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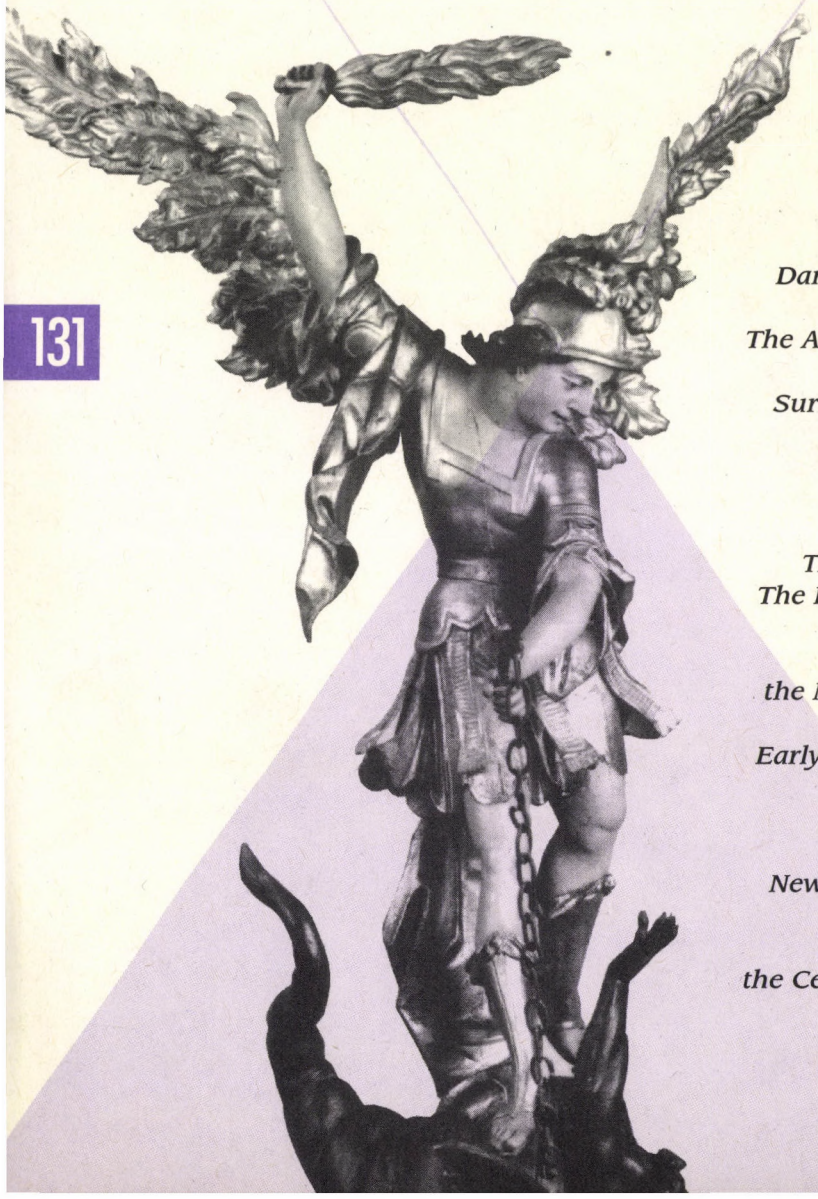

131

Balkan Testament

•

Danube and Post-Danube

•

The Austro-Hungarian Empire and Surviving Ethnic Tensions

•

The Genetic Code of Socialism

•

The End of the Word? The Poetry of Dezső Tandori

•

Looking Back at the Melancholic Revolution

•

Early Fiction and Journalism by Ferenc Molnár

•

The New Higher Education Act

•

Celebrating the Central European Baroque

The Hungarian Quarterly

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László Végel

Balkan Testament

Part 1

Summer 1991

In Budapest on Andrássy út the news-vendors are shouting: "Slovenia bombed." "The Yugoslav People's Army has occupied Slovenia." "Dead on both sides." "Border crossings into Slovenia and Croatia closed." My first visit to Budapest for some time. My wife and I got here yesterday, we were planning to go on to Pécs. My wife is nervous, she can't swallow her lunch. "We must go straight back to Újvidék (Novi Sad), the children are home alone." Prolonged anxiety fills me. Why should I deceive myself? I was expecting this to happen, it didn't take me unawares; the preliminaries had been going on for decades. Nonetheless, in Budapest it has an apocalyptic effect. Who will I be? The citizen of a phantasmagorial country in which a real civil war has broken out. Its existence is now only proved by the civil war. My wife and I walk about till our train, the Meridián, leaves. I look at one of the street-plates. *Népköztársaság útja* (Avenue of the People's Republic) has been crossed out discreetly in red, and under it is the new street-plate: *Andrássy út*. Perhaps we should have done it this way. If all these things had been done at the end of the sixties, we would at least have avoided the civil war. That's not what happened. The agony was carefully planned and organized. Yugoslavia is a long time adying, like Tito.

In the market in Újvidék, a chap draws me aside and asks me if I am interested in a revolver in working order. I can have it for 5,000 marks. An ex-apparatchik writer—we're up to our necks with them—boasting of incriminating documents on his fellow writers in his possession. He says officiously that they'll come in handy. No one should think they're safe. The chains of post-totalitarianism are just long enough to make people feel relatively free, prompting them to a long run with the spear, stabbing the heart of another citizen with unswervable conviction. *We live under the sign of the spear and the chain.*

History, as we know, is written by the victors. The future curriculum for our children is born before our eyes.

László Végel
is a Hungarian novelist and playwright who lives in Novi Sad in the Vojvodina. This is Part 1 of a selection from his forthcoming journal.

I'm walking down the avenue. Ambulances rush past. But even so Újvidék is bathed in light. Only those who are very familiar with the everyday life of the avenue notice that at night the windows of the apartment blocks are shuttered, as if no one would be at home. No light comes from the TVs either; the citizens are in hiding. Tomorrow I'll buy batteries so that I can read a few pages and make a few notes in the corner of my room. It's time I screened my reading material and buried myself in one or two books which are not meant to inspire a following.

Police turn up at night outside the front door and drag people off to battle. From the window I watch the dark square outside my flat. A beam of light shines on me, they're checking whether I'm still at the place I was at yesterday. My waking state is confined between these flashes.

In August an impromptu hospital was set up in a school in one of the villages on the Danube. And bloody September came round, the start of the school year. Part of the school building remained a hospital; in the other part the bell summoned the primary school children. The usual socialist-realist reports on the class diary weren't published in the press. Not because socialist realism has had its day. Last year the one-time champions of the self-governing democracy even wrote socialist-realist news stories about Christmas trees. It's more likely that in this time of civil war we are ashamed of the start of the school year. Who's got the strength of mind to welcome the first-formers? While the children were learning to write, helicopters landed in the school playground, and nurses carried the wounded, moaning with pain. A mine had torn apart the thigh of one of them, blood was pouring from the chest of another. For a while the children went on learning how to write, then the school was temporarily closed. I wonder what sort of forces were let loose in the children's imagination by this sight?

Pictures flash across the television. Half destroyed Baranya villages. In actual fact Serbian, Croatian, and even Hungarian villages. Simple peasants speak, holding on tight to their guns. One of them points to a small house in the distance. Yes, that's where they're shooting from. Neighbour lives in fear of neighbour. Not long ago they ploughed and sowed together. Not only village fights village, but street fights street. Snipers hide in lofts. In one village a man was quartered. In another a young man had his throat cut. I don't dare write down his nationality, or who did it, because I'd find myself right in the middle of the political propaganda war. Impartiality, sound judgement has become an extremely suspicious luxury. Human documents, secret reports from the recent past are being exposed, published, for the time being only the less important ones, the most significant are still locked away in safes. But it's clear that everybody who wasn't on the infamous cadre list was afraid. I can't imagine how that much fear could have fitted into life, how it could all have been so skillfully concealed. Now the fear has exploded, it's been converted into hatred and has darkened reason. The one party system exploded too late. And only partially, just enough for its ruins to be repainted, but the piles of ruins are so heavy that they may bury a world beneath them.

Our bus breaks down in a small town in Syrmia. Slowly dusk falls. We wait impatiently in a restaurant garden. The driver phones, swears, he feels helpless, the garage doesn't promise anything. Some of the passengers start picking a totally aimless quarrel with the driver. He tolerates it for a time, then becomes impatient. "Could you stop complaining. There's a war on. Or is that my fault too?" The passengers hem and haw. Soon afterwards they are drinking beer with the driver. Military vehicles rush down the street and armoured cars pass up. The frontline is less than 50 kilometres away. I've got used to the low-flying planes. Soldiers of the reserve sit at the tables drinking beer. Most of them are around 40. Or maybe younger, who knows, a uniform makes people look older. When pretty girls appear on the terrace, the reservists call out, like teenagers. The girls giggle and go on their way. A singer turns up: high spirits on the terrace. Quite honestly everybody behaves as if this war had been going on for decades.

Money is circulating very slowly, the bank clerks are bored, they sit and chat. One of them says: "For weeks now my husband and I, my girlfriend and her husband have been sleeping in one room in a weekend cottage. For the husbands' sake, in case the army takes them away at night. And we all thought for a bit of a change we'd swap partners now and again. At least it makes up for the war."

My one-time friends have become ministers, counsellors, managing directors, and party leaders. I'm not shocked by that, this sort of thing happened in the one party system, now it's just continuing. Many have made the most of it in both worlds. When the one party system fell, some got themselves promoted from a smaller post to a bigger one, the others went down a few rungs in the hierarchy. The yearning for power was always stronger than knowledge. Cultured, sensitive, talented people surrender to authority, and in the meantime they make themselves out to be victims because they haven't taken full advantage of it. And that's true too. Talented people give themselves over erotically to evil, the mediocre carry out orders. To submit to the desire for power is the most dangerous and the sweetest; or rather, on the one hand it's the easiest, on the other it's the most difficult choice. Those who have merely obeyed orders are unaware of all the torments of this choice which we could call the torment of culture. That's why I shake my head if someone places the blame for our situation on Balkan ways. It sounds good, and guarantees some sort of cultural superiority to whoever makes that claim. We shouldn't forget, however, that in the Balkans, just as anywhere else, educated and talented people shoved along this creaky cart with conviction.

