. Civil society is not yet strong enough to provide a fertile soil for genuine democracy, and the tribal spirit is easy to manipulate.

The way in which the passions already unleashed are being manipulated by the national ideology aggravates the simple problems of living by maintaining and enhancing ethnic tensions. Regardless of nationality, the people least resistant to the virus of nationalism are those unable to recognize their own personal worth and identity—nor can they have these recognized by others in a community—people who find their identity only in their sense of belonging to an ethnic group.

That sad defenselessness fills the soil of nationalism which, by encouraging feelings of mutual threat, hinders a healthy process of individualization, increases intolerance, and provokes conflicts. That mentality not only excludes cooperation with the other nation, but goes as far as to practically ignore even the very fact of Eastern European coexistence. In the midst of hatred, this actually contributes to its continuation: its response to the exclusive claims to one nation is a similarly exclusive claim.

If every vision of reality that differs will be condemned as unnational, Hungarians will sooner or later accept that all their worries and anxieties are specifically Hungarian ones, and that the source of all evil is the other nation.

That, however, would lead to the evolution and intensification of an atmosphere in which people feel that, as long as our minority problems remain unsolved, it is useless to try to do anything at all. And that is the way in which ideology, even if unwittingly, encourages passivity, and essentially hinders modernization and democratic progress. ❧

Péter Mihályi

Plunder—Squander—Plunder

The Strange Demise of State Ownership

The legacy that the present Hungarian government took over is not easy to define in simple terms. It included an external debt of 20 billion dollars and an internal debt of 1,000 billion forints. This negative legacy, after some initial hesitation, was unambiguously assumed by the new government. On the other hand, the Hungarian economy had a number of features that appeared advantageous to most outside observers. Whether these were really beneficial or disadvantageous is a matter for dispute; there is, however, no doubt that the previous governments had made great efforts to have these advantages, genuine or not, acknowledged at home and abroad. It was correctly recognized by the new government that this heritage formed a whole logical chain and could not be disentangled; it thus had no power to decide which to keep and which to discard.

Whether openly declared or not, Bukharin's slogan, "*enrichissez vous*", had been put into practice for at least a decade. This was the message that the Hungarian Socialist Workers Party, long rid of its messianic communism, kept sending out to the managers of state-owned companies, to agricultural cooperatives and to enterprising citizens. Within a few years the government had removed a significant part of the administrative barriers to the accumulation of capital, making it possible for a relatively large part of the population to genuinely increase its wealth, if within limits, in the form of real estate, savings accounts, means of production or entrepreneurial skills. Paradoxically, the Company Reform, carried out in

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1 ■ Put in a different way: it was the expansion of the legal and illegal private sector which compelled the state-owned sector to increase its power precisely at the expense of the unregulated private sector, but even more at that of the central authorities.

1984–1985, the creation of self-governing enterprises, followed organically from this policy.[1]

In an effort to alleviate the country's debt service burden, the previous governments had already been trying to lure foreign capital to Hungary. Although the volume of capital invested in the form of joint ventures was not really large, some highly reputed western firms appeared on the scene.[2] In the summer of 1988, the Grósz government was in fact ready to sell complete enterprises to western investors. After that, foreign capital had every right to expect that the government now taking office would stick to the measures on which they had based their earlier decisions.

Hungary's introduction of the types of taxation customary in the EEC countries even *before* the changeover from communism (January 1988) was one of the major evidences of her "westernization" in the eyes of foreign observers. Economists in Hungary were a great deal less enthusiastic, although few were as critical as János Kornai [1989] who wrote: "The current tax system is an absurd mixture combining the paternalistic redistribution of a socialist economy with the fiscal impotence of an impoverished Third World country and the subtle, progressive tax system of a dreamed-up Scandinavian welfare state." (pp. 62–63)

The banking reform—the two-tier bank system— started in 1987, was also part of this dubious legacy. From the very start, the government allowed, or even encouraged, commercial banks—called into existence by a word of command—and owned by the state and industrial firms, also state-owned to settle their financial relations in whatever way they could. The banks kept on extending the expired loans of their clients, for which they were rewarded by part ownership of, and mortgages on, the same companies. Industrial companies, for a variety of reasons, were also ready to establish cross-ownership with the banks and, whenever they could, joined them in partnership through increasing their capital.

At the same time, year after year, the government kept up, in fact even increased, its monetary pressure on the economy. This was demanded by the country's foreign creditors, and every western politician, businessman and journalist visiting Hungary insisted that this was the right thing to do. "A palm-tree grows when carrying a burden," they explained. This particular palm-tree, however, refused to grow, although it did perhaps become stronger. Daily liquidity problems forced companies to gradually sell off or mortgage their sub-units, real estate, securities, and all assets that could be converted into cash. Thus, within the state-owned sphere the building up of a peculiar company structure based on cross-ownership had begun already before the changeover to a market economy. The main protagonists in this process were the commercial banks, but close "supplier-buyer" type relationships between companies were not a negligible factor either.

2 ■ By the end of 1990, the 100 joint companies established thus far had accumulated a mere 500 million dollars of capital. The list containing the names of the foreign partners involved, on the other hand, is really impressive. They include Girozentrale, Siemens, Adidas, Volvo, Ikea, Citibank, Societé Générale, etc. (See *Hungarian Trade Journal*, 1988. No. 3.)

This was the situation inherited by the Antall government in May 1990. In the large-company sector, privatization had already begun (Corporation Act, Transformation Act), and the legal and administrative apparatus needed for state control over privatization (Property Policy Guidelines, State Property Agency [SPA] was in the process of creation. The argument was generally accepted by economists that because of the debt service burden stemming from the country's external and internal debt, privatization must be carried out on a purely commercial basis. There would be no reprivatization, no giving away; state property would be divested only to those who have the money to pay for it.

The main proposition of this study is that this principle proved impossible to adhere to; *state property is not being sold but looted and dispersed*. The process may be called spontaneous privatization, self-privatization, company-initiated privatization, privatization initiated by advisors: the name makes little difference. These labels are, to a degree, quite apt in so far as the associations they suggest have a certain basis in reality and refer correctly to some elements of the process. Nevertheless, they fail to express what I regard as the crux, namely that *in the enterprises transforming themselves into corporations, insiders attain, without any significant investment, managerial rights equivalent to ownership, and largely independent of the government bureaucracy.* Something is going on that nobody wanted, least of all the government.[3]

Immediately after the elections the new government did have a chance to revoke the Company Reform in the interest of a centrally directed privatization campaign—i.e., to take back the previously granted ownership powers from the self-governing bodies of companies[4] that would in all likelihood have led to severe political conflict and to a decline in production.[5] Since, in the summer of 1990, the vaults of the National Bank were completely empty, the government was understandably reluctant to take any step that might have harmed the country's reputation in the eyes of foreign creditors. Another reason why no drastic action against company autonomy could be seriously considered was that the condition for the withdrawal of autonomy would have been for the government to recreate, in one form or another,

3 ■ For the views of the goverment on privatization, see *A nemzeti megújhodás programja* (The Programme of National Revival), 1990.

4 ■ The idea was included also among Kornai's (1989) suggestions.

5 ■ This was exactly what happened in the former GDR. The political momentum due to German reunification and Bonn's resolute support, measurable in hundreds of billions of Deutschmarks, made it possible to wipe the slate clean. Whatever autonomy there was in the enterprises of the former GDR was cancelled by a single stroke of the pen. That move also contributed to the catastrophic decline in production—within two years the GDP fell by half—but the bill was footed by Bonn, so consumption by the population of the eastern provinces did not decrease in any significant measure.

the entire bureaucratic apparatus (National Planning Office, branch ministries) necessary to control the companies. This was completely out of the question at the time.

Looked at more closely, the picture of this process is of course more colourful. The list of owners within the state sector now includes, beside banks, also municipalities, non-profit organizations as well as the (still) surviving old-type cooperatives. Matters are further complicated by the fact that cross-ownership has not stopped at the limits of the state sector. Company assets estimated to be worth 2,000 billion forints, often referred to as the "national property to be privatized", have been penetrated all over by spears (and sometimes by thousands of tiny thorns) from the private sector.

It is an open question as to when the transfer of state property to forms of economic associations can be regarded as genuine change. Neither the law nor statistics offer enough for an answer. Looking at it from a *legal* aspect, one must admit that Tamás Sárközy [1991] is right. State-owned firms had been creating joint enterprises with cooperatives since 1968, and after 1972 there was no longer any restriction on the foundation of stock companies or private companies with foreign partners either. This, however, was not called privatization at the time by anyone (pp. 56–57). Nor is there any doubt that, previous to the change in the political and economic system, a major part of the transformations had remained purely formal, and had no effect whatsoever on the management of the firms involved. (See Móra [1990], Voszka [1991a], [1991b].) Measuring categories of ownership *statistically* is equally difficult. In cases where there are several owners, the weight of the owners may be determined on the basis of two different interpretations, both of which are justifiable. According to one, each owner is assessed separately, in his or her own right, and the one in possession of the dominant share may be regarded as the "chief" owner. Thus, for instance, if 30 per cent of the stock of a company is owned by the state and 70 per cent by private persons, then, taking individual ownership rights into account, out of 101 owners, one (the state) will have an ownership share of 30 per cent and 100 (the rest) 0.7 per cent each, thus the company should be regarded as state-owned. In the second interpretation, ownership shares must be counted combining the shares of owners of the same type, so the stock company in the above example must be considered privately owned since, with their combined 70 per cent stake, the private persons together have a dominant position over the state whose share is only 30 per cent. Obviously, the first interpretation expresses which type of owner has control over the company concerned, while the second reflects the capital that has a dominant position in the same company.[6]

It is very difficult to characterize this transformation process in figures, even approximate ones, so it cannot be established with any certainty if the ongoing privatization process really amounts to free distribution. At first glance, the figures

6 ■ For details on these problems see the study by Árvay (1992), which is also the source of the figures in the example quoted here.

of the State Property Agency [SPA] seem to contradict that: in the two-year period from March 1990 to March 1992 the income of SPA from sales amounted to 70 to 80 billion forints. That is a considerable sum when baldly stated. However, compared to the total audited value of 550 to 600 billion of company assets changing forms in the process of corporatization, it is not all that much. The real worth of the SPA's 70 to 80 billion forints of nominal sales income is decreased further by the fact that, in the process of transformation, the ultimate seller (not the SPA but the Treasury taken in a figurative sense) also suffered major losses stemming from cancelled debts and taxes.

Some of these losses can be expressed in figures as soon as the sale has been effected; when Parliament and the public will learn about them is up to the government. The greater part of lost government income, however, is future losses (arising from tax concessions) and their size can only be approximately established at the time the transformation permit is granted. Although estimates of these losses have never been published by the SPA, I would not be surprised if they turned out to run into tens of billions.[7]

One thing is certain: in a legal sense thus far only a minor part—maybe 10 or 12 per cent—of the state's total company property, worth 550 to 600 billion forints, was transferred to foreigners or Hungarian private owners.[8] However, analysis of figures cannot stop at this point. It follows from the nature of cross-ownership that it is not enough to examine the distribution of ownership in a company, the ownership category of the principal owners must also be known. To find this out is at least a two-stage operation and often requires three or even more steps to accomplish, since the ownership status of the "mother companies" or even "grandmother companies" must be determined too.[9]

This, however, is still the "official", visible part of privatization. The highly convoluted manipulations, by which smart entrepreneurs regroup the assets of state-owned companies in favour of the private sector, have been described by several authors (See Matolcsy [1991] and Kállay [1992]. The methods are varied. The most

7 ■ According to Voszka [1992], the privatization of the electronics company Videoton alone, combined with its restucturing, cost the Treasury 20 to 30 billion forints. That was the amount of debt written off by the State so that "in return for four billion forint cash payment and a couple of encouraging promises" the company could finally pass into private hands.

8 ■ According to data published in the SPA Newsletter *(ÁVÜ Hírlevél)* in March 1992, the share of property remaining with the SPA and the corporations, following the company transformations approved between 1 March 1990 and 31 March 1992, totalled 86 per cent; 8 per cent went to foreign owners, the rest was divided between municipalities and private persons. (These figures do not include the so called property protection cases. In the period referred to, 381 buy-sell, leasing and assets transactions were approved, to a total value of 70 billion forints.)

9 ■ The above mentioned Videoton case also suggests caution. The consortium which bought the company includes not only private persons but an investment and financial consulting firm and a state-owned bank, both of which have a considerable share in the company.

frequent ploy is a trade deal in which private firms, established by managers of a former state-owned company and their partners, "driving a hard bargain", achieve highly advantageous price conditions for themselves, causing totally unjustified losses in income to the company, which has become transformed and incorporated in the meantime, the majority of its stock, however, still belongings to the state. One has every reason to suppose, even though it has never been proved, that a number of the small businesses founded by the tens of thousands today are being created precisely in the hope of deals of this kind. In the trade and service sectors,and even in the area of traditional industrial activities, it has become quite frequent for key people in state-owned companies, banking on their own professional experience and the widespread contacts they have built up over the years, to found private firms without any significant investment. The state-owned firms thus voided usually do not survive for long, and are sooner or later forced to sell off their assets as well.

The remnants of the state sector

The times of omnipotent party leaders have passed: control over the means of production is shared between the government bureaucracy and the management of the firm. There is no doubt that the ownership structure taking shape before our eyes is, compared to textbook models of capitalism or to the actual practice of western market economies, still a world of weak owners. As Kornai [1989] writes: "A person who handles the money of the state and lets the state cover his or her losses is not an entrepreneur. (...) From a sociological point of view, the state company sector is a part of the government bureaucracy." (pp. 22,28) As long as the subject is a comparison between systems, the truth of this can hardly be denied. Not regarding redistribution within government property as privatization, and therefore not expecting a growth in efficiency from such a solution, is therefore the proper attitude to take.

That position, however, is founded on the tacit assumption that the cause of all the ills in the socialist economy was the lack of private ownership, of strong owners. This is an oversimplification. Soviet-type societies also had a number of other features which negatively affected economic performance. These are all well known and have been frequently discussed, it will therefore suffice simply to list them:

- militarization and consequent centralization of society;
- ideological commitment to full employment and fixed prices;
- deliberate downplaying, and consequent underestimation, of the role of monetary processes;
- disregard of regulation based on legislation;
- egalitarian and anti-business social attitudes.[10]

The change of the political system swept away these irrational dictates barring the

10 ■ Although differing in intensity from time to time and from country to country, dependence on the Soviet Union made rational economic management even more difficult.

way to reasonable company management. Thus the managers of state-owned companies found themselves in a new environment, one that had become fundamentally different in two respects from what it was like before: following free elections, managers were no longer dependent on the government and party leadership, and the above described economic anomalies were also done away with. Therefore, in this competitive environment, they may be justly expected to manage the capital assets entrusted to them with greater wisdom and efficiency than before. Whether this will really happen cannot be decided on the level of abstraction of this study. For the time being it will be enough to acknowledge that *even within the framework of state ownership, it is theoretically possible for the present "weak" owners to become, if not "strong", at least "stronger".*

At this moment, however, it is still far from clear what objectives company managers, with much stronger positions now, will have. There is ample reason for both trust and distrust. Positive as well as negative examples may be mentioned by the dozen. As far as one can tell, the country seems to wish that these uncertain times of transition were over. The formula for the remedy appears obvious enough: the process of privatization must be speeded up.

Table 1

FORESEEN OBSTACLES

1. In the absence of a social consensus, a weak government is incapable of comprehensive property reform.

2. Linking privatization and compensation has a slowing-down effect.

3. A centralized privatization agency with a small staff can only deal with few companies at a time.

4. Household savings are not large enough for the purchasing of state-owned companies.

UNFORESEEN OBSTACLES

1. The interest of foreign capital is reduced by worldwide oversupply. Because of the collapse of the COMECON and the Soviet market, the loss in value of capital assets is much greater than expected.

2. The unfavourable experiences of privatization in the former Czecho-Slovakia, the GDR and Poland appear to have vindicated those who advocated a slower pace.

3. It has become clear that privatization is not indispensible for the elimination of "shortages".

4. The privatized companies contribute little to an equal sharing of tax burdens.

Obstacles to speeding up privatization

To anyone who had a closer knowledge of the economies of Soviet-type societies, it must have been clear from the start that the privatization process would take years, rather than months, much less days. The results achieved during the past three years have, however, fallen short of even the most pessimistic expectations. This can be said, in general, of every post-socialist economy and Hungary is no exception.

The items in Table 1 form an indivisible chain. There would be little sense in further ranking them.

The list of *foreseen* obstacles hardly requires a more detailed commentary. It had been quite clear, even before the elections of 1990, that the privatization process would be speeded up if the most fundamental decisions were taken on the basis of social consensus—or more exactly, on that of agreement between the parliamentary parties. If that failed, both legislation and execution would suffer the consequences. This was quite easy to foresee. Three years have passed since the foundation of the SPA, and that institution still does not enjoy stable management or an approved set of working rules and regulations. The government has been unable to this day to work out a final version to replace the "temporary" Property Policy Guidelines, originally meant to be in effect for six months, etc.

Paradoxically, one of the main reasons for the concealed and latent character of privatization in Hungary is lack of cooperation between the major parliamentary parties. During the past three years, a number of companies which can be called giants by Hungarian standards were sold yet there is no reliable information on how much was paid for them. Neither the parties involved nor the SPA are willing to make the figures public. They argue that the details of a business deal are confidential, a matter for the seller and buyer only. This lack of openness does immense damage. For the man in the street it is an offence against his sense of justice, while the experts are resentful because they are convinced that, if they were personally involved in the privatization transactions, they would be able to work out better deals. From the point of view of the day to day interests of the government, however, this secrecy clearly has advantages. The details of the actual transactions never become public, whereas any eventual scandal, should it come out in the open, can be handled on an individual basis, with chosen scapegoats used to cover mismanagement or illegal actions on a massive scale.[11] The exclusion of the public is not really against the interests of the company managements either: they are playing a game without stakes, and the worst that can happen to them is that they fail to win.

11 ■ The danger of privatization programmes involving a single, massive dose of transformation (for instance the privatization by vouchers carried out in Czechoslovakia) is precisely that everything is done under the eyes of the public, and the government must give an account of its management of the national propery "in a lump". At such times it may easily happen that a couple of scandals involving minor transactions cast a shadow over the entire privatization process, and may also have a crucial effect on the fate of the government itself.

Early on, the Antall government had wanted to entrust privatization to a centralized apparatus with a small staff. However, it was easy to see that these few people would be able to handle only a few deals at a time, and therefore such a state of affairs could not be maintained for long.

Early in 1991 the SPA had a staff of 100 but the number of those in genuine decision-making positions could not have been more than thirty or forty. Eighteen months later the SPA had 200 officials in its employ, yet it was still compelled to commission outsiders to do some of its work. The situation was well described by top officials of the SPA itself at a press conference: "Managers of the companies [i.e. top managers of the companies to be privatized] are regarded, if you like, as privatization commissioners, while consulting companies act as the agents of SPA".[12]

What we are dealing with here is a conflict between at least three different standpoints. First, the Treasury is justifiably worried about growing costs due to the increase in SPA personnel. On the other hand, when divided, the assets owned by the SPA are usually worth more than they would be if retained in one piece. This holds true not only when the individually calculated value of a plant is compared to the value of the firm as a whole or when a supermarket chain is divided up into its parts, or when the real estate and the factory are sold separately, but often also in valuations made within a single plant. Such an itemized divestiture however, would require a far greater number of SPA officials. The third viewpoint is that protecting the honesty of business transactions would also call for a multiple increase in SPA staff, so that the entire privatization process should be carried out by officials beyond suspicion. At present, however, neither the managers of the companies to be privatized nor the consultants employed by the SPA are bound by the same legal and ethical norms as the civil servants, which makes it hard to condemn or punish any violations of those norms.

Almost the entire Hungarian and international literature on privatization treats it as self-evident that the savings of the public cannot generate sufficient demand to buy out the government sector.[13] The measure of values on the two sides may be a matter for dispute (i.e. the value of state property to be privatized is far from unambiguous, nor is it clear in what proportion the savings of the population as recorded by the banks is divided between households and individual entrepreneurs). Nevertheless, it appears quite certain that the public does not want to, or is unable to, convert its cash savings into direct ownership or equity. True, via the mechanism of cross-ownership, households, as bank depositors, have actually become de facto owners, but the public is largely unaware of this fact.[14]

12 ■ See *Népszabadság*, May 6, 1993, reporting on a press conference by Tamás Szabó, the minister responsible for privatization.

13 ■ For instance, according to a programme proposal of the Blue Ribbon Committee (1990), "at the present rate of savings it would take about a century for the Hungarian population to buy the companies owned by the state". (p. 40)

The most important of the *unforeseen* obstacles is perhaps the fact that, by the end of 1991, Hungary lost its relative advantage. Today the whole of East Europe is in the process of privatization, and Western investors are in a position to choose from a massive number of firms of similar standards from Rostock to Vladivostok.[15] This general oversupply has at least two grave consequences. First, it gives an opportunity to big multinational companies, with the largest capital at their disposal, to divide the market between themselves in advance. The idea that potential buyers should be made to bid in open auctions, reasonable as it may sound, is unworkable because the big Western companies are unwilling to compete, and East European governments, precisely because of the oversupply of companies on offer, are unable to insist on such competition. Secondly, this has an indirect influence also on the behaviour of domestic entrepreneurs less well supplied with capital. In a position of competitive bidding they also refuse to pay more than the foreign bidder.

Nor had anyone expected that, as a consequence of the sudden collapse of the Soviet economy, and COMECON, as well as the Yugoslav civil war, that Hungary as a location would be devalued in the eyes of foreign investors to the extent that it was. Painful as it was for Hungary, it turned out that the book value of companies offered for sale was unrelated to their market value. The reason is not that the Hungarian currency is not convertible or that the Hungarian accounting system is faulty. To put it in somewhat oversimplified terms, what we are seeing here and now is a triumph of marginal utility over the labour theory of value: it has become clear that the market value of our capital assets is determined not by the amount of labour accumulated in them but exclusively by the relationship between supply and demand.[16]

Paradoxically, the privatization process in Hungary was also slowed down by the failure of the neighbouring countries, following different paths, to produce unambiguous results. The majority of Hungarian economists had been skeptical from the start regarding methods based on free of charge or quasi-free of charge distribution.

14 ■ The situation is likely to change after the first major bank crashes, when it will become clear that the financial institutions going bankrupt because of bad loans granted to companies have been risking, at least partly, the savings of the public.

15 ■ Moreover, in these days the vogue for privatization has actually reached the Third World as well. What is on offer there is neither better nor worse than the assets post-socialist countries are trying to sell.

16 ■ This dilemma is shown up very well by the disagreement concerning the sale of the Ganz Vehicle Company. Kornai [1989] regards it as an outrageous example of how the nation's property is being wasted that the Hungarian government was willing to sell such a long-established company with a fine reputation for a mere 2 million dollars in cash. "Even if the assets of the company had been totally valueless, the name "Ganz" alone is worth many times that much," he writes (p. 43, footnote). "This may be true," Sárközy [1991] writes in answer, "except that, according to the information leaked out of the negotiations, the British party had no desire at all to adopt that name, it was the Hungarian side that fought for it and actually paid the investor for attaching the Hungarian company name to its own." (pp. 37-38.)

Nevertheless, at the turn of 1989/1990, after so many wrong forecasts and unforeseen developments, it would have been unwise to declare flatly that all such methods were unviable. During the past three years, however, it became evident that even these seemingly simple methods of privatization needed extensive preparations; new and unexpected opportunities would have to be taken into account all the time, and therefore neither the former Czechoslovakia nor Poland have thus far managed to proceed beyond the preparatory stage.

News from the GDR was also contrary to all expectations. Here, the problem was not the pace of privatization but the income from the sales. The former GDR companies were sold at a loss— because of their huge debts and the environmental measures that would have to be taken. According to preliminary estimates, by 1994, these losses will run to 200-250 billion Deutschmarks. This is a notable development because, with respect to technological standards, the quality of labour employed, market relations and goodwill, companies in the former GDR were probably in a similar, if not better position, than those in Hungary.

Nor could it be foreseen at the turn of 1989/1990 that shortage symptoms, seen as one of the most damaging basic features of socialist economies, would be relatively easy to remedy without privatization of the large companies. From the point of view of macroeconomic stabilization, privatization turned out to be not all that urgent. The experience of Hungary and the other post-communist countries at a similar stage of development showed that toleration of privatization "from below" and government-controlled liberalization of imports were in themselves sufficient to push back consumer demand, and that there was no need to sell state-owned companies in order to mop up the excess purchasing power of households.

In my view the most important experience of the year 1991—although rarely mentioned in the current debates concerning privatization—was that in the unavoidable transition period of changing the political and economic systems, the Hungarian tax system turned out to be even more inefficient than had been assumed by Kornai. To get the better of the state, to steal its property, Kornai wrote, is a forgivable sin in the eyes of citizens, and this is something that must be taken into account when the tax system of the transition period is being considered. Kornai's warning, however, fell onto deaf ears.

In 1990 and 1991 the poor tax morality of the private sector and of households spread over to the company sphere with the speed of an epidemic. 1991 figures published by the tax office are quite shocking: while production of the company sector grew by 5 to 10 per cent, net income declared by enterprises fell by 60 per cent (from 306 billion to 140 billion forints), and tax revenue also fell accordingly.[17] It turned out that the tax system, thought to have been well-tested by then, had only

17 ■ The gains and losses behind this incredible result were the following: the entrepreneurial profits, still "planned" to run to close to 400 billion forints in December 1990, turned out to be only 260 billion, losses, compared to the 20 billion forints expected, were nearly 200 billion forints. (*HVG*, April 11, 1992.)

been operative as long as it had been backed up by the repressive-stimulating machinery of the one-party state.[18]

Following the changeover from communism, these controlling mechanisms disappeared for good; the mechanisms of self-interest characteristic of market economies, however, are still in an incipient stage. Of the earlier forces of compulsion and incentires only one, the large-company factor, is still in operation. Luckily for the tax authority, a major share of today's industrial and agricultural enterprises still function in a large-company form where, because of in-house conflicts of interest and the large numbers of administrative staff, not even the smallest attempt at accounting manipulation can remain secret. Even this limiting factor, however, is of partial effect only. Many of the former state-owned giants have in the meantime passed into the hand of multinationals. These foreign owners—partly because of tax exemption guaranteed by the government and partly because of concealed and difficult to detect transfers of profits within the company—are also pretty poor taxpayers.

Thus, in the final analysis, a considerable proportion of state revenue inevitably comes from the "suckers": unprivatized companies still owned by the state.[19] For this very reason it would make little fiscal sense to further narrow down this group of enterprises, even though the profitability of these companies would presumably be improved if the state's stake in them were reduced. The country's foreign creditors, however, would probably take a dim view of any further growth in the budget deficit, a fact the government cannot afford to ignore.

Speeding up privatization among the "sucker" companies is made more difficult by the scarcity of potential buyers, which is due precisely to their being "suckers": Thanks to their strict observance of all tax rules, the finances of these companies are in a state likely to deter any serious investor. According to Matolcsy [1991], the

18 ■ First, the state sector then covered 80-90 per cent of the entire economy; junctures leading abroad or towards households were deliberately closed or restricted. Even if Company X was able to disguise a part of its profits by reporting them—for tax purposes—as expenses, the same amounts appeared on the books of Companies Y and Z as profit. From the point of view of the state, this made no difference.

Second, as in every socialist country, there was a direct relationship between a company's reported profits (and tax obligations) and its opportunities to invest and raise wages and salaries. Management therefore was under pressure from two sides: workers fought for higher wages and the managerial staff for greater development possibilities, both of which could be achieved only if the company was to report profits.

Third, the bulk of tax revenues came from centralized large companies which could be relatively easily controlled.

Fourth, company managers were fully aware that they were being watched all the time, before their selection as well as after, so their personal enrichment would not remain secret. Few had the courage even to think of improving their personal position through tax fraud or any similar manoeuvre.

19 ■ This is true not just for taxes paid on profits, but for all other forms of revenue too, such as payments made for social security, to the unemployment fund, to the technical development fund, for excise duties, etc.

ratio between the tax burdens of an honestly paying state-owned company and a smartly operated private firm is five to one. And there the circle closes: potential buyers have every reason to pay no more than a symbolic price, but the state is also right when it feels that, under the conditions offered, it would be a grave political mistake to sell off the nation's large companies at bargain prices.

In such circumstances it is very difficult to conceive of a strategy of speeding up that would, within a foreseeable time, bring us closer to the desired purpose: an economic structure based on "strong" owners. Individually, each of the foreseen and unforeseen obstacles listed above could be surmounted; together, however, they cannot.

Conclusions

In all likelihood, in the next few years, only a further extension of privatization techniques based on cross-ownership can be expected: the range will increase to include leasing, trusteeship agreements and other similar legal techniques. Regarding their outcome, these forms have *no other purpose than minimal legal control over the dispersion of assets* and stretching out of the process in time. Modest as these objectives are, their achievement will not be easy at all. The company structure based on cross ownership offers itself to all kinds of abuse.

For a number of well known reasons here left unmentioned, no significant economic growth is expected for the coming years. In the absence of major capital injections from abroad, the most efficient strategy leading to the growth of a private sector will inevitably be to bleed the still existing state-owned companies white, and then to devour them piece by piece later. No matter how badly it wants to, the state will be unable to save the companies it still owns and sell them at a good price. The main reason will not be because the managers appointed by the state will be, by their very position, incapable of operating the national assets entrusted to them, but because it will be a very long time before the government will be in a position to put fresh resources into these companies.

Sometime back in the seventies, a Hungarian economist, Tibor Liska, described the planned economy based on state ownership as a system of plunder and squander. First, the state expropriated all private owners, then these collectively owned assets were frequently and haphazardly redistributed among various economic agents (enterprises, ministries, local authorities, etc.). History, it seems, is fond of threefold forms based on repetition. Today we are once again living in an era of plundering. The concept of selling the (large) companies owned by the state for money has turned out to be impossible to accomplish in practice because the government found itself in far too weak a bargaining position. For the time being domestic and foreign private capital is unwilling to pay a fair price, since they know that, in roundabout ways, sooner or later what is wanted within any given company can be acquired for much less than its real worth. Strange as it may sound, it does not necessarily follow from the foregoing that the concept of privatization based on

commercial principles ought to be removed from the list of objectives of economic policy. The present method, even if it does not bring in too much cash in net value, has proved successful from two points of view. First, it has created an opportunity for the government to convert future incomes in Hungarian currency into current incomes in dollars at a time when this was highly critical from the aspect of the country's international liquidity. This really meant a lot in 1991, and at least two or three difficult years are still likely to come. However, even more importantly, this seemingly anarchical plundering does, in fact, go on in a highly competitive manner. And this is almost all that capitalism is about. ❧

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Judit Durst

The Second Economy: Flourishing More Than Ever

Did the phenomenon commonly called the second economy affect the political transition in any way? What happened in this second economy in the course of the transition? Can the small businessmen "brought up" by this sector fill the role of catalyst that is intended for them in the creation of a market economy? These are some of the questions that are currently being studied.

According to the economist János Kornai, writing in 1989, in Hungary the process of modernization, and its concomitant, the emergence of a capitalist economy,was drastically interrupted in 1949 to be held back for several decades. It was not until the 1960s that it showed some signs of recovery with the legalization of household farms and other forms of private enterprise, in the form of the second economy. At this moment there is a good chance for the process to accelerate. However, even if such an acceleration did take place, it would still take years before a mature private sector could really be established.

The second economy, in the sense here used, was characteristically Hungarian. The economists István R. Gábor and Péter Galasi when describing the private economy in Hungary between the second half of the 1960s and the end of the 1980s, applied the term to activities, either fully legal or tacitly tolerated, people were engaged in outside their normal working hours and also, outside the primary economy — in other words, outside the socialist state sector.

The reason behind the formation of the second economy in the 1960s, and its dynamic development later, was that it proved indispensable to a planned economy without a market. It filled the gaps and satisfied the demands that were not met—could not be met—by the primary economy. The decision to legalize the second economy, first by allowing household farming, and much later—sometime in the early 1980s—by the establishment of Gmk-s and Vgmk-s (economic cooperatives within companies) that were meant to boost private production and provide services was an obvious acceptance of the second economy's role in society by the central authorities. By showing a tolerant attitude towards the second economy, these authorities were, in fact, admitting that the planned economy was unable to function without it.

There have been several attempts to estimate the size of this second economy. Some worked on the basis of time-budget surveys. János Tímár, a lecturer at the Budapest University of Economics, concluded that roughly thirty per cent of total working time was taken

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up by work in the second economy. Using similar methods, the sociologist Rudolf Andorka found that in 1986-87 "people in the 15 to 69 age group spent two-thirds of their total working hours at their place of employment in the socialist sector, and worked in the second economy for the remaining third. According to that survey, the greatest part of the working time in the second economy involved agricultural work (household farms); cooperative house building came second, followed by the various services.

After studying earlier similar surveys, Andorka called attention to the fact that Hungarians were spending a growing amount of time working in the second economy. In 1976-77 a "mere" twenty-five per cent of total working hours were spent outside the socialist sector, this figure had gone up to thirty-six per cent by 1986-87.

Studying the origin of people's income was another method of estimating the scale of the second economy. These surveys also showed that by the mid-1980s the percentage of the family income deriving from household farms and other forms of private enterprises had increased. (It was 16.7 per cent in 1977, and 20.4 per cent in 1987.)

Since the beginning of the political transition, there have been two serious attempts to estimate the size of the second economy. One was conducted by Katalin Balázs and Mihály Laki and concerned the invisible household incomes. The other was carried out by Mária Lackó, who was concerned with the size of three large areas in the second economy—the black economy, household farming, and cooperative house building—within the country's GDP.

The two surveys—with all their deficiencies—produced the same approximate figure, i.e., that 15 to 33 per cent of gross GDP originates in the second economy. Mária Lackó's calculations, using exact mathematical models, showed that between 1973 and 1987 the second economy's contribution to the country's GDP increased from 13 per cent to 18 per cent, or from 57.9 billion Forints to 226 billion Forints. After this, the growth of the second economy was even more dynamic: it amounted to 26 per cent in 1988, rising to 31 per cent in 1989 and 34 per cent in 1990. On the basis of these calculations Lackó arrived at the conclusion that this increase was likely to continue during the transitional period leading from state socialism to a market economy.

The same is suggested by the sociologist Endre Sík, who summed up the results of his "thought experiments" in a recent essay. (The author calls his reasoning a "thought experiment", since he reckons that it only has hypothetical value. He argues that only the dilettantes or the dishonest can have the audacity to claim to have reliable data on the second economy.)

Endre Sík points out that, following the recent political changes, the terminology, too, needs to be revised. Although such terms as "first economy" and "second economy" may have proved useful in relation to the socialist system, they are no longer applicable for the simple reason that socialism has gone. In the absence of socialism it no longer makes sense to talk about a first economy, nor about its postulated counterpart, the second economy.

To describe the new institutions that are replacing the second economy, we must make use of the complementary terms of formal and informal economy, as done by economists in the capitalist countries, Endre Sík suggests. In keeping with this classification, every activity that is regulated by law, either written or customary, and accepted in political and everyday life, is part of the formal economy; everything that falls outside it is part of the informal economy.

Endre Sík argues that the informal economy is more extensive than the second economy was and that, in the near future, we

Illegals on the Black

Perhaps the most flourishing area of the black economy is illegal labour. According to some estimates, one in ten workers is illegally employed. The darkest sector of the black economy is the illegal employment of foreigners. Last year the Hungarian authorities issued 20,000 work permits to foreign citizens, of which 13,000 went to citizens of Romania. The number of foreigners staying in Hungary illegally is considerably larger—some put it at 250,000—and they presumably add to the number of illegal employees.

Ágnes Hárs, who works for the Institute of Employment, interviewed a number of people.

A Hungarian builder:

"I made contact with this building worker gang from Transylvania through acquaintances. They did the job in three months... don't ask me about Hungarians... they would have wanted three times as much money and would have worked from 7 a.m. till 3 p.m., at the most. This Transylvanian gang works from 4:30 a.m. till 8 p.m... Board and lodging was additional to wages; about one-twentieth of total costs. An eighty-six year old lady lives next door, on her own. The men stay at her place... for a reasonable price, and they get three meals a day, two of them cooked. Accommodation is a hundred Forints per day per person, the same for food. Accommodation means a bed, or a mattress, if there are too many of them. The men have the use of two rooms and a terrace. It is in my best interest to look after the accommodation. Then no time is wasted on travel; we don't lose precious working hours. Nothing is put in writing about the work. Nobody can prove that this is illegal. One could say that we are building this house as cooperative self-help. The neighbours here are a community, it would never occur to anyone to go to the authorities... So far we have saved 500,000 forints by employing Transylvanians..."

can anticipate its further expansion. He argues that the agents of the informal economy learned their responses in the second economy. They developed certain behaviour patterns and a shared value system. It was generally accepted for example, that cheating the government was an act of shrewdness rather than of crime.

People invested much money in the second economy; they acquired know-how, established contacts, and gained experience. These are assets that nobody wants to lose. This means that everyone who had an interest in the second economy—more than two-thirds of the population, according to the surveys conducted in the 1980s—will continue to have an interest in the informal economy. Even the government is interested in its continuation: earlier it was useful in overcoming shortages, now it acts as a brake on impoverishment. All kinds of activities that flourished in the second economy will therefore continue. They will indeed be added to by new activities. Open borders make the country more accessible to drug smugglers and organized crime.

The foreman of the Transylvanian gang:

"Here we make four or five times as much a month as we would back home. As much in just two months as in a year. Add that there isn't always work back home; this winter too, they sent us home on leave. Board and lodging don't really matter to us, we are ready to work this hard, because we know that we wouldn't get the job otherwise. How do we manage to get away from our jobs in Romania? We make a deal with the doctor. We pay him—sometimes a hundred leis, sometimes several hundreds. We know that we work twice as hard, and earn half as much, as the Hungarians here. We would like to work even harder, so that more could be done in one day, and we could go home sooner. Many of us work for the forints, to take them home and exchange them. When we sell forints back at home, we can get five leis to the forint, which is much better than the official exchange rate."

Someone who went to the "hiring market" to find a goose herd:

"At first we didn't much like the idea of going to the railway station at Békéscsaba to find a goose herd.

But we tried to find somebody to look after our three thousand geese and had no luck for a long time. There is all this nonsense about unemployment and everything... But finally we found 'Dzui'.

The goose herd who met his employer at the railway station in Békéscsaba: "I sit in park. No money for train home, only to come here. I think something will come up. When I leave Romania I think I want work. When no work, what a man do? Drink, play cards. Not me. Work, a bottle of beer and a cigarette, that's all I want. Now I get money, master show me 200 Marks. I get what I wanted. I like farm, I have everything I need; a table, a bed, everything is good. Except one thing. Miss that. A friend."

The rapid rise in unemployment also led to the growth of the black economy. Once unemployed, a large number who were previously engaged in the second economy part time to complement their primary income, are now forced to do the same full time but as soon as someone turns an extra source of income into a full-time job, he will have to earn more; to insure success, he will have to take greater risks. What is now at stake is making a living, not just a bit extra.

Furthermore the economic changes in Hungary were brought about by people who had little capital, on which their present business activities are based. It is hardly surprising therefore that they are out to make a fast buck, what they are interested in are large profits and a quick return on investments. Their strategies include tax evasion and illegal employment. The introduction of a more stringent tax system had the result that the number of tax evaders multiplied. In the mid-1980s tax fraud cost the country between eight to nine billion forints; according to the tax office's estimates, the size of the invisible revenue is somewhere in the region of 300 billion Forints today.

One of the benefits brought by a second economy was that without it the political transition could not have been so peaceful, Endre Sík argues. Proletarians turn to revolutionary tactics only when they have nothing to

lose but their chains. The majority of Hungarians had earlier invested in the second economy and therefore had a great deal to lose. There was a relatively independent professional class in the country, together with a relatively well-paid section of the working class, and even the poor were not as poor here as they were elsewhere; almost everyone had a job and a home. Therefore, the majority managed to struggle on somehow. When people own possessions, they will not want to risk them by taking part in radical action.

Acquired habits played an equally important part in the peaceful character of the Hungarian revolution. Those who participated in the second economy had learned through experience that things usually worked out somehow. This is hardly a revolutionary approach. There is nothing surprising in the fact that the people who seemed readiest to demonstrate in the streets, those who feel that the recent political changes has not gone far enough, are those who did not take part in the second economy: the retired who are always left out of everything.

Finally, the intricate network of social relations also contributed to the non-violent character of the transition, according to Endre Sik, making a living, indeed life itself, depended on contacts, on an extended cousinage, on what might be called an old boys' network of great variety. And if one did business with somebody, corrupting them or being corrupted by them, one cannot switch promptly to treating them as an enemy.

Many, unfortunately, only stress the favourable aspects of the second economy. It has almost become a commonplace that the fact that Hungary was able to adjust to a market economy more swiftly and easily than any of her neighbours was due to its extensive and well-developed second economy. But some did call attention to the negative aspects of this schizophrenic product of state socialism as well . They pointed out that the interests, the reactions and the goals of a true capitalist are very different from those of a participant in the second economy; that experiences gained in the second economy of a socialist state do not automatically help adjustment to a market economy.

Why cannot participants in the second economy be expected to show a constructive approach to the market right away? The answer according to Ildikó Ékes, who is on the staff of the Economic and Social Studies Research Institute of the Trade Unions, lies in the fact that the second economy, being embedded in the socialist sector, could not provide the relevant training. A true market economy requires very different skills and ways of thinking than a second economy.

One of the fundamental differences between a true capitalist businessman and the typical actor in the secondary economy—who is fittingly described by Iván Szelényi as "someone halfway between being a wage labourer and a socialist private entrepreneur"—is that while a true capitalist continuously tries to expand his business, even at the cost of limiting his own consumption, his opposite number in the second economy will under no circumstances consider extending his activities beyond a certain limit. This approach logically follows from his past experience in a planned economy, when a prosperous self-employed artisan had always been identified as a "capitalist parasite".

The permanent insecurity of the socialist entrepreneurs is linked to this anti-capitalist attitude, as well as to the instability of the regulation of this area. Economic policies characterized by the method of "now tighten up, now relax" created a permanent anxiety in the second economy. The obvious consequence was that traditional values associated with artisans and merchants were replaced by the morality of "getting rich quick". The socio-psychological factors discussed above could in themselves considerably delay the establishment of a market economy in the former socialist states. ❧

Gábor Bakos

Magyar Suzuki

The scale of the Suzuki project in Hungary, the largest direct Japanese investment in Central Europe, makes it worthy of consideration in detail.

Following lengthy negotiations and preparations, the Suzuki factory in Esztergom started operations on October 1, 1992.

The market

Given Hungary's population of only 10 million, it might be thought that the country did not represent a significant market for cars. In fact, because many of Hungary's cars are extremely old, there is a substantial potential market. The average age of the cars on Hungary's roads is 10 years and 40 per cent of them (the East German Trabants and Wartburgs) have polluting two-stroke engines.

The level of demand for cars can be seen in the figures for car imports. In 1989, a total of 204,345 cars were brought into the country, of which 136,280 (67 per cent) were imported by state-owned car trading companies and the remaining 68,065 were brought in by private individuals. Although the figures for 1989 were probably exceptional, pushed up by the temporary low (10 per cent) import duty, in 1990, with import duty at 35 per cent, private individuals still brought some 30,000 cars into Hungary.

Current estimates put the level of demand on the Hungarian market at 120,000 to 140,000 cars per year. Suzuki plans an annual output of 50,000 cars in Hungary by 1995, half of which would be sold in Hungary.

Suzuki's global marketing strategy is to establish regional manufacturing centres for one particular vehicle. Thus, the mini Maruti is made in India, an off-road vehicle is made in Spain, and the compact hatchback Swift is made in Hungary.

The founding agreement

Almost ten years of negotiations led up to the signing of the founding agreement in 1990.

Under the agreement, Suzuki Swifts, with 1.0 and 1.3 litre engines, were to be made in Hungary from 1992. Output of 15,000 vehicles was planned for the first year, rising to 50,000 by 1995 and eventually reaching 100,000 per annum.

A joint venture, Magyar Suzuki, was set up in April 1991. Suzuki contributed 40 per

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cent of the $17 million founding capital. The Japanese C. Itoh put up 11 per cent, the International Finance Corporation 9 per cent and Hungarian investors the remaining 40 per cent.

The total cost of the investment in Hungary is $240 million, and the additional $170 million came from international credit. For example, the Japanese Eximbank granted credit for the import from Japan of a large part of the machinery to be installed in the Esztergom plant. The loan was guaranteed by the National Bank of Hungary.

The Hungarian government supported the project in a variety of ways. Firstly, the factory site was sold to Magyar Suzuki at a price well below its market value. Secondly, the joint venture will enjoy full exemption from corporate tax for the first five years, and will enjoy a preferential rate thereafter. Thirdly, machinery, equipment and components for cars for export will be free of import duty, while import duty of 5 per cent was to have been charged on components for cars for the Hungarian market. In fact, this latter figure was later cut to 3 per cent and then to zero, as part of a HUF 10 billion zero-rated quota granted to both Suzuki and General Motors, the other international company presently making cars in Hungary.

As the deal neared completion, government support fell away somewhat. Mr Akira Shinohara, deputy manager of Magyar Suzuki, claims that despite earlier government promises of financial support for the car industry, Hungarian suppliers are now suffering from a shortage of capital. The wide-scale liberalisation of imports also stripped away some possible protection for the fledgling car industry.

On the other hand, Suzuki requested that the local authorities be responsible for some of the peripheral expenses of the project, for example the construction of a service road to the factory site. Suzuki also successfully bargained for a relaxation of certain environmental protection regulations.

Potential economic benefits

The Suzuki project envisaged the large-scale involvement of Hungarian suppliers. While the basic engine and gear-box components would come from Japan, it was planned that within the first year of production, 50 per cent of all the work (20 per cent in assembly and 30 per cent in the supply of components) would be carried out by Hungarian suppliers. This share was eventually planned to rise to 70 per cent. The Hungarian element consists of the basic assembly plant in Esztergom and Hungarian suppliers. As the share of the Esztergom plant is not expected to increase, the involvement of a larger number of Hungarian suppliers is required to increase the total Hungarian share in the project.

Initially, 50 Hungarian companies were targeted as potential suppliers to Suzuki. The recruitment of companies was, however, beset by two major problems. The first of these was that, at a time of large-scale privatisation, the legal status of enterprises was unclear. The second was that the government, facing a spiralling budget deficit, could not afford to provide the necessary financial support for development.

Table 1

SUBCONTRACTING AS VALUE COMPOSITION OF THE CAR (PER CENT)

	1992	1993	1994
Suzuki Japan (imports)	70	60	40
Hungarian share of which	30	40	60
Magyar Suzuki (Esztergom)	20	20	20
Hungarian suppliers	10	20	40

Source: Ministry of Industry and Trade, Budapest

The potential suppliers required investments ranging from HUF 15m (USD 180,000) to HUF 100m (USD 1.2m) in order to upgrade their production to the standards required by Suzuki. Although Suzuki has so far signed contracts with only 20 Hungarian suppliers, a recent survey showed that as many as 130 companies would be capable of supplying components if cash for restructuring were available. The possibility of taking out loans from Japanese banks for this purpose is now being looked into.

It is of vital importance for Suzuki that the Hungarian share reaches 50 per cent as soon as possible as this would, under EC regulations, qualify the vehicles as of Hungarian origin and they would then not be subject to the EC quota imposed on Japanese-made cars.

Among the contracts already signed is one between the Precision Instrument Works of Eger and Showa of Japan under which the Hungarian company has been making shock absorbers under licence from Showa since June 1992. Another involves the Bakony Works of Veszprém, which set up a joint venture with Suzuki to make windscreen wipers and wiper motors. Under a cooperation agreement between Sumimoto Wiring System and the IMAG factory of the Ikarus bus company, which makes wire harnesses and seat frames for Magyar Suzuki, the Japanese company supplies the production equipment and trains the Hungarian workforce.

Overall, however, fruitful cooperation between Suzuki and Hungarian suppliers has proved elusive. One reason is the rather inflexible stance adopted by Suzuki during negotiations. For example, Suzuki at no stage revealed the findings of its feasibility study on the Esztergom plant to the Hungarian authorities, nor did it consult the government on the question of Hungarian suppliers and only recently submitted an estimate of the cost of bringing the Hungarian companies' production up to scratch.

The Hungarian Ministry of Industry calculates that, if Hungarian suppliers are to provide the 20 per cent share targeted for 1993, an injection of HUF 2.8bn (USD 35m) into 25 former suppliers of Ikarus, the Hungarian bus-making company, is required. Of the total sum, HUF 1.8bn would be in the form of credit, granted to the companies at a preferential 15 per cent interest rate. Of the 25 companies notified by the Industrial Development Bank (Budapest), 12 applied for a loan, but only 4 were selected as creditworthy. Those who failed to gain access to this credit line had two other options; taking out a loan from a Japanese bank or setting up a joint venture with a Japanese company. This latter solution is made more attractive by the fact that a new joint venture has access to a "job creation loan" of up to HUF 100m. Suzuki has an important role to play in seeking likely Japanese companies to team up with potential Hungarian suppliers.

The other problem facing Hungarian suppliers to Suzuki is the relatively small size of the orders. The planned annual output of 50,000 cars is only half the 100,000 generally considered the optimum number. To Hungarian companies which already supply mirrors, plastic parts, wires etc. to Western car makers, the small size of Suzuki's orders is not particularly attractive. Furthermore, Western European carmakers usually help suppliers by giving them the initial equipment free of charge, a practice which Suzuki could also adopt.

Magyar Suzuki will undoubtedly help provide employment to a skilled Hungarian workforce. The Esztergom factory employs 1,200 workers and is expected to generate another 17,000 jobs in the supplier companies.

Although there are Hungarian workers who have experience in bus building and related fields, Suzuki opted instead to take

on inexperienced workers who were sent to Japan for training. (This was also the case in the US, where Honda and Toyota took on inexperienced workers in Ohio and Kentucky even though many skilled workers, for example from GM, were available.)

The reason behind this is that the Japanese companies do not have to retrain skilled workers who may have "poor" work habits or may not be prepared to "do things their way". A further advantage of a young, inexperienced workforce is that wages can be lower and the day when a pension is collected is further away.

Magyar Suzuki took about half of its future workforce to Japan for several months of training. The trainees had to sign a contract stating that they would repay the cost of training if they left the company within two years. In the event, only 15 trainees have so far dropped out.

Suzuki's employees do not get the perks offered by Hungary's other carmaker, Hungarian Opel, where all managers are given a car. At Magyar Suzuki, only the Japanese managers enjoy this privilege.

Marketing

The agreement which established the joint venture placed most of the responsibility of marketing the product on the Hungarian partners. The joint venture was given exclusive sales rights for the cars and parts within Europe and Suzuki was merely required to advise the joint venture on marketing and to promote sales through its marketing network. Although the obligations on Suzuki are rather vague, once large-scale production is achieved, it is likely that Suzuki will assist sales through its Western European sales network.

In the first two years of production, the bulk of the vehicles will be sold in Hungary. Only in 1994, when output is raised, will exports come seriously into play. By 1995, it is expected that almost half of the output of the Hungarian factory will go for export.

Table 2

OUTPUT AND SALES (NUMBER OF VEHICLES)

	1992	1993	1994	1995
Output	740	22,300	42,300	50,000
Sales in Hungary	740	20,300	24,300	26,000
Exports	-	2,000	18,000	24,000

Source: Ministry of Industry and Trade (Budapest)

Payment problems

Although access to hard currency through Hungarian banks has become increasingly easier, the forint is still not a convertible currency and, because imported components have to be paid for in hard currency, this affects Magyar Suzuki's balance of payments.

While some Japanese experts claim that Magyar Suzuki's imports will exceed its exports for at least ten years, other observers argue that exports will outpace imports by the third or fourth year of production, if output reaches 20,000 and the Hungarian share of the project reaches 60 per cent.

One solution to the payment problems is for Suzuki to expand sales in Western Europe, another, which the company is actively considering, is exporting Hungarian produce such as wine and poultry to Japan or other markets.

Increasing competition

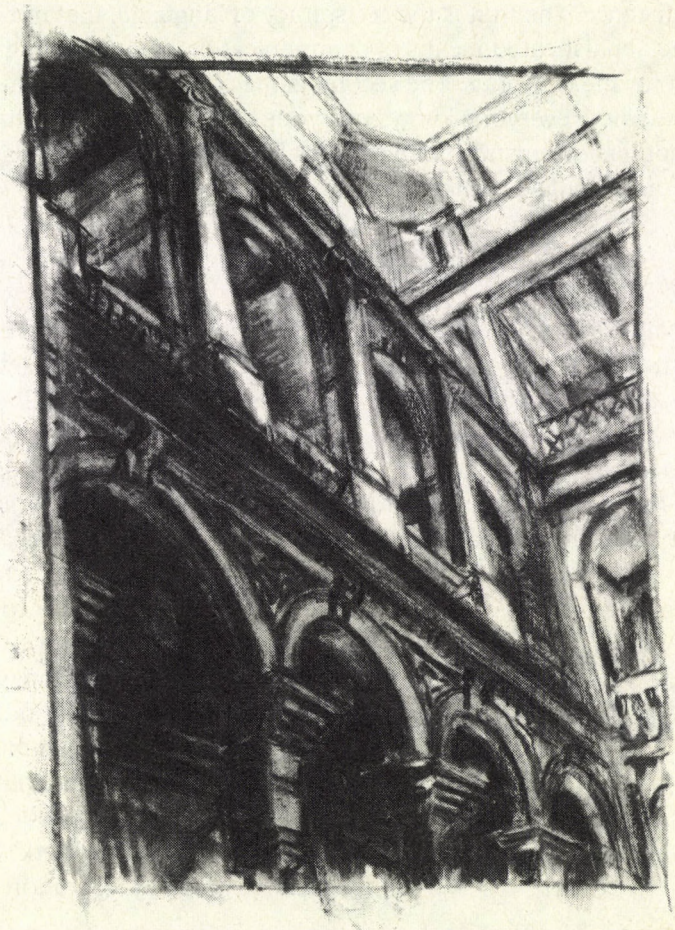
The Hungarian car market has seen considerable changes since Suzuki first contemplated opening a factory here.

Firstly, Suzuki is not alone in Hungary. In July 1992, General Motors opened its car and engine assembly plant in Szentgotthárd

(W. Hungary). The car assembly plant, which cost DEM 80m, will produce 15,000 Opel Astras annually, while the engine assembly plant, which cost DEM 440m, will turn out an annual 200,000 engines, with a maximum capacity of 400,000. Hungarian-made components account for around 15 per cent of the total. In April 1992, Ford opened a components factory in Hungary. Audi of Germany decided to set up a fully owned subsidiary in Győr for the production of a new engine-family. The total value of the investment is going to be DM320 million, and opening is scheduled for 1994. The new factory will provide jobs for over 1000 Hungarians. The Hungarian government helped the investment by granting a full tax exemption for the first 5 years, and a 60 percent tax cut for a further 5 years period thereafter.

Secondly, most major car companies have set up sales agencies in Hungary in the past two or three years, and these sell around one to two thousand cars per year.

Despite the increase in supply, the market for cars in Hungary is clearly not saturated; Hungarians are still prepared to wait two to three months for delivery of an Indian Maruti. ❧



Peter Unwin

Defeated, Reviving and Restored

Hungary Observed Over Four Decades

I know Hungary better than most Englishmen, most foreigners even, but that is not to say that I know Hungary well. I have lived six years of my life in Budapest, travelled widely, thought, written and spoken about Hungary for years. I have many Hungarian friends, but still the twin conspiracies keep me and people like me at a distance. The first is the conspiracy of language, that most beautiful, ingenious and sophisticated means of communication between Hungarians, and of bafflement for the rest of us. The second is the conspiracy of intimacy in a small country, where everyone knows everyone else, knew their mothers and their grandmothers even, and communicates by allusion that escapes outsiders, even well-informed outsiders like me.

The second time round

But we all must do what we can with what we have, and when I went back to Hungary in 1983 to live there a second time, I brought some assets with me. I could speak a little Hungarian, follow it in a vague, out of touch kind of way, even find my way painfully slowly through the newspapers. I had a few Hungarian friends left over from last time, nearly twenty-five years earlier. I knew the essentials of Hungarian history. And I had by then been thinking about the country pretty steadily for nearly forty years.

I remember that my first impression when we came back to Budapest in 1983 was one of surprise. In the seventies and eighties the western press made too much of the wonders of Hungary: goulash communism, the replacement of Marx and Engels with Marks and Spencer, a country that was making communism work. All this seemed gross exaggeration to me. Real

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terror and deep poverty were gone. So was the worst of the damage done by the sieges of 1945 and 1956. But there was still cautious anxiety in the air, still stifling hypocrisy in the newspapers. Hungary in the early eighties, I decided, was better than I had known it in the late fifties, but it was still not very good.

In retrospect, of course, we can see that the avalanche of change which swept through central and eastern Europe in 1989 was poised, almost ready to move, throughout the early eighties. In Hungary communist authoritarianism had been relatively tamed. It struck only when it thought it had to, and spread its favours fairly widely. Hungarians spoke more freely, though not, in my house at least, with complete freedom. They enjoyed the limited but real benefits which long years of cautious economic reform had brought. Bolder spirits wrote cautiously subversive poetry, made cautiously inquisitive films, asked questions about the past. This was not the heady intellectual freedom of the summer of 1956, but it was the edgy search for more vigorous expression of the summer of 1954: so far and no further had Hungary come in thirty years.

But there were people within the system who, while they denied it, were pushing back the limitations as far as they thought they could. Greatly daring, Hungary had joined the International Monetary Fund. It was making cautious, secretive enquiries about the European Community. Sound communist internationalists talked about specifically national interests, about the contribution even small countries could make to the European debate.

A story illustrates the point. I arrived back in Hungary in July, 1983. The West was making up its mind to deploy Cruise and Pershing missiles in western Europe to counter the menace of Soviet SS 20 missiles targeted on European capitals. I decided that in my first round of talks with Hungarian ministers and officials I must bring the conversation round to the tension which was so palpably growing in Europe, not take the easy way out and talk vacuously of friendship only. One conversation after another ended with rueful agreement that we were in for a hard diplomatic winter.

Geoffrey Howe, the Foreign Secretary, visited Hungary in September of that year. He talked frankly of the horror in the west at the shooting down of the Korean airliner over the Soviet Far East. Hungarian ministers and officials squirmed, but British and Hungarians agreed that it was right to go on talking, even more when times were hard than when things were easier. And late in 1983 Margaret Thatcher told the Hungarian government that she would like to visit Hungary.

She did, at the very end of January, 1984. Hungarians still tell me of the impression she made on them then: going to the market, paying for her purchases, fishing her forints out of the brown paper envelope in which the Embassy had provided them. I remember when in Szentendre she darted across the main street and started to talk to the crowds who waited for her, I felt that things were changing in Hungary. But the really interesting story was the one that was not told.

To me it was clear at Christmas 1983 that Margaret Thatcher's eagerness to come to Budapest was an embarrassment to the Hungarian government. The West German and Italian leaders too had decided at about that time to take up Hungarian invitations; and these were the three countries that had agreed to take American missiles. Moscow was clearly not amused, suspecting a western plot or Hungarian treachery. But Hungarian ministers stuck to their gun and maintained the invitations, though they spaced out Kohl's and Andreotti's visits into the spring. Margaret Thatcher came on schedule, tramped round the market and Szentendre in the winter cold, and talked and listened seriously to the Hungarian leaders.

Relative liberalism of course made a difference to a diplomat's life and work in Hungary. It brought visitors: ministers in the Prime Minister's wake, Princess Margaret with the Royal Ballet. It took Hungarians, notably János Kádár, to London. It brought the Cultural Forum to Budapest: part talking shop, part cultural bean-feast, with its Hungarian hosts undecided as to whether to play up their liberalism or clamp down on a few dissidents who, quite naturally, wanted to make the most of the publicity opportunity which the Cultural Forum brought. We built up the work of the British Council, spread our net of acquaintance wider. I made public speeches, something unheard of in Hungary in earlier years. And yet there were constraints. I remember for example that the celebration of the fortieth anniversary of the liberation of Hungary turned quite Stalinist in tone. And I remember too the then editor of *The New Hungarian Quarterly,* Iván Boldizsár, decided that he could not publish a frank but scarcely controversial little article I offered him. The Hungarian service of the BBC broadcast it instead.

So things were changing, but very slowly. Fear and old age I think held János Kádár back. He knew that political reform had to follow economic reform in Hungary. But he feared the consequences of opening up the past, opening up the relationship with Moscow to scrutiny. Economic circumstance pressed in on Hungary; hard decisions were necessary; they were not taken; and Hungary drifted, just as democracies so often do before elections. Finally it was Moscow, not Budapest, Gorbachev not Kádár or Grósz, who gave the last shove to the avalanche that was to change the world in 1989.