I traipse from shop to shop with a shopping bag under my arm. You can't get yoghurt or fresh milk in the Újvidék shops. Those responsible say that the majority of the 30,000 Serbian refugees from Croatia are children and consumption has risen suddenly. The Red Cross is asking for powdered milk. The shopgirl explains this impassionately to one of her regular customers. The city buses are running less frequently. Transport between towns is uncertain. Trains stop and wait on the open track.

I have often witnessed how sincerely people mourn dictators. How people cried in the streets when Tito died. Without any special instructions they turned up on the job in dark suits. Were they scared? What of? The Ministry of the Interior? The future? Stunningly sincere emotions dig the deepest graves.

Foreign journalists make their way to Újvidék. They're full of complaints: the lavatories of this country at civil war are dirty. The band in the restaurant is too loud. Everyone is noisy. On the other hand, they are obviously surprised that you can buy English tea in our grocery shops. Noted French perfumes adorn the shop windows. The waiter in the hotel answers in English. The journalists find it hard to get their bearings in the antecedents of the civil war, but that isn't of the essence now. The Balkans provide front page news. Short, clear-cut answers are demanded of the natives. "Tell me, are you for or against, and tell me promptly." "The editor is holding over four pages for your civil war," they say. "Is it true that you gouge out each other's eyes? That you quarter each other?" They turn on the tape recorder and at that moment maybe I too am a native in their eyes. How can I speak about something which I can just stammer, something that I don't really understand myself? What really gets me is the sudden irrational about-face of emotions. In one and the same person sentiment and intellect are in irreconcilable opposition. I run into an old acquaintance, an authority on France and its culture. He knows every bookshop in Paris, and even now nothing is published by one of the better French writers without him being aware of it. He talks about the politics of the day with derision. He says he wished he lived in France. He is sorry he wasn't born French. At the same time he wouldn't hesitate to sacrifice his life somewhere in the Krajina mountains at a moment's notice, he says. The laws of life are different in the *Barbaricum*, he says. Others are overcome by a destructive nihilism due to the cruel disillusionment with the principles of recent decades. Many accuse rationality, they feel the intention to improve society rationally has led them into a *cul de sac*, so now they cling defiantly to irrationality believing it will help them survive the accumulation of lies. The loss of ideals had more serious consequences in Yugoslavia than in the other socialist countries. The outside glitter was greater here and the internal corruption more fatal. I'm afraid that a future peace won't reconcile reason and sentiment, the mind and the instincts, but will release newer, terrible forces of destruction. The agony of the communist state has gone to anchor in our nerve cells. Things that, in public life, were concealed earlier, because everyone was afraid of informers, are now nakedly exposed in private life. This is how I meditate, of course mainly to myself. None of this interests the journalist, he questions me about the Chetniks and the Ustasha. I get involved in the implications, in a history which has been carefully curtained off for a long time. The western journalists forget that they supplied the silk for these curtains, often as a present. And in the meantime I ponder on the Balkan myths on whose froth I have lived for decades.

Fin d'un millénaire. Two hundred kilogrammes of flour. A hundred kilogrammes of sugar. Sixty litres of cooking oil. 150 tins of reduced Carnex liver paté. 100 tins

of Neoplanta minced meat. Torch, batteries. 100 litres of fruit juice. Salt. Thirty litres of Coca-Cola. Kerosene. Eight rosettes in the national colours. National flag. National costume for every member of the family. National cookery book. National liberalism. National poets, bound in leather, pages uncut. National party membership card. Two flinches of smoked bacon. Four smoked hams. A list of suspicious residents, the names of witnesses, clearly marked. Antibiotics. Kalashnikov. Bandages. Jewelry, or in other words, the favourite souvenirs of the communist state. For the less affluent: ten kilogrammes of sugar, four litres of oil, fifteen kilogrammes of flour. Salt. Rusty rifle. Many condoms. Rosette in national colours. Souvenirs of the communist party: empty promises. Relics of the nation state: promises again.

The heroes buy safes, open Swiss bank accounts and send their children to universities abroad.

Autumn 1991

Late at night there is an announcement that no men between the age of 20 and 60, in other words no one of military age, can travel abroad without permission from the authorities. Papers are checked at the border. I take my passport out of the drawer and gaze at it for some time. Letters don't arrive, telephone lines are interrupted, messages from friends don't get through, words run out. This is true solitude. How vain are those writers who in safe times announce that they have chosen solitude. You can't just choose it. Solitude is either inevitable or a fashionable lie.

I stop in the main square of Újvidék, moved by the women protesting against the war. Is it possible that not all is lost? When the guns fall silent we'll have to erect a statue to the memory of the protesting women in the quietest part of the town. I wonder whether I'll live to see that day. I forgive all the women whom I loved hopelessly, and who didn't give me so much as a tender glance in return. The illustrious men—I'm afraid some of my former friends among them—call each other mister and practice the bourgeois *bon ton* on cram courses. Then, in their well-heated offices, they denounce the protesting women—out in spite of the rain—as degenerate, defeatist, traitors, and bloody liberals. We want war, they yell, and this is echoed by the press and on the television screen. Let the mounds of dead grow, justice must be victorious! Thus preach apparatchiks who have not borne children.

I watch the northern light of October nights; it's not the moon that is giving light, the stars are shrouded by clouds; the sky doesn't reflect the lights of Újvidék, but even so a bluish white light of unknown origin vaporizes in the air. The bluish headlights of the ambulances cut through this vapour of lights. The tenth peace treaty has been signed, but the guns are louder and ever louder, the number of dead is unknown, but it's definitely much higher than an ordinary writer's imagination can grasp. At night they come to take the young men off to fight. Husbands hide. Wives stay to guard the house and the children. A wife I know phones to ask whether

I have any messages for Budapest. Women can cross the border without permission from the military authorities. She is going as far as Kelebia to wait in an empty car-park for her husband. The Hungarian Writers' Union newsletter arrives. A writer of my generation and a few of my friends take part in a literary evening for refugees in Budapest. Introduction, etc. Strange, hectic days. One of my acquaintances was called up the other day. He's turned fifty. A gunner. I heard he was taken to somewhere near Vukovár. My imagination has become blunted. That's how I live: with an imprisoned imagination. I write more easily if the children stay at home in the evenings. Even that gives me security. The telephone is silent. In the evening I stare out of the window at the deserted street, watching for a long time the play of shadows in the sky. The spray of light from I don't know where tells me that on the other side of the Danube the souls of the unburied are flying skywards. The number of graves without flowers is multiplying in the Újvidék cemetery. "Let's change the subject," that's what they mostly say in the street, on the bus, in the shops.

Marko Lopušina's *The Black History of Yugoslav Censorship* was published recently. I highly recommend it to all those newly baked experts on Yugoslavia. Banned films, theatrical performances, books... Anyone who doesn't know that while samizdat was flourishing in the countries of existing socialism—here the writers of the first samizdat publication were put in prison and its founder was found dead by the secret police, having "taken an overdose"—hasn't got a clue about the roots of the current Yugoslav civil war. From time to time the well-qualified, whimsically self-directed censorship, whose representatives weren't anonymous apparatchiks, but often reputed and acknowledged writers, came down on those works born in the hysterical zone between samizdat and official literature. And then my hand begins to tremble: I catch sight of my name in the book; at the bottom of the list of names the book records the banning of the Priština production of *Judit*. It happened more than a year ago, in 1990, but to me it seems ages since one of the last of the East Central European prohibitions took place. This is an anecdote from the European ironical fringe. At that time people were celebrating the formerly banned works, but they closed their eyes to this one: why should we spoil the celebratory East Central European mood. The director, Fadil Hysaj, one of the leading figures in the Albanian opposition movement, was highly aware of the minority-national dimension of *Judit*. And—as always—the authorities recognized this. Tanks had patrolled near the theatre not long before. I probably don't need to say any more about the relationship between the nation and literature. The national minority nature of certain works is brought out by the tragic times, otherwise it is modestly concealed, almost imperceptible, by no means as obtrusive as those philistine designers make it out to be nowadays; those artists who are creating new national flourishes from the decorations they received as former official awards. As to how nationally orientated a work is, those moments in which lightning flashes bear witness to it, but whatever happens, the work remains like a candle the light of which is struck by lightning. Hunched over my desk, with the official seal of a ban,

and on the threshold of a total war situation, having dreamt for decades of escape and leaving the country, I am now still chained to where I've always lived, and all I can say is that I'd rather the designers went on busying themselves, than return to those times in which the bloody skin of the work was turned inside out by force. After all the first is just a populist battle for status to be smiled at, the latter brute force. There was never much choice in East Central Europe. It was either brute force or shameless ostentation. At one time an all-powerful party decided who was a chauvinist, nowadays the criers of many parties prepare their own leather-bound list of nationalists. It'll be like this for a long time.

Who would have thought that you can get rich in the "dirty war"? In one of the cafés several young "volunteers" in their brand new uniforms are throwing wads of notes around. They are having a business discussion. Then they each get into their expensive Western cars and drive off. It gradually becomes clear that the irresponsibly extended agony of this regime is in fact secured by the sandwich class with national feelings who feathered their nests in existing socialism, and are now too behaving with pragmatism: they are relentlessly capitalizing their national feelings. In the chaos of war they feel sufficiently strong to monopolize the booty. I feel sorry for the national-populist literary ideologists who curse Europe so vehemently in the name of true-born national feelings. These young people will be the patrons who will turn up later in elegant Parisian nightclubs, and recover from the toils of war in the company of their mistresses. The young waitress watches their departure with reverence. She is more aware of the deceptiveness of history than the writers. She waits in silence. She knows that the new national caste too will give itself over to sophisticated decadent pleasures sooner or later. One doesn't have to look far for the moral: the new class which came after 1945 behaved in a similar way.

I run into an old acquaintance in the street. We can't bring ourselves to ask the banal question: "How are you?" We don't ask each other how our wives are, what's up with the children. It would be tasteless to chat about the weather, and any other subject is out of the question. He invites me round to his flat for a coffee. It's better to be silent together than alone. We gape at the morning TV news. From time to time we glance at each other, commenting on the events with our glance. His six year old son bursts into the room. He shows off his drawings. He has drawn various types of tanks. The father looks at me, embarrassed. He pushes the sheets of paper away from him in irritation, but he doesn't dare to tell his son off. The boy comes to me and I too just give a passing glance at the drawings. He stands at a loss in the middle of the room; he doesn't understand his father and he's probably right. He at least is portraying what we keep silent about. This is the way the terrified part of what used to be Yugoslavia keeps quiet while the children draw tanks.

The late night news on Belgrade radio almost offers an on the spot report on the fighting in Dubrovnik. I'd like, at least in my imagination, to hear the sound of the sea, but my imagination loses out. Mihály Szajbély once wrote about how naturally I had said on the phone that my wife and children were at the seaside. The

Hungarian writers in Yugoslavia, as opposed to the writers in Hungary, have their own coast, he wrote, and that claim was much more than a superficial observation. It symbolized the patriotism of the rootless. The imagination had somewhere to escape to. The heroes in *Memoirs of a Macro* escape to the sea, to the South. Now there's nowhere we can escape to without it having a distorting effect on our ego. The citizens of Dubrovnik have been living without water and electricity for ten days now. Even to get hold of an apple is an almost miraculous feat. Women give birth in cellars in the company of rats. Eggs are ten to fifteen times more expensive than in Újvidék. Will I see Dubrovnik again in this life? I listen to the live broadcast on the radio, the rumble of artillery, the explosion of grenades, in my room with the curtains drawn. Cilip airport is in flames; the tarmac onto which I so often stepped from the plane, with great excitement, the scent of Mediterranean spices in my nostrils, is red hot. In the summer of 1991 I walked down the Dubrovnik *Stradun*, and I lingered beside the Onofrio fountain. Already at the time tourists had become sparse, the national parties had won decisive victories all over the country in the first multi-party elections, the premonition of war had crept furtively into the town, like the aggravating autumn sea winds had into the narrow streets of the old town. But well turned out foreign women were still streaking on the *Stradun*; I heard English, Italian, German, and French being spoken, and I daydreamed that if later on I were to feel excluded from everywhere and unable to find my place, I'd come and live here. I knew that it would be quite out of the question, all the same it was good to daydream. One isn't allowed to even daydream any more. Either about that or anything else.

Anti-war demonstrations at Ada, Zenta, Becse, and Kanizsa, where mainly Hungarians live. This is a cry of help from the weak who just can't find an emotional reason to take part in the fratricidal war between the Serbs and the Croats. This isn't a case of cynical indifference, it's the gesture of helpless people shocked at the sight of a war between brothers. Job must have turned towards heaven in like despair when he asked his God why he was punishing him. But God doesn't reply. The military police beat several of the crowd till they drew blood, and conscripts continue to be called up nightly. I met several Serbian intellectuals and I describe the events anxiously to them. They look down in embarrassment, they don't want to know. I don't pursue the issue any further. The best of them suffer in solitude and have just as many sleepless nights as I do, and as for those who haven't got a conscience, there's no point in my questioning them anyway.

Julianna Teleki, one of the organizers of the Becse peace demonstrations, complains to a journalist that about 2,000 reserves were called up at Becse, in that small Bácska town; everyone is frightened, many of the men have left their families to take refuge in Hungary, where they hang around aimlessly, and if they meet compatriots in the Szeged market or at the bus station, they complain that they are not very popular in Hungary either; people think of the Yugoslav Hungarians as Yugoslavs. That woman who had the guts to confront the local military authorities

was brave enough to remind the nation state/mother state of its spiritual and cultural *sacro egoismo.* Only women dare to be brave twice in a row. Men expect either laurels, or a martyr's wreath after the first attempt.

Winter 1991

Nenad Čanak, the pacifist who was enlisted by force, was the first to speak about the knife, known as *hrvosek* or *srbosek,* which is passed from hand to hand among the soldiers. If a Serb kills a Croat, he takes away the latter's knife, the handle of which is decorated with notches. He knows that a Croat soldier has murdered a Serb with this knife. Then he goes and butchers another Croat, and he cuts a new notch in the handle of the knife. If he's killed by a Croat, the latter takes away the knife and stabs a Serb with it. In this way the number of notches on the handle increases, and the knife passes from hand to hand, as it did in the Tito relay race on Youth Day. The handle had once upon a time got stuck in the rock of the one-party system, then the rock crumbled, the knife fell to the ground. The bunches of flowers flew to the feet of those who carried the baton, the enormous celebration went on and on: the nations of the country, the country, the Ministry of the Interior, and the army danced, the comissars saw to it that the splendid festivity went without a hitch, and in the meantime the knife started to live its own life. The growing number of notches turned into the symbols of ethnic war. What a morbid thing it is that the soldiers christened it Tito's baton. Part of the ritual is that the blood is never wiped off it. This is a contract sealed with blood valid to the end of time.

It was announced in Alma Ata today that the Soviet Union had ceased to exist and the Community of Independent States was founded. Yeltsin, the President of Russia, did not demand that all Russians should live in one state. Yesterday, in the Balkans, a new Serb state came into being, the Serbian Republic of Krajina. Its primary objective is that every Serb should live in one state. Russia is far away; Krajina, on the other hand, is near. Why should I be optimistic? Why should I think that hell would be confined within the phantasmagorical Yugoslav circle? No. The United States won the ideological cold war, whereupon an ethnic cold war broke out in the countries on the fringe.

Serbia is front page news in the world press, but perhaps people know less about it today than they did one or two decades earlier. Desimir Tošic writes that almost two thirds of the population of Serbia is made up of settlers who moved here after 1945. An even greater proportion of people in the Vojvodina are new. In other words the ancient, traditional Serbian civilisation is part of the past. The majority of the settlers are Bosnian, Montenegrin or Dinaric Serbs, who represent the rustic, militant culture of the marches. It's quite natural that, after 1945, they were given privileged status because they came in as representatives of the revolutionary army. If the first Yugoslavia (until 1941) was Serbian Yugoslavia, then the second (until 1991) was Dinaric Yugoslavia. In both cases, the village (or ancient) civilization got

the upper hand. Perhaps the surprising thing about this is that in the anti-modernization and anti-urban East Central Europe, they consider these marches, this non-urban culture as the true, the unspoilt, the authentic, the deep-rooted.

H. announced recently at a public function that she would go anywhere and talk to anyone in the interests of the Hungarian minority. Not many people have remained resolute in this way, you see much more impotence covered up by bragging. The defiance cleared H.'s face of any ulterior motive, her profile was rejuvenated, her expressive sensuality was reminiscent of the innocence of childhood. I'm sure it wasn't the stage lighting that produced this effect, but the spoken words. Up till now I've always associated self-sacrifice with some sort of Jansenist resolve or supernatural strength. For the first time in my life I saw self-sacrifice raised to sensuality impregnated with mature feminine tact.

I buck up enough courage to go down to the Danube bank. Who comes here nowadays? Where does the shadow coming towards me disappear to? What does he want of me? Why did one of the shadows turn after me in the dark? Why doesn't he ask me something? Why should I go home? Why isn't anyone waiting for me at home?

For the first time in six months I set foot abroad. The border guard looks at my passport and checks my exit permit issued by the military authorities. He gives me a piercing look. How many people has he taken final leave of with that severe glance? What can he be thinking? Whether I'll come back or not? One more, one less? How would he know that he is weighing up a *Lokalpatriot* without a country, a bastard child of Europe, whom the world has disinherited, and who has drawn the conclusion from this that bastards are incapable of changing their names and their imaginary homes. Without a home or a name they can never be refugees. As I cross the border I am reminded of Czeslaw Milosz's Pythagoras tag, the threat that anyone who leaves his homeland must expect the Erinyes to be at his heels forever. On the other hand, I firmly believe that this is better than waiting permanently for them. They know that wherever I go I cannot leave my homeland since there is none in reality. I have created a country with my orphaned imagination. I insist on it more than on the real one, just to make it real. So they have no intention of punishing me, and anyway that's not their job. They are allowed to merely banter with only the pseudo-nomads.

Želimir Žilnik's car often breaks down. He is a film director awarded the Golden Bear in Berlin. It's snowing heavily, we get out, poke around at the engine, and hurry on. Near the border between Czechoslovakia and Germany the countryside has a magnetic atmosphere, this is exactly how Krleža pictured the whole Austro-Hungarian Empire. On the road to the frontier better and better looking Czech girls hitch lifts with German cars. From time to time, a car slows down, a bald head looks out of the window, then with his index finger he beckons the girl to get in. She happily jumps into the car. The German border police give us a thorough going over, they ask for our letters of invitation, then demand that we show them the German

marks we have for food and lodging. Zilnik has about 500 marks on him, so do I, that's quite a fortune in Újvidék but here it's just enough for the border policeman to push it angrily aside. They mutter and grumble, and I can see from their expression that they are trying to detect whether or not we intend to remain in Germany as refugees. We are worse off than the Czech girls who get themselves ferried across the border by elderly Germans so that they can spend the night in a reasonably clean hotel. The border police wink knowingly at their fellow countrymen. The girls smile submissively, happy that they don't even have to show their passports.They could say that they have been touched by the air of western freedom. The debasement of East Central Europe is just like the failure of a romantic uprising. It is like the annihilation of a snowflake, a snowflake which at the very last moment acknowledges that nature is stronger.