Hungary in the hard years

But often, in my three years as ambassador in Budapest, my mind went back to the first years we had lived there, in the late fifties and early sixties. We first came to Hungary in the summer of 1958. The execution of Imre Nagy had just horrified the world, and a friend said that we seemed admirably calm for people who were going to live in a graveyard. When we arrived a friend in the Legation pointed out the Fő utca prison to me. It seemed then to epitomise

oppression; even today I do not like to look at it and think about it. At that time we, like all diplomats in Hungary, led a double life.

On the one hand, we lived—wife, two small children and I—quietly on the Sas-hegy. Our flat enjoyed one of Buda's innumerable great views. We took the children to play and paddle at a little American Legation club on the Szabadság-hegy. Cardinal Mindszenty baptised our new baby in the American Legation. We learned the social ways of diplomacy. We drove to Balaton past unbroken processions of peasant carts. Every month or so we went shopping in Vienna.

On the other hand, I had my daily work in the Legation. Until the end of 1959 at least I was concerned mostly with chronicling rumour: of arrests, secret political trials, imprisonment and executions, all the tragic detritus that followed the defeat of the revolution. Now we know officially what was rumoured, whispered about then: the hunting down of the brave souls who had committed themselves in the revolution, young lives wasted in Vác prison beside the Danube, executions in the Gyűjtőfogház. That was my introduction to diplomatic work abroad. When I mentioned it to an acquaintance in the Politburo many years afterwards, he said wistfully, "You must have found it hard to like us then".

But at the same time we started to reach out, very tentatively, to the men and women we saw as the real leaders of the Hungarian people: the writers, artists and intellectuals who spoke for something deeper and older than repression. Groups of Hungarian writers went to London, István Vas and Géza Ottlik among them. Men like Colin Davis and Michael Redgrave addressed nervous Hungarian audiences in the Legation hall. László Lajtha lectured on Hungarian music. He ended with the sentence, "And so we see that Hungarian music is popular, national and classless". I still remember the silence in which that last, supremely heretical word fell on his audience's ears.

That was the time when I first started to learn about Hungarian history and life. I listened to Hungarians who worked in the Legation, to the retired colonel and his sister in the flat below ours, on whom I practised my Hungarian, and to the little group of Hungarian writers, artists and journalists whom we gradually made our friends. There were good times to be had, even in a graveyard. Slowly it dawned on me how desperately ignorant we were in the west of central European history. Slowly I accumulated information, historical, literary, philosophical, each piece of it revealing its relevance to what was going on in Budapest in those worst of times.

For they were bad times. Hungary was prostrate. Whether by choice or necessity, the Hungarian government practised total subservience to Moscow, profound hypocrisy about every issue of importance, and brutal authoritarianism towards the Hungarian people. Ordinary Hungarians were poor, afraid, and in despair. It was impossible then to know that the blackest years of repression would one day come to an end, be replaced by cautious liberalization and

reform. The revolution was dead, its best men broken— and no-one then could know that nearly thirty years later would come resurrection.

A visitor in Hungary

I went back to Hungary as a visitor twice in 1989. The first time was in June, for the reburial of Imre Nagy. I found Hungary revitalized, more changed in the three years since I left than in the twenty two years that lay between my first posting to Budapest and my second. My Politburo acquaintance told me that power had slipped from his Party's grasp, but no-one was certain who would pick it up. I was scarcely off the plane before a man I had known as a minister asked me, quite seriously, if I thought the countries of the old Little Entente were preparing to attack Hungary. There was still fear of Moscow too. All the more admirable, then, was the courage that went into the reburial, the mass demonstration at Heroes' Square, and the respectful reinterment at Rákoskeresztúr. Party and government were swept aside that day; ordinary people took charge. "June 16, 1989", I wrote afterwards, "was a good day for the quiet, the private, the once-humiliated, in Hungary".

I went back to Hungary again in November 1989. I was finishing my book about Imre Nagy and I went primarily to talk to people who had known him. But, preoccupied as I was, I could not help but notice the change that had taken place since June. The East German refugees had poured across the open Hungarian frontier into Austria. They had taken their special trains out of Czechoslovakia. They had brought down the Berlin Wall itself. In the west all attention was focussed on Germany. We had forgotten that others, Hungary and Poland above all, had led the way. But by the time I went back to Hungary in November 1989, change was manifest in Hungary also. The Socialist Workers' Party had dissolved itself. The People's Republic was gone. Hungary looked forward to freedom, democracy and law. I left Hungary filled with optimism.

Hungarians who have read this far, full of the travails they have faced since 1989, will be smiling now at my naiveté. Certainly, when I went to Budapest this spring to write about the Queen's State Visit to Hungary I met even more than usual of Hungary's eternal pessimists. They told me of unemployment and inflation, ship-wrecked heavy industry, the arrogance of the new rich and the distress of the poor. Instability among Hungary's neighbours was a manifest threat. So was the immaturity of Hungary's political system. A flood of refugees from the Vojvodina, for instance, could bring the house of cards crashing down.

Of course they were right, and of course they are wrong. I remain on balance an optimist about today's Hungary. It has democracy, law, personal freedom. It is at long last its own master. It has friends in the west. Its people are able, enduring, intellectually and personally agile. There are few ethnic tensions within today's Hungary, and it has, as it has always had, a blazing sense of its

own national identity. Perhaps Hungarians have learned self-discipline the hard way in the last fifty years: "we talk foolishly but we act sensibly", someone said to me. Taking things by and large, I come down on the side of that little band of Hungarian optimists, outnumbered though they may be by Hungarian pessimists.

One thing I know for sure. Hungary today, for all its troubles and all its faults, is a better place than the uncertain Hungary I knew when I was ambassador in Budapest; and unimaginably better than the broken, grieving Hungary that I first discovered in the hard years of the late fifties, after the Hungarian revolution had gone down to betrayal, destruction and defeat. ❧

Gabriel Ronay

Margaret of Scotland: Queen, Saint and Legend

Scotland's year-long celebrations marking the 900th anniversary of St Margaret's death have reawakened long dormant interest in Hungary in the reputed Hungarian origins of the Scottish queen. The royal dignity and splendour displayed by the Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh during their state visit to Budapest in May have helped to focus even further the minds of Hungarians on the relations between the ruling houses of the two countries down the centuries. While mediaeval legends on the subject are plentiful, facts are in short supply.

Aware of the staying power of old legends and ancient myths, the Hungarian Prime Minister's Office and the Foreign Ministry asked me to help separate fact from mediaeval fiction about St Margaret's extraction and the circumstances of her arrival in Scotland in 1068. After four decades of communist anathema on saints and queens, there is a thirst for information about St Margaret. Leading dailies have commissioned lengthy articles on newly discovered facts on Margaret's Hungarian sojourn and her role in drawing Scotland into the mainstream of Europe's spiritual and cultural development.

Unfortunately, some of the organizers in Scotland of the St Margaret anniversary celebrations are paying tribute to the wrong queen. For the image of Scotland's queen had been conjured up after her death by the Catholic Church to suit its own militant mediaeval agenda. Details of her beatified portrait had been filled in with monastic hearsay, ancient legends and fine Edinburgh *haar*. This icon-like image, dusted off for present day use, has been embraced with barely a dissenting voice in Edinburgh. Old academic jealousies and quaint nationalist notions of history have blocked attempts to present the real Margaret.

In a potted biography issued with the calendar of events for the 900th anniversary celebrations, the organizers confidently state that Margaret was born in Hungary in 1047, the daughter of a Hungarian princess and Edward Aetheling. Actually, she was not born in Hungary but in Kiev, Russia, born not in 1047 but in 1045, and her mother was certainly not a Hungarian princess. In a further press release, they tried to fudge this vital issue with a vaguer formulation, describing Agatha, Margaret's mother, as "a

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Gabriel Ronay

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lady of misty origins but definitely of a royal house of Eastern Europe".

In fact, Agatha was neither of misty origin, nor the daughter of East European royalty, a hopeful reference to St Stephen of Hungary. After analysing all the available contemporary sources in England, Norway, Germany, Hungary, and Russia, and checking the "credibility ratings" of the most influential near-contemporary twenty-nine Anglo-Norman chroniclers, I can state that Agatha was the daughter of Liudolf, the prince of West Friesland. She married the exile Edward Aetheling in Kiev in 1044 to help forge a Continent-wide anti-Danish coalition, and their first child, Margaret, was born there.

The organizers of the pious commemorative events are not alone in their confusion. A fine collection of mediaeval fiction and baseless "historical information" is being offered to visitors to Edinburgh Castle in Lucy Menzies's account of St Margaret's origins. According to her booklet, *St Margaret Queen of Scotland and Her Chapel,* the infant Edward (Margaret's father) was "sent abroad to the protection of King Stephen of Hungary". He most certainly was not. Nor was he "brought up as a protégé of St Stephen's queen, Gisela", nor did he marry "a cousin of Gisela"—or any other East European princess.

A direct move to Hungary in South-East Europe in 1017 to save the lives of Edmund Ironside's two small sons—Edmund and Edward—from the henchmen of Canute makes no sense. The north was the world of the two Anglo-Saxon princes and their protector, the Earl Walgar, a world made familiar by ties of kinship, similarity of customs and shared traditions. A move to Hungary would have isolated the heirs to the Anglo-Saxon throne. But Kiev, on the well-established Viking route eastwards, and the loose family ties to Ingegerd, Yaroslav the Great's wife, made perfect sense, and newly discovered documentary evidence bears this out.

Indeed, the two Anglo-Saxon aethelings, Edward and Edmund, arrived in Hungary from Kiev in 1046, not 1017, as asserted by nineteen leading Anglo-Norman chroniclers, when the good king St Stephen was long dead and buried. And they arrived not as helpless young refugees seeking succour, but as Kievan soldiers of fortune backing their fellow exile, Prince Andrew of Hungary, in his bid for the throne of Hungary. Besides, Edward was already married to Agatha and their first-born, Margaret, was one year old.

Another claim made by the organizers of the celebrations across Scotland is that Margaret and her family "considered returning to Hungary" in the aftermath of the Norman conquest and were forced to seek refuge at the court of Malcolm Canmore "as a result of a storm at sea". This too is no more than romantic fiction.

Edward's widow Agatha and her children—Margaret, Christina and Edgar—had absolutely no intention of making their way back to Hungary. They were fleeing to Scotland at the invitation of Malcolm, who had befriended them while in exile himself at the court of Edward the Confessor in London.

The actual originator of the miraculous storm theory—and of the Divine Hand behind Margaret's Scottish landfall—was Bishop Turgotus, myth-maker extraordinary and chaplain to the Scottish queen. Successive generations of Scottish and English chroniclers, drawing on the St Margaret hagiography penned by Turgotus, felt justified in asserting that Agatha and her family, despairing of Edgar Aetheling's chances of being crowned king of England to nullify the legitimacy of William the Conqueror, "chartered a ship and sailed for the Continent to return to Hungary" in the summer of 1068.

By tracing the chain of borrowing among the key twenty-nine English and Anglo-Norman chroniclers, it is possible to pinpoint the common source of this age-old

canard. Only Florence of Worcester managed to avoid the pitfall of the "providential storm" and record the momentous events that had prompted the royal refugee family's flight. He recorded in his *Chronicon ex Chronicis* that Edgar Aetheling broke his oath of allegiance to William the Conqueror in the summer of 1068. His family's flight to Scotland, the place of refuge for English opponents of the Norman conquerors, was instigated by the Earls Marlesweyn and Gospatric and a handful of other disaffected Northumbrian lords. "Fearing that they might be thrown into prison like others, and wishing to escape king William's tyranny, they took with them Edgar Aetheling, his mother Agatha and his two sisters, Margaret and Christina."

In the harsh conditions and in the threatening situation of 1068, direct flight to a Scottish sanctuary is much more plausible than the romantic tale of providential shipwreck. But the allegory of the tempest that allegedly tossed Margaret and her family onto the shores of Scotland was convincing enough for a seafaring nation that saw storms at sea as manifestations of the Divine Will. It also suited the Church, which used Margaret's remarkable life as a paragon of Catholic piety and virtue in the land of remarkably lax Celtic priests.

It is quite likely, however, that Agatha used as a prudent ruse the rumour that she and her family "were returning to Hungary" in order to mislead the watchful Norman guards. Turgotus appears to have taken the stratagem literally. So too, apparently, have the committee organizing the 900th anniversary celebrations.

However surprising, it is a fact that, in spite of the importance of Edward Aetheling for British history, virtually nothing is recorded in English and Scottish primary sources about the odyssey of his Continental exile, his marriage in exile or how he and his elder brother, Edmund, escaped with their lives when Canute, the Danish usurper, sent the rightful heirs to the throne of Wessex to his vassal in Sweden with "a letter of death". Indeed, the two little Anglo-Saxon princes' subsequent movements, and the key role allotted to Edward Aetheling forty years later by his royal uncle, Edward the Confessor, in his scheme to avert the Norman conquest, have fallen through the net of the national consciousness. The surviving accounts of Margaret's parents' and uncle's Continental peregrinations appear more as a gathering of legends than as authentic history. There is, in fact, no authoritative single source that can furnish reliable facts about them. Yet without reliable information on Edward Aetheling's years in exile, neither the true origins of St Margaret, nor her early formative years can be charted, let alone understood.

In my recent book, *The Lost King of England*, I retraced her father's footsteps, uncovered proof of his route to Kiev, filled in the missing years of his life in exile, and unearthed documentary evidence of Edward and Agatha's marriage in Kiev. With the aid of the newly discovered evidence, and a fresh approach to the available documentary evidence, new insight was gained into Edward and Edmund Aetheling's extraordinary lives at the Kievan and Hungarian courts and the circumstances of St Margaret's upbringing. Without this, Margaret would have retained her wooden image, well suited to hagiolatry and beloved of the romantic school of history in Edinburgh.

In spite of the romances and escapades, Edward Aetheling's life in exile turned out to be an adventure story with a difference. Under the polished exterior of an exile, Edward revealed a constant preoccupation with home, a yearning for a country that was, in fact, more alien to him than those foreign countries that had given him refuge. For in the Promised Land he had been dreaming

about during his forty years of exile, the poisoner's cup, not gratitude awaited him. I investigated, and threw fresh light on, his role in the turbulent years preceding the Norman Conquest in view of his uncle's desperate plan to keep the crown of Wessex in Anglo-Saxon hands through the person of Edward. And I came to the inevitable conclusion that his mysterious death forty-eight hours after his return from exile, but before his uncle the king could confirm his position as heir-apparent, was murder. It made the Norman invasion inevitable and changed profoundly his daughters' and son's lives, as well as English and Scottish history.

Fate had dealt harshly with Edmund Ironside's children, but most cruelly with Edward Aetheling because of the false hopes it had raised in him. Edward's misfortunes plumbed the depths of a Greek tragedy. The sight of a good man struggling against incredible odds to fulfil his mission in life, only to be struck down as the great dream of his life was about to come true, arouses pity. But there was no relief, no catharsis, as Edward was unceremoniously removed from the face of the Earth by the more ruthless contenders for the crown of England. Inevitably, her father's tragedy marked young Margaret, but because of her strength of character and spiritual fortitude it did not warp her.

Edward Aetheling, perhaps more fittingly also known as Edward the Exile, left no mark, no monument to be remembered by. Like water in the sands of time, his memory would have vanished without a trace had it not been for Margaret. Through her, Edmund Ironside's progeny resumed their place in the fabric of British society and, through her children's children, the ancient Anglo-Saxon line recovered the crown of England. Margaret made her father's story complete, lending it an extra dimension that more than made up for the seemingly senseless tribulations of her father and her uncle.

But her claim to fame does *not* rest on her genetic services to Aethelred's house. By all accounts, she was a remarkable person who carved for herself a very special niche in Scottish history. She made the most of the exigencies of exile and rose above the tragic loss of her father at a vulnerable age. She was clever and intelligent and showed early signs of a spiritual steadfastness reinforced by an iron will.

Bishop Turgotus, her confessor, knew her well, and from his observations there emerges a woman of strong will-power and unusual intelligence. The old priest certainly idealized her and his account of her life was written in a strong didactic vein, as much for dynastic as church purposes. He openly acknowledges this in the Prologue of his biography dedicated to Queen Matilda, Margaret's daughter, who "commanded that I should narrate for you the particulars of the life of your mother, whose memory is held in veneration."

Cleansed of religious cant and the tendentious interpretations of a dynastic apologist, the events and incidents recounted by Turgotus make clearer the sources of her popularity and why she captured the imagination of her contemporaries. Having arrived in England from Hungary aged twelve, with a foreign-born mother and exile-bred father, she began her life as a royal princess with distinct handicaps. These were accentuated by the murder of her father and the ineffectual support of her great-uncle, Edward the Confessor.

But sharp Margaret made the most of her chances of an education and of the advantages of a regulated court life, first in Hungary, and then in England. Although the differences in tone and style must have been considerable, the Benedictine monks who directed the spiritual life at both courts did provide a sense of continuity. She soon surprised her English teachers with her grasp

of facts and the breadth of her knowledge. She "employed herself in the study of the Holy Scriptures, and therein with joy to exercise her mind. Her understanding was keen to comprehend any matter, whatever it might be; to this was joined a great tenacity of memory, enabling her to store it up, along with a graceful flow of language to express it."

The emphasis at Edward the Confessor's court, as before at the court of Andrew I of Hungary, was on loyalty and obedience to St Peter's successor in Rome. The Continental ways of her mother and of the Hungarian lords who accompanied the family, first to England and then to Scotland, certainly added an extra dimension to Margaret's spiritual make-up, but could hardly temper her fierce devotion to Rome. Her allegiance to the Pope, forged in exile and nurtured in rootlessness, was absolute. The easy-going ways of the Scottish court and of Celtic Christianity offended her.

Her keen intellect helped her to cope with the difficult situation created by her family's flight to Scotland in 1068. Margaret, who had hoped to become a nun, was placed in an unenviable situation: she could not reject Malcolm Canmore, who proved an ardent suitor, without depriving her family of a safe haven, or jeopardizing her brother's prospects of restoration in England. Even Turgotus admits that Margaret acquiesced to the idea of becoming Malcolm's wife "rather in obedience of the will of her friends than to her own". But it is a mark of her intelligence that, having been compelled to submit to *force majeure*, she accepted her fate with good grace.

Margaret was clever; she was also a woman. And since she could not change the ways of the world and was clearly forced to do as the world does, she appears to have decided upon reshaping her husband in her own image—and so change her surrounding world at a remove. The force of her personality and zeal for reform can be gauged from her recorded impact on her husband. Malcolm was a simple, forthright warrior used to the wild ways of his country, and the sophistication of his wife impressed him.

"There was in him a sort of dread of offending one whose life was so venerable," wrote Turgotus. "And he readily obeyed her wishes and prudent counsels in all things. Whatever she refused, he refused also for the love of her. Hence it was that, although he could not read, he would turn over and examine books which she used either for her devotions or her study; and whenever he heard her express especial liking for a particular book, he also would look at it with special interest, kissing it, and often taking it into his hands..."

Later myth-makers over-emphasized her piety, religious fervour and charity, for as Malcolm's queen she fed the hungry, comforted the orphans, defended the defenceless, and ransomed helpless English prisoners. But if one strips away the myth-makers' exaggeration, there emerges a strong and cleverly manipulative woman who does not fit the simplistic role allotted to her by some historians.

The testimonies of her contemporaries show that she ruled her court with an iron rod. She banished Malcolm's old drinking companions, put an end to the old Highland ways and entertained visitors in Continental style. She turned Malcolm's simple fort at Dunfermline into a royal court, where they ate of gold and silver tableware. English and Continental courtiers thronged Dunfermline, doctors of theology came from far and wide to consult her. Royal patronage of the arts was lavish. Her accomplishments were legion, but there was nothing of the conventional saint about her.

Her most lasting achievement was to reform, in the teeth of bitter resistance, the Celtic Church in Scotland and bring it into

line with Rome. The practices and customs of the Gaelic-speaking clergy and their flocks were seriously out of step with Roman orthodoxy. The resistance of the Scottish Church was broken with the help of three English religious advisers seconded to Dunfermline by Archbishop Lanfranc of Canterbury and the judicious use of excommunication as a weapon against old Highland customs. Margaret restored the sanctity of the Sabbath, hitherto a day for markets and fairs, outlawed Celtic-rite Masses, regulated the date of Lent, and instilled a new social code and orthodoxy. Under Margaret's reforms, Scotland became part of a Rome-led religious Common Market.

In trying to separate fact from mediaeval fiction and explode the ring of myths gathered around a stereotype of Margaret, one becomes aware that in spite of her accomplishments she was a stern woman who had no sense of humour. She did not tolerate frivolity and there was a quiet menace in her anger, though her fury was always tempered by her strict code of justice. She brought up her children strictly, believing that "he that spareth the rod hateth his son".

After her death on November 16, 1093, the myth-makers quickly turned her into an object of veneration. Reports of miracles at her grave in Dunfermline proliferated and gave rise to a lore that has endured to this day. The image of a saintly queen, conjured up by the Catholic Church in response to its need for a model of virtue on the western extremity of Christendom, soon eclipsed that clever, cultured but complex woman. Her relics, and her reputedly miraculous intercessions with the Heavenly Host, drew thousands of pilgrims to Dunfermline.

Until the advent of the Reformation there was no stopping the growth of the St Margaret industry. Then, chroniclers claimed, "heretics stole into the Kingdome [of Scotland], trampled underfoot all divine and human lawes and seized the sacred moveables of Dunfermline Church; some things of greater veneration and value were saved from sacrilegious hands". So it was that St Margaret's mortal remains began their undignified peregrinations some four centuries after her death.

It is recorded that her very well-preserved head was brought to Edinburgh Castle at the request of Mary, Queen of Scots, but on her flight in 1567 it passed into the custody of a Benedictine monk who guarded it until 1597. Then a Jesuit, Fr John Robie, took the relic to Antwerp and, upon its authentication as the true head of St Margaret, it was taken to the Scots College at Douai, France, in 1627. It disappeared during the turbulence of the French Revolution, and turned to dust in a distant corner of a new, secular Europe.

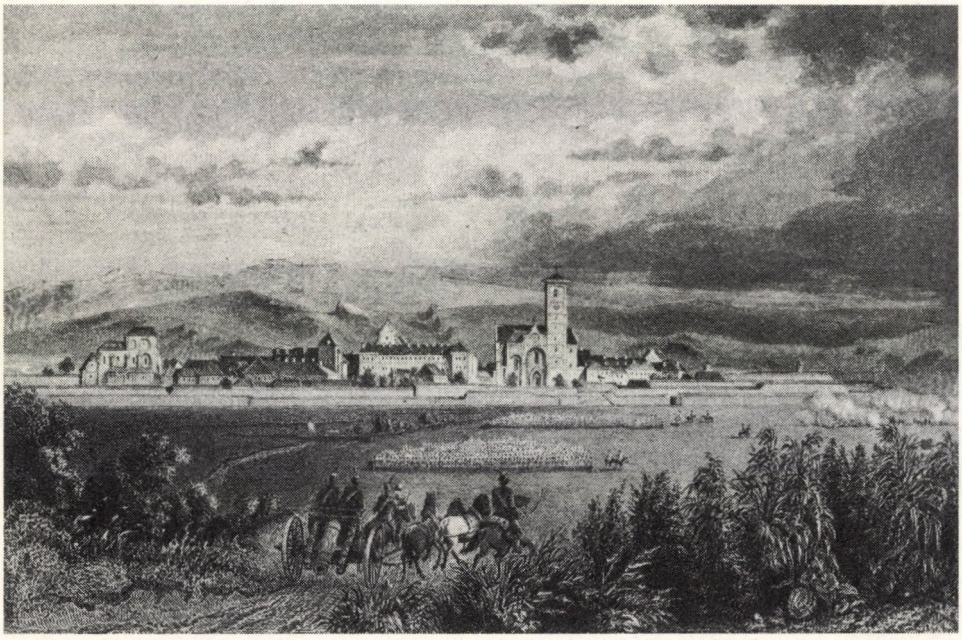
By curious coincidence, just as interest was waning in St Margaret in a West preoccupied by the Enlightenment, several 18th century Hungarian antiquarians came to hear rumours of the Hungarian origins of Scotland's queen and saint and began to study Agatha's origins. Dániel Cornides wrote a closely argued treatise in Latin on Agatha's origins in which he plumped for the St Stephen's daughter version; György Pray and István Katona, two other 18th century scholars, misread the sources and burdened Bishop Bruno of Augsburg with fathering Margaret.

Amateurish though their attempts to uncover St Margaret's origins may have been, they did, however, succeed in "establishing" in Hungary the old Anglo-Norman *canard* about her Hungarian extraction. Others, equally inept at critical textual analysis of primary sources, followed. Nearly a dozen historians addressed themselves to the issue in the second half of the 19th century; most were politically motivated believing that, in a kind of *quid pro quo* for the refuge granted to Edward and Edmund Aetheling by a king of

Hungary in the 11th century, Queen Victoria should "intercede" with Vienna on behalf of the hard-pressed Hungarians.

In the years following the harsh terms of the peace of Trianon imposed on a defeated Hungary by the victors of the Great War, several more Hungarian historians addressed themselves to St Margaret's Magyar origins. Count Béla Malcomes, Sándor Fest and Jeno Horváth also lost themselves in the maze of Anglo-Norman chronicles without the compass of textual analysis; they were equally determined to exploit St Margaret's alleged Hungarian extraction for political ends. Horváth, the author of the work *Az Árpádok diplomáciája*, frankly admitted that, in the hopeless years after Trianon, he took up research on St Margaret's origins "in the hope that the English will not let down the country that once offered refuge to the two Anglo-Saxon princes". Unfortunately, in his zeal he first married St Stephen's "daughter" Agatha to Edmund, and after his death to Edward Aetheling. But perfidious Albion did not rise even to this double bait.

After the long years of communist anathema on saints and Queens, Hungary is once again showing serious interest in St Margaret. It would be fitting if in this year, devoted to her anniversary, both Scots and Hungarians honoured the real Margaret, not the mediaeval stereotype of the legends and hagiographies. ❧



The Castle and Roman Catholic Cathedral at Gyulafehérvár. Ludwig Rohbock—János Hunfalvy: Magyarország és Erdély *(Hungary and Transylvania). Darmstadt, 1864.*

Ágnes R. Várkonyi

Pro quiete regni—For the Peace of the Realm

The 1568 Law on Religious Tolerance in the Principality of Transylvania

The dawn of the modern age was accompanied in Europe with the dual experience of revival and division. The Christian world reacted to the advance of the Ottoman empire with a number of revivals. This, however, brought new discords to the surface. With the great achievements of the Renaissance and the Reformation, namely, printing, education in the vernaculars and free scientific enquiry, rulers and ruled, scholars and laymen just about learning to read, royal courts, towns and villages all lived through these changes in their own ways. Part and parcel were crises and afflictions that derived from religious conflict. Erasmus, in 1516, clearly shows the disintegration of mediaeval unity—the *universalis Christiana* with this sound observation. *"In the past it was the office of preachers to weed out root and branch quarrelsomeness from the soul of the people. Now the English loathe the French, just because they are French, the Scotch the English because they are English, the Italians the Germans, the Suebians the Swiss and we can say this about the others too. Every land loathes every other, and so do cities. Why is a wedge driven between us by these many foolish names, why are we not welded together by that common word: Christ."*

Hungary lived through the breaking up of the old European unity suffering a disaster that affected its very existence. The Hungarian army that met the host of Sultan Suleiman in August 1526 on the battlefield of Mohács was practically wiped out. Along with most of the country's church and secular dignitaries, Louis II, King of Hungary and Bohemia was killed. The body of a strong and respected mediaeval country was first cut in two by the new frontier between the Ottoman and Christian worlds; then, as the vacant Hungarian throne attracted two claimants, John Szapolyai (1487-1540), the voivode of Transylvania, and Archduke Ferdinand of Austria (1503-1564), lord of the Austrian hereditary lands, what was left of the kingdom was

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further divided, ruled in the West by King Ferdinand and in the East by King John. The two parts were separated by a triangle occupied by the Turks, the peak of which extended far beyond Buda. The shadow of a divided Europe fell heavily on this Hungary, now sundered into three parts; she could get no help against the Turks from a Western world divided by a struggle between the Bourbons and the Habsburgs and by religious strife.

The events that led up to the 1568 Diet reached back in many respects to the Hungarian attempts to achieve unity. King John was recognized by France, which even took him as an ally, his country became a protectorate of the Porte, and he was helped by his brother-in-law, King Sigismund of Poland, was received with understanding by the Holy See, and established direct contact with the Emperor Charles V, who recognized the need for a new unity of Europe. At all costs, John wanted to avoid civil war, and his religious policy was marked by openness, enhanced by the fact that his wife, Isabella, had been brought up in the spirit of Italian and Polish humanism. The speeches delivered by his envoys were imbued with the spirit of European unity. In April 1541, at the Imperial Diet of Ratisbon, the princes engrossed in religious struggle listened to a Hungarian proposal: *"Put an end to senseless polemics, leave off purposeless and senseless enmity! Abandon mutual hostilities at least at the hour of extreme peril. Should Hungary perish, the whole of Europe would suffer the consequences!"*

When Suleiman's Janissaries occupied Buda in 1541, King John was already dead. Isabella, the widowed queen, fled to Transylvania with her infant son. She also took with her a copy of an important work by Erasmus, the *Institutio Principis Christiani* (The Education of the Christian Prince) which Erasmus had dedicated to Charles V, at the time sixteen years of age. The copy Isabella took to Transylvania bore the following note: *Sum Johannis Regis Electi Hungariae* (I belong to John, the elected king of Hungary). It has not yet been fully clarified to what extent the principles of the work had influenced King John; what is certain is that they did prevail in the education of his son. This is all the more important as few princes have been entrusted with a greater task, or under more adverse conditions, than the young John Sigismund, who had to create a state.

The Principality of Transylvania came into being out of the eastern parts of John Szapolyai's kingdom. Buda, together with the fertile plains, the eastern part of Transdanubia and the lower tip of Transylvania, was under Turkish rule. In 1570, John Sigismund renounced the crown and became Prince of Transylvania. Along with maintaining the traditions of the Hungarian royal court, Transylvania had to undertake all the duties that fell to Hungarian statehood. The law decreeing religious tolerance was born with the Transylvanian state in 1568, as part of the very process of building that state.