I'm no less distracted in Berlin. I wander the streets aimlessly, and nights I collapse with tiredness. As I walk the streets I occasionally go into one of the street phone-boxes and dial tensely, wanting to hear a familiar voice from Újvidék. She's out shopping. She's gone for a walk with the children. Then she'll cook lunch. I don't know whether there'll be flowers on the table. That's all I want to know, nothing else, the voice betrays all sorts of other things. Including things one can't talk about on the phone. When we looked at each other in silence for a long time at home, we learnt to speak a secret language. I leave the phone booth and with my hand I protect my face from the icy Berlin wind. This short trip abroad seems to be an unnecessary luxury. The familiar voice rings in my ears, I soothe the bad conscience of the vagabond with the illusion of abolishing distance. Far from the war, on the Kurfürstendamm I mutter meaningless words to myself. If a passerby were to decipher this halting speech, he'd surely be surprised that I long to be in the place where I have no home.

The new Hungarian censorship gives me a scratch. At times the conceited conscripts of the mother-country's multi-party system grab the minorities by the scruff of their necks. Like it or lump it: I've got my role cut out. I should be the heroic evidence of national unity. Or its adhesive, if that's the way fate has it. The unreliable elements should learn from my fate. More and more people are leaving Vojvodina for Budapest in order to check up on and call to account those left at home. But what happens if one day there won't be anyone to check up on? I'd like to live in Budapest and in Újvidék, but that's almost impossible. One or the other! In Budapest I'm a member of an exotic minority, who's expected to feel as the majority wants me to. At times they are friendly, but I must be like a looking glass: reflecting them. This looking glass is at the same time a festive Wailing Wall, the symbol of an exemplary eternal suffering. Sometime it's dirty and then it has to be firmly wiped.

I'm reading something by an old friend: he draws a strict boundary between Central Europe and the Byzantine East. Serbia and Romania are in the latter. Unintentionally he turns several million Hungarians out of Central Europe. We land up behind the new Iron Curtain, in the Orthodox world. Perhaps in secret or thanks

to some sort of coincidence or the mercy of the chaos of integration we could smuggle ourselves back in again. I'll only be free of barbarism if I become contraband. In a few days I return to Újvidék. If they want to study my wounds I'd rather hide them.

There is a name on my answer phone; I know exactly what it is warning me about. News spreads like wildfire; the lights go out in the apartment blocks. I'm sitting at home with a deserter friend of mine. We hear a door slam in the staircase, the lift slows down and we are both silent. Demonstrations in Belgrade. Újvidék does not demonstrate; mobilization is underway all over the town. There's no difference between reward and punishment in this town. It's fallen into a catatonic state. Even in Belgrade they don't need the police and tear-gas to break up the crowds: the soft velvety opposition subsides impotently. The paralysis is general, all energy is sapped, only a black hole with magnetic force remains. I go out into the street late at night. I set out for the Danube on foot. Even at this hour the avenue is full of brightly lit florists; flowers are very much in demand in times of danger. I've never seen so many lovely flowers as I have these last months. I buy a bunch and stroll down the street. I glance at my watch, I arrive on time: coffee, grilled sandwiches and cheese scones are waiting for me. The meeting of the senses cheers me up, my tongue is loosened, I can manage quite a long conversation, every word is like a knot tied in a handkerchief, it reminds me of the knot before, and I find this investigation more and more sensible. In the spiritual air-raid shelter I have hope, as I concentrate on a single shining point. The danger sharpens and refines my feelings: in the darkness that surrounds me the lack of faith that I'm burdened with nevertheless has an uplifting effect, and I acknowledge the fact that common sense is needed to believe in miracles.

An official puts on the agenda a cleansing of the media in the spirit of national sentiment, but he says it all with such self-pity he might be crooning a syrupy pop song. All around me the ethnic structures are being clarified. The exposed representatives of the majority nation chastise the "Yugoslavianism" which has withered away the Serbian national identity. The whole region says the same thing in various languages: "Our nation has need of spiritual self-defence". I've even read that Yugoslavianism was propagated by agents of the Vatican and the Komintern. I'm capable of adapting to the unbearable life, I'll soon be like a mole, but when I hear unbearable thoughts I still feel deep resentment. When I run up against them I become aware that our words will soon be like broken windows.

"Death to the Hungarians," was written on the wall of my sister's house. My brother-in-law noticed it as he was going to work. He roused his son, who spent the whole morning scrubbing the paint off the wall. A big dirty patch was left. The boy learnt more than his father. The work of his hands proved that there are signs which you can never get off a wall. ❧

(To be concluded in our next issue)

János Székely

Pálinkás

(Short story)

The ground of the manège was covered in sawdust.

They spread it every day without ever taking away the old, so that in time a span-thick layer accumulated, even thicker in the corners. By the evening, the riders always ravaged it, treading on it mercilessly and galloping all over, leaving a million moon craters of hoof-print, but by the morning the stablehands smoothed it down carefully; on festive occasions they even raked a sort of naive pattern (squares or a line of waves) on it.

It served not only to quieten the gait of the horses, making things comfortable, sparing their hoofs, but also to absorb their dirt. But anything that sucks in filth for very long, with time becomes filth itself. The sawdust of the manège dried a little in the hottest summer months, but otherwise it gleamed moist and red, like felt, casting out pale nodes of mould and giving off a pungent smell of urine, sweat and dung.

Now that spring was coming, a weird change took place in the sawdust of the arena. It was still half wet, but already half dry; a sharp line divided it into a winter and a summer corner, diagonally, depending on the direction of the oblique spring sunshine that swept along the ground from morning to evening, leaving parts of it in the shade.

The horses were lined up to wait for the class.

They stood in line on the shady side of the sawdust, on short rein, in twos, in charge of one stablehand for each pair, as in the stable over there, where there was also one stablehand to two horses. They chewed the bit with an air of boredom, sighed deeply in the squeeze of the girth, stretched their necks long in their effort to loosen the rein—which made the horsemen stagger and check their unruly animals with a mad tugging of the bridle.

They were good horses; English thoroughbreds crossed with peasant horses, Nonius's brood; halfbreds every one of them. They inherited a spare build, skittish force and self-control from

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their sires; a winter coat, staying power and being undemanding from their dams.The grey ones were beautiful (especially the apple-grey ones with ringed croups), the black ones too with their short, shiny coat, but even the yellow horses and the black-maned chestnuts were really superb. There were no cream horses, only that grey gelding standing at the end of the row with its head hanging and with the tiny reddish spots all over the filthy white coat aroused some antipathy.[1]

Who has not been amazed by the rich and plastic vocabulary of an old trade? These ancient terms are splendid, they are precise and vivid, almost tangible; perfect metaphors each and every one of them; in their genesis and spontaneous action we can contemplate language as if *in statu nascendi*. The old gelding at the end of the line was a 'fly-blown grey' in the ancient terminology of horse-breeding. It was grey, a fly-blown grey—and yes, it looked as if thousands and thousands of horse-flies (or rather, reddish-brownish dung-flies) had swarmed all over its coat; they settled everywhere, even on the muzzle, even around the eyes, even on the legs, they spread over the horse disgustingly from crest to hoof—it aroused a desire to go over and flap them away with a compassionate heart.

Nature does not care a whit about aesthetics; she doesn't care if we think of something as repulsive or beautiful. This big horse, however, seemed to be suffering from his own colour; although the high withers, the strong, sinewy legs and the slanting scapula indicated a first class bloodline; very possibly he was the quickest and noblest horse in the whole squadron. But this would never be known. Pálinkás—for this was the miserable creature's name—had decided from the outset to forego the idea of using his inborn talents, he had refused to make an effort and had chosen the easy solution: to slack and idle. It is possible to say that, whenever a living being is born, a lamp lights up in them (a kind of inner flame) and this is expressed in their eyes. In Pálinkás's eyes this light had died long ago. He was disillusioned, lazy and unruly, ambition (the most human characteristic of horses) was completely lacking in him; he was not willing to do more than loiter, loiter and eat—and even then he was sneaky, surly and gloomy.

Right now, among his fellows, all saddled, he was waiting for the class. Since he was standing at the end of the line, he was the first to get the golden May sunshine wandering on the sawdust day by day. The rest were plunged in shade. Pálinkás, alone, almost lit up in the beams coming in through the window. His coat glowed yellow and white, his russety flies had sharp outlines, they were about to swarm, one could almost hear them buzz. He stood there with an air of resignation, his head hanging, as if forbearing through his countenance his own spots sucking his blood and ovipositing into him. Or as if the stinking, reddish filth of the sawdust had splashed on him; that was how Pálinkás stood there, enveloped in light and misery.

1 ■ In Hungarian a grey means a white-maned horse with dark skin. A white horse has white skin—there are such horses, but they are very rare (Author's note).

Keeping pace and in closed formation, the class turned from the row of chestnuts, whose leaves perched on the branches transparent-red and gluey, like as many nestlings freshly hatched. Hardly had they entered the hazy darkness, opening the low gate of the manège, when Pálinkás's master caught sight of his horse. A mute terror seized him immediately. Even though he knew it would happen (why should it not?), even though he was tortured and full of misgivings for days and was practically prepared, yet now, when his own eyes convinced him of what he knew anyway, he became even more desperate. He didn't expect anything different—yet he was disappointed. "Here he is, here he comes again, he was led out again," he said to himself with a chill and the—now permanent—anxiety he had been trying to repress so firmly, with so much effort that it had become the only real sense in his life—this ferocious, animal anxiety once again overcame him.

His self-deluding hope and secret comfort in the midst of his internal struggle that Pálinkás "will perhaps not be led out this time," was not completely unfounded. It had happened, in the course of the previous six months, it had happened twice that the monstrous fly-blown grey had remained in the stable, who knows why, perhaps he had had to be shod. On these occasions, his young master was given another horse from those ridden by the second year, and he remembered those events as great festive occasions, unforgettable hours. The riding-lesson was joyous at those times, full of glee and relief. Cincér, the white-faced cream with white stockings, whom he rode instead of Pálinkás, had a mild trot, a long and comfortable gallop, and she was always happy to break into a gallop, since she liked movement. True, she would sometimes raise her head in the gallop, hitting his rider firmly on the nose with her bony headtop (making tears and snot flow abundantly), but what was this compared to Pálinkás's atrocities?

The young man in riding-boots—practically a child—trying to conceal, as usual, a genuine terror by stiff, soldierly behaviour, hated his horse for reasons other than his mere appearance. He would not have minded a much uglier one, a shabby cream horse or a gypsy hack with dung on its croup. The trouble was that Pálinkás had a reputation in the whole squadron for his shrewd crimes. He was not only ugly and lazy, but everybody knew he was an evil, sly and dull animal. The antipathy his appearance aroused, far from inciting penance in him, led to an open, unbridled debauch and lewd revenge. He would never tire of showing his hatred for mankind. This creature, always languid when loitering, suddenly started to move when somebody mounted him. He simply would not tolerate a rider. Whenever he had a rider he did not manage to throw with his very first movement, he would buck for a quarter of an hour if necessary: he pranced, flung out, pranced again, flung out again, twisting his body like brumbies in Texas do when they are being broken in. And he never gave in; even if he took a few moments of rest, he always started over again after a few more minutes: he proved unbreakable.

It is natural for a horse to kick, but this one bit as well; the arm of the stablehand who mounted him regularly, tended him, rubbed him down, fed and watered him,

was always purple. Once, after three quarters of an hour of struggle, he even managed to throw the stable overseer himself—he even stamped on the poor man in revenge. The better a horseman was, the more he hated him; he was personally angry with the best ones. When he was led out on a long rein, or when he felt that the stablehand's attention was somewhere else (and the rein was somewhat looser), he pranced and tried to knock them down with a writhing movement of his front hoofs, quick as lightning. After taking revenge, he immediately sank back into languid indifference. After all, every horse had his own faults: Baku also knocked down his stablehand from time to time; Vali was ticklish, she went crazy, squealed and neighed every time someone touched her; Regös bucked and kicked; Ede was a biter. But Pálinkás had all these faults together. Like the wallboard representing the perfectly sick horse (showing all the possible horse diseases: malanders, curb, scab, and heaves), Pálinkás collected and practiced with apparent relish all the crimes of saddle-horses. Perfect is something with no defects. But something that has all the defects can only be perfect too. This was precisely Pálinkás's case: perfectly terrible and terribly perfect.

The class marched into the spacious hall and lined up on the shiny side of the sawdust in a split second, also in a straight line, facing the horses. Pálinkás's master, the shortest of his class and therefore at the end of the line, was face to face with his mount. Outwardly in an upright position, but inwardly nauseated and trembling with the fatal knowledge of imminent hellfire, he looked at Pálinkás, frozen into sunlight; at the hanging head, the iridescent eyes and the flies around the eyes. There was nothing else to do, in half a minute he has to run to the horse (and enthusiastically, as if pulled by a burning desire), he has to mount and immediately, most probably, he will roll in the sawdust of the manège. Then, ashamed, his knees and elbows aching, he will have to stagger to his feet, remount, roll in the sawdust again, and so on and so forth, without any rest, for two whole hours, ignoring his snickering fellows, until his stomach turned upside down and his brain dizzy. And he will be lucky if Pálinkás does not stamp on him or knock him down! This can also happen (why not?), and probably will happen by the end of the second hour, when Pálinkás loses his temper completely. That is what he will have to do, there is no way out, this is what always happened, this is what will always happen; he will have to run to the horse, mount, even if the horse throws him, breaks his bones and humiliates him a thousand times—because it is his horse.

"Mine, mine, that's all, he's mine," he kept saying to himself, numb with pointless grief and bitterness, even though he knew very well that the horse was not his. Nobody could keep his own horse, they all belonged to the army. It was by mere chance that he got Pálinkás; he fell to his lot out of twenty-seven horses; God, how easily he could have got another one! He could have been given kind Broomback or the splendid jumper Newmanor, and how different, how radically different riding-lessons would be then—how much easier life would be!

Pálinkás's tiny master ran his eyes enviously over the greys, chestnuts and black horses that stood in the shade, his own ugly monster gleaming alone, enwrapped in light. The memory of the first riding-lesson flashed to his mind. The class stood there in the same order on the steaming sawdust, facing the horses he did not know a thing about, he did not know even one of them, he had no idea how they would be distributed, in alphabetic order or according to size. It was neither this nor that; the short command rang out: "To horse!"—and his fellows started to run immediately; they went straight to the target, like bees to the hive, trying to snatch the rein from the stablehand's grip, jostling and pushing each other, taking one horse after another. Of course, he ran too, since everybody ran, but without a well-defined goal, vacillating, uncertain, so that each horse he landed by was taken, bridle around the neck, stirrups being adjusted. So he ran on, scurried to and fro and finally he realized that even though in the beginning there were as many horses as horsemen, he remained without one. Not true! The instructor called his attention to a masterless grey over at the end of the line. So he ran to the horse, turned out the stirrup and mounted with great difficulty, with the stableman's help. How could he have known that Pálinkás would remain his forever and that, with Pálinkás, two hours of nightmare three times a week would be his lot from then on?

Now that all this flashed into his memory (and vividly, more present than reality) he was inclined to think that perhaps it was not mere chance after all that this horse was assigned to him. His fellows were practically all the children of military men, the ambitious offspring of ambitious officers and NCOs who could, and probably did, have some idea about horses. Besides, who knows, they may have had a word with the stablehands—at least, they had asked about the nature of the animals and about the best choices. From what he knew about local customs, he imagined this to be possible, even probable; today he himself would do the same. At that time, however, he had not a clue about anything at all. He found himself in the cavalry unsuspecting, by chance, because he could not differentiate between the services, and only the cavalry was short of men. The others in his class were not only familiar with horses, they probably had a cavalry spirit inculcated in them by the time they had to choose a horse; as for him, he knew only that he wanted to be a soldier. Not that he thought of himself as fit to be one, but because he did not consider himself fit to be anything else. He had manifold talents, various interests, but he was not especially interested in anything. "Why not be a soldier?", he decided at random, not even dreaming that there were gunners, sappers, hussars, infantrymen, but no soldiers *tout court.*

Yes, everybody but himself must have had their chosen horse, that is why they dashed by him resolutely. This indecision of his, this clear fit-for-nothingness and at the same time fit-for-everythingness (which made him a soldier)—this is why he ended up with the last of the horses, this is what gave him Pálinkás, and not fortune! That is how it had to be, that is how it probably was. Then, at the first riding-lesson, the moment he climbed into the saddle (slowly the stablehand moved away), he felt

the horse jerk, or was it only its skin, and then he took wing, flew over the horse's head like playing leapfrog and found himself in the sawdust. In the very beginning he flew rather lightly, didn't even roll over, fell on his feet like a cat. Later, however, as his horseman's ambition grew and his seat became steadier, Pálinkás had more and more trouble throwing him, and then he fell horribly, tremendously. The third or the fourth time he burrowed into the sawdust sliding on his face, somersaulting, or fell on the plank with an enormous bang so that he became breathless and could not move for a good while.

He had to jump up and remount every time, enduring wordlessly the malicious glee of his gallopping fellows. This was the most horrible thing, this knowledge that he was being laughed at openly as a bad horseman and as somebody who obviously had no place among the rest. He would have done anything to make up for this defect, to wash down the shame, the more so because in the meantime he was also infected with the cavalry-spirit.

A good trooper
Has it fine...

he sang full-throated on the march, and in his letters home he quoted Balassa's lines that he had learnt by heart, and without effort, in Mr Jánosi's class:

Good Saracen horses
Jumping under them...

or:

And you, falcon-winged swift horses.

These were the songs he sang, these were the poems he recited, scared to death of his own horse and aware that he was a miserable horseman. He would have done anything to make up for this, but months had gone by and he was no better off, in fact, he was worse off with every passing day. The more he was scared of his horse the more readily it threw him; the more he was thrown the more he was scared of the horse. His fear and Pálinkás's viciousness found and nurtured each other, and there was no way to know to what point this could be endured and where it would lead.

He understood how much this wretched grey had filled his inner world when he began dreaming about him. It was not enough for the horse to torture him for two hours three times a week in the manège (and who knows how many hours more on the Friday ride), from then on he took over his nights as well. He saw Pálinkás in his dream dimly at a distance, and he was filled with an unspeakable happiness that the horse was so far away. But suddenly he saw him more clearly, in clearer detail

and distinct; hard as he tried not to admit, in the end he was compelled to acknowledge that Pálinkás was approaching. It was not that he moved (his feet remained under him and stiff), he just grew. Slowly, very slowly, he could make out the thin mane, the scanty crest, and then the flies: it was as if he himself was slowly coming nearer to the horse. He could not understand how he could do such a thing, what made him aproach Pálinkás (when it was so good to be far from him). Yet he hastened closer and closer and the horse continued to grow visibly. He was standing in half-profile, life size by now, he could have touched him if he had just reached out with his arms. Yet even then he did not stop growing. As if he was being blown up like a balloon, like a bubble: now he stood twice, three times his real size, looking him steadily in the eye; bristles thick as a finger stood out on his flexible muzzle, his blunt, yellow teeth opened a yard wide when he neighed. And after all that, he still grew! Only the eyes were visible now, the huge, evil-looking whites of the eye full of blood vessels and the pupils, not round but elliptic; the sunlight blazed on them so that whirling, wheeling circles of light, coloured rainbows swirled all around. When Pálinkás' eye (by then grown big as the sky) finally burst, it was the reveille horn.