The constitution and institutions of the new state were created between 1541 and 1570. At first, the Transylvanian Estates (known as the "three nations",

consisting of the nobles [Hungarians], Székelys and Saxons, with mediaeval institutional privileges), led by György Martinuzzi (1482-1551), the Bishop of Várad and chancellor, who as regent governed on behalf of a ruler then still a minor, managed to get Suleiman and Ferdinand I to recognize their right to elect a prince; they established the country's economic independence and defence, developed channels of international mediation and diplomacy, and set up a flourishing princely court in Renaissance spirit. The Szeben Diet of 1566 set down the basic principle of policy: *"The cure of the country rests equally on the law and on arms."* The new value assigned to the law, placing it above arms, tallies with Erasmus' requirement that the prince must try to ensure domestic peace by the rule of law.

The law had to be enforced to ensure domestic peace as the young Transylvanian state was not only threatened by foreign powers but by the spectre of civil war as well. The sanctity of private property was strictly protected: the theft of a few bunches of grapes or of a sheep was punished by hanging. Those taking the rogue's part or protecting the criminal, be they Székely, Saxon or nobleman, *"must be punished with the same punishment as are the thieves, indeed, they should be hanged even higher..."* At the same time, a whole range of laws were passed on the prevention of crime and on clemency. Help had to be provided to the poor, the abject, the injured; the punishment of forfeiting property could not be extended to heirs, the sins of the fathers could not be visited on the children and grandchildren. Rehabilitation was due to well-behaved criminals after a year, and after three years the mark of punishment was annulled once the criminal had atoned for his crime. These were humane laws, and seemed to echo Erasmus' *"the law only serves public welfare"*. It was in the basic interest of the young Transylvanian state to create domestic peace, law and order. The law on religion passed by the Torda Diet fits well into this conception of the polity.

Earlier historians tended to derive the law of religious freedom from John Sigismund's Polish and Italian upbringing, his classical education and possibly his preference for literature and music over the martial virtues, for which he was even considered by some as a "weak", enervated ruler. John Sigismund was indeed an educated prince. When he was 17 years old, the Venetian envoy, Paolo Tiepolo wrote of him that *"he may become one of the most eminent princes of the age"*. Dionigi Atanagi, the Roman humanist, dedicated an anthology to him in 1565, which included two sonnets by Michelangelo. The prince spoke fluent Italian and was a skilled musician: as a boy he was presented a virginal by the Saxons of Szeben, and he welcomed Bálint Bakfark, the Brassó-born virtuoso lutanist and famous master of polyphonic music, at his court. The princely court at Gyulafehérvár was a microcosm of this divided Europe, a meeting place of languages, religions and schools of thought. But the law on religion was not passed by the prince alone, under the influence of one of these schools, as had earlier been thought; it was the outcome of a concerted effort by the Diet and the Prince.

The blurred features of two generations appear against the background of the

Torda

John Sigismund convened the 1568 Diet in a historic town with a strong tradition of self-government, where the local economy, the fertile hinterland and, last but not least, the diligent and capable inhabitants could provide, even in wintertime, the victualling and billeting of the large numbers gathered for the event.

He had a special liking for Torda, which, because of its central location, near Kolozsvár, and its prosperity, had been the venue for diets on several occasions before 1568. The town's historical significance goes back to Roman times. It was particularly favoured for its rich salt mines, it lay along the Roman road, and archaeologists have excavated the remains of a major military camp. Saint Stephen the King (1000-1038), the first monarch of Hungary, made it the seat of Torda county. In the Middle Ages it was a royal domain (terra regalis, Regia civitas). Its particular natural endowments, the narrow Torda Gorge with its precipitous walls, has been linked in folk tradition with the name of Saint Ladislas, King of Hungary (1040-1095). It was inhabited by burghers, German miners, Hungarian noblemen and salters. It was destroyed during the Mongol invasion of Hungary in 1241, but King Andrew III (1250-1301) confirmed the charter of the reconstructed town, and also granted privileges to the new settlers, allowing them their own elected magistrates. The king pointed out that it was his duty to support his subjects, and particularly the foreign settlers, and raise them from poverty. By the 15th century Torda was already a noted strategic and political foothold. A 19th century topographer described the town as follows:

"Moving on south-eastward from Kolozsvár, over the mountain range flanking the southern side of the valley of the Szamos, we come to the beautiful valley of the Aranyos. Torda was built on the left bank of the Aranyos, right at the mouth of the Turi and Ajtóni burns, which unite in the town. The valley is flanked by a chain of hills to the east and the west, whose slopes are planted with vines. The town is of a fairly modest and rustic appearance; though its streets are regular, it can boast only a few outstanding buildings. It consists of three parts: Old and New Torda, which were united in 1672, and Egyházfalva, also united with the market-town. This latter is along the banks of the

Sóspatak and the road leading to the salt mines. The Catholic parish church in the market-place of Old Torda is a large but not very beautiful building. At the southern side of this church are the remains of Torda Castle; its building was started in 1453, using the stones of an old Roman castellum. The Catholic church is near the county hall. Torda is the seat of the county named after it. The Calvinists also have a church in Old Torda. The church of the Lutheran Saxons, surrounded by old stonewalls, stands between Old and New Torda. This latter quarter also houses the church and convent of the Franciscan friars. The church in Egyházfalva once belonged to the Paulines. Apart from the churches mentioned, the Unitarians have one church, the Uniates two, and the Greek Orthodox one. As is usually the case in most Transylvanian towns, six different denominations are thus represented in this small town whose inhabitants come to about 8,000. The overwhelming majority of the inhabitants are Hungarians.

Torda was built on the site of a Roman colony, which owed its origin to the salt mines there and was called S a l i n a e or S a l i n o p o l i s.

On Leányvár [Girl's Castle] hill, to the south-west of the town, once stood a Roman castle, of which only a few ditches have survived. Roman relics, statues, urns and coins are still being excavated; large wide bricks are also found, the remains of a Roman aqueduct which brought good water from the outskirts of Koppánd. A semicircular gate of the old Roman town, built of large stones without the use of mortar, withstood the adversities of time for nearly 1500 years, collapsing only in 1657.

Southeast of Torda there is a beautiful plain along the Aranyos; this is said to be the site of a bloody battle in which the Roman Emperor Trajan defeated Decebal, the king of the Dacians in A.D. 101. The Vlachs even today call this region Trajan's Meadow (Prat lui Traian), while the Hungarians call it Keresztes mező (Crusader Meadow). There are a few mounds on it which are thought by some to be the graves of Romans who died in the battle. Later too, this place saw more than one battle, and during the reign of the national princes it was here that troops gathered for military exercises on several occasions."

—Lajos Rohbock—János Hunfalvy: *Magyarország és Erdély* (Hungary and Transylvania in Original Pictures), Darmstadt, 1864.—

law: the survivors of Mohács and the first generation born after the catastrophe. Among them were Stephen Báthori, the Captain-General of Várad, and later Prince of Transylvania and King of Poland, Kristóf Hagymássy, the national Captain-General and Lord Lieutenant of Central Szolnok County, Michael Hermann, the Chief Magistrate of Brassó, and Peter Haller, a Saxon and mayor of Szeben. Johannes Honterus, the humanist scholar and founder of the Lutheran Church of the Saxons, was no longer alive at the time of the Torda Diet, but his spirit lived on in his pupils. Giorgio Blandrata, a follower of Miguel Servet, who had been forced to flee his country and who had found refuge in Transylvania, where he became the court physician, was presumably a member of the princely council. One of the catalysers of the law in all probability was Ferenc Dávid (cca 1510-1579), a theologian educated in the humanist atmosphere of the princely seat of Gyulafehérvár and at Wittenberg University, whose life brought him from the rectorates of the Latin schools at Beszterce and then Kolozsvár, to the court-chaplaincy. Dávid established Unitarianism as part of an anti-Trinitarian trend.

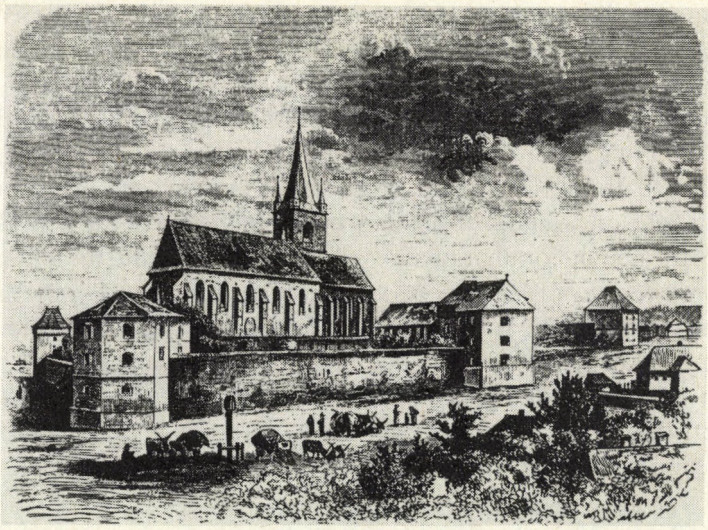
Transylvania accepted the Reformation at a very early stage, but this did not lead towards a dominant single faith; rather, it gave rise to the speedy establishment of various denominations in a region where Rome and Byzantium met and overlapped. Transylvania had always had powerful commercial and cultural links with other parts of Europe. The Saxons, with their many towns, had close links with other German-speaking areas.

The Hussites, the Renaissance and Humanism, and the spirit of reform associated with the Franciscans had all found a ready response there.

By 1568, the great tide of the Reformation had already engulfed the whole principality. Nagyszeben, a centre of the Saxons, had been Lutheran since 1526; by 1542 Honterus had organized the Saxon Church. In the 1550s, Calvinism gained ground, mainly among the Hungarian lower nobility. Roman Catholicism, in a minority, still survived among a few aristocratic families such as the Báthoris, and in enclaves in the Székely Country. In the early 1560s, anti-Trinitarianism appeared, midst stormy religious debates, particularly in Ko-

Toponyms mentioned

Hungarian	*Romanian*	*German*
Várad	Oradea	Grosswardein
Szeben (Nagyszeben)	Sibiu	Hermannstadt
Torda	Turda	Thorenburg
Brassó	Brasov	Kronstadt
Gyulafehérvár	Balgrad at the time, now Alba Iulia	Weissenburg at the time, now Karlsburg
Beszterce	Bistrita	Bistritz
Udvarhely	Odorheiu	
Fogaras	Fagaras	Fogarasch



The Calvinist Church within the Castle of Marosvásárhely (drawn by János Greguss). Balázs Orbán: A Székelyföld leírása *(A Description of the Székely Country). Pest, 1868.*

lozsvár and Torda and the Székelys of Udvarhelyszék. The greatest in number in the principality were Protestants of one sort or another, but none of the denominations was able to achieve dominance, nor did religious division follow precisely the borders set up by social conditions or by feudal society. The 1568 Diet assembled at a time when conditions were ripe for a settlement by law of the religious situation.

Europe had been trying for decades to cope with the chronic crises of conscience that were occasioned by religious conflicts. One of the solutions was thought to lie in the creation of a country with one religion, but violence, coercion and the familiar methods of mental terror led to repeated crises. The Augsburg law of 1555 was the other, which with the principle of *cuius regio eius religio* placed the conscience of subjects into the hands of the prevailing power. Torda opted for a different way.

The first sentence of the 1568 law refers to the fact that the Diet had previously already passed laws concerning religion, and it "reaffirms" these. The religious laws of 1545, 1548, 1552 and 1564 recognized the new denominations and guaranteed their functioning. Furthermore, the laws passed in 1544 and 1545 also tried to lay down a *status quo*, and put an end to further innovations.

The third group of laws directly anticipated the spirit of the 1568 law. They express the demand to accept other people's religious convictions and respect the individual. The Torda diet took a typical stand in 1545. György Martinuzzi, the Regent, wishing to stem the Reformation which had spread like wildfire among the Saxons, summoned Honterus to attend the diet. However, the princely council,

including its Catholic members, observed that the whole Saxon nation had already accepted *Libellus Reformationis*, and opposed the Regent with the Estates also taking the side of Honterus. At the same time, they laid down in law that the priests of the old religion, that is Catholic priests, could not be hindered or restricted in the practice of their office, nor could they be molested. Punishment was due to people who scandalized or offended others. According to the 1557 law, everybody was free to follow the religion he chose, whether it included the old or the new liturgies, but followers of the new denominations were not to incommodate the adherents of the old. The Torda decree of 1563 is worthy of particular attention. For the first time the use of churches in parishes with adherents of various religious denominations was regulated. Accordingly, the various denominations among the Székelys were to use the church jointly by holding divine services in turn, each minister of religion waiting until the other concluded his service. They had thus sought peaceful solutions even earlier and had tried to establish the mechanisms of mutual tolerance.

The 1568 law went further in four respects.

The new law left Biblical exegesis to the preachers: *"the preachers are to preach the Gospel everywhere, each according to his own interpretation".*

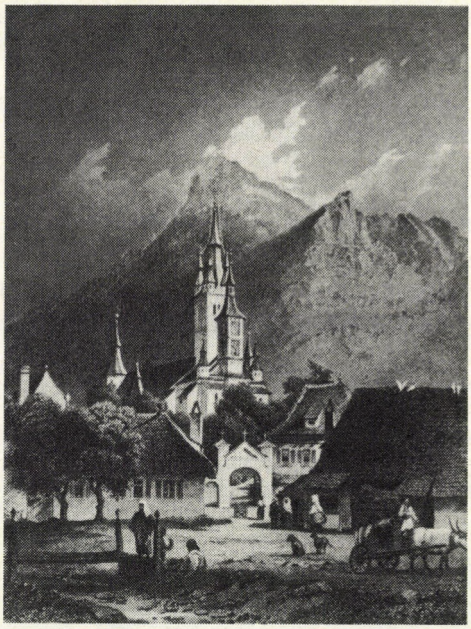
The choice of religion and of the preacher became the right of the parishes, of the shared institutions of the faithful. In other words, it was not any form of temporal authority—the state or the landlord—which decided on their spiritual matters, but the towns, market-towns and villages themselves: *"and the parish, if it wants to accept it, should do so, but if not, nobody should force it by compulsion, but it should have a preacher whose teachings are to its liking".*

The law protects the preacher who expounds the Gospel according to his own interpretation, and it also protects the parishes which take the decisions: *"none of the superintendents nor anyone else should offend the preachers, no one should be abused by anyone for his religion, in keeping with the previous constitutions, and no one is permitted to threaten anybody with captivity or removal from his post because of his teaching."*

Finally, perhaps the most important aspect of all, the law leaves religion to the conscience of the individual, i.e., it sets down the principle of freedom of conscience: *"Because faith is the gift of God, it springs from listening, which listening forwards the word of God."*

Interestingly, the reason directly given in the law for these decisions of great consequence is freedom of conscience. Implied is also public interest: the first sentence refers back to the previous laws, and so the reason given at the 1564 Diet remains valid, *"pro quiete regnicolarum"*, a looser interpretation of which would be *pro quiete Regni*, that is in the spirit of the law, in the interest of the peace of the realm.

For nearly a century now, there has been a debate among Hungarian historians over the character of this law. Is it really the first (and a particularly early)



The Orthodox Church at Brassó-Kronstadt-Brasov. Ludwig Rohbock—János Hunfalvy: Magyarország és Erdély *(Hungary and Transylvania). Darmstadt, 1864.*

formulation of religious freedom and tolerance in modern times? And if it establishes freedom of worship, is it not biassed at the expense of the Catholics, and particularly of the Orthodox Romanians, who at the time made up about 25 per cent of the inhabitants of Transylvania?

The Diet did not, and could not make provisions on returning goods and chattels that had been taken from the Catholic Church. This would have been contrary to the spirit of the law, which wished to stabilize the conditions established, and which set down that it is the individual and the parish that make decisions on religious matters, and the prince, and hence temporal authority, has no right to interfere. At the time of the Diet, the Transylvanian bishopric had long been vacant. That was partly due to reasons outside of the Transylvanian principality, as there was a dispute between the Holy See and the Habsburg king on the question. The Vienna court referred to the Papal bull of the Council of Constance and considered the nomination of bishops as its right. The Holy See, on the other hand, did not accept a state of affairs in which its only part in selecting the successors of the Apostles would be to take note of the filling of the bishopric; no trace was found of the bull among the papers of the Council, and the process was in conflict with canon law. In this context the Catholic Church meant the threat of the enforcement of the power of the Habsburg Emperor and King in the principality, and alarming signs of religious persecution were already evident in royal Hungary. The young Transylva-

nian state had to defend itself against the influence of the foreign power; it could not afford a civil war to rage within a fragile country. Nevertheless, the Torda law included no form of prohibition, and its principles concerning freedom of conscience and the respect for religious conviction were valid for all the religions, including he Catholics.

Neither the social nor the ecclesiastical conditions allowed for an institutionalized acceptance of the Orthodox religion. Orthodox Transylvanians were subject to the bishopric of Wallachia; the Romanians had no hierarchy within the principality and their ecclesiastic language was church Slavonic. Some of the Romanians practised transhumant animal husbandry, with a seasonal movement of sheep between the pastures on the slopes of he Carpathians, within the territories of the Transylvanian principality and the Romanian principalities in Moldavia and Wallachia. Nonetheless, Transylvania designated a bishop at the head of Orthodox Romanians in Transylvania, and first the Saxons of Szeben, then those of Brassó set up printing presses and promoted the translation of various religious texts, including the Bible, into Romanian, with the intention of spreading reformed faith. A special paragraph of the law the Torda Diet passed in 1568, compelled Orthodox believers to accept the bishop appointed by the Prince. This, of course, asserted the influence of the state, but at the same time the 1566 ruling also remained valid: *"concerning religion, it has been established that in keeping with the previous articles, the preaching of the Gospel should not be hindered among any of the nations"*.

A real novelty of the 1568 law is the confidence it places in the people. It confides in the individual's ability to take his own decision, all by himself, without any outside influence, by listening to his inner voice. It has confidence in the inhabitants of towns, market towns and villages that they are able to choose and protect the peace of their parish. In fact this places responsibility on the people. Man is responsible for the creation of his own spiritual peace and for creating the conditions under which people of different faiths can live peacefully alongside one another. It grants confidence to people in themselves and in their fellow-beings when it lays down that they should respect the religion of the other man, as the other man too, respects his. All this called for neither more nor less than for the communities to learn how to deal with their daily conflicts and to develop skills in solving the conflicts arising from their being different.

The basic principles of this law prevailed all during the existence of the principality, despite the changing and often tragic and serious condition of Transylvania.

The law reiterated repeatedly (1570, 1572) that the prince cannot interfere in religious matters, while it is his duty to punish the "innovators", that is not to allow any change in the basic spirit of the 1568 law. One reason for this conservative element was to prevent temporal power to allot undue advantage to any one of the religions over another if, or whenever, power came into different hands. Of course,

The Lutheran Fortified Church (Kirchenburg) at Tartlau (Prázsmár). Ludwig Rohbock–János Hunfalvy: Magyarország és Erdély *(Hungary and Transylvania). Darmstadt, 1864.*

it was impossible for all this to succeed in its pure form. New solutions to the issues were particularly called for by changing conditions.

But the majority of new decisions were taken in the spirit of the Torda law of religious freedom. In the grave situation of the 17th century, Transylvania remained a receptive country. It offered refuge to the Anabaptists who were expelled from Moravia, the Unitarians from Poland, and fugitives from the Hungarian kingdom, regardless of religious denomination. It received enterprising merchants, Armenians, Jews, Greeks, members of the Levant Company, and the Orthodox from the Wallachian principality. The spirit of respect for the human dignity of people of different religions is reflected in the letters-patent Prince Gabriel Bethlen (1580-1629) granted to the Jews: *"They will be granted religious freedom which they can practise according to their ritual custom but without disturbing others."* The patent issued in 1623 also sets down that they may move about without any distinguishing mark *"in Christian apparel"*, since any discrimination is "humiliating". The patent ensures several economic advantages and the right to integration, and concludes: *"These are the privileges which we have ordered for the aforementioned people of Jewish religion, to be executed readily and with respect."*

Recent studies have justified the report by the Calvinist Bishop János Keserű Dajka (cca 1580-1633) of Transylvania, according to which Gabriel Bethlen was surrounded by many people of different religions, *"by virtue of the country's laws"*, and more than half of his councillors were Catholics. In his testament, the prince

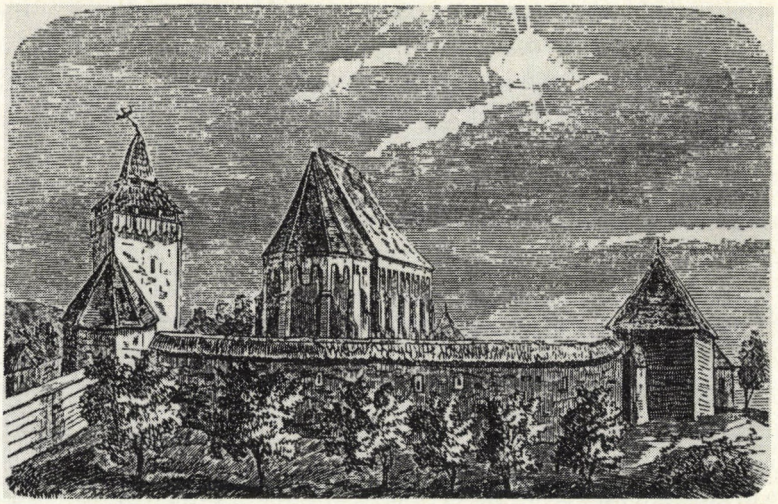
reiterated the basic principle of the Torda Diet; it sets down that the country's perils can be avoided if they respect God, maintain unity among themselves, and *"do not quarrel with each other over religion, but leave that to the judgment of the high Priest in heaven, where He will repay everyone according to his deserts: let them not be priests and let them not save others by force; they should let them live in freedom according to the country's constitution, accepting whichever of the four accepted religions."*

Prince George II Rákóczi (1621-1660) confirmed the liberty of conscience and the right of serfs and villages to freely chose their religion, in his code issued in 1652, called the *Approbatae Constitutiones*, which forbids all forms of pressure.

The spirit of the law prevails in the assistance and rights granted to Orthodox Christians. Prince Michael Apafi (1632-1690) confirmed the financing of the Romanian school founded in Fogaras by Prince George I Rákóczi (1591-1648) and his Consort, Zsuzsanna Lorántffy (1600-1660), and provided princely protection to the first, and highest standard, establishment for educating Romanian priests and teachers. He also summoned the Romanian bishop to the Diet.

The influence of the Law on religion of 1568 could be felt in the Habsburg kingdom as well. Cardinal Péter Pázmány (1570-1637), the leading figure of the counter-reformation, and Archbishop of Esztergom, was familiar with conditions in Transylvania and had the cause of the principality at heart. He also maintained close contacts with Prince Gabriel Bethlen. In a recently published *Opinio*, dated 1608, Pázmány wished to uphold the exercise of free religious choice in opposition to the extremists. Miklós Zrinyi (1620-1664), the Banus of Croatia, general, poet and politician, stressed, in the knowledge of religious conditions in Transylvania, that since there were various religions in the kingdom as well, the reform of the country should be started by putting an end to religious animosities and ensuring the free practice of religion. The Habsburg government came to a *modus vivendi* on the question of religion after the uprising led by Imre Thököly (1657-1705). But while in Transylvania free choice of religion was the legal right of serfs as well, the compromise arrived at in the kingdom tried to attend to the grievances of Protestants in a law passed by the Sopron Diet of 1681, by paying due regard to seigneurial rights as well. Finally, after the Turks had been driven out of Hungary by the Holy League, Francis II Rákóczi (1676-1752) led a rebellion against the absolutist Habsburg Emperor and Hungarian king, at the time of the War of Spanish Succession. Rákóczi organized a new Hungarian state in the Kingdom, and he asserted the spirit of the Torda Diet there as well. The Szécsény Diet in 1705 declared the general principle of religious freedom, restricted seigneurial rights, and took stock of churches according to parishes, taking into consideration the religious division of the inhabitants and allotting the church to the majority denomination, but obliging them to help the minority in building their own church. The hospitals and alms houses, whichever denomination they may have belonged to, were compelled to receive the poor regardless of their denomination.

The law passed by the Torda Diet and freedom of worship created the conditions



The ancient Unitarian Church at Ders. Balázs Orbán: A Székelyföld leírása *(A Description of the Székely Country). Pest, 1868.*

for freedom of education in the vernacular, since schools, printing presses and gifts, of stipends for study abroad, the pulpit and all the important means of institutionalized education in the vernacular, were in the hands of the churches. The national cultures of peoples of different languages, living side by side, in enclaves, and in mixed areas, were nurtured by the free development of their own vernacular tongue.

As a mark of the influence of the 1568 law, Comenius (Jan Komensky, 1592-1670) seems to have been searching for a solution in a similar direction. He had close links with Transylvania and was aware of the fact that the principality was the only one of the countries in the region where freedom of conscience and the free exercise of religion were assured by law, and where the children of the three nations, Hungarians, Saxons and Romanians, could study in their vernacular. Comenius came to Hungary after he had learned that his homeland, Bohemia, was left out of the Peace Treaty of Westphalia, which meant for him and for his co-religionists that—as he wrote it—having lost the independence of their country, they will *"never be granted liberty of conscience"*. He started to draw up a comprehensive programme in the Calvinist college of Sárospatak, the bridge-head of the Transylvanian principality, with a view to mutual understanding between the peoples of Central Europe, divided in religion and language. Mátyás Bél (1684-1749) examined the towns and villages in the Hungarian kingdom under different conditions, but with similar notions in mind, when he recorded the religions of the inhabitants, and described how followers of the various denominations were living together, as it was his conviction that religious tolerance constituted one of the main conditions for prosperity in the region.

The idea of civic tolerance began to crystallize in the debates of the late 17th

century. There is no evidence whatever that French, English and Dutch authors were familiar with the conditions of the principality, although the awareness of religious freedom in Transylvania often featured in reactions abroad to the rebellions in Hungary and to political polemics. But it is unlikely that the knowledge of the law passed by the Torda Diet reached, say, Pierre Bayle (1647-1706) when, a good hundred years later, he wrote: *"Nothing would be more suitable to turn the world into a bloody theatre of chaos and butchery than to accept the principle that all those who are convinced of the truth of their religion have the right to wipe out everybody else... It is obvious that true religion, whatever it should be, cannot grant the right for violence against others..."* A similar conceptual congruence can be observed in Bayle's opinion stressing the sovereignty of conscience: *"On the subject of religion the rule of judgment lies in the conscience and not in reason."*

It can be taken for granted that John Locke was also unfamiliar with the religious conditions in Transylvania when he wrote his *Epistola de tolerantia* in 1685, when in hiding in Amsterdam. Bayle taught philosophy in Rotterdam from 1681 onwards, and dozens of Transylvanian students were studying at universities in the Netherlands. Amsterdam granted asylum to Comenius and to Polish, Bohemian and Moravian fugitives. Anyway, the thoughts expressed under the ogive arches of the Torda church in the winter of 1568 were a distant prelude to Locke's ideas: the authorities, the state may not interfere in the faith of the individual. *"...no man can so far abandon the care of his own eternal salvation as to embrace under compulsion a worship or faith prescribed by someone else, be he prince or subject. For no man, even if he would, can believe at another's dictation...the care of souls cannot belong to the civil magistrate, because his power consists wholly in compulsion. But true and saving religion consists in the inward persuasion of the mind, without which nothing has any value with God and such is the nature of human understanding, that it cannot be compelled by any outward force. Confiscate a man's goods, imprison or torture his body: such punishments will not make him change his inward judgment of things."* ❧

György Dalos

Is the East European Joke Finished?

"What will happen when Socialism finally reaches the Sahara? For a while, nothing. And then, a shortage of sand will occur."

It was February 1950. László B., a twenty-four-year-old tractor driver, and János M., a bricklayer who was a year younger, were on an agitprop tour to promote spring ploughing contracts. They were careless enough to chose this exalted occasion for a departure from the dry language of propaganda. Stopping at a farmstead on the way, László B. told the following joke:

"The teacher gave portraits of Stalin and Rákosi to the children, and told them to take them home. Next day he asked the children where they had hung the pictures. One child answered that his father hung Comrade Stalin in the larder so he could see it was empty and there was nothing to be got from there, and Comrade Rákosi in the lavatory so he could tell what a smell there was about."

Not to be outdone, János M. hastened to share one of his jokes:

"Rákosi and Gerő were driving over a bridge when they were stopped by a donkey that stood in front of their car. The donkey wouldn't budge, so Gerő got out, walked up to the donkey and whispered something in its ear. The animal leapt straight into the Danube. When Rákosi asked Gerő what he had whispered to the donkey, Gerő replied: 'I told it to join the Party'."

An informer happened to be present, and he reported the story-tellers to the authorities. The two young men were

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promptly put on trial. Both pleaded guilty and regretted the act of subversion with which they had been charged. "They brought up in their defence," the sentence handed down by the court of County Sz. reads, "that they had made their statements in jest. Due to their inappropriate ideological education they failed to realize the destructive quality of what they had said, but they realize it now, and will do their utmost in the future to make up for their error by exemplary hard work."

The court was not moved by these repentant words. "It is the view of the Criminal Court that the person of Mátyás Rákosi embodies the democratic system of government itself, and therefore any tasteless manifestation directed at his person must be regarded as a grave offence. The 'joke' and other statements which, according to the prosecution, come under the cited paragraphs of the Criminal Code are likely to bring contempt on the democratic order. The Criminal Court considered it an aggravating circumstance that the tasteless misrepresentation offended the leaders of the workers of the world and those of Hungary, and the defendants' statements were also apt to reduce the success of the agitprop work." Miraculously enough in the circumstances, the court also managed to find some "important extenuating circumstances" for the two hapless fellows, whom even the local Party secretary tried to defend. It took into account that both "descended from poor peasant families", and thus "the character of the offence was not viewed by the court as conspiratorial acts carried out by the class enemy but rather as the hardly deliberate, irresponsible behaviour of young people brought up in a regime hostile to the people, who have not yet undergone proper ideological reeducation." László B. and János M. therefore got off with suspended prison sentences of three and two months respectively, and were obliged to reimburse the Treasury for the costs of the court, amounting to 194 forints and 78 fillérs per person.

Of course, the Criminal Code did not include any offence under the heading "telling jokes". The article under which the tractor driver and bricklayer were charged was called "incitement". The somewhat tautological argument of the defendants that they only joked "in jest" failed to influence the court. Looked at from the viewpoint of the fact of incitement, the word "joke" has no relevance; it is consistently used between quotes in the written judgment. In other words, the state recognizes no such thing as a joke. But what will become of jokes if they are taken seriously?