Another time he saw a green wood in his dream, a wood of beautiful, tall trees, the foliage lightly tousled and blown by the wind. A great silence hung in the wood, a moist dense shade; only the wind blew above, only some stray beams swept the under-brush. But suddenly there was a rustle; a distant rattling of the under-brush filtered through the whistling of the foliage. Yes, he could definitely hear it: steps approached him, something was walking inside. He strained all his senses and listened. After a while, Pálinkás stepped out from two straight tree-trunks; he walked clumsily, stretching his long neck dumbly; he was ugly, horrible, but he carried a beautiful figure of a woman on his back and there was a splendid, spiral-shaped horn in the middle of his forehead.

After some time he could hardly account to himself what he had dreamt and what he had really lived through, since what had actually happened was as impossible as his wildest dream. Since he never had enough sleep (he woke up exhausted and broken each time), dream and reality had become more and more mixed in his consciousness. Together they produced an apocalyptic horse, as large as the world, a gigantic nightmare, a terrible, fly-blown grey jade, who filled his horizon completely and whose death he desired, because he was scared of him, scared, scared, terribly scared, and all his moral strength was not enough to overcome his fear.

True, some of his dreams cast a spell upon him for days on end, with their mysterious, intimate atmosphere. For example, Pálinkás as a unicorn with that lovely veiled girl on his back—that was truly magic. The atmosphere that held his dreams made him try to see Pálinkás with a different eye, to understand him. Perhaps this was because of his colour, perhaps the antipathy radiating towards him was what triggered off reciprocity, he said to himself peaceably; perhaps it was

only ceaseless retaliation, lashing and lovelessness that elicited this depraved revenge; that is how it must be, it could not be otherwise. "If that's how you want me to be, then that's how I'll be", and "give as good as you get" was what he attributed to his unsuspecting horse, and started to pay visits to him up there in the stable, like the others, who went to see their cherished horses from time to time.

In truth he could not tolerate the constant fear and hatred, he wanted to love his horse like the others loved their horses. From then on, he paid his respects to the horse day after day, lumps of sugar and his bread ration in his pocket, pieces of black army bread that he sprinkled with salt so that they would taste even better; this is what he brought to win the horse's favour. It proved a hard but not impossible task. Pálinkás, who had become perfectly used to punishment, kicks and lashes in the course of his life and expected nothing else from anyone in the world, received the peace-offering with suspicion. But let us not hide anything of their strange relationship, the young man was bitten several times. Nevertheless, he stopped giving the horse a swift kick in the stomach, as his sense of justice and his instincts demanded, but sat by him at the edge of the feed-box like an experienced vet and, trembling with fear, he tenderly patted, caressed and comforted him.

Why should we embellish the truth: he was begging the horse for love. In the beginning, the horse was quite surprised, perhaps he didn't even really believe it. But later, when the young man did not punish him for his slyness for the second, for the third time, but continued to feed him, Pálinkás very, very slowly began to thaw. It was not the bread or the sugar that melted his compulsive hatred but the forgiveness, the lack of punishment. After being comforted, he proved to be much more devoted than the stable's favourites, who were used to being patted. From then on, it was enough to enter the stable, the ugly fly-blown grey immediately perked up his ears, neighed and whinnied to express his devotion. He nuzzled the young man's trouser pockets, snorting funnily, trying to fish for the crust, not managing of course, but his master helped him stealthily and both of them laughed.

In the meantime, and in hot waves, a feeling overcame him: how much he hated this horse! That in turn made him hate himself for flattering the horse, for deceiving him in his love. He felt like an unscrupulous adventurer who deceives to get love in return; a shrewd hypocrite who conquers with cold calculation, while feeling nothing but hatred. He was wrong, however: love cannot be feigned forever. If we pretend long enough to be in love with somebody, we will sooner or later fall in love with them; the emptier the vessel, the more it longs to be filled. Very soon he was amazed to realize that he played, made friends with and laughed with the horse with more and more pleasure (and more sincerely). Yes, they laughed whole-heartedly, they even grieved together—especially after riding-lessons.

For Pálinkás—however tame and tender, even coquettish, he became otherwise— continued to be implacable in the manège. There he knew nothing about a truce. They parted in the evening in the greatest understanding possible, on the hay of the stable; they met again with the greatest hopes in the morning on the sawdust;

but the moment he mounted the horse immediately started to buck, flung out with his back bent, pranced, flung out, pranced again, twisting his body; determined, obstinate and as mechanical as if he had been wound up. He would never stop; he continued for ten minutes or a quarter of an hour until he finally managed to get rid of his rider.

"My God, what on earth can this be?", brooded the young man, straining his brains, but there was no response. He might have thought the horse was sick, but his whole appearance contradicted this supposition. Do not imagine Pálinkás to be the broken down hack with rattling bones that his master's dreams transformed him into sometimes. On the contrary, he was a vigorous, sound, extremely well-fed animal, fatter than desirable because of his depraved dodging of work. One look at him would convince anybody that he was not sick at all; he was ugly health itself.

Then perhaps it was his age that made him protest; perhaps he could not endure toil any more. But, first, Pálinkás although his nippers were certainly gone a long time ago, had not approached the final limit of a horse's life. He was not young, but not really old either; his name showed that, too. Although studs gave quite impossible names to their foals in those days, they marked each age group with a different initial in alphabetical order (Aladár, Baku, Cincér), so that the age of the horses could be read on their name-plates. Pálinkás, then, had completed his fourteenth year at most. The cause for his behaviour could not be senile decay— a second possibility— because this wild bucking cost him ten or twenty times as much energy than trotting peacefully for four or five hours with his rider on his back. Indeed, he exposed his deteriorating powers to shorter but much more intensive work.

"What on earth can it be?", the desperate young man brooded in vain, and sometimes, after a riding-lesson, when he sat by the horse to grieve together over their failure, he asked his horse the same thing. "What's wrong with you? Tell me what's your trouble? Talk to me, sweet." The horse would lean his head on him, press his forehead against his master's forehead, and almost cry with emotion. It was obvious that he understood the question, or at least the emotive charge of it, and if he could speak, he would answer, but he was condemned to be mute to the end of his days. He was not allowed to, he could not say a word, he could only communicate with his body, with his existence. Whatever he could say with his being, he had said already, he had explained it openly and distinctly, a clearer statement, hard as he may try, was impossible for him. And this filled both horse and horseman with even more grief.

Now that he stood there, facing the fly-blown grey ablaze in the sunshine, all this flitted through his mind. No, it did not flit through, it was all there present in his mind, he knew all these things simultaneously. The terror and hatred he had always felt for his horse here in the manège was mixed with the pity and love that had developed in the stable during their intimacy, and this made waiting even more

suspenseful. Whatever might follow, he would strive to persist, to remain in the saddle, that was as much as he could do, that was what depended on him; he would endure the rest just as he had endured so far. He mounted with this resigned fatalism when the instructor finally arrived.

Pálinkás was in action immediately. He started his regular show with a great impetus, mechanically; the rest trotted around steadily while he bucked in the middle of the arena. This time, however, he did not manage to throw his rider so easily. So he increased the tempo, pranced, flung out, raged as never before, kicked up a sunlit cloud of sawdust around him, but the young man stood the test firmly. He clenched his teeth, clutched at the saddle and decided to let his fingers or his thighs be torn off rather than burrow in the sawdust to his fellows' glee. And Pálinkás experimented with new figures. He threw his front-hooves forward on the ground, pushed his croup high and, muzzle in the dust, tried to shake off his rider, jumping high from time to time, nearly somersaulting. His master, however (since, except for two occasions, he had been on the worst horse), had learnt more and had become a better horseman, it seemed, than his sneering fellows. He clung with all his might; when he bumped back to the saddle, he found his balance again and pressed his knees firmly, he worked hard with rein and thighs, in other words, he struggled and his struggle was rewarded with success. True, it was not a struggle of knowledge, of skill, but rather of stubborn persistence, and was probably not very edifying from the outside. A terribly ugly horse, covered from head to hoof with foam, raging, clowning with a rider clutching desperately on his back, going bumpity bump, tumbling about on his back... No, it cannot be called an impressive sight by any standards. However, the young man felt that it was, because it was the first time he had managed to make Pálinkás give up the battle, calm down in his rage and range for a few moments among his fellows who had been trotting around calmly all the time.

He continued to be on the alert, of course, since his cherished mount could start any time, he knew only too well that the horse preferred the unexpected attack; indeed, one of his never-failing tricks was to surprise. It happened when the instructor ordered the gallop. The gallop gave Pálinkás the pretext to start a series of never ending and unsittable tiny bounces, then (increasing the tempo again) a mad bucking, with enormous leaps covering huge spaces, pulling to the left, to one side; his rider was fluttering and floating on him, flying after him like a rag. He did not touch the saddle any more, he clutched on by his nails. He could already hear his body hitting the plank, but luck came to his aid another time. When Pálinkás employed his final ruse and, after his side-ways gallop, halted suddenly by leaning on his fore-legs, his rider was thrown back to his seat. He found himself in the saddle unexpectedly. This obviously happened by mere chance, he did not attribute it to himself, all the same it filled him with the joy of victory.

Then the horse pretended to give up the battle a second time: he hurried towards the other horses. He galloped swiftly alongside the long wall, his body elongated,

his rider felt the ground come closer and closer and he could foresee that something would happen at the corner. It was unthinkable that Pálinkás could turn at the short wall at this speed. He guessed that he would dash straight into the boards and brake there again; this was very probable, so he prepared for the ruse. However, this was not how it happened. Just at the corner, the horse leaned low, like a motorbike, his hoofs sprayed dust to the side, up to the windows, and his rider felt clearly, knew for sure, that very soon something irredeemable would happen. It is impossible for the horse to straighten from this terrible tilt after the curve. He tried to support him with the rein, to balance him by shifting his own centre of gravity, but Pálinkás tilted even lower, came closer and closer to the ground with his sweaty side, when finally all his four legs slipped and he somersaulted onto the sawdust.