Fortunately the "incitement" article was not rigidly applied to jokes all the time in every country of East Europe. In Hungary in the sixties, for instance, "carelessness", "lack of hostile intentions" or "of slight social danger" were often regarded as mitigating circumstances.

The natural sense of humour of some lawyers may have had something to do with this. Indeed, the rather sensitive position of judges passing sentence in cases of this type was characterized early on by the following joke:

"A judge comes out of the courtroom roaring with laughter. 'What are you

laughing at?', his colleague asks. 'I heard a fantastic joke,' the judge answers, unable to stop laughing. 'Tell me,' his colleague pleads with him. 'I can't,' the judge says. 'I just gave someone five years for it.'"

This is exactly where the basic weakness of the entire construction of the incitement article lies, at least where jokes are concerned. In fact, anyone prosecuting jokes must inevitably prosecute laughter as well. Anyone laughing at a joke admits to at least part of its truth, and to say that a joke is "likely to incite to hatred" is an admission that this hatred may not be entirely groundless.

The sense of humour of some judges can be seen in the fact that in judicial circles certain jokes were called "three per twos", meaning that the teller of the joke could expect three years in prison, and the listener, two.

The sources of the modern East European joke are rural folk tales, urban Jewish jokes, the stock of anecdotes and the material of the sexual or "dirty" jokes of earlier times. How these stereotypes lived on and developed in contemporary popular humour is well illustrated by a joke from the early seventies:

"A wise rabbi is asked why the Hungarian economic reform attempt of 1968 had failed. 'Well, I'm not an economist,' he replies, 'but this reminds me of a story:

Old and ugly Sarah has nothing in this world but an aging, mangy dog. One day she catches a goldfish in the lake. 'Have mercy and spare my life,' the goldfish begs her. 'If you do, I'll fulfil three wishes of yours.' Sarah throws the goldfish back into the lake. 'My first wish,' she says, 'is that I want to be young again.' At once she turns into a beautiful young maiden. 'And finally,' Sarah says, 'I want my mangy old dog turn into a handsome young gentleman.' And lo and behold: an extremely good-looking young man appears right by her side. 'Fine,' says Sarah happily. 'Then we will go inside and make love.' The two of them go to the bedroom, and take off their clothes. They are in bed already and in each other's arms when the handsome young man sighs ruefully: 'What a pity you had me castrated twelve years ago.'"

This joke puts a classical fable, probably of Russian origin, into the framework of a Hassidic anecdote. The structure of the story is determined by the mystic number of fairy tales, the number three. The third of Sarah's three wishes provides a surprise erotic twist to the plot. That element, borrowed from "dirty" jokes, is the fuse that ignites the joke. The brutal ending of the story demonstrates both its unrealistic and symbolic character at the same time.

On a trivial, obscene level, the joke conveys more or less the same message that György Lukács hinted at on the eve of the introduction of the economic reform, i.e., that the reform will fail if it is not combined with political change. The wise rabbi of the seventies, however, went a step further than the philosopher did. He told us that in 1968 it was already too late for reforms in Hungary (and most likely anywhere else in East Europe). Since the society had been deprived of its autonomy ("castrated"), not even a miracle could modernize it ("make it young again"). That must sound very familiar to all those who have studied the events of the year 1989.

Ever since political jokes existed, questions have constantly been raised about the identity of their authors. Who can those utterly destructive characters be, whose favourite pastime is to poke fun at the authority of the omnipotent state? What is their purpose? Where do they get all that extra time and mental energy? Do they only want to amuse themselves or have they much darker designs? Some people believe they can be located in the coffee-houses of Budapest, while others suspect the existence of secret joke factories somewhere.

At times the jokes themselves refer back to their authors, if in a mythical form. The jokes about "Radio Yerevan", for instance, started on in the Soviet Union in the mid-1950s. The "joke radio station", imagined to be broadcasting from the Armenian capital, in fact parodied a peculiar type of radio show and newspaper column, called "Answers to Questions Raised by Workers" or something similar, which were intended by the authorities to fill the most obvious information gaps, especially at times when the population was particularly worried by certain issues.

In Hungary, more open even in the worst of times, the Unknown Joke-Teller was personified:

"Kádár learns that the inventor of jokes in Hungary is a certain Mr. Kohn. He summons Kohn to amuse him.

Kádár receives his guest with a richly laden table. Poor Kohn's mouth falls open at the sight of the luxury. Kádár notices, and tells him in a patronizing tone: 'See that? That is how all working people will soon live in Hungary.'

'But Comrade Kádár,' Kohn replies, 'I was made to understand that I would be the one telling the jokes tonight.'"

This story kills two birds with one stone. It conforms to the up-to-date version of the legend of the good king, that of "Kádár the liberal" who supposedly enjoyed jokes about himself. On the other hand, however, Kohn, like a kind of court jester, tells the truth to his king. Kohn, of course, is a fairy-tale figure; nevertheless, through him, we learn about one of the main causes for the emergence of jokes: the gap between utopia and everyday reality. Just like the party leader's richly laden table cannot change the actual fact of the country's poverty, so a naive, well-meaning lie, or even a half-truth, cannot substitute the whole truth. And "humour," the humourist Karinthy once said, "is the whole truth".

Jokes, like folk songs or tales, are invented by individuals. Their extreme diversity in style, genre and quality indicates that those individuals must be numerous. The motifs and language of some stories unmistakably suggest a working-class background; others must be the product of intellectuals' meeting-places. It is, however, equally characteristic of every one of them that, as products of oral folklore, they receive their final form only in the process of being told.

Unlike those works of art which gain their final shape through being written down, painted or composed, jokes, as works of art, do not become finished with the first telling. They are modified, added to and updated whenever retold, and the new

There is a US-Soviet summit meeting in the Kremlin in Moscow. During a break, President Nixon goes to the lavatory, locks himself and then finds that he is unable to open the door again. He bangs on it and shouts until his private secretary arrives, but whatever the two men try to do, the door remains locked. So the secretary goes to find out what should be done. He comes back and tells Nixon: "Mr President, I was told you have to sing the Internationale, only then will the door open." "Teach me how to sing it," the President says, so the secretary has to go and learn how to sing the Internationale. This done, he returns and teaches Nixon. Nixon sings it and so he can get out at last.

At the next round of summitry, in Washington, Brezhnev goes to the loo in the White House during a break and locks himself in. Once he's finished, he finds he cannot open the door. After some yells and bangs, his secretary comes but they find they are unable to open the door. So the secretary goes to find out what has to be done. He comes back and tells Brezhnev through the door, "Comrade Brezhnev, you have to flush the toilet, and the door will then automatically open."

versions always bear the marks of the environment in which they are heard. Some jokes of Soviet origin spread after 1945 to Poland, Czechoslovakia or the GDR, only to crop up decades later in Cuba or Vietnam.

The figures of the East European joke spring from ancient stereotypes and patterns. At the dawn of the modern era, idiots and cripples were the traditional targets of popular humour—a reflection of the condition of man thrown into an absurd world. In the 19th century, entire communities became the butt of jokes. Thus in Hungary, the people of the village Rátót came to be known as dimwits, and the very name of their village became synonymous with idiocy. A similar role was played in Germany by East Frisians and by Belgians in France. Entire nations were attributed features that were supposed to be characteristic of them and no one else. Szeklers were depicted as taciturn, Scots as mean. Jews were typecast as particularly cunning, and Gypsies as both sly and dumb at the same time. These prejudices and stereotypes, frequently racist in nature, bore the stamps of ancient ethnic conflicts. They developed into a veritable humorous ethnography in modern East European jokes.

The traditional protagonists in "dirty" jokes were priests who were portrayed as rascals and secret sex maniacs, and nuns who habitually ended up in bed with priests or friars. They are familiar from Boccaccio's stories. Other frequent characters are whores, girls losing their "innocence" before getting married, aging and ugly women with voracious sexual appetites (something aging and ugly men were rarely reproached for), and—depicted with particular viciousness—homosexuals and impotent men.

Some of these ancient stereotypes survived in East European popular humour. The "East Frisian" traits were transplanted onto policemen who, however, came to share their legendary stupidity increasingly with party leaders. The latter were often sent to brothels by the inventors of jokes and, after their death, to hell. The somewhat racist typecasting of peoples continued with the difference that a new central figure emerged: "the" Russian whose chauvinistic megalomania was coupled with servility. There was also "the" Pole who, according to the jokes, "hates to work", as well as "the" Chinese, partly as an incarnation of the perennial "Yellow Danger", and partly as an inexhaustible source of anti-Soviet *Schadenfreude*.

The true leading characters of the East European political joke, however, were undoubtedly the leaders of the countries concerned. These persons were portrayed in the great wax-works of jokes as murderers, thiefs, liars, madmen or idiots, drunkards, ignorant fools or, at best, scheming scoundrels. The more inaccessible, distant and godlike a political leader was, the more malicious was his treatment in jokes. None of a politician's actions were ever presumed to have a noble intention.

At the same time, however, popular humour reacted with surprising subtlety to the differences between the harshness of the rule of these leaders. This was especially true in Soviet joke production, probably because the people there had longer and much more varied experience concerning the nature of political power than the other East European societies.

When in 1982, former KGB Chief Yuri Andropov became First Secretary of the Soviet Communist Party, he immediately set upon the task of improving the work discipline of Soviet citizens—chiefly by police action. Moscow reacted almost immediately with a joke which bore the title "The History of the KGB in Telephone Conversations". It went like this:

"Under Stalin:
'Hallo, KGB?'
'Yes, what do you want?'
'My neighbour is having red caviar.'
'We'll be right there!'
Under Kruschchev:
'Hallo, KGB?'
'Yes, what do you want?'
'My neighbour is having red caviar.'
'Sure. So what?'
'He's eating it with a spoon.'
'We'll be right there!'
Under Brezhnev:
'Hallo, KGB?'
'Yes, what do you want?'
'My neighbour is having red caviar.'
'Sure. So what?'
'He's eating it with a spoon.'

At a summit meeting, Gorbachev notices three interesting buttons on President Bush's waistcoat, so he asks him about them.

"Oh," the President says, "it's just one of those little American gadgets I like so much. Whenever I feel hot, I just press this one and I will get immediately cooled. When I am cold, you see, I press this one and I'll be warmed up in a few seconds. And, when I'm tired, I press the third one, and in just a few seconds I will feel fresh again. All very simple and practical." Gorbachev is impressed.

Next time the two presidents meet, Gorbachev appears with the door of a Moskwitch car around his neck, his head sticking out through the window.

"For heaven's sake, Mr President," Bush asks him, "what is that you have around your neck?" "Oh," Gorbachev replies, "just one of those little practical Soviet things we are so fond of back at home. When I feel hot, you see, I just wind down the window, like this. Whenever I feel cold, all I have to do is wind it up, you know. And, when I'm tired, I simply take the door off."

'Sure. So what?'
'The spoon's made of gold.'
'We'll be right there!'
Under Andropov:
'Hallo, KGB?'
'Yes, what do you want?'
'My neighbour is having red caviar.'
'Sure. So what?"
'He's eating it with a spoon.'
'Sure. So what?'
'The spoon's made of gold.'
'Sure. So what?'
'He's doing it in working hours.'
'We'll be right there!'"

This joke is in fact a step-by-step description of the gradual degeneration of Soviet state authority. It makes clear that the scope for action on the part of the apparatus of oppression became narrower with every change in the driver's seat, but the idea of control was never given up, for the main thing throughout is "red caviar", a symbol of suppressed consumer desires.

Of course, delicacies like red caviar are not mass consumption goods even if they are freely available. In this respect, despite the abundance so loudly advertised, the

situation was best described by the dictum of the comedian Arkady Raykin: "We have everything but not for everybody." That in a society claiming to be classless, a class—or more exactly caste—approach was prevalent in the distribution of material goods, was as much a basic experience of ordinary people as was the fact that the injustice and inequality evident had a political background. A Budapest joke cast light precisely on that political background.

"What is cognac? Cognac is a drink consumed by the working class via its democratically elected representatives."

This joke belongs to a type which—like the "Radio Yerevan" stories—has a question-and-answer form, and involves a clear aphorism without an epic core. The question here, however, is not put to the Armenian radio station but to a companion by the teller of the joke. The brief pause following the question is a silent symbol. It is the listener who, by his curiosity, paves the way for the answer, and stretches out the punchline himself.

More important, however, the aphorism about the drink of the working class is a so-called "definition joke" which mocks the definitions of Marxist indoctrination courses, and attempts to be as axiomatic as they are. At the same time, it is highly insidious and also two-edged: the example cited not only exposes the injustices of the distribution of cognac but also takes a potshot at the official system of political representation. It implies that the Volkskammers, the Supreme Soviets, Parliaments and Seyms are simply the meeting places of (s)elected cognac-drinkers.

Poland's "caviar" was meat. Even political explosions were associated with that commodity. Whenever the "elected representatives of the working class" tried—frequently under pressure from the international financial organizations—to raise the price of meat, the country was swept by massive unrest. The government was scared several times into calling off price rises, and took revenge upon the rebellious population with empty shelves. That situation was the subject of a host of jokes. Here is one:

"In Warsaw a customer goes into a butcher's shop and asks the two attendants:

'Have you got some pork?'

'No.'

'Beef?'

'No.'

'Chicken?'

'No.'

'Sausages?'

'No.'

Disappointed, the customer leaves. When he is out of the door, one attendant turns to the other.

'What a memory!'"

Making fun of the privileged usually had a consoling function in East European jokes. In this case, however, we are witnessing a different game. Here the man in

Before a state visit to France, President Brezhnev is advised that greeting President Pompidou in French at the airport would make a tremendous impression. A choice team of university professors, linguists and other experts is carefully screened, appointed, and they start teaching Brezhnev to say "Bonjour, Monsieur le President, Bonjour, Madame Pompidou." After a promising start, however, they seem to be getting nowhere. Several weeks go by, the date of the visit is getting closer, and still Brezhnev has made no progress at all.

At the last minute, somebody comes up with a brilliant idea. Why not write out the French greeting in block letters on the inside of the Soviet President's tie, so he could peek at it while he's shaking hands? Everyone thinks this is a great idea so they doctor his red tie appropriately. At last, Brezhnev steps off his plane at Charles de Gaulle airport, beams and shakes hands with President Pompidou and his wife, politely saying "Drip dry... Do not iron..." **—Addenda by the editorial staff—**

the street has fun at his own expense, laughing at his own misery. And the worse the shortage, the more biting the masochistic irony.

In this respect, the record was probably held by Ceausescu's Romania. I heard the following joke in 1980 in Kolozsvár:

"An old and confused Romanian housewife is standing in front of her apartment, staring at her empty shopping bag and mumbling to herself. 'Now, was I just about to go shopping, or have I just come back from shopping?'"

The tragicomic dimension of this joke derives, of course, not only from the amnesia of the old lady but from our identification with her. We, the listeners, are the senile ones; we are the ones standing in front of our own apartments with our shopping bag empty, and we are the humiliated whose only privilege, in comparison with the high and mighty, is that we can laugh at our own expense.

The philosophical basis of the East European joke is the profound conviction that in "existing socialism" there is neither freedom nor equality, and that the principles of the founders of socialism are completely disregarded by the Party. Common people are oppressed, humiliated and cheated; the system, except for its institutionalized power-enforcement, is incapable of functioning, and will therefore inevitably lose out in competition with the West, and it will probably come to a sorry end.

The biggest difference between Eastern and Western people in the mirror of jokes, however, is that the former, at least up to the end of 1989, did not worry about the future, and were not afraid of the end of the world. No catastrophe, not even the nightmare of nuclear conflict was bad enough to prevent East Europeans from making jokes about it. The joke-teller of the fifties, for instance, had the following advice to give about how to behave in the case of nuclear attack:

"We must wrap ourselves in a bedsheet, and crawl silently in the direction of the cemetery.' 'Why silently?,' asks the listener in surprise. 'To avoid panic', comes the answer."

This joke would probably be frowned upon as frivolous by members of the Western peace movements, even though the "advice" it gives is an almost literal quote from the relevant instructions taught at the obligatory Civil Defence courses of the times. The noisy peace propaganda of the fifties, often a mere tool for increasing production and intensifing oppression, resulted in making the very world "peace" distinctly unpopular. Besides, most people gave little credit to the oft-mentioned threat of an imperialist attack. An accident or a breakdown in the military machinery seemed a much more likely danger:

"Someone pushes a button by mistake in the Soviet atomic missile centre. A couple of minutes later a furious general rushes in, shouting in rage, 'Crazy bastards! If it were only that Belgium has ceased to exist, I would let it go. But this lack of discipline is simply outrageous!'"

This is in fact a joke variant of an idea put forward by the Soviet press in the early fifties, namely that an atomic war might break out by accident, unless Moscow's disarmament proposals were accepted by the West. The characteristically Soviet element in the joke is the assumption that a Soviet general would view the accidental destruction of Belgium not as a disaster but as a breakdown in discipline. The use of alienating language was a frequent tool of the "serious" press in the Soviet Union; suffice it to recall that the first Soviet press reports on Chernobyl called that dress rehearsal for Armageddon simply "an accident" (*"khavariya"*). The use of verbal smoke screens is, of course, fairly usual in the West too: a similar downplaying role is filled, for instance, by the German abbreviation "GAU" (*Grösster Anzunehmender Unfall* = Largest Presumable Accident) which has a neutral, technical ring to it.

Political propaganda campaigns were frequently carried out by the governments of East Europe in an attempt to change the indifference of the public to matter of peace and war. In Hungary in the fifties—and much later in some countries—agitprop people ("educators of the people", as they were then called) did not shrink back from invading the privacy of people's homes to spread their message. This is the origin of a joke born at the end of the seventies in the GDR.

" The bell rings in the home of the Meiers. Two political educators are standing before the door. They ask Herr Meier how he relates to the neutron bomb. Herr Meier, completely confounded, rushes into the kitchen to ask his wife. He returns a moment later, cowering. 'Momentarily we are not in a position to take over more than two,' he tells them."

This nightmare joke exposes a country whose utterly conformist, unimaginative citizens are more afraid of antiwar propaganda than of war itself. The reason is that a nuclear holocaust is something they cannot picture, whereas they have a very clear image of party disciplinary action or a police warning. Atomic death may be

horrible but a conflict with the authorities is definitely very unpleasant. A Romanian joke on a similar subject builds on the same experience:

"What is worse, the neutron bomb or Ceausescu? Ceausescu, of course. Why? Because the neutron bombs only kills people but Ceausescu won't let them live."

The East European joke had a considerable influence on public thinking. Not only because the stock of popular anecdotes was made good use of by the comics of Berlin's Distel, Budapest's Mikroszkóp Theatre or the Miniature Theatre of Leningrad. Their influence was deeper than that: wherever they could spread more or less freely, the jokes automatically deprived the loftily ideological official language of any credibility it may have had.

Jokes, however, had a less beneficial effect too, one that may be called "metapolitical", namely that the majority of their audience recognized its own way of thinking in them, and thought it justified. For instance, the fact that, in the countries of "existing socialism", the productivity of labour was extremely low was portrayed by the joke-tellers through the mythic character of the lazy worker. There was a good deal of self-justification in that gesture. And when "the" Russians, "the" communists and party leaders of all ranks and varieties were depicted as evil oppressors, incorrigible liars or corrupt criminals but, in any case, the powers-that-be, whose rule was unquestionable, it implied that any resistance was useless. In most Warsaw Pact countries the East European joke was a substitute for rebellion, a grinning alibi for several decades of accommodation. Thus, in that sense, the joke was not only our treasure but also our misery.

That latter circumstance is especially important because a social analysis of the jokes unequivocally indicates that during the years the world picture of both the average citizen and the intellectuals of East European societies grew free of illusions. No one who told, listened to and laughed at these jokes can say that he or she did not know anything about the real nature of the regime. The jokes and those handing them on put an entire reality between quotes but, at the same time, they joked away the serious consequences arising from that attitude. The same "joking away mentality" is also likely to make things easier for some of the authoritarian post-communist regimes in the region.

Political jokes require, if not dictatorships, at least bad government. Although there is no shortage of those in this region, parliamentary democracy and freedom of the press, even in their present rudimentary forms, already threaten jokes.

Will the East European joke survive the "Eastern Bloc"? In its original form it hardly will. It will certainly lack the kind of bitter audacity with which, taking genuine risks, it used to blurt out the eternal "government secret", letting everyone know that the emperor had no clothes. Changes of political systems are usually also changes of paradigm, creating new stereotypes. One can only hope that in the painful process of the development of a new "up" and a new "down", East European societies will be able to find a kind of humour adequate to the situation. They had better find it before, due to the enormous difficulties, they become too depressed to laugh anymore. ❧

János M. Rainer

The Soldiers of Art

Art and Society in the Age of Stalin. Edited by Péter György and Hedvig Turai. Budapest, Corvina, 1992. 140 pp. English language edition.

Man frees himself from his past by laughing at it. Marx's saw is applicable to this book on Stalinism in the arts. With Stalinism far behind us, and with socialism also fading away, the authors seem to be infected with a certain inward chuckle. Naturally, in order to be so infected, you must not be haunted by painful personal memories. For art critics in their forties, socialist realism, a movement once threatening to overtake the entire domain of art (jokingly referred to in Hungarian as *szocreál*), is at best a childhood memory. One therefore overcomes one's urge to laugh off the past and gets rid of it by subjecting it to analysis instead.

For the analytical mind, however, the subject is, almost by definition, too important "to be dismissed with a relieved and happy gesture". Contemplating the strange afterlife of *szocreál*, László Beke comments, admittedly both cynically and ambiguously, that "... *szocreál* is more alive than ever before. Despite the fact that the overwhelming majority of *szocreál* products are, from the artistic and ideological point of view, worthless propaganda kitsch, the dislike we feel for them occasionally changes to nostalgia. In a paradoxical way, this nostalgia is strengthened by postmodern thinking and eclectic taste indifferent to value. Comparing the various official arts of the twentieth century, the Slavic scholar Ákos Szilágyi provides an explanation of the ironic postmodern interpretation in the opening essay of the book: "The whole Soviet Union seemes to be one enormous work of art created out of nothing by the ironic genius, the Great Master, the Supreme Artist. This gigantic Stalinist parody of religious art fascinates the postmodern imagination with its sheer dimensions, and with its insatiable desire to encompass all aspects of life. Something which is scandalous

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from the moral standpoint can still make an aesthetically exciting and delightful subject."

The authors of the book were lucky to be born a little too late to have any personal experience of the moral scandal of Stalinism. Having said that, I feel that the essentially analytical approach illustrated in the above quotations is the book's greatest asset. The contributors are obviously aware of the moral scandal. They are, however, not drawn to passing judgment in that simplistic—and often hypocritical—vein which is so fashionable today. Whether it is architecture or painting, photography, interior design or music, the authors—the finest of the younger art historians—are only interested in the subject of their inquiry: the product that has become part of everyday life. Quite understandably, this approach is rather different to what people in Hungary have been accustomed to. As long as the memory of the "Supreme Artist", or indeed the presence of his less vigorous successors, was still closely felt, most authors declined to write about the "products" of the period in question. They were much more interested in art marginalized by the totalitarian regime, in those movements and artists who tried to survive, who were determined "to stick it out". Mátyás Domokos's essay, "Leltárhiány" (Items unaccounted for) is an extreme yet typical example: written in 1986 on Stalinism in Hungary, this article—perhaps the best on the subject—was about the literature which was not suppressed as it *could not* even be written; it was about the possible works of great writers—in some cases unfinished pieces, but mostly pieces existing only in the writers' heads—which could never materialize because of political persecution, deliberate neglect or censorship.

Distance in time and the detachment in approach, the place from which the analysis itself comes, all create a peculiar perspective. Here, the culture of Stalinism is being analysed by art historians and historians of Hungary—a country in which the Great Blueprint was willingly copied. The motive behind copying, the works seem to suggest, was to share in the perfection of the original; the result is nevertheless both provincial and ridiculous, even though the idea of producing a parody could not have been further from the imitators' minds. In this respect, Stalinist culture indeed "knew no frontiers"; every single one of its versions conveys the same message, each indoctrinating people to accept the one norm which is both possible and obligatory.

Copying and imitation became possible and obligatory not only between countries and cultures but also between individual artists, or occasionally, even between works of art. In his contribution, András Zwickl studies the relationship between originals and copies in the painting of the 1950s. "Art seemed to have reverted to an earlier phase, like the Middle Ages, for example, when the value of the work was determined not by its individuality and the novelty of its creative intention, but by its service to ideology," Zwickl claims. "The criterion used in the judging of pictures was first and foremost their didactic usefulness, and following to a successful model was not a crime, but a virtue." In fact, it was more than that: it was the fulfilment of a purpose. The portrait, for example, was a favoured and cultic object of copies and variations, guaranteeing the omnipresence of the leader who

personified the one and only ideology, György Szücs claims in his essay, "The Philosophy of Pictorial Sovereignty". "The assortment of decorations came out of the same box [...] the mechanism was at work, whether the leader "arrived" to join the situation or not. If he did, he added his voice and behaviour, if he did not, ideology was still present..." Therefore, there is nothing curious about the way the metamorphosis of works of art functioning as standardized blueprints—the copying, the turning of photos into paintings and vice versa, etc.—became untraceable: "It was not their material form but their ideological message that mattered." (György Szücs)

Almost every contributor explores the exciting possibilities in making comparisons: the "original" is compared to its "monumental miniature" copy in Hungary; the Russian revolutionary art and culture of the 1920s is compared to the totalitarian art of the Soviet state; and the art of Nazi Germany is compared to art in the Soviet Union, providing countless interesting viewpoints for analysis. Evidently, several of the book's contributors were interested in the currently still fashionable theory concerning the similarities, and the common origin even, of Stalinism and nazism, both as political regimes and as cultural phenomena. András Ferkai believes, for example, that the notion of "imperial architecture" oversimplifes, although "... we may draw a parallel between the designs of Hitler and Stalin for the gigantic transformation of their capital cities and the creation of public buildings of an imperial significance. Indeed, we may discover some eerie similarities in the designs for the memorials to the German and Soviet soldiers who fell during the war in Russia." However, there are considerable differences in urban planning, in the concept of the ideal home, and even in the style of architecture: in nazi Germany the ideal home was a house with a garden, suggesting some kind of collective petit bourgeoisie, in marked contrast with the enormous highrise tenements of the Stalinist Soviet Union, in which the faceless and subordinate mass society of the archaic Eastern land and village community, the *obschina,* was formed anew.

In his essay on "history painting", András Rényi also deals with the same parallel. Nazism never felt the need to derive its claim to power by reference to the past: the legitimation of nazism was rendered partly by a supernatural phenomenon (the charismatic quality of the Führer), and partly by quasi-biological factors (such as the myth of the superiority of the race). By contrast, Marxism, as a "scientific theory", was opposed to the creation of myths, deriving its own inevitable triumph from historical processes, from "historical necessity". In the first case, therefore, the emphasis was on the mythical unity of past, present and future. For *szocreál,* however, the past is only a moment in the unstable process leading to the present and the future, capturing the "momentary balance of the classes" and the "logic of the class struggle". At the same time, however, the future is also presented, at least at the level of intentions.

As far as the result in a broader sense is concerned Rényi, too, points out that nazi myths were as much the effect of rational calculation (on the part of the Ministry of Propaganda, for example) as the scientific cult of Stalin's "science" was susceptible to the power of myth. The difference between the totalitarian cultures is discussed

Silent Writers

There was this submerged archipelago of unpublished writings, but beneath it the much larger continental shelf of aborted, never written works, throttled and forcibly plugged inspiration.

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"There is one particular legend: that of the silent writer", István Vas once said in an interview. "Originally, this legend was invented by the silencers, so to speak, to the effect that those who were silenced actually remained silent by choice. At that time anyone who was called a silent writer was in big trouble. Later, however, to be a silent writer implied heroicism, and it became a myth. Thank God, there were no silent writers in Hungarian literature; had writers kept silent every time there was a dictatorship, or a foreign occupation of the country, then there would have been hardly any literature in Hungary from the Battle of Mohács on. Because poets do not keep silent; the so-called silent writers, too, only became silent when they were silenced. Until then, they did everything in their power to write and to be able to write. Only when that was no longer possible, were there silent writers."

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I asked him whether he had written poems just for himself, for his own desk-drawer, in those years, from the banning of Válasz *in 1949 until April 1954, when for the first time in five years, one of his poems was published; whether he had written poems outside* The Twenty-Sixth Year *sonnet cycle. "I did not write!", Lőrinc Szabó replied immediately and categorically. "Why not?", I inquired innocently and affably. "Because I was afraid!", he replied with a sigh, and once again, promptly. "I was afraid," he repeated, "because knowing myself I also knew that once I wrote them, I would be unable not to show them, or if they were found on me, I would easily find myself in big trouble..."; as an example, he mentioned* The Twenty-Sixth Year, *which he had read out to his friend and acquaintances in tears, after swearing them to secrecy and solemnly entrusting a copy to the care of some of the greatest admirers of his poetry for the benefit of the future centuries. (And indeed, it was not without consequences: further copies of the secret requiem were reproduced over and over again in the greatest secrecy, and were circulated in Budapest among people, all of whom were sworn to secrecy.) [...]* — **From "Items Unaccounted For," an essay by Mátyás Domokos, published in 1986.** —

A Socialist Disneyland

The idea of establishing a sculpture park for statues representing the socialist regime was originally put forward in the 1980s by the literary historian László Szörényi, who is now Hungarian Ambassador in Rome. A mere avantgarde stroke of wit then, it is about to become reality in the near future. The fact that a similar project had already been proposed by Lunacharsky in 1918 takes nothing away from the originality of the idea. The destruction of symbols and pictures, carried out in the name of the command "Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image..." has always been inspired by ideology.

If different sections of society view their common history with tolerance, the representations of a country's historical periods form successive layers in the distinguished locations where the genius loci can set to work. The result is the birth of sacred locations, honoured by every political system, and with a symbolic and a practical meaning that does not change over time in terms of their cultic significance.

Of course, all this can easily come about in a country where history is by and large a continuous process. In Eastern Europe, however, attempts have been made, and are still being made, either to pretend that the past never happened, or to project the legitimacy of the new regime back into the past. The latest wave of the demolition and removal of sculptures began in Nowa Huta in Poland, in the autumn of 1989. That was the time in Hungary when restoration of the Lenin statue, made by Pál Pátzay and widely joked about for its huge winter coat, was well on its way, on the instructions of Attila Zsigmond, a member of parliament and the director of the Budapest Gallery. Then, again on the pretext of renovation, a statue of a policeman made in 1950 by a journeyman artist, was swiftly removed from its site in central Budapest after having been vandalized by the activists of the October Party. The monument to the 1919 Hungarian Soviet Republic, in Debrecen, several tons in weight, was pulled down shortly after, roughly at the same time that the statue of that Moscovite communist Ferenc Münnich was given the red paint treatment (and not for protection against corrosion). Most of the local Lenin statues were removed from public squares.

Nevertheless, there was no St Bartholomew's Eve Massacre of communist statues. Nearly six hundred individual sculptures and groups of statues, memorial walls and reliefs were erected by the socialist regime in Budapest alone. The majority of these were spared the outrage against the reliquia of communism, even though at least

two-thirds of them can be regarded as strongly ideological; a mere twenty odd sculptures were banished from the public squares, and even then only to a future sculpture park on the outskirts of Budapest.

Most of the pieces in the almost finished park have already taken their place on their new red-brick pedestals, set at a very modest height, and thus wickedly robbed of their earlier heroic and monumental qualities. By the half-finished gates stands, almost as an exclamation mark, the statue of a Soviet soldier holding a flag: the former supporting figure to the Liberation Monument towering over the Danube is a fine work by Zsigmond Kisfaludy Stróbl in the (socialist) realist style. Once there was a long wall behind this statue, which probably was meant to create the feeling of eternity associated with frontal view. Opposite this statue stand those of Captain Ostapenko and Captain Steinmetz, two Soviet truce negotiators killed during the siege of Budapest. The two soldiers, who used to stand on the main roads leading East and West from Budapest, have always been closely linked in the public mind; now they are close in the spatial sense too. The statue of Ostapenko, made by Jenő Kerényi, is one of the more decent works of the period.

Another feature of the sculpture park is the Béla Kun memorial, a post-modern, multifigure and horrendously expensive composition in bronze and tin, made by Imre Varga in 1986, originally displayed in the Vérmező park. Levitating in thin air, the sculpture looks slightly silly here, since the pile of cobblestones, the "weapon of the proletariat", is missing from underneath the crowd listening to the hated communist leader of the Hungarian Soviet Republic, Béla Kun. The cobblestone pediment was left at the scene of the crime. This deservedly world-famous sculptor is not resting on his oars: rumour has it that he is currently working on the artistic problems of an Imre Nagy memorial.

A light breeze plays among the figures of bronze and stone, already enclosed with saplings of birch and pine, now at knee-height, planted in the hope that one day they will screen these monuments from the eyes of the faint-hearted inhabitants of the neighbourhood. For the time being, however, this monuments "dump" is patrolled by security guards with Alsatians and Rottweilers, turning away anybody who might want to take a trip down memory lane before the official opening. Even journalists are required to have a permit, but the guards cannot help with information as to who issues one. No names, no telephone numbers. The heritage of the past is everywhere.—**András Iván Bojár**—

by Ákos Szilágyi in an even broader context, in relation to the history of philosophy. Both totalitarian cultures wished to restore the pre-modern "totality", a unitary world order destroyed by modernism, by monetary order. They both share the impossibility of such a reversion, one might add, unless a chosen group (the Party, the Führer, a full-time revolutionary, a prophet, an Ayatollah, etc.) uses violence to channel the uneasiness of the members of a community of some sort (nation state, empire, Peace Camp), and their desire for the Good. In Szilágyi's interpretation, nazism did not destroy the monetary order; on the contrary, nazism took the "pan-aestheticism" of the monetary order to extremes in the sphere of politics by appropriating the leader (the human commodity) and his ideology. Stalinism, on the other hand, wanted to eliminate "capitalism" and turned the political (and the cultural) sphere into a theocracy. Despite all its claims to being scientific, the art of Stalinism is a kind of religious art.

It is only natural, therefore, that in such a culture the individual character of modern art, will be lost. Stalinist culture—whether we are talking about architecture or painting, sculpture or the urban landscape, music, newsreels or shop-window decoration—is a unitary phenomenon. It is a totality serving to convey a single message: the "will to a period style" (in Péter György's words), which is about the grandness of the final solution crowning the historical process. Since in reality all this took place in a pre-modern society lacking basic commodities, it was inevitably self-generating and irritatingly didactic. No matter how hard the authors of the book try to concentrate on the resulting product, even they could not avoid the problems of violence and control. Thus the culture of Stalinism was religious and courtly.

With the help of these comparisons the authors draw a picture of the process and the historical location of the origin of the totalitarian culture of Stalinism. In its own category, *Art and Society in the Age of Stalin* is undoubtedly a work that breaks fresh ground in Hungary. The wealth and the quality of the illustrations match the high standard of the writing. In the already mentioned closing study by László Beke, the "strange afterlife of socialist realism" during the gradual erosion of the state-religion and court is discussed, when, at least in Eastern Europe, the ideology and political power that harboured *szocreál* were being "subverted" precisely by the ironic application of its artistic vocabulary. The snake finally bit its own tail—the conceptual artists using the idiom of the 1950s were silenced or forced into exile by the "pragmatic" and "enlightened" culture-dictators ashamed of their own past. Despite all this, or perhaps because of all this, the monuments of *szocreál* are an organic part of postmodern mass culture, László Beke claims.

Is it possible to expel them from there by pulling down statues and organizing political campaigns? A start in that direction has been made. Paradoxically, or perhaps quite appropriately, it is being done using a typically totalitarian gesture, the aggressive implementation of one particular political will out of many. However, inner liberation from Stalinism will only be possible if it relates to the object—whether it is done with a hearty laugh or through a clever analysis. ❧

John Lukacs

Noblesse Oblige

János Gudenus—László Szentirmay: *Összetört címerek. A magyar arisztokrácia sorsa és az 1945 utáni megpróbáltatások* (Broken Escutcheons. The Fate of the Hungarian Aristocracy and their Post-1945 Trials and Tribulations). Budapest, Mozaik-Piremon, 1989. 512 pp.

There are many remarkable things about this work, not the least among them the circumstances of its composition and the time of its publication. It was published just before the official ending of the—more and more in name only—communist regime in Hungary; but its research and writing had taken place over many years before that. During those years—the bulk of the 1980s—a renewed interest in the history and in the protracted existence of Hungarian aristocratic families had arisen. In many ways this amounted to a rehabilitation of a historic class whose reputation had been officially maligned and obscured for many decades. The substance (and the subtitle) of this book concern those four decades after 1945, but there is much more to the book than that. It contains many details, lists, and a large amount of genealogical information. While the study of genealogy is an important ancillary science of history, there is often a substantial difference separating genealogists from historians. The primary purpose of the former is the establishment of ancestral ramifications and their chronology, often without the inclination to a broader critical judgment of past events and characters that is (or should be) the principal task of the historian. In the case of this book, the historical interest of its authors is at least as strong as their purpose to provide the filling of enormous gaps of genealogical information, which is to their credit.

Before turning to the tragic (but not uninspiring) history of a dispossessed and maligned and occasionally persecuted class of people, this reviewer must make an attempt

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at certain definitions—or, rather, certain distinctions—especially for English and American readers. Surely, during the last one hundred years, the word "aristocracy" in English, and especially in American, usage has been inflated beyond the previous (and, let me add, never quite precise) limitations of its meaning. Yet in Hungary the older limitations prevailed and still, by and large, prevail. There are always exceptions, of course: but, generally speaking, "aristocracy" has meant the high nobility in Hungary, where titles and ranks have been simpler than the richly variegated titles and ranks in Britain: in essence princes (of whom there were very few in Hungary), counts, and barons. Whatever definitional complications ensue, they exist not at the upper but at the lower scale of these categories: from the fact that an unusually large segment of the Hungarian population (according to some estimates as much as 8 or 10 per cent one hundred and fifty years ago) could consider themselves "nobles". This nobility differed from the aristocracy, not only by rank or title or wealth but in almost every sense. The closest Western European term for them would be a *petite noblesse terrienne*—more definite and less fluid than the English "country gentry". Yet for long centuries the juridical and civic status of this nobility were almost equal to those of the high nobility. Beginning with the seventeenth century, the differences between this gentry and the high nobility increased. The scope of Gudenus and Szentirmay concerns principally the latter, that is, the traditional Hungarian aristocracy, *mutatis mutandis*.

There is another definitional difficulty. The titles of the overwhelming majority of the Hungarian aristocracy were creations of the Habsburgs— rulers of at least a portion of Hungary since 1527, and of most of Hungary 150 years later. There was, however, a small Transylvanian nobility, not Habsburg-created, mostly originating in the seventeenth century: they then became part of the national aristocracy, though maintaining some particular characteristics of their own. There were, furthermore, non-Hungarian noble families who eventually chose to settle in the country and—besides their occasional intermarriages—became regarded as members of the Hungarian aristocracy. The result was a duality in the loyalties and in the inclinations of many aristocratic families in Hungary, at least until 1867. Most of them felt and professed their loyalty to the Habsburg king; yet many of them (and often this involved the very same people) did not hesitate to avow their allegiance to Hungarian independence and freedom. This was one of the reasons why we may essay the generalization that in Hungary the aristocracy was seldom hated by the people; the reputation and the record of most of its members were patriotic enough.

By the end of the nineteenth century, literary prototypes of the Hungarian aristocracy began to appear in the novels of some of the greatest Hungarian writers: Jókai, Mikszáth, later Krúdy. They are seldom treated with disdain.

At the same time we ought to mention two, less salutary, factors. One was the frequent indifference of the high nobility to social problems, indeed, to the causes of culture and art—with many noteworthy exceptions of course. The other was the enormous, and often unthinking, respect that their very titles inspired, among a people who were, by tradition and national habit, accustomed to a hierarchical society—though a habit that was neither predominantly servile (as, say, in Russia) nor predominantly snobbish (as, say, in England) but particularly Hungarian.

After 1918 the monarchy was gone. No new titles were created. (Franz Joseph had created many, including an estimable number for prominent and loyal Jewish families—

barons always, counts never.) Many of the Hungarian aristocracy lost their estates in lands that were now annexed to Yugoslavia, Romania, Czechoslovakia. Because of the conservative social and political characteristics of the Horthy regime, the social, political, and financial status of the aristocracy did not change drastically. There was, however, a subtle, but increasingly significant, mutation. The majority of the aristocracy had been, of course, endangered by communism and opposed it. They were less endangered by national socialist radicalism. Yet their conservative, traditionalist, and humanist inclinations were such that they opposed this new kind of radical populism, with which few of the aristocracy made common cause. Aristocratic characteristics in the past had been traditionalist but not necessarily humanist. But what happened during the last one hundred years was the adoption of the older bourgeois, civic, liberal, and humanist values by many aristocratic families themselves. Their past, and often unthinking, traditionalism became replaced by a more conscious historicism; and they were inclined to recoil from the vulgarities and excesses of the kind of nationalist populism that became the ingredient of extremist parties and ideologies. Their religious (and in most cases Catholic) convictions contributed to this reaction. Consequently, by 1939 the Hungarian aristocracy was being attacked by the radical "Right" even more often than by the "Left"; they were designated as "reactionaries".

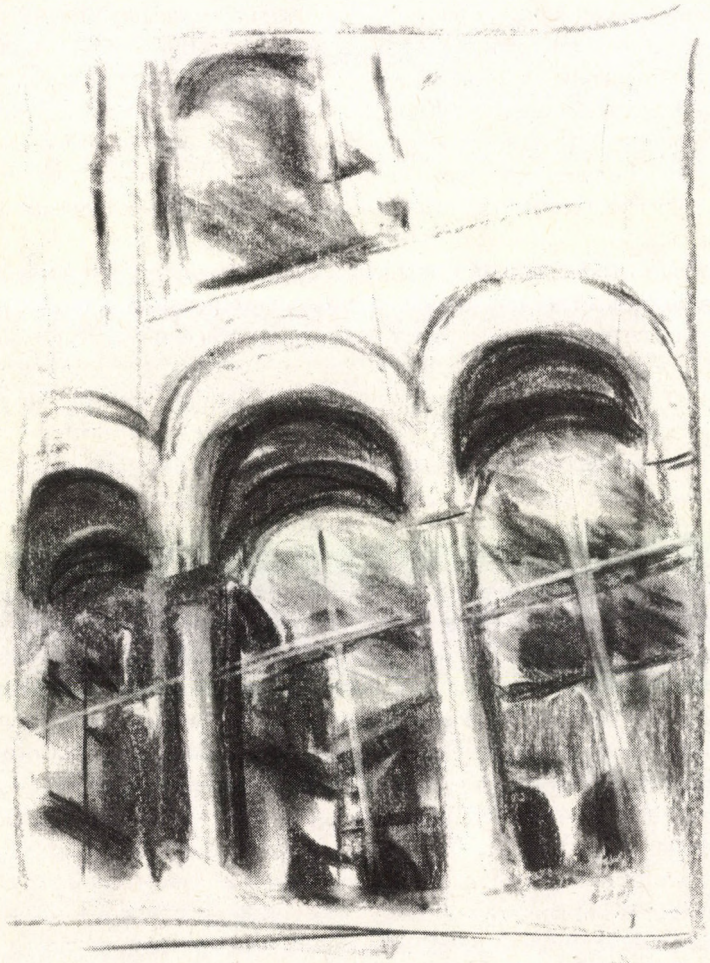
This was, by and large, a European phenomenon. Indeed, it may be said that, for some of the high nobility, their "finest hour" came during the Second World War—which was, in reality, the end of the aristocratic era. (Consider but the strong aristocratic presence in the dramatic tragedy of the German resistance to Hitler in 1944.) That was evident in Hungary, too, where, with some exaggeration, we may say that the aristocracy was the only class whose majority were not only immune, but opposed and resistant, to the totalitarian virus of Right and Left alike. For this they went unrewarded by the subsequent Communist regime, which expropriated their estates and houses, imprisoned many of them, deprived them of their private properties and civil rights, and officially blackened their reputation.Their fate during this period forms the principal, and most detailed, portion of the Gudenus—Szentirmay book. It was the most tragic, because the most painful and harmful, chapter in the long history of the Hungarian aristocracy. Yet the record is often inspiring: their remaining members bore their sufferings with admirable self-discipline, stoic silence, and fortitude. That through the centuries they were annealed to the fate of the mass of the Hungarian people is also reflected by the fact—suggested rather than stated by the authors—that a more than considerable portion of the former Hungarian aristocracy chose to remain in Hungary even at a time when members of other upper classes, including the thin but significant layer of the Hungarian financial and industrial patriciate, had elected—with every reason—to flee into exile.

The result is that, after its dreadful trials and tribulations, respect for the remaining former title-bearers in Hungary has remained unbroken; indeed, it may be stronger than before. Of course historic nostalgia and social snobbery, that is, the admiration for a remaining and politically powerless aristocracy in a democratic society and age, are universal phenomena: but we may essay the tentative statement that in Hungary there may be more to it than that.

Let me repeat the caveat: not every member of the aristocracy behaved in an exemplary way during the national socialist and communist years. Still, by and large, the aristoc-

racy in Hungary incarnated visible evidence of tradition, of religious convictions, and of a pride issuing less from a sense of inherited privileges than from inherited obligations of self-respect. For this reason the title—*Broken Escutcheons*—of this near-encyclopedic work may be misleading. Their wealth was destroyed; their reputations were not.

Very estimable is the exceptional industry and effort of the writers in bringing about such a near-encyclopedic collection of data. The book consists of thirty concise chapters which generally follow a historical chronology. (They include the judgments and experiences of the authors themselves.) The notes amount to another forty pages, after which follow forty-one various, independent, and not always coherent appendices. Some of these are genealogical, but almost none of them are without historical interest. All in all, this is an extraordinary contribution to the relatively recent social and political history of Hungary, with a substance and tone that is as factual as it is moral. ❧



George Szirtes

Hints at Greatness

Miklós Radnóti: *Foamy Sky*. The Major Poems of Miklós Radnóti. Selected and translated by Zsuzsanna Ozsváth and Frederick Turner. Princeton, 128 pp £17.00 (paperback, £6.95) 0 69101530 9

In an interview broadcast some time before his death, and quoted in Zoltán Sumonyi's study, the poet István Vas remembered his friend and contemporary Miklós Radnóti. In May 1943, Vas was due to be sent to a labour camp, and it was only the intervention of a doctor who certified him as mentally unsound that prevented him being transported to almost certain death. Radnóti himself was about to leave for his third round of forced labour and Vas went to see him off. The army doctor who had certified him was there again and had read Radnóti's work. Why should he not save Radnóti the same way? He set out to find him, but just too late. The wagon had been closed. Soon it drew off. Vas never met Radnóti again. On a forced march that November, at the age of thirty nine, Radnóti was shot and his body dumped in an anonymous mass grave. On exhumation eighteen months later, after the war was over, a notebook was found in his pocket which contained some of his last and greatest poems. (Facsimiles of this notebook have been published in Hungary and even in this form have a talismanic resonance.) His last published volume, whose title was the same as this selection, translated by the American poet, Frederick Turner, and Zsuzsanna Ozsváth, was reissued with the addition of the last poems.

One reads history backwards and if that history is sufficiently tragic or tidy (which may sometimes be the same thing) it begins to feel like myth. Radnóti had long been obsessed by his own death, so much so, that he seems to have been able to imagine its precise circumstances. He produced a distinct body of 'prophetic' poems, in which a particular form of death is courted, feared and almost desired. The reader approaches these with a certain veneration, as though they were more than poems. Slowly, everything assumes a mythic shape and the life

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George Szirtes's *latest volume of poems,* Bridge Passages, *was published by Oxford University Press in 1991. See also his essays, book reviews and translations from Hungarian poetry in recent issues of* NHQ. *This article is an extended version of his review published in* The Times Literary Supplement *of 14 May 1993.*

embraces the oeuvre so comprehensively that the one disappears into the other.

Radnóti's sense of fate started almost literally *ab ovo*. His mother died giving birth to him, and his twin brother died with her. In a lyrical piece of extended prose of 1940, *Under Gemini*—published in Kenneth McRobbie's translation by Corvina in 1985—and in many poems, particularly in "And Cain Spoke unto Abel his Brother", Radnóti was to ask himself why he had been spared. In the event his guilt could only be assuaged by the tragic role he undertook. Although he is said to have had opportunities, he made no attempt to save himself when the time came. It is true that, like his fellow Jew Vas, Radnóti turned Catholic in the early thirties, but there is little reason to doubt the sincerity of his conversion.

His early work showed great technical facility: he wrote pagan dithyrambic verses in praise of sensual experience. These now seem slightly kitsch, slightly fin-de-siécle in expression. The elder poet and editor Babits wondered if they were quite sincere, and we might wonder too. The facility, which consisted at least partly of a delicate ear for classical metres, never deserted him. Another early poem pictures him as an erotic Christ figure of whom the girls dream every night. The posturing of this might seem ridiculous were it not for the lightness and sheer verve of the few lines in which it is carried off—and, again, for the fate which turned this slight apparent jest into yet another prophecy. The greatest poems consist chiefly of love poems addressed to his wife, Fanni, and seven eclogues reflecting on the war and coming disasters. The last pair of these was found in the exhumed notebook. They are known as the seventh and eighth, the sixth being assumed missing.

Radnóti has not been short of translators, though the poems are quite complex in their operation. His Hungarian moves between natural ease and a poetic artificiality of diction that is hard to capture. Frederick Turner, in his introductory essay, takes the Orphic myth and argues—as did Elizabeth Sewell, among others, before him—for the existence of a biological ur-language underlying the poet's own native tongue. According to this, the translator's task (Turner does not speak Hungarian) is to enter the ur-language, Orpheus fashion, and return with the Eurydice of the poem. In practice, for Turner, this means reproducing Radnóti's forms, particularly the metre, after carefully listening to the poems in Hungarian while consulting his collaborator Zsuzsanna Ozsváth's literal translation. In this case, the collaborator assumes even more importance than usual since ambiguities in phrasing and the sheer meaning of cadence require careful amplification. Turner can be grateful for Zsuzsanna Ozsváth's long engagement and commitment to Radnóti, without which literal traslation would have achieved little. However, this is a complex operation. When this works, the results are outstanding and add greatly to our understanding. Turner has a good formalist's ear for measure, and he tries to approximate to the foreign agglutinating nature of Hungarian by coining complex words such as 'evelight', 'leafdress' and 'wordhounds'. Some of these are very inventive and attractive, but one can have too many in a single poem. Coining compound words in a language which already agglutinates (as Radnóti does, though not necessarily where Turner does) is one thing; it is something else in one which doesn't. Radnóti's artificialities are more difficult still and the archaisms Turner devises are sometimes obtrusive, although if the reader also has the Gömöri/Wilmer, or Thomas Land, or Jascha Kessler translations to hand, the formal archaisms serve as an interesting corrective.

As regards the metre Turner has per-

formed some extraordinary acts of ventriloquism, some of which are highly successful. He matches stress to stress, quantity (when he can) to quantity, and even tries to echo some of the vowel and consonant effects of his originals. On the debit side, some of the rhymes, particularly feminine ones, appear rather banal—for example, in *In the Gibbering Palm Tree*—and sometimes the metre in combination with the rhyme patters more childishly than it does in the original. *Neither Memory Nor Magic* strikes a nostalgic note hard to carry off in a language like English (even American English) which hasn't easily tolerated it this century. The pathos diminishes, the pain skips, the rhyme strains. For all the ur-ness of the ur-language English and Hungarian contain different experiences. Even the metres mean something else. Nevertheless, Turner is right to make the attempt: metre and rhyme are never extraneous to a classically minded poet. They belong to the infrastructure, not the superstructure of the poem.

The greatness of Radnóti's poems might or might not be apparent from all the translations in the book—indeed not all the poems translated seem to me to be great poems taken individually—but what is certain is that all important poems benefit from being often translated, and that Turner's successes easily validate—as they must—the failures. *A Garden on God's Hill*, *Canticle*, *War Diary*, *Twenty Nine Years*, *Like Death*, *A Vague Ode*, *The Dreadful Angel*, *As Imperceptibly* and the major *Eclogues* are all delivered with grace, ingenuity and power. They possess authority and do, as all first rate translations must, hint at the greatness of the original—not in the ur-language but in that other real language in which poems must be written.

In the real language transformations can and must take place. In one of the best translated poems, the very title will mean something different to a non-Hungarian reader. *Istenhegyi kert* is more specific than symbolic to one who knows the hill: *God's Hill* reverses this relationship for one who doesn't, or might suggest *God's Hill* with other associations altogether. But the translator does right to adapt, and in so doing amplifies something implicit. Far more to the point, and even more successfully, in the same poem "Halálos kört röpül / köröttem egy elkésett, szőke méh" becomes "And behold, a late blonde bee / draws rings around me like a gold bull's eye". The gold bull's eye might not have been the image in Radnóti's mind, he was probably thinking of a magic circle, but the bull's eye is fine trouvé, preparing us for the comparison of the bee's buzz with the bullet's sense. It is a practical criticism of it. A review could resolve itself into such minutiae. The test, for a non-Hungarian reader—and they are the ones who matter—is whether the poem in his own language makes sense to him as a poem. Not necessarily as a poem of his language, but nevertheless in it. Its foreignness should carry the strangeness of anything that is new and outside his experience but within the compass of his imagination. A great translation will suggest the authority and character of the original and it can only do this by striking similar depths. Those depths, as Turner rightly argues, have much to do with the form of the original poem. But the meaning of form cannot be tied down to a series of precise mimetic statements: there is something necessarily unresolved in our Babel. Diction and prosody are equally defining, though neither will be easily defined by itself in its own language, let alone in the medium of another. Turner's best translations by-pass the issue by sheer power of conviction: they resemble the work of other Americans such as Aiken, Tate, Hecht, and Wilbur, as well as contemporary new formalists such as Gioia, and assert themselves as poems within a particular tradition of wit

and control. I doubt whether a better version of *Twenty-Nine Years* will be produced in the near future: there the translator as poet is at the top of his form.

As concerns the book as a whole, Radnóti might be cleaner and sharper than the average Turner translation suggests, but it could hardly be otherwise: Radnóti—to judge from these—is the great poet. But everyone should be judged by their best. For English language readers who wish to read Radnóti this is a very good place to start. ❧

George Gömöri

Hungarica in the UK

Guide to Documents and Manuscripts in Great Britain Relating to the Kingdom of Hungary from the Earliest Times to 1800. Ed. György Kurucz. Mansell, 1992. 593 pp, and index.

The need for a comprehensive guide to pre-1800 documents on Hungary or manuscripts written by Hungarians and Englishmen dealing with Hungarian affairs has long been felt. The voluminous bibliographical guide, compiled and edited by György Kurucz, a young Hungarian historian, is therefore to be welcomed. Kurucz arranges his material in alpha-numerical order giving a brief description of each item or number of items. The method followed by him is quite simple: he has worked his way through existing catalogues of the Public Record Office and the British Library and sent out questionnaires to a large number of British libraries and archives. Then he collated the replies and drew up his final list. Most of the material found by Kurucz is in the Public Record Office (it runs to over 90 per cent of the contents of his *Guide*), and there are numerous entries from the British Library (covering 40 pages). As he worked his way through all 68 'classes' of the Public Record office, Kurucz found and duly listed large batches of dispatches by English diplomats *en poste* in Constantinople (Thomas Glover, Sir Thomas Roe, William Paget, Robert Sutton) and in Vienna (David Murray, Sir Thomas Robinson, Bevil Skelton, and George Stepney, to mention but a few). Some of this material has been known and used by Hungarian scholars (for example, at the beginning of the century Dávid Angyal made use of Sir Thomas Roe's reports), but their present comprehensive listing certainly opens up new areas for research. It is also likely that amongst the many letters by Gábor Bethlen or the Rákóczi princes, listed in the *Guide*, there will be some that are so far unpublished which will yield new information on Anglo-Hungarian relations.

Had this ambitious bibliography con-

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fined itself to Hungarica in the Public Record Office, much would have been achieved. Kurucz, however, purports to provide a comprehensive guide to all British libraries—a goal which he distinctly fails to attain. It is not only that he sets his sights too high, but the methods he uses are not efficient enough. He cannot be blamed for the fact that he did not follow up the negative replies to his questionnaire—this would have been a time-consuming task indeed. Yet a simple glance at the list of manuscript holdings of Sheffield University Library could have alerted him to the fact that the Hartlib Collection there includes Hungarica, or a glance at the list of MSS in a Cambridge college (Peterhouse) would have informed him that its library holds the correspondence of an 18th century Hungarian diplomat with an English orientalist. (Both libraries were listed as 'negative' in the *Guide*.) However, Kurucz can be taken to task for the tentativeness of some of his entries and for the numerous omissions of Hungarica in well-known British collections.

Let me give an example of what I term tentativeness. The very first entry in this volume (1.1) relates to the National Library of Wales in Aberystwyth: "The notes of David Pennant (1763-1841) on Germany, France and Hungary probably contain relevant material". Now do they or do they not? When did David Pennant visit Hungary and if so, in what capacity: as a merchant, a traveller or a diplomat? Everything is left to the user's imagination. Or another example: Pál P. Jászberényi was a popular author of textbooks in Restoration England, between 1664 and 1670 his Latin grammar ran into four editions. Kurucz has heard something of him, so he chances a guess under the heading of the Guildhall Library (Corporation of London Records Office): "There are probably references to Hungarians who visited England in the seventeenth or eighteenth centuries...such as János Ádámi, János Bánfihunyadi and Pál Jászberényi" (17.1). He happens to be right about the last one, but wrong about the first two. He also fails to list two letters by the same Jászberényi under the Dean and Chapter Library of Durham (Hunter MSS 9/153 and 154), notwithstanding the fact that they had been listed in Thomas Rud, *Codicum Manuscriptorum Ecclesiae Cathedralis Dunelmensis* (Durham, 1825), quite a few years ago.

Incompleteness is another shortcoming of the *Guide...Relating to the Kingdom of Hungary* and, considering the comprehensive ambitions of the book, a fairly serious one. Although the author assures us that his work "cannot claim to be exhaustive", his omissions reflect badly on his research methods. The omissions can be divided into categories of 'obvious' and 'hidden' or 'camouflaged' Hungarica. Let us look at the British Library with its vast Hungarian-related holdings (553 items are listed in this bibliography) and wonder why Kurucz missed Hungarica in each important British Library collection, including MSS which were previously published. Let me list some of his omissions: Harley 405, fol. 42,61 and 825; Lansdowne 42, fol. 33 and 1264; Sloane 629, fol. 356 and 1911, 1913, and 1922; Additional 174-196; 11.513; 15.771-72; 35.831, fol. 121 and 48.709, fol. 210. The last batch of comissions (Additional) is particularly interesting, for they include letters by the Hungarian adventurer Móric Benyovszky, letters by the 18th century British diplomat and playwright Sir George Etherege and several volumes of a yet unpublished travelogue by the antiquarian Jeremiah Milles who visited Hungary in 1737. But that is not all; the list of omissions can be continued almost indefinitely: Additional 20. 404, f. 161 contains six letters by Francis II Rákóczi to Cardinal Gualtieri; Add. 21.523, fol. 212 is a letter by the younger Michael Apafi to William of Orange, and Add. 19.736 is an 18th century

travelogue in Hungary written in French by the Chevalier Pierre de Baustremont.

One could also mention the vast collection of *album amicorum* in the British Library. Kurucz has a vague idea that some of them contain inscriptions in Hungarian or Hungarians' entries in Latin—he lists exactly four albums, including a very rich one owned by Ferenc Baba (not Babai!) of Marosvásárhely. This information, however, is very incomplete; I know of no less than 67 albums in the British Library which include sentences or whole pages written by Hungarians travelling abroad or meeting foreign visitors in Hungary or Transylvania.

Kurucz's work in Lambeth Palace Library (in the archives of many bishops and leading divines of the Church of England) has yielded some interesting items not published before. But once again, he misses quite a few Hungarica, e.g.: MSS 661, fol. 164-165; 666, fol. 27-28; 930, fol. 130 and 941, fol. 138. As for another great Protestant collection, Sion College Library, it is not included in Kurucz's queries; a pity, for having worked there I happen to know that it holds at least two important Hungarica from the 17th century (Arc. A. 89 and Arc. L. 42).

But it is not only London collections that yield less to Kurucz's investigations than they should—the Bodleian is also a case in point. This great Oxford library has its fair share of manuscripts relating to pre-1800 Hungary of which Kurucz lists some and ignores others. Thus there are reams of the Tanner collection of MSS which he leaves untouched: e.g. William Sancroft's correspondence abounds in Hungarica. Let me list a few items missing from the *Guide*: Tanner 35, fol. l. and 105; 37, fol. 45; 43, fols. 39, 41, 42. But there are gaps in his listings of the Rawlinson collection as well (D 234; 58, fol. 27 and 55; 389, fol. 155). There are also some omissions, although not so glaring, in the listings of the manuscripts in the Cambridge University Library.