This is what happened: he fell over in order to have his rider tumble down.

After the banging and spine-chilling fall, Pálinkás's rider regained consciousness and realized that bitter saliva flooded his lips and a terrible weight pressed on him. Apparently, he was underneath, lying in the sawdust, buried under live flesh, under his horse, up to the waist. It was then Pálinkás tried to stagger to his feet. In order to jump onto his feet, he had to press his left foreleg against his rider's chest, the very middle of his chest. "Now he will tread on me," the miserable lad thought, and without any hope whatsoever, he continued to struggle mechanically. He grasped the hoof with two hands and tried to heave it from his chest, to push it sideways in case the horse would in fact press down on him when jumping to his feet. Pálinkás did not agree and lifted his hoof above the young man's heart. He pressed and treaded upon him so strongly that his ribs were cracking and he became breathless; he was afraid that his chest would crack under the terrible weight concentrated on a small area. That was when he committed the only, the final mistake which made his struggle—fought for his human dignity—a vain and ridiculous agony. The mistake that crowned his disgrace. In order to warn his horse and his fellows of the danger threatening him, in order to release at last all the anguish and grief he had been hiding for half a year, he started to moan.

He was amazed to hear his own voice and knew immediately that this was forbidden, this was fatal, that he should not have given in to this temptation for all the treasures of the world. But now it was all over, now all the appearances he had worked so hard to maintain were gone, so he shouted again and again into the spaciousness of the arena: "Ah, ah," and a third time, "Ah!"

His scream was followed by a perplexed silence, and then he could hear a not very carefully hidden snicker—yes, this is logical; he knew it would be so. But it seemed that Pálinkás had also heard his voice. He looked him straight in the face with his enormous eyes full of blood-vessels. A weird light, some kind of recognition flashed in those dead eyes; the pressure of the hoof relaxed a little. Pálinkás jumped up without treading upon his chest with all his weight. In vain did they tell him later that in these situations every horse spares his rider instinctively—he who remembered how Pálinkás trampled the stable overseer underfoot in his rage and who

remembered those eyes gazing at him from so close, believed firmly that his horse had spared him as a special favour, owing to their friendship, personally, as it were.

The regimental medical officer stated that he had a cracked rib, which was unpleasant but basically fortunate, since it mitigated the shame to a certain extent. The injured, the martyrs to riding, were always given a special esteem in the cavalry. Nothing else could have neutralized the class's scorn that his unspeakably vile and cowardly moaning had deserved. "No wonder he moaned, his ribs were broken," was the unspoken general opinion (general pardon, so to say), and because of this he did not have to flee immediately, he could remain among his fellows.

By the time he was ready to leave the sickbay and the huge brace was taken off his chest—that is by the time he could mount a horse again— the manège was utterly deserted, a cheering group of sparrows were bathing in the raked sawdust from morning to night.

The time for the great summer rides had come. Pálinkás's master turned out from the row of green and splendid chestnut trees, this time towards the open arena, and although he sang with all his lungs how fine he had it, he was nauseated again and in his mind he was desperate. Yes, the happy sick leave was over, the salutary fracture of the ribs had healed. Very soon, in five minutes, he would have to stand there in front of the terrible fly-blown grey horse, mount him again, struggle again, fall and so on—in other words, everything was going to start anew. However, there was a surprise waiting for him in the open arena. Pálinkás was not one of the twenty-seven horses called for the hacking practise. Cincér stood in his place, somewhere in the middle of the line. Cincér, the sweet little mare with the white stockings, the one who never did more than bash her rider in the nose with the top of her head.

The young man was overwhelmed with gratitude and inexpressible relief. He could hardly believe his eyes. His secret hope, his only comfort in the midst of his inner struggle that "perhaps Pálinkás would not be led out one day", behold, had come true, he would finally be able to ride happily, peacefully and relieved, and even better, this happened when he had to spend two days on end on horseback. He had been preparing himself for two days of constant defeat on Pálinkás's back (or rather, under his hoofs). My God, how terrible these days would have been! Instead, he would be accorded two days of constant celebration. He mounted Cincér with ease, and, with similar ease and a gentle pressing of the thighs, he led his horse out of line into the cavalcade, after the others.

Hardly had they trotted a few hundred meters among growing corn-fields and yellow wheat-fields, hardly had they arrived under the oak wood (in the depths of which Pálinkás had once appeared in his dream as a unicorn), when his companions called his attention to a splendid sight. Not far from them, on the brink of some kind of ravine or perhaps a gorge, overgrown with blackthorn and whitethorn, a blond rider was struggling with two horses, a grey and a black. His own, the saddle-horse,

was black; the unridden pack-horse was a light grey. Very untypically, it was not the well-fed saddle-horse, but the pack-horse, loaded with ammunition boxes, who was causing the scandal. He obstinately stood there, simply not willing to continue. The more the rider pulled him, irritated, the lazier he backed off; he backed off and off; his neck stretched, his legs standing firmly on the ground, he almost sat down on his croup while trying to pull the black horse with the rider backwards. His real aim, however, was visibly something other than resistance—perhaps he just wanted to get rid of the load. The indication of this was that he stopped short from time to time and tried to shake off the boxes strapped onto his back by shifting his centre of gravity forwards. At these moments the black horse, annoyed, turned rapidly and took advantage of his inattention by kicking him mercilessly several times.

The scene was far from over. After some kicking, the two horses, the grey and the black, stood facing one another and struggled rabidly to draw the other one into the opposite direction, like chickens who had found a worm. The rider, the only link between them, was almost torn in two by this tug of war. He was probably a first class horseman; he managed to remain mounted, though the efforts of both horses weighed upon his knees. As long as he could, he forced and pulled the pack-horse, and when it became necessary, he loosened his grip; in the meanwhile his carbine had slid from his back onto his chest and his cap had fallen off. It was obvious that he would rather die than agree to fall or lose the lead-rein. But it was also obvious that he could not persist till the end of time, he would have to capitulate sooner or later.

The class enjoyed themselves watching the solitary rider's struggle. They enjoyed seeing that older and more dignified riders could also fare badly, since that trio there (the fair-haired rider and the two horses) were probably lagging behind the third year that had started before them. They made malicious guesses who the poor blond rider was; and that stubborn grey horse, the one who was playing the dirty on him. "Pálinkás," recognition flashed into the mind of the young man, the great sufferer who was watching the struggle from a ringside seat (Cincér's saddle) this time. He was the only one to recognize him from afar; he immediately turned from the horse in his heart and took the blond rider's side. "Pálinkás, without doubt, Pálinkás, of course!" Only now that he saw someone else struggling with him, only now could he fully understand the curse he had been released from. It seemed that after all his rib had counted for something and the commanders had acknowledged that the beast was not fit to be a saddle-horse. But, as it had just been demonstrated, he was not fit to be a pack-horse either—not fit for anything!

His excruciating past made him so desperate, he became so angry again at his former mount that when the blond rider—running out of patience and strength—whipped off his carbine, and, short of a better instrument, tried to teach him manners with it, the young man even encouraged him. "Don't spare him", and "pitch into him", he said, approving every blow; the rider bashed the horse, hit him with the stock, thrashed him indiscriminately, now his head, now his croup. He

grabbed the butt with one hand, the leading-rein with the other, pulling the jibbing Pálinkás closer to his own horse (or his own horse to Pálinkás), and as soon as he was close enough, he whacked him. He bashed, he thrashed, he struck untiringly and methodically as if he was taking revenge in his place half a year of torture. Yes, someone else took revenge for his disgrace, he himself was too weak to do so. That is how he should have treated this abomination; he should have taught him manners from the start; how much shame and anxiety he could have been spared! The closer he came to the scene, the more he stuffed himself with a furious joy that Pálinkás had met his match at last. Neither pity nor sorrow rose in him, or if it did, he silenced it like a man. He identified himself with the avenging blond angel, he felt all his movements in his own muscles: "Hit him harder, hit him harder", as if he himself was raging, brandishing up there.

But then a curious thing happened. Pálinkás, who was defending himself trembling, whinnying, almost crying, reached the verge of the ravine (or perhaps gorge), but as the rider was still beating him, he continued to jibe; he jibbed into the bushes flanking the edge; then even further; and suddenly he fell into the gully. He fell with his croup down and rolled over so that he arrived in the depths on his back in the midst of frightful bangs and cracks. As he arrived, so he remained there. He lay there on the boxes strapped onto his back and did not move, did not try to rise onto his feet again, his four legs remained pointing towards the sky, drooping. His blond butcher and victim, whom he finally managed to whip off the saddle while falling, climbed down to him frightened on the clayey bank among the prickly thorns; he shook the horse pointing by the muzzle and by the tender chin, trying to wake him up, but Pálinkás did not even flinch.

The spirit also has his own economy: if something is ready-made for us, we do not have to create it again. Since the image of a carcase on its back was once expressed perfectly, we do not have to bother to create it again, we can simply steal it—this is what a quotation is for. Thus, Pálinkás, like Baudelaire's carcase:

> *Legs raised like some old whore, far gone in passion,*
> *The breathing, deadly poison-sweating mass*
> *Opened its paunch in careless cynic fashion,*
> *Ballooned with evil gas.*
>
> *Transl. Roy Campbell*

And this moist, white belly, sweaty with torture, was already swarming with flies. Yellow flies, reddish and brown flies, flies impatient to oviposit, blow-flies. Pálinkás's own flies, the ones he was fatally wearing from his birth, infested his underbelly, but even his groins; his armpit, his chest; they settled on his coat by the thousands, in swarms, one could almost hear them buzz.