Finally, Kurucz makes mistakes when identifying and spelling names both in the text and the index. One thing we can safely assume about "Johannes Adamus, Transylvanus" (15.92) who visited London in 1670 and wrote a Latin poem about it, was that he did not call himself "Ádámi" (as Kurucz has it)—he was either a Hungarian "Ádám" or a Saxon "Adami". Under 15.94 the Calvinist minister in question is Köpeczi not "Köpcsényi"; moreover, the receipt was signed not only by him but by fellow-minister Jablonczay. Item 21.929 refers to a Hungarian prisoner of the Turks begging in England whose name must be "Horvat" not Hornet" as the document may have it (though it could equally well be a reading error). The Transylvanian envoy Kristóf Paskó is misspelt as "Pako" (15.90) and the Hungarian visitor János Szántay as "Szanty" (21.1476). The London-based Hungarian alchemist János Bánfihunyadi had a son of the same name, so while the "Huniades" of item 2l.1437 refers to the elder Bánfihunyadi, the person mentioned in a document in the House of Lords Record Office (item 18.5) is John Hunyadi junior. Kurucz also misreads some Polish names: the right spelling is Godlewski (item 21.5273) and Malachowski, with a crossed Polish "1" (item 21.6487). As for the English diplomat Simon Clement (later on Sir Simon Clement, item 21.3527 et al.), he is clearly the same person as "Clements, Simon", so it is superfluous to list him twice in the bulging and otherwise very useful index. ❧

Alan Walker

Joukowsky's Portraits of Liszt

"Canada feels richer and happier
at the thought of possessing you."
Vincent Risch to Liszt.
Toronto, 1883

The recent discovery of an unknown oil portrait of Franz Liszt in Canada represents a major contribution to Liszt iconography. For many years the painting eluded detection by Liszt scholars, and its discovery reminds us of the composer's connections with the country.

How did the portrait come to be painted, and how did it find its way to Canada?

I

In 1881, Vincent Risch of the Toronto pianomakers Mason & Risch went to Germany and sought an interview with Liszt, who was then living in Weimar. His chief motive was to introduce Liszt to the firm's upright pianos, and get the master's opinion. Liszt was so receptive to these instruments that he inspired Risch to attempt the construction of a grand piano. Until then Mason & Risch had made only uprights and squares. By April 1882, the prototype was completed in Toronto, and everyone who heard it was impressed with the richness of its tone and the breadth and power of its sound. Risch hastened to inform Liszt, and offered to send him one of the new models. Ever curious about new developments in piano design, Liszt agreed to receive the Mason & Risch grand, and wrote to them as follows:

> July 16, 1882
> Bayreuth
>
> Very honoured Gentlemen:
>
> Accept my thanks for your kind favour, which now lies before me. Send me one of your new Grands to Weimar, where I return at the end of August, and shall remain for a month. After playing on it and testing it thoroughly, I will give you my candid opinion.
>
> F. Liszt.[1]

The instrument duly arrived in Weimar in the late summer of 1882, and was installed in the music room of Liszt's home in the Hofgärtnerei where the master gave it a thorough work-out. Although Liszt was entirely satisfied with the instrument, and kept it in the Hofgärtnerei for nearly two months, he was unable to give it permanent space, and he eventually made a present of it to his old friend Hofrath Carl Gille, in nearby Jena.

A few weeks later, Liszt's "candid opinion" arrived in Toronto. He described the

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1 ■ *The Toronto Globe*, December 18, 1883. Thanks are due to Oliver Pocknell for his generous help with research in the Toronto press.

Mason and Risch grand piano as "excellent, magnificent, unequalled" — words which Vincent Risch was to put to good use in his subsequent advertising campaign in Ontario. Liszt's pleasure in the instrument was genuine, however. He started referring to Risch as "the Erard of Canada," and was prompted to make a reciprocal gesture. He arranged for the painter Baron Paul von Joukowsky to execute his portrait in oils, and have it shipped to Vincent Risch as a gift. Liszt's choice of Joukowsky to paint the picture was a logical one. The young artist was much in the news in the summer of 1882, since he had designed the stage sets for the world premiere of *Parsifal* in Bayreuth, and had attracted world attention. Liszt and Joukowsky had spent much time together during the Bayreuth Festival, which is where the idea of a portrait was first discussed. Shortly after he returned to Weimar, Liszt wrote to Joukowsky:

> Weimar
> 12 September 1882
>
> You are awaited here most warmly. Your studio is all ready at the Kunstschule. The Grand Duke assured me of that only yesterday and I will see you with sincere pleasure.
>
> Liszt[2]

Evidently the sittings for the portrait took place in the Weimar Art School in the second half of September 1882. By October it was finished.[3] The portrait created something of a stir in Weimar. It was widely admired for its realistic, not to say uncompromising treatment of Liszt's face. When the Grand Duke of Weimar first saw it (on September 29, 1882) he exclaimed to Liszt: "The painter has treated you as fate generally treats mortals: harshly."[4]

Others in Liszt's circle were sure that the violent, almost frightening face, would puncture Liszt's vanity. That is not likely, since Liszt himself had chosen Joukowsky for his integrity, and he knew that the artist was not about to flatter him. It is worth recalling that Liszt was once asked by the Weimar court photographer Louis Held whether he would like the warts erased from a photographic negative. Liszt replied to the contrary. In this he was like Cromwell who was asked a similar question. "Paint me as I am" replied England's Chief of Men. "If you leave out a single wart you will not get a penny!" Joukowsky, in fact, was quite a "hit" in Weimar, and the grand duke would gladly have placed him at the head of the Kunstschule had the painter wanted to settle down in the city.

By November 10, 1882, the picture was framed and ready to send to Canada. But now came a delay. Liszt told the firm of Mason & Risch:

> Very Honoured Gentlemen:
>
> The Mason and Risch Grand Piano which you forwarded to me is excellent, magnificent, unequalled [*"ist vortrefflich, prächtig, musterhaft"*]. Artists, Judges and the Public will certainly be of the same opinion.
>
> With my sincerest regards, I desire to send you my portrait. It has been painted for you by Baron Joukowsky, son of the renowned Russian author, and personal friend and instructor of the Emperor Alexander II.
>
> But now that his Liszt Portrait has turned out to be so remarkably successful, people here wished to have a second similar one from Joukowsky for the [Weimar] Museum. The painter kindly complied with the request, by which a delay of two or three months is necessitated in my forwarding the first portrait to Toronto.
>
> Baron Joukowsky made the original sketches for the "Parsifal" scenes at Bayreuth, which were so successfully carried out.

2 ■ LM, no. 45, p. 262.

3 ■ "Joukowsky's portrait is a real and complete success", wrote Liszt on October 8, 1882. WLLM, p. 435.

4 ■ WLLM, p.432.

Excuse the delay, very honoured gentlemen, and accept the assurance of my highest regard.

10th November, 1882, Weimar
F. Liszt[5]

Liszt's letter contains a surprise: it informs us that Joukowsky was now engaged on a second portrait of the composer. The impulse to make it evidently arose because the grand duke wanted a sample of "modern" art for the Weimar Museum, before the original was lost to Canada. But where and when was the second portrait painted?

II

On November 19, 1882, Liszt set out for Venice in order to spend the winter with Richard and Cosima Wagner at the Palazzo Vendramin. Joukowsky was also there, so the sittings continued in Venice. Rather than make an exact copy of what he had already done in Weimar, Joukowsky heeded the comments of the Italian artist Alberto Pasini, among others, who advised him to paint out the laurel background and get rid of the chair. By January 7, 1883, the modified second portrait was finished, and was attracting as much attention as the first. Liszt told his friend Baroness Olga von Meyendorff:

> "[Joukowsky's] portrait of me is having no less success in Venice than in Weimar. Pasini — whom you will see again in Rome in April — and Wolkoff have *sincerely* congratulated him on it, with some slight criticisms which Joukowsky took into account by reducing the laurel grove and the armchair decoration."[6]

With the completion of the copy, the time had now come to part with the original. Liszt had already begun to have doubts about sending such an important picture to Toronto, for he now thought the gift too generous. As early as November 29, 1882, he had told Olga von Meyendorff:

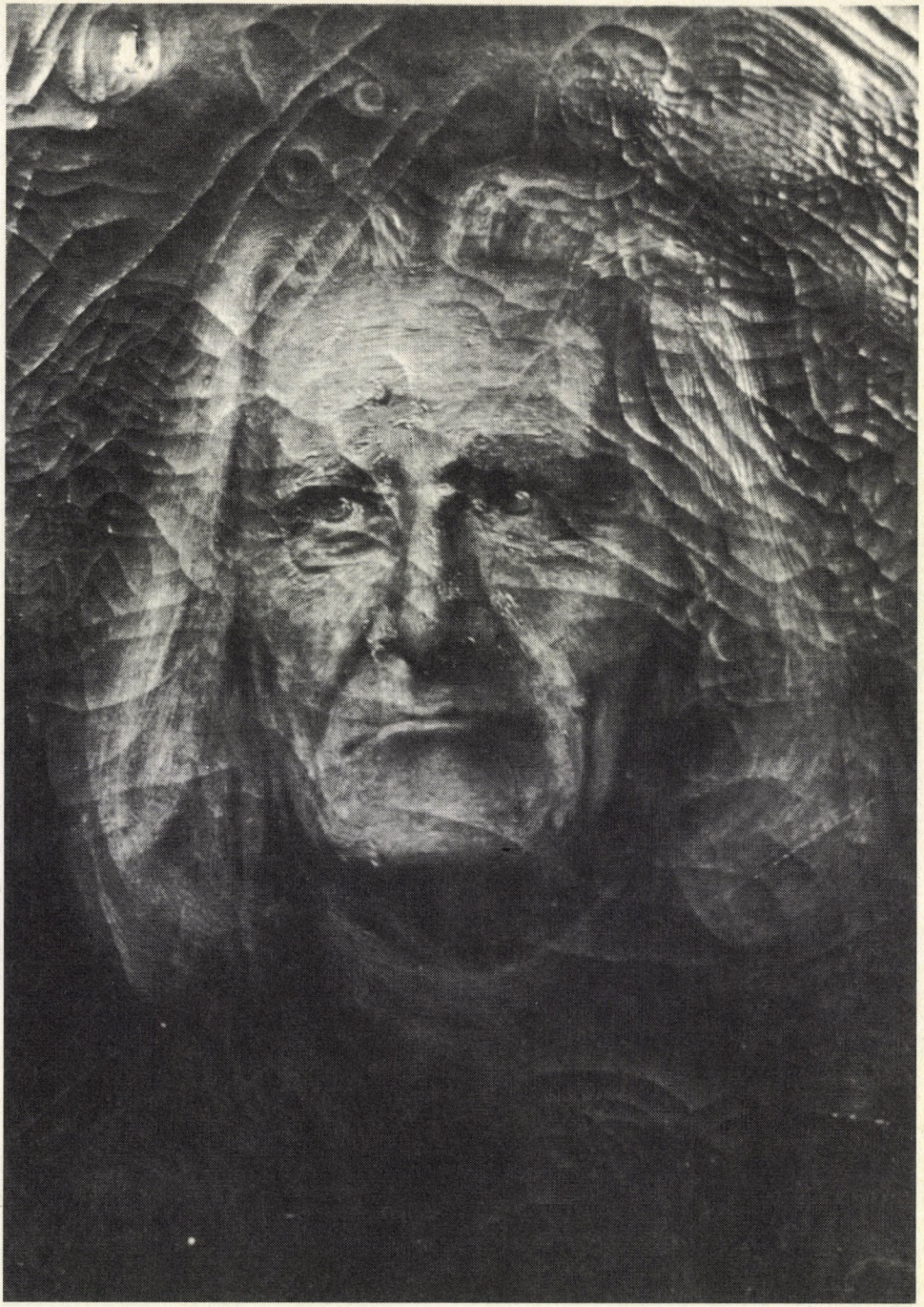
> "[Joukowsky] intends to paint a second portrait of me; but on reflection I shall not send the first to Toronto, as the gift seems to me disproportionate. It will suffice to have a large photograph of it made for the Canadian recipient, and to add a frame costing 200 francs."[7]

Liszt now approached the firm of Alfred Krupp to carry out the photography. Best remembered today as Germany's biggest armaments manufacturer, Alfred Krupp also stood on the leading edge of photography. This was before the invention of film; the negative was captured on glass plates. The technology required for a full-sized photographic reproduction three or four feet square was considerable, and involved the use of large cameras and long exposures. A life-size photograph, then, would still have made a handsome present for Risch, since such things were still quite new. Three such photographs are thought to have been made for Liszt, although they have meanwhile disappeared. It is entirely possible that the black-and-white reproduction of this first Joukowsky portrait, showing Liszt sitting in a high-backed cardinal's chair, first crept into the iconographies from one of Krupp's photographic plates.

5 ■ La Mara misdated this letter, which she concluded must have been written in the early part of 1883, from Budapest. She saw it only in the form of a rough draft (Liszt often sketched out preliminary versions of his letters before deciding their final form) sent to her by one Herr O. Schultz, a Leipzig bookseller (LLB, vol. 2, p. 346). The above English translation was presumably made by Vincent Risch himself from Liszt's final text. See *The Toronto Globe*, December 18, 1883.

6 ■ WLLM, pp. 442-43.

7 ■ WLLM, p. 438.



Paul von Joukowsky's 1883 portrait of Liszt, "the Grand Duke's copy".

III

We do not know why Liszt changed his mind again, but change it he did. Joukowsky's first portrait, the one Liszt commissioned in "payment" for the piano, arrived in Toronto on September 5, 1883. Vincent Risch told Liszt:

> "For weeks Toronto society came in their thousands to our hall, with their hats off and as serious as if they were in church. Men come and gaze on those well-known, admired, and venerated features. There is not a house in Toronto in which there is not a piano, and where the name of works of Liszt are not loved and admired.
>
> The Princess Louise and the Marquis of Lorne and suite came also to pay their tribute of admiration for genius, before leaving for England.[8] This portrait, so strikingly natural, establishes the talent of the artist, and makes us all feel that you, dear master, are in our midst; and Canada feels richer and happier at the thought of possessing you."[9]

It seems that Joukowsky himself may have persuaded Liszt to change his mind and let the portrait go to Toronto at the painter's own expense. "You always act nobly, perhaps too much so," Liszt told him. "Risch is another proof of it. I dare not speak against it."[10]

And on the same day, *The Toronto Globe* carried an article about the painting.

> "An oil painting by Baron Joukowsky of the Abbé Liszt, life size and three quarter length, is on exhibition at the ware rooms of Messrs. Mason and Risch, King Street. Mr. A. Dickson Patterson[11] writes thus to The Globe concerning it: 'The famous old musician is represented sitting in a Cardinal's high-back chair, his hands lightly locked together, and his face while indicating a highly strung and sensitive nature, wears an expression worthy of being the theme of a poet. It is to the technical qualities, however, of the painting to which I wish particularly to draw attention, and to those who have not had the opportunity of seeing good paintings of the present-day Continental school I may be allowed to say that this work is strongly characteristic of its best qualities, as it also brings to mind the manner of some of the leaders of the British school. In a word the canvas possesses vitality, which is the essence of good painting. As works of high standing by foreign masters are unfortunately rare in this country, I would suggest to all lovers of art to go see this enviable possession of Messrs Mason & Risch.' "[12]

Thereafter, the portrait continued to be displayed in the Mason & Risch showrooms until after World War Two. It was sometimes loaned to the Royal Toronto Conservatory of Music, a fact which misled a number of experts into supposing that this institution owned it (including Robert Bory, whose wrong attribution in his *Liszt par l'image*, p. 206, led two generations of Liszt scholars astray). In 1974 Mason & Risch went into liquidation, many items were auctioned, and the painting disappeared. It has still not been found to this day.

Meanwhile, what of the second portrait, the one that Joukowsky executed for the Grand Duke of Weimar in Venice? We sur-

8 ■ Princess Louise (1848-1939) was the fourth daughter of Queen Victoria. Her husband, the Marquis of Lorne (1845-1914), was Governor General of Canada from 1878-1883.

9 ■ WFLR, pp. 189-90. See also Liszt's letter on this topic to Risch (LLB, vol. 2, p. 346).

10 ■ LLB, vol. 8, p. 408.

11 ■ Mr A. Dickson Patterson (1854-1930) was a prominent Canadian portrait painter, who had studied under Sir John Everett Millais at the South Kensington School, London. He won a bronze medal in the Pan American Exposition in Buffalo, in 1901.

12 ■ Issue of September 5, 1883, p. 6.

mise that it stayed behind in Germany for at least three years. Then, in August 1886, less than a month after Liszt had died, we find it displayed at the Empire and Colonial Exhibition at the Crystal Palace in London, where it adorned the Mason & Risch booth. Since it was there for the sole purpose of helping Vincent Risch to capitalize on Liszt's endorsement of his pianos, much like the earlier painting had done in Toronto, we assume that Risch himself had arranged for its transport from Central Europe to London.[13] But instead of returning it, it was sent on to Toronto — whether by accident or design we cannot be sure.

IV

At about the same time that the first painting disappeared, the "Grand Duke's copy" came to light — during the aforementioned auction of the effects of Mason & Risch. This is an intriguing coincidence, and it may well be that the two events are connected. We cannot go beyond that statement at the present time. For the past twenty years the "Grand Duke's copy" has been in the private possession of a family in a Toronto suburb. That is where I discovered it, in January 1993. The search had taken me almost five years. Several things encouraged me to continue. First, it had never been reproduced in colour, only in black-and-white, and that seemed to me unfortunate. Second, the painting was supposed to be in Canada, and many people wrote to me inquiring as to its whereabouts simply because I myself presently live here and devote much of my time to Liszt studies: the correspondence was becoming unmanageable. Finally, the painting was clearly a very unusual one by an outstanding artist, and it had struck Liszt's contemporaries with force. On January 17, 1993, I was invited into the home of the present owner and recognized the painting at once. It was not the portrait I had set out to find, but the "Grand Duke's copy". That was nonetheless a highly acceptable substitute. A number of excellent colour photographs were taken shortly afterwards by my colleague Jack Whorwood, which will doubtless find their way into future Liszt iconographies.[14] The painting is still in the original Venetian frame selected for it by Joukowsky. To judge from the present deterioration of the painting—including cracked varnish, minor water stains in the lower right corner, and a small puncture in the canvas near the top left corner—we assume that it endured much neglect, that it may have been in storage for much of the time, and that it was perhaps damaged in transit. When it has been restored, it will surely come to be regarded by all who see it as one of the major portraits of Liszt's old age. ❧

13 ■ See the *London Illustrated News* for August 14, 1886, which carried a long article about the painting, and about the connection between Liszt and the house of Mason & Risch.

14 ■ One of these colour photographs was published in the American journal *Piano and Keyboard*, issue of May 1993.

SOURCES

LLB La Mara (ed.) *Liszt's Briefe*, 8 vols. Leipzig, 1893-1905.

LM "Letters from musicians", Leningrad National Institute for Theatre, Music and Cinema. Leningrad, 1967.

WFLR Wohl, Janka. *François Liszt: Recollections of a compatriot*. Trans. B. Peyton Ward, London, 1887.

WLLM Waters, Edward N., (ed.) *The letters of Franz Liszt to Olga von Meyendorff*, 1871-1886. Dumbarton Oaks, 1979.

The Toronto Globe, cited by issue.

The London Illustrated News, cited by issue.

Elgin Strub-Ronayne

Liszt and the Founding of the Weimar Conservatory

On August 28th 1850, the 101st anniversary of Goethe's birth, Franz Liszt conducted the first performance of *Lohengrin* at the Grand Ducal Theatre in Weimar. The undertaking proved to be even more taxing than he had foreseen. The orchestra, close to mutiny, had complained loudly about the complicated rhythms, strange harmonies, unplayable passages, and the interminable length of the opera. Only Liszt's immense belief in Wagner's music, his energy and great powers of persuasion, and no less than forty-six rehearsals, had made the performance possible. The four hour marathon that exhausted performers and audience alike was unlikely to have done full justice to the work, considering the circumstances. The musicians who played in the court orchestras largely came from humble backgrounds. Since compulsory military service obliged them to learn a second instrument for a military band, they could only afford lessons from the *Stadtmusicus*, the municipal music teacher, who had to teach all instruments and whose expertise was therefore limited.

Liszt had long been aware that the technical difficulties presented by his own music and by that of his contemporaries were way beyond the capabilities of the court orchestras. The Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra was the great exception. That, however, was not, and never had been, a court orchestra dependent on the fluctuating interest and financial support of successive rulers. From its beginnings around 1700 as an amateur ensemble under Georg Philipp Telemann, it had developed independently, attracting excellent musicians during the years that followed and it gradually turned into a professional orchestra. By 1847, after twelve years under the directorship of Felix

Mendelssohn, the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra had reached an extraordinarily high standard. Mendelssohn had also been instrumental in the founding of a music school in Leipzig in 1843, staffed by members of the orchestra. He thus ensured the continuity in tradition and style which survived his untimely death and is still in evidence today.

Liszt probably had a similar institution in mind when he approached the Grand Duke of Weimar, Carl Friedrich. Liszt suggested that a music school would both raise the

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standard of the court orchestra's playing and Weimar's reputation as a musical centre. The Grand Duke seemed quite taken with the idea, until Liszt revealed that he had discussed the project with his friend Richard Wagner and that they wanted to work on it together. Wagner was at that time in deep disgrace, owing to his participation in the 1848 Revolution in Saxony. He had been Court Conductor there at the time and was forced to flee for his life into exile in Switzerland. Through this project, Liszt had hoped to persuade the Grand Duke to intercede on Wagner's behalf. Carl Friedrich, however, was not prepared to put his amicable relationship with the King of Saxony at risk, so the whole plan had to be abandoned. With hindsight, had the Grand Duke agreed, then Weimar, rather than Bayreuth, might have become the venue for the annual Wagner Festival. Further pleas for a music school fell on deaf ears during the following years and were among the many frustrations that eventually brought about Liszt's quitting of Weimar in 1861.

After an absence of three years, Liszt returned for a brief visit following an invitation to be guest of honour at a concert in the Singers Hall of the Wartburg. (This imposing castle, overlooking the small town of Eisenach, had, twenty years previously, provided Wagner with the story and setting for *Tannhäuser*.) The concert was given by the Eisenacher Kurrende, a boys choir of great renown dating back to Bach's time. Liszt was entranced by their performance and so impressed by their conductor, Carl Müllerhartung, that he advised the Grand Duke of Weimar, now Carl Alexander, son of Carl Friedrich, to find a position for this young man.

Accordingly, in 1865, Carl Müllerhartung arrived in Weimar to take charge of the church choir and teach music at the Gymnasium. By the time Liszt returned to Weimar in 1869, Müllerhartung had also been appointed third conductor of the court orchestra (the other two were Karl Storr and Eduard Lassen) where he experienced the same difficulties with performing standards as Liszt had done. The need to establish a school for orchestral players was brought up with renewed insistence and this time the suggestion fell on more fertile ground. The *Intendant* of the Court Theatre asked Müllerhartung to submit his proposals in writing to the Grand Duke. After due consideration Carl Alexander agreed to support the venture and in September 1872, Germany's first *Orchesterschule* opened in Weimar with Carl Müllerhartung as its director. No biography has been written of this quite extraordinary man who, in addition to carrying out the duties of the posts he held in the musical life of Weimar, devoted the next thirty years to building up and running the *Orchesterschule*. Apart from some jottings in Müllerhartung's own hand and a few documents and letters found among his effects, which were published on the occasion of the centenary of his birth, little is known about him. His dedication and energy are borne out by the simple fact that, when he finally retired at the age of 68, seven colleagues took over his various posts.

Carl Müllerhartung was born in Sulza on May 19th 1834, where his father, Christian Müller, was the municipal choirmaster. His mother was born Hartung and her son only combined the two names to Müllerhartung in 1863, when he was awarded his degree as Professor of Music in Eisenach. He had studied composition, piano, organ and conducting with Friedrich Kühmstedt, a well known composer of *lieder* and highly respected Professor of Music. When he retired, Müllerhartung took over his various positions, which included the directorship of the Eisenacher Kurrende.

Müllerhartung submitted four principal aims for the *Orchesterschule*. It should, through its performances, be an example for small orchestras; supply musicians, even if only for a single performance, to choirs in the Grand Duchy; build up a library of good music, available free of charge to any orchestra in the Grand Duchy; by its example, encourage the founding of similar schools throughout Germany.

Small wonder that the vision of Weimar at the centre of such a grand scheme appealed to the Grand Duke. He responded by offering the school the use of three attic rooms in the Wittums Palais, the home of Carl Alexander's great grandmother Anna Amalia from 1774 until her death in 1807.

Anna Amalia had come to Weimar at the age of 16 to marry the 18 year old Grand Duke Ernst August, who died two years later, leaving her a widow at 18 with one small son and another child on the way. In spite of her youth and inexperience, she battled with incredible tenacity for the right to act as Regent until her first-born, Carl August, came of age. To everyone's amazement, she got her way. She used her powers wisely and well and created an ambience so congenial that several of the writers, poets and philosophers who visited Weimar at her invitation, decided to make their home there. In later years Goethe, Schiller, Christoph Martin Wieland and Johann Gottfried Herder were among her regular guests at the Wittums Palais (Widow's palace). There is no doubt that Anna Amalia was largely responsible for gaining Weimar the reputation as a centre of culture that has lasted to the present day.

The *Orchesterschule* opened with 15 pupils. No-one could apply before their Confirmation, so the youngest would have been about 14 years old. It was one of the Director's duties to send an annual report on the school's progress to the Grand Duke. On reading the first of these in the *Erster Bericht der Grossherzoglichen Orchester und Musikschule 1872-77*, in which Müllerhartung laid down the school's regulations and curriculum, one is instantly struck by the wide range of subjects he considered necessary for the education and training of an orchestral musician. His school statutes, twenty-one in number, provide record of an important new project and reveal something of the man and of the attitudes and social climate of the time.

They emphasize a general musical education: two instruments (one string, one wind) in addition to the piano, orchestration, and conducting for each pupil. They lay down the number of hours of rehearsal weekly for orchestras and sections (6 hours), for chamber music (2 hours). The hours of instruction for orchestral instruments depend on the number of pupils in the class: from a minimum of 2 hours per week for classes containing 3 pupils, to 5 hours for classes containing the maximum of 8 or 9 pupils. Theory, harmony, instrumentation and history of music are also covered. Attendance at classes on German Language, History, Geography and Arithmetic is obligatory for "two years following Confirmation, or longer if necessary". Apart from the Examination Concert, in which pupils who excelled in the annual examinations in front of the musical staff, take part, "there will be regular monthly concerts, devoted in turn to orchestral works, solo pieces and chamber music".

Müllerhartung was determined that the *Orchesterschule* in Weimar should in no way resemble the music colleges that already existed in Germany; these he criticised for their "mass drilling of virtuosi" and "immensely one-sided training". He deplored their lack of discipline: attendance at classes was voluntary and pupils were generally free to do as they pleased. By contrast, the pupils in Weimar not only had to be present at all classes, but were expected to be well-behaved

in school as well as out of it. To ensure this, Müllerhartung added a supplement to the Statutes, governing the pupils' use of their free time, laying down the need to request formal permission to attend social gatherings, or balls and even to smoke.

Of the fifteen pupils enrolled in September 1872 for their first music lessons in the attic rooms of the Wittums Palais, only one was from Weimar. The others came from the surrounding villages and other German towns including Erfurt, Aachen and Mannheim. These 14 and 15 year old boys, many of whom had only had an elementary education, were suddenly confronted with 32 hours of lessons a week, which included 5 hours of compulsory piano lessons plus an hour of practice in school, but did not include 4 or 5 hours of daily practice on their instruments. If any became faint-hearted at the prospect, there is no record of it. Carl Müllerhartung's enthusiasm must have swept them along. They gave their first public concert in December 1873, by which time their numbers had risen to thirty-one. The programme was Gluck's Overture to Iphigenia, Spohr's Violin Concerto in G major, Weber's Konzertstück for piano in F minor, and concluded with Haydn's Symphony in D major.

By 1874 so many were applying for places that the Grand Duke agreed to make a few rooms in the old Granary, beside the Wittums Palais, available to the school. A Franciscan convent had once occupied the site and the Granary had been built on the ruins of the old church. Not long before, the building had been converted to house government offices and the *Orchesterschule* had to share it with the Accounts Department, part of the State Archives and a military store. The new classrooms were inaugurated by a concert. Müllerhartung composed an overture for the occasion, which was followed by the Violin Concerto in A minor by Rode, the Piano Concerto in C minor by Beethoven and the concert ended with the 'Wartburg Festival March', also by Müllerhartung.

The following year 20 girls were enrolled, with a view to training music teachers, singers and solo pianists. Their curriculum included Harmony, Choral Singing, History of Music, Literature and Aesthetics, and a choice of Violin, Cello or Harp. In 1876 a preparatory course for children from the age of 10 was offered. Of the 11 who enrolled that year, including two of Müllerhartung's own children, two studied the violin, two the cello and seven the piano.

By June 1877, at the end of the fifth year of the school's existence, there were 104 pupils, 33 of them girls. In this, the first graduation year, of the 57 students that had completed the course, 26 joined military bands and 11 civilian orchestras, 3 became teachers or administrators and the rest continued their studies elsewhere.

Despite its obvious success, the school was still financially insecure. The annual contribution of 6,500 Marks from the Grand Ducal coffers did not cover the expenses. Fortunately the teaching staff received salaries as members of the Court Orchestra and did not have to depend on the trifling fee the music school could afford to pay them for lessons. Müllerhartung himself received no payment at all for his first ten years as Director, and had it not been for liberal gifts from private benefactors, the school would not have survived. One of the most generous was, of course, Franz Liszt, who presented the school at the outset with three valuable pianos and a pedal harmonium. He also gave moral support to teachers and pupils alike by attending as many of the school's musical events as possible. Liszt's first appearance at a concert given by the school orchestra was on May 15th, 1875. The programme was devoted entirely to his compositions, beginning with the tone poem 'Orpheus', his transcription of Schubert's 'Wanderer' Fan-

tasy, the Hungarian Rhapsody in E minor and the Crusader's March from the Oratorio 'The Legend of St Elizabeth'. On a later occasion, when the school gave a complete performance of that Oratorio, Liszt wrote to Müllerhartung:

Honoured Friend

May I reiterate my thanks and praise for the astonishing performances achieved by the *Weimarer Orchesterschule* under your masterly direction, of which yesterday's concert was a striking example. Please convey my homage to your daughter for the beautiful sound and soulful performance of Elizabeth's final scene.

yours truly and respectfully

Franz Liszt

Liszt's former son in law, the pianist and conductor Hans von Bülow, was also very supportive. He kept an eye on the progress of the more advanced piano pupils, came to orchestral rehearsals occasionally and gave piano recitals at the school. He also donated 5,000 Marks towards the founding of a Bülow Scholarship—"as an expression of my admiration for the school's excellent results"—to be awarded annually to the pupil with the best examination marks.

From 1877 onwards the orchestra and various ensembles from the *Orchesterschule* began to take a growing part in the festive occasions held in Weimar itself. Müllerhartung's reports now provide glimpses of the social and political events of the time, as well as the progress of the school. The unveiling of a bust of Cranach in the Grand Ducal Museum, the opening of a Nursing Home or an important anniversary would be marked by music carefully chosen and enthusiastically performed. By this time the pupils had reached 163 in number and included foreigners; 5 from the USA, 3 from Russia, 3 from Austro-Hungary, 4 from Switzerland and 1 from England. Subscription concerts took place in the Court Theatre in which the school orchestra accompanied guest soloists from abroad, some of them former pupils. At the first of these concerts, in October 1880, the Swiss violinist Pilet, who had studied at the School in 1876 for a year, played the Beethoven Violin Concerto.

In 1885 the decision was taken to form an Opera School. The student singers themselves, on their own initiative and without help from any of the teaching staff, had put on a comic opera by Konradin Kreuzer, *Das Nachtlager von Granada,* to celebrate Carl Müllerhartung's twenty-five years as conductor of the Court Orchestra. It was a well-kept secret and after Müllerhartung had recovered from his surprise he said "I would probably never have dared to put on an opera with such young people, had they not proved by their own initiative that it was possible", and so the students brought about Germany's first Opera Department attached to a Music School. In comparison to the famous Music Colleges and Conservatoires, Weimar still had very limited funds and far fewer students; nevertheless, as Müllerhartung proudly reported in 1887, within two years the *Opernschule* managed to put on *Das goldene Kreuz* by Ignaz Brüll, in which the singers, chorus and orchestra were all students. The school was henceforth known as the *Grossherzogliche Orchester, Musik und Opernschule.*

The Opera Course had seven compulsory courses, each taking up two hours a week, ranging from solo singing to harmony. Responsibility for vocal training was taken over by a well-known singing couple, Feodor and Rosa von Milde. Both were famed for their Wagner interpretations. They had sung the parts of Telramund and Elsa in that first performance of *Lohengrin* which had caused Liszt so much trouble—thereby setting a ball rolling which now, over thirty years later, had finally reached its goal.

In order to house the Opera School, the Grand Duke was obliged to allocate more space in the Old Granary. Feverish work during the summer holidays of 1885 turned the extra space into eight classrooms. The school hall had also been enlarged, the orchestra platform turned into a stage and the cloakrooms into an orchestra pit. Before the end of the year the school received an unexpected and valuable gift. Goethe's last surviving descendant, his grandson Walther, died and the vast collection of manuscripts, books and art treasures, locked away since Goethe's death in 1832, were now available for study, and the enormous task of sorting and cataloguing was about to begin. The Executors agreed at the outset, however, that his considerable music library should go to the *Orchesterschule*.

In 1897 the *Grossherzogliche Orchester und Musikschule* celebrated its twenty-fifth anniversary. During those years, the school had put on 288 public concerts and trained 1,425 young musicians, but there was still one more project in the pipeline—a Theatre School, which was added in 1899 with additional classes in speech training, deportment and mime, make-up and costume design. Unfortunately, there was no more space forthcoming in the Old Granary: in fact, the school had to wait until 1926 before it finally took over the whole building. Carl Müllerhartung retired in 1902 aged 68, and spent his last years in Berlin, dying on June 11th, 1908.

During the Great War the school experienced difficult times. Owing to conscription the orchestra had to be disbanded, the piano came to the fore as the main subject and the school was criticized for straying from its original purpose. In 1916 the new Director, Bruno Hinze-Reinhold, began building up the orchestra again. His ultimate ambition was to achieve *Hochschulstatus*, in other words to raise the school to a College of Music. But there were more momentous changes about to upset the status quo in Weimar. In the aftermath of the defeat of Germany in 1918, the Grand Duke Wilhelm Ernst abdicated and the political and social climate changed overnight, and the *Grossherzogliche Orchester, Musik, Opern und Theaterschule* became the *Staatliche Musikschule* under the jurisdiction of the land of Thuringia. By 1926 Hinze-Reinhold had incorporated advanced classes for composition and master classes for violin and piano. A Department of Education was added in 1929 and, in the following year, the school achieved college status with the new name of *Staatliche Hochschule für Musik*.

During the Second World War the school experienced much the same difficulties as during the First. Classes became increasingly irregular until a direct hit by an American bomb on 31st March, 1945 put an end to all musical activity. Nevertheless, the school managed to re-open the following year, introducing two new courses in Musicology and Folk Music. Lack of space was again a problem, until in 1949 with the government offices of the region transferred from Weimar to Erfurt, the imposing Fürstenhaus became vacant and was given over to the school. Music lessons continued in both buildings and in 1956, to celebrate the 155th anniversary of the birth of Liszt, his name was bestowed on the school. Since then it has been the *Franz Liszt Hochschule für Musik*.

In 1960 the *Hochschule* organised its first International Music Seminar; this, despite the erection of the Berlin Wall the following year, continued to be held annually. For 28 years these two weeks in July were to provide the only opportunity for young musicians from some of the eastern European countries to meet with their peers from the west. The contact was of incalculable value, not only as a musical and intellectual stimulus but also in dispelling much of the personal prejudice inspired by political propaganda

on both sides. Since the unification of Germany, the Weimar Seminar no longer has its unique role. It has also lost its state support and must now find private sponsorship. The *Hochschule* itself, although still state supported, has also experienced much turmoil and uncertainty about its future for the past four years. During the 120 years of its existence, however, the school has managed to survive several national crises and changes of government and now, in the spirit of its founder Carl Müllerhartung, and its most illustrious patron, Franz Liszt, it faces the new challenge with resolute optimism. ❧

Tamás Koltai

Voices Off

The drama on stage is not always the tempestuous one. The transformation going on off stage in the theatre these days, however, often gives rise to serious conflicts that are more dramatic than any imagined by a playwright. Since those in charge of theatres are now often appointed on the basis of applications submitted by them, dramatic situations have grown in frequency. The past was indeed another country. Up till the late 1980s, a theatre manager or senior director had to enjoy the confidence of ministerial and party bigwigs. There was no time-limit set to an appointment, and the individuals concerned were secure in their positions for decades even, irrespective of the theatre's artistic or box-office standing, or conversely, they could be replaced if thought to be politically unreliable or if someone appeared on the scene who was more favoured. Conflicts within a theatre also led to the replacement of the manager, as happened once, for instance, at the Budapest National, where the manager and senior director were made to swap posts, thus reverse their position in the hierarchy. These changes were always carried out in an arbitrary way, though it must be said that in some cases professional and not only ideological considerations prevailed.

At present Hungarian theatres, almost without exception, still operate with permanent companies. Although in the 1970s contracts were introduced for the actors, the heads of theatres were still appointed in the conventional way. Actors signed contracts for one to three years, which permitted both parties not to renew them, while managers and senior directors continued to be appointed for an indefinite period, staying on or being removed by state decision. (The senior director is also the principal artistic executive of the theatre.) By the late 1970s, the Budapest National was so poorly managed that the theatrical élite and a few liberal-minded officials who supported them succeeded in getting two young directors, Gábor Székely and Gábor Zsámbéki, appointed. Up to then, they had been in charge of the two best provincial theatres, in Szolnok and Kaposvár respectively, both of which, to a certain extent, counted as "opposition" theatres. Székely and Zsámbéki brought along some of their actors and many changes were made, improving morale and artistic standards at the National. They changed the repertoire, the way rehearsals were tackled and the style of acting. However, they soon found themselves up against the conserva-

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tive core of the company. They also found themselves up against the administrative director who, as a loyal party man, kept a close eye on every step they took and every word they uttered, and used every possible means to try and obstruct them. After a five year struggle, in spite of which much of artistic value was produced, the chief party ideologue of the time replaced Székely and Zsámbéki. An opponent of his within the party hierarchy, however, managed to obtain permission for the two sacked men to start a new and independent company. In 1983 this led to the Katona József Theatre, which has since toured the world and is now one of the most sought after and renowned of European companies.

Around the time of the birth of the young Hungarian democracy, a system of inviting applications for managerial posts was introduced. The applications are judged by a professional advisory board, made up of representatives of the various theatre organizations, actors, directors, stage designers and theatre critics; the board's recommendation is the basis on which the posts are filled for a given period. The appointments are then made by the Budapest or other local government concerned.

But there are two exceptions to this rule: the State Opera House and the National Theatre, both in the capital city. (There are two other National Theatres in Hungary, one in Miskolc and the other in Pécs.) Here the competent minister has the right to make the appointments. This is what happens in many other countries in the case of their national opera and theatre companies, since these represent national culture in a special way. Being expected to maintain special standards, they receive special treatment. Right now, however, both these Budapest companies are in a state of grave crisis, despite the fact that their managements enjoy the confidence of the Cultural Ministry, not to mention exceptional subsidies for their operation or, more precisely, their survival. The crisis is less spectacular in the Opera House, as a few grandioso first nights and foreign tourists in the audience make up for the drab weekday performances. *Rheingold* has been staged, following the latest Bayreuth production, making use of monumental sets that alone cost 11 million forints (about one fifth of the annual subsidy assigned to a large provincial theatre, which is meant to cover all the expenses of the company and the cost of ten to twelve productions.) Due to the huge expense, it has already been decided that *Die Walküre*, the second part of the *Ring* cycle, will come to the stage in two years' time, rather than next year as originally planned. The production as such is up to par, a gifted cast sings in German, using a Hungarian subtitling system. However, most of the performances, and particularly the subscription evenings, are much weaker artistically. The best singers are under contract abroad. At the time of writing, lovers of the theatre and of music are discussing an open letter by the manager of the Opera House in which he took exception to the way the opera has been criticized.

The situation is somewhat similar at the National, though there it is enveloped in a deeper silence—not only in the press but in the house as well, as audiences are gradually deserting the theatre. Recently even premieres have played to half empty houses. Schoolchildren are usually brought in to boost numbers at subsequent performances—the National is now functioning essentially as a youth theatre. Most of the productions are extremely weak in quality and the company is unworthy of what is supposed to be the country's leading theatre. Here the lack of directors can be doubly felt. Nor has the theatre had any luck with guest directors either. The director invited from Germany for Schiller's *Don Carlos*,

bewildered the public with a display of rare dilettantism. Andrzei Wajda lent his name to the play-bill for Wyspiansky's *Nuptials*. The play was rehearsed by a Hungarian director as "co-director", who had seen Wajda's production in Cracow. Wajda was supposed to provide the finishing touches in the last phase of the rehearsals but never turned up for some reason only he knows (he was sent a video recording of the rehearsals)—so the premiere was cancelled. Much the same thing happened with a *Twelfth Night*, whose director did arrive from abroad, but what with all the ongoing bickering, rehearsals were broken off, the director went home and the production was off.

Strange situations arise even in those places where the leading positions are open to application. Democratic mechanisms do not seem to be running smoothly yet. Contracts recently expired in several of the major Budapest theatres, and Budapest local government authorities invited applications for all the posts at one and the same time. As could be expected, for the three companies of uniformly high standards, the incumbent manager was considered to be the most suitable. This is all the less surprising as there is a general shortage of skilled directors and adequate managers, so much so that new applications have to be called on occasion, as the first round produced no suitable applicant. The three Budapest theatres in question—the Katona József, the Vígszínház and the Vidám Színpad—are all considered to be commercially successful companies, although they play to different kinds of audiences. But the Budapest Lieutenant of the State who, acting on behalf of the government occasionally criticizes the decisions of local governments on which the opposition has a majority, raised objections to the applications, on the grounds that only artistic plans were set out, while important financial and economic indices received no mention. Let me repeat that the companies in question have for years been functioning smoothly, and there was no change in the management. This formal objection—which the Budaest local government body has rejected—was obviously politically motivated. It is also generally known that the process cannot end with the dismissal of incumbent managers whose applications are judged "deficient", at the most it can serve as a kind of demonstration of power. It seems it will take years for the new democratic institutions to shed their novelty, cease to be instruments of politicking and become a mechanism serving the community.

The Katona József Theatre underwent a certain amount of transformation during the ten years of its existence. Of the two founding executives, Gábor Székely and Gábor Zsámbéki, only the latter has remained, in fact he is now the manager. Székely, who originally was manager, has left the company. He did not approve of the frequent touring and festival appearances on which the company's international career is based, and presumably felt that to maintain an international standard takes up too much valuable time and retards the company's artistic development. Székely is a perfectionist who subordinates everything to quality. Since he left the Katona József, he has not directed anywhere in Hungary, though he has had more than enough invitations to do so. If he were to set up an independent company, he could in all probability pick and choose amongst those who would wish to work with him, since he enjoys an extraordinary prestige in the theatrical world. Indeed, everyone feels it a luxury for one of the best Hungarian directors to work only occasionally and then with a small German company, the theater tri-bühne of Stuttgart, which offers him the conditions he feels right for his work.

Meanwhile, the Katona József is going its own way. It no longer has the outstanding successes it had six to eight years ago, though still does well, and has remained the best Hungarian company. It is a member of the Union of European Theatres, set up by Giorgio Strehler. Other members include the Piccolo Teatro of Milan, the Royal National Theatre and the Royal Shakespeare Company, the Berliner Ensemble, the Little Theatre of St Petersburg, the Paris Odéon, the Bulandra Theatre of Bucharest, the Schauspielhaus of Düsseldorf, and the Swedish Royal Theatre of Drama—which gives an idea of its status. The member companies have signed up for close cooperation and frequent guest performances. Their first festival was held last year in Düsseldorf, and this is intended to be an annual event; indeed, October and November this year will see the festival in Budapest, an international theatrical get-together on a scale and standard never before seen in Hungary.

There is hope that the Katona József will soon have a rival in the form of the new Művész Színház (Arts Theatre), which is due to start functioning in September. Its birth was stormy enough. The management was appointed after applications had been invited. One applicant for the manager's post was Mari Törőcsik, one of the best known Hungarian actresses; it was, however, an open secret that the theatre would in fact be managed by the playwright György Schwajda, who had managed a provincial theatre company for some years. His qualities—good organizer with a firm hand, sound taste and practicality—are well-known. It was he who carried out a complete reconstruction of the Szolnok Theatre on a minimum budget within a short time, and worked out an economic system in which the actors earned more than in other theatres.

The trouble arose from the fact that the new Művész Színház, understandably enough, wishes to work with a group of actors which meets the standards required by its management. Those they had in mind include several highly reputed actors, a few of whom had earlier been members of the Katona József company, while others had been successfully freelancing. The complication was that the new management decided not to renew the contracts of most of the Arizona company, which had been housed in the building. Mari Törőcsik shouldered the thankless task of breaking the news to each of the actors concerned. It is easy to imagine how embarrassing a task it must have been, bearing in mind that those whose contracts were not renewed, were having to go without a steady income and were being placed in the precarious situation that actors without contracts and of average ability find themselves in. Those who lost their posts exchanged public insults with Mari Törőcsik, though it must be said that the latter has been more restrained. Spirits were further ruffled by the news that the Művész intends to sign exclusive contracts with its members, which means they will not be able to make guest appearances in other productions. In return they will receive a base salary that is two to three times higher than the norm, in addition to fees for each performance. No one knows where the money is to come from for all this, since the state subsidies are calculated on the same basis for every professional theatre. Everybody is waiting for another miracle from György Schwajda, who has already proved himself as miracle worker—or at least as a money raiser.

All these are of course only concomitant symptoms. Controversy, scandal and money may be of the utmost import at the moment. But what the Arts Theatre will be like will become clear from its performances, starting this autumn, something that is true for all theatres. ❧

Gergely Bikácsy

Fragments

Hungarian Film Week 1993

András Sólyom: *Széljegyzetek Casanovához* (Glosses to Casanova), *Temetés* (Funeral); Tamás Almási: *Miénk a gyár!* (The Factory Is Ours!); Ádám Csillag: *Szív utca* (Szív Street); Ildikó Szabó: *Gyerekgyilkosságok* (Child Murders); Júlia Szederkényi: *Paramicha avagy Glonci, az emlékező* (Paramicha, or Glonci the Rememberer); András Szirtes: *Sade márki élete* (The Life of the Marquis de Sade)

Paradoxically, what made the 24th Hungarian Film Week worthwhile was also its weakness: too many films were shown. There were few feature films proper, that is full-length dramatic features. To draw attention away from this and the grave crisis of the Hungarian film industry in general, the organizers collected every bit of celluloid to be found, including television news footage, films submitted for a college diploma or by amateur clubs. The effort, however, backfired. Few members of the public or critics neglected to comment on this oddity. It was impossible to look at even a fragment of all this mass of fragmentation, and of those I did see I can only mention those worthy of writing on (another fragment). Thanks to this readers will perhaps imagine that things are not as bad as they are.

An experimental programme screened by Hungarian Television, called *Intermezzo*—4-5 minute shorts between two major programmes at peak viewing times—has had a mixed reception. Most viewers have reacted with boredom and annoyance, those of highbrow tastes, in search of novelty, have been impressed. Recently *Intermezzo* was awarded a prize by film and TV critics—not for any single piece but for the venture as such.

Miklós Szentkuthy (1908-1988) was among the most experimental of Hungarian fiction writers, with his works translated into several languages, and with his name known, indeed popular, mainly in France. His baroque fancy and tremendous erudition calls for a director working with a broad brush, someone like Greenaway. This, however, would call for plenty of production money. András Sólyom's version of Szentkuthy's *Glosses to Casanova*, presents Venice, reflected in the water, houses, faces, and a text which responds to the water and the spectacle, supporting or counterpointing them.

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Sólyom first appeared ten years ago, with a good fairy-tale film. In recent years he has been working for television, making quality programmes, particularly for the *Video World* series. The old limits and pigeonholes of television, indeed the genre of the documentary in general, are no longer respected by young gifted directors, who keep prying apart the rigid, somewhat rusty locks of the form.

Sólyom is engaged in similar efforts, trying to seize possibilities inherent in video which conventional TV programmes largely ignore. With *Casanova*, he amply proved his sense for a visual interpretation of multi-layer literary texts, pointing to beyond the politics and the topicalities of the day. His other video work, different in character, bears out the same thing: he wants to go beyond words, events, and the surface, with the help of the video image, an image that can be stopped, accelerated, blown up, and shaped and moulded much more easily than film sequences.

The Film Week presented two video pieces by Sólyom, both political subjects. In the first of the two, a critic and a Slavic scholar talk about the Moscow putsch. You see pictures of the putsch all through, sometimes superimposed on one another and sometimes in a split frame. They are clearly television images. Here the video technique makes sense: television appears to stand between the interlocutors, and the smaller image on the monitor talks back to the moving-picture background that fills the whole screen. It is the parallel play of thoughts, texts, words and pictures, now backing one another, now pressing against each other, implicitly or explicitly denying each other. The subject of the discussion is that the conservative plotters did not make use of the possibilities offered by visual communication, that is television, they remained the slaves of the word, of the text, and their single appearance before the cameras was so pitiful that it anticipated their defeat. As the interlocutors aptly point out: in the West the television image serves the spectacular, while in the East, somehow or other, it is fortunately still the instrument of truth, exposing false and deceitful texts.

Even more interesting is Sólyom's later work, *Funeral*, which he actually made jointly with Ákos Szilágyi, the Slavic scholar and poet, who was one of the parties in the previous discussion. Szilágyi's poem, based on sound effects and almost like a drum solo, is heard under sequences of the funerals of various Moscow party leaders, cut into one another and sometimes intercut. The funerals of Lenin, Kalinin, Brezhnev, Andropov, and Chernenko follow the rigid ritual of Byzantine ceremonies, which in the course of time ended up as self-parodies. Szilágyi's satirical "sound poem", radiating the grotesque, and the newsreel pictures involving all the devices of video together, serves as an interesting example for the new possibilities in television.

Although this year's Hungarian Film Week included no whole-length documentary of the scope or importance of Judit Ember's *Pócspetri* or Lívia Gyarmathy's *Recsk*, there was much that gave evidence of talent nevertheless. The Grand Prix went to Tamás Almási's *The Factory is Ours!* The director devoted several years to collecting the material, which finally amounted to four hours. He virtually moved to Ózd, an iron and steel town in northern Hungary, overdeveloped as part of the Stalinist industrial policy of the fifties. The slimming down and reorganization of unprofitable steel plants turned several tens of thousands out of their jobs. In the documentary, many tell their story, and the outlines of far-reaching social change appear in the background of their personal tragedies. The multi-stage privatization of the Iron Works amounts to a political horror

film, one not without surrealistic elements. The film, based on interviews, will serve as valuable oral history for future historians and sociologists.

The other prize in the documentary category went to a two-part film by Ádám Csillag, *Szív Street*. It examines a symptom that seems to be of much less consequence than *The Factory is Ours!*, but it presents a cross-section of daily life behind the political changes, with a portrayal of people, some aiming at independence and autonomy, and others, the servile ones, ready to serve the powers that be.

Ádám Csillag made his name with *Danubesaurus*, an epic follow-up of the controversial Bős (Gabcikovo) dam construction along the Slovak-Hungarian border. He created much trouble for himself with this documentary, as its subject, the barrage scheme, grew into the biggest political issue of the closing years of the communist regime—indeed it has continued to poison Slovak-Hungarian relations to the present day. He presented two versions of his Gabcikovo material at a press screening: a 26-minute version *Requiem for the Blue Danube*, and a 6-minute version *Danube Torso*.

The first part of *Szív Street* takes place at the turn of 1991 and 1992, and the second in the early spring of 1992. The new headmaster of the Erkel Ferenc General School in Szív utca has included religious instruction in the morning timetable, shifting other subjects to times before and after normal school hours, doing so in opposition to parents and colleagues. He held no parents' meeting for a long time, and later it also became clear that he had compiled a roll of the children, that recorded their religious affiliation. This is unconstitutional in Hungary, and is reckoned as unacceptable discrimination.

The first part of the film, interrupting the story-line, allows the headmaster to expound his views at length. He also speaks about his life, and the outlines of a portrait emerge: it is hard to forget this history teacher, speaking in confidental tones, singing and playing the organ in the church, who after the change of the political system became headmaster of the school. In the second part, the headmaster is one, but no longer the sole character. This makes it tenser and more dramatic, but perhaps less profound.

Does the headmaster have the right to question children who protest against one of his decisions in writing? He obviously has. At a hearing? An examination? And interrogation? Or in a conversation? It all depends on the tone and the details. One small girl leaves the headmaster's office sobbing and intimidated. The case leads to a disciplinary hearing, where the headmaster appears with a lawyer. The presence of a lawyer seems bizarre at a school hearing, but it is a godsend for the film, as it provides new sources of tension. Finally the teachers declare at a secret ballot that they do not support their headmaster and he is then suspended by the district local government authority. Some of the parents, some 200 to 300 people, hold a demonstration in his favour, demanding his reinstatement. *Szív Street* ends with this demonstration.

It is unfortunately scarcely possible to highlight any of the feature films at the Film Week (I discussed Árpád Sopsits's *Video Blues*, which was awarded a special prize, in *NHQ* 128.) The Grand Prix and the prize of foreign critics went to Ildikó Szabó's *Child Murders*. So, later, did a FIPRESCI prize at Cannes.

Ildikó Szabó's first feature film *Damn Real*, came five years ago, and attracted attention. Now she has presented a film shaped with a firm hand. Unlike the many exercises in cinematic tradition-breaking, which go to any length to produce something new and up-to-date, and—skillfully or not—

slip in daily politics and problems arising from the political change, *Child Murders* reaches back to the traditions of the Hungarian first-filmmakers of the 1960s. It uses no short-lived material linked to everyday events. A similar film was present at the Hungarian Film Week two years ago (Árpád Sopsits's *Shooting Gallery*). Ildikó Szabó's film creates a world in its own right, or at least makes a marked effort to create one. *Child Murders* uses a tough idiom: its gloomy lyrical melody conveys hope and hopelessness all at once. The story is set in the urban fringe near Budapest, with teenagers at its centre: yet it is not marked by adolescent or hoodlum romanticism, rather by the eye of the camera delving into the real depths of life.

The crime story thread is intertwined with horror film elements. An infant thrown into the Danube, a teenage girl pushed into the Danube. A murderous child, a victim even though she is the criminal. There seems to be too much stilted, cumulative darkness, shadow and deviance. But all these only form the outlines, a mere story (which the director, having used an idea by the writer Zsuzsa Tóth, presents in a firmly shaped, self-assured manner, with an accurate sense of proportion). What is of value in *Child Murders* is its emotional force, and its disciplined formal idiom which blends lyricism with pitiless realism. It is a taut and hard idiom, which successfully amalgamates the traditional with a more resolved, looser camera movement and intermittent construction. The cameraman, Tamás Sas, and the child protagonist also carried off prizes. The child actor won the special prize of foreign critics.

Júlia Szederkényi's strange film, *Paramicha, or Glonci the Rememberer* proved to be the best first feature by a debutant director. The story, which is told in a documentary guise, tells of how scientists project somebody's memories on a monitor through an instrument connected to the brain, so as to rob, monopolize and analyze all the images of a life. Wim Wenders uses a somewhat similar idea in his most recent film, *To the End of the World.* Wenders was unable to resist the challenge of the box office, and the Hungarian director in her first film was unable to resist the challenge of experimenting. *Glonci...* takes no note of the viewer's limits of tolerance. Szederkényi gets lost in certain plays of form, for example the superfluous use of the "subjective camera", and the double and triple overcomplications of fiction disguised as a documentary. With a commanding consistency, she throws away the conventions of a story line. Sometimes she overshoots the scenes, permitting longeurs. The director has independent (or thought to be independent) ideas on the motion picture, and, at the time of growing conservatism in the cinema, a commendable, consistently firm artistic position.

Among the experimental films, András Szirtes's video report on the Marquis de Sade is of interest. Szirtes, for years, tried to obtain money for a feature film, and the test shots also went on for several months. A French coproducer showed up, but he later stood down. So the feature film did not come about, and Szirtes shot a two-hour long fictitious report with semi-close-ups and full close-ups of a single character, in which the Marquis de Sade so to speak talks to posterity. Szirtes carefully "spoilt" the video image, thus giving the film a kind of object trouvé look, which one can contemplate like an archeological find. Thus this fictitious report can be taken to be a gifted, interesting study, a trailer for a film which once perhaps will be.

I have closed this review with a film which, for all its worth, is not a real film. This is perhaps justified after the 1993 Hungarian Film Week, rich in gifted experiments but so very poor in watchable films. ❧

Letters to the Editor

Sir, *NHQ* is a fine periodical in many ways. The range of its coverage satisfies the appetite of this particular Englishman who has no Hungarian to speak of and yet wishes to acquaint himself with the best thinking on a wide range of issues affecting Hungary. However, there are several, unconnected, points which I should like to raise concerning contributions to the Winter issue, Volume 33.

1. George Schöpflin's persistent use of the word "ethnic" in his piece, "Power, Ethnicity and Communism in Yugoslavia", spoils what is otherwise an admirable account of that sad country's recent history. [e.g. "no one single ethnic group", p. 3; "these two ethnic groups", p. 9—a reference to Serbs and Croats; and "the ethnic issue" p. 12; etc.] All dictionary definitions of "ethnic" I have consulted make the word synonymous with "racial". The Concise Oxford Dictionary is typical in defining "ethnicity" as "originating from a specified racial, linguistic, etc. group".

Every expert I have asked accepts that there is certainly no racial, and precious little linguistic, difference between Serbs and Croats, or between them and those Bosnian Muslims whom Schöpflin himself describes as "Muslims of Serbo-Croat mother tongue".

Without wishing to labour this point, is it not the spurious use of the word in the grisly euphemism "ethnic cleansing", applied by the unscrupulous leaders of Yugoslavia's various communities to justify their political ambitions, that is partly to blame for the hatred, traumata and violence which have overtaken the Yugoslavs?

Perpetration of "ethnic" by so sound and reputable a scholar as Schöpflin does no service to the cause of those trying to persuade the southern Slavs that they have more to gain by co-operation and peace than conflicts based on supposed past differences largely exacerbated by religion.

2. In his "Catching the Fleeting Moment", András Bozóki writes of "the late Misha Glenny" in a review of his "The Rebirth of History". Many of Glenny's friends will, like me, be alarmed to learn of his premature departure from the land of the living! As far as I am aware, this young author is alive and well, having left the staff of the BBC to concentrate on further writing as a freelance.

3. I am somewhat confused as to why János M. Rainer should offer us a review of Peter Unwin's "Voice in the Wilderness, Imre Nagy and the Hungarian Revolution". In trying to order a copy of this in London, I was told it was out of print, which makes

Rainer's review all the more frustrating. Yet if I can be assured by the experts that the book will again become available, I should be only too willing to purchase a copy on the basis of that review!

Jack Thompson,
Senior Newsreader
BBC World Service Television News
London

Sir, "The Polish writer of grotesque, Witold Witkiewicz" mentioned by Brian Horowitz in the first number of the renamed *The Hungarian Quarterly,* is non-existent. He might have meant either Stanislaw Ignacy Witkiewicz, or Witold Gombrowicz—probably the latter, who is, incidentally, much admired by Péter Esterházy (and other Hungarian writers, including the undersigned) but still insufficiently known in the English-speaking world.

George Gömöri
University of Cambridge
Faculty of Modern and
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At a summit meeting, Gorbachev notices three interesting buttons on President Bush's waistcoat, so he asks him about them.
"Oh," the President says, "it's just one of those little American gadgets I like so much. Whenever I feel hot, I just press this one and I will get immediately cooled. When I am cold, you see, I press this one and I'll be warmed up in a few seconds. And, when I'm tired, I press the third one, and in just a few seconds I will feel fresh again. All very simple and practical." Gorbachev is impressed.
Next time the two presidents meet, Gorbachev appears with the door of a Moskwitch car around his neck, his head sticking out through the window.
"For heaven's sake, Mr President," Bush asks him, "what is that you have around your neck?"
"Oh," Gorbachev replies, "just one of those little practical Soviet things we are so fond of back at home. When I feel hot, you see, I just wind down the window, like this. Whenever I feel cold, all I have to do is wind it up, you know. And, when I'm tired, I simply take the door off."

From: *Is the East European Joke Finished?*
by György Dalos, p. 113.

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