He saw all this clearly, because they rode straight past Pálinkás. They even had to make a detour to the verge of the ravine, because the carcase was blocking the way.

It was a strange case, a great sensation, it had never happened in the squadron before. Someone had beaten a stubborn pack-horse to death by himself during a hack! They thought of the blond youth in the third year with a horror mixed with admiration, this youth who committed this heroic deed and villainy; they discussed whether he would be discharged from the cavalry or punished less severely.

He was not punished at all. Two days later, when they arrived home from the wonderfully successful hack, from the beautiful ride leading through woods and fields, through distant misty valleys, the news awaited them that the vet had in the meantime dissected Pálinkás's carcase. He had found horrors inside. Yes, there were a few fresh bruises on his head and on his croup, undoubtedly, but he would have easily recovered from those; the cause of death was not the beating. It was the aneurysm of a vital artery in his chest that had cracked suddenly, burst, as it were, as a consequence of a sudden increase in blood pressure. It had killed him as instantly as a shot through the heart. It was not quite clear if it had really happened as the vet had said or if he was merely trying to find an excuse for the blond rider—anyway, that is what the autopsy report stated. Certainly, however, other things also emerged in the course of the dissection. For example, a fracture on his spine; an old, hidden fracture, perhaps from the time he was a colt, an encyst spinous process on his tenth vertebra spondyle that had split off and wandered away, that had no external symptoms but had probably caused inexpressible pain to the wretched horse whenever somebody mounted him (or whenever his back was burdened). This was the key to his being, to his behaviour, to all his fury; this was what he had tried, but not managed, to express so bravely. He could have been used for anything else, he could have drawn a plough, a cart or a waggon merrily and happily; instead, they always wanted to ride him; always on his back, they wanted only his back, although he should never have been saddled at all. They demanded something from Pálinkás that was painful, that contradicted his being, that he could never concede. All his life he was compelled to do something he was not capable of.

His one-time master, the tiny, childlike youth was overwhelmed with remorse once he learnt this. He remembered his horse's dead eyes, his groans, his tameness in the stable, his protest in the manège—all this had been extremely clear talk, it could not have been clearer. Yet he had understood nothing. He remembered well his enthusiasm for the blond rider, cheering and encouraging him to beat and thrash the horse, to take revenge for him, for his half a year of agony; he remembered that he identified himself completely with Pálinkás's torturer, indeed, he had wished the horse dead many times before. He felt like a murderer. He walked up the chestnut row, stepped into the stable and through the little grating noises of the horses champing at their oats and the pitter-patter of their hoofs, he thought he heard the intimate neigh of the ugly fly-blown grey. He sat by the feed-box like he used to do when, trembling with fear but patiently (in the manner of an experienced vet), he had calmed and caressed him in order to win his love, and gazed at the empty stall of his horse. The stall was thoroughly swept and strewn with crackling wheat-straw,

the name-plate had been taken off, the feed-box was emptied. Everything was clean and beautiful; everything was ready to receive the new resident; as if nobody had ever stood there before. Only the feed-box and the bright, polished surface of the two bails between the stalls, only the beams gleaming a waxen yellow reminded him of Pálinkás—it was Pálinkás who had rubbed his body against them and polished them bright. That was all that remained of him, the glow of the beams, nothing more. And perhaps the painful loss in his one-time rider, the feeling that once upon a time he was, but he isn't any more; he will never be any more. And the memory, the memory of his kicks, of his devotion, and yes, of his crimes, which were actually the crimes of suffering. The young man crouching by the feed-box gazed at all this for a long time, looking into himself, as it were, and in his pity and sudden enthusiasm he wanted to do something special, something expiating to redeem all that is of course basically irredeemable. He wished to erect a memorial to his beloved horse, so that at least his name and his fame would survive. Among all those who ever lived, all the people and all the animals, Pálinkás's name must last, because everyone suffers much and in many ways as long as they live, but perhaps no one ever suffered as much and in such a way as this miserable horse had. That is what the shocked young man wanted to do, he even felt that he was capable of it; but how to go about it, he had no idea. ❧

ÉVA AJTÓS

Johann Lucas Kracker: Abraham and the Three Angels.
1752-1757. Diocesal Collection.
Móra Ferenc Museum, Szeged.

George Szirtes

The Stranded Whale

"Ritratto qui dal naturale appunto"
—for Victor Határ, out of Gombrich

Goltzius, the Dutchman, gave him ears,
and the anonymous Italian at Ancona
who merely drew the Dutch monster again
felt no imperative on his part to explain
the curious transplant or to thank the donor.
He knew a thing was only what appears:
an alien contraption
which could be reproduced with a new caption.

I've never seen a whale too close, but felt
that supine weight unroll along the strand,
the crowds of people scurrying with knives
and tubs and hats and multiplicity of lives
to raid the store of life which lay to hand:
a thousand tiny candles that would melt
in the furnace of a belly
capacious enough to hold all Italy.

I imagine a vast stomach lined with rooms:
there's sunlight, a fresh wind, a curtain blowing,
and voices, brief enough to mist a glass.
And underneath it all a faint wheezing of brass,
the whale beginning to sing, his ears growing,
its pinnae shaking gently as he booms.
The whale defies comparison:
but when he sings it's just as well to listen.

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.

Victor Határ

Compte Rendu, in the Guise of a 'Letter to the Editor'

"Another damned thick, square book! Always scribble, scribble! Eh! Mr Gibbon?"
Duke of Gloucester (1781)

Sir, you have asked me to write about my arrival to these shores and settling down and fitting in in England in a few words. What can I say in less than half-a-million words? What can I say that would not sound to English ears as dead-pan flattery, outpourings of my gratitude for having been accepted, granted asylum and, later on, citizenship?

What Gabriele D'Annunzio wrote about France, "everyone has two homelands, one is his own and one—*la France*," holds good of England too: yet there is a difference. *Marianne* takes it for granted that everybody owes her adoration, admiration, transport at the sight of her beauty: tributes to be given, prostrated, to which she nonchalantly turns her back, yet frowns on the *sale métèque* who speaks broken French. But *Britannia* is delighted on hearing your thick accent, your mistakes and malapropisms, and even if you implore her to stop you and correct you she hugs you and beams at you with a radiant smile, "Me, to correct your mistakes or your accent? I wouldn't dream of it! It makes your charm!"

You feel welcome, you feel at ease and at home at once: and that makes all the difference. So, aren't you a bit late with your funny questionnaire? I have spent half of my adult life in this country and by now I am a kind of a freak, a mongrel: I find my bearings in this troubled world of ours as an Englishman. My outlook, my taste in literature, in music, in philosophy is English; though in culinary matters my stomach is hopelessly Continental. When in Rome, in Paris, in Cologne or Munich, Vienna or Budapest, I feel ruefully "at home" and, unlike a number of my monoglot fellow citizens trotting the globe, I'm shamelessly polyglot. It is that kind of schizophrenia which is safe and sound, you can live with it and even make an asset of it.

Victor Határ
is a poet, novelist, playwright, essayist, critic, and broadcaster living in England since 1956.

My sins against the Holy Ghost (or call it *Genius Loci*) are manifold. My interest in, and knowledge of, cricket is negligible. All ball games (base-foot-basket—and those yet to be invented) are wasted on me. Golf doesn't appeal to

me, it never did (I find outright irritating a President who, always in golfing outfit and ever on outdoor holidays, delegates world-affairs to his minions and is conspicuous in the White House by his absence). Of course, I started by being nonplused and dumbfounded by everything, my English being next to nothing (in spite of the fact that by then my translations of *Tristram Shandy* and *Sentimental Journey* were in the bag)—but from the word go we hit it off excellently.

At 42 but feeling 22, intoxicated by the Holy Presence of Freedom, I simply felt "transfigured", radiating happiness. After the turmoil of 1956, stepping ashore, I found an island in a state of genteel, stately narcolepsy. The pace slowed down, nobody was egging me on, nothing was urgent. It was like travelling well nigh a century back in time. I found myself in a country which was a monarchy, had a monarch, had many dukes and duchesses—just like the Austro-Hungarian monarchy in which I was born. Hard work was rewarded with hard currency, inflation was never heard of, what I earned I could keep or spend at leisure, no one came in the dead of night to arrest me. More than once did I catch myself—in my first little terrace house up at Parliament Hill Fields—at daybreak bursting into laughter with happiness: the screws were nowhere, my Gulags had sunk. I took advantage of it immediately: the "natives" were slow and slack, I was quick and a workaholic. As the years went by, the rise in my living standards became visible: my rambling Victorian house in Wimbledon, by then full of antiques, was dubbed a "mini-chateau" by friends less fortunate (or less diligent) than me, and as to literature, I pushed forward in leaps and bounds, turning more and more friends into enemies. Once my books grew over a yard on the bookshelves I could safely say, *si hostes requiris, circumspice*.

As to royalty, we lived in amiable aloofness. With our interests in life being so very different, we never met; for them, corgies and horses; for me, English philosophy, world history, origin of religions, Gibbon and Collingwood, Milman and Lord Russell, Plotinus and Wittgenstein, maps and explorers, ships and cathedrals, gnostics and Italian Renaissance sceptics. Now you may realize why we never met; there is a modicum of truth in what Lawrence Durrell said about them, in a casual aside, I think somewhere in the *Alexandria Quartet*: "Royalty is the religion of the mob".

I hate the snobbery of name dropping, but I have to tell you how I happened to meet someone special of the High and Mighty—Mrs T., at a diplomatic reception. Graciously granting me a couple of minutes of her valuable time, she listened with wonderment to my quaint anecdote about a Commissioner of Oaths who was supposed to go through the motions with us when granting citizenship but halfway through an internal "removal", desks being shifted, children milling around, dogs chasing cats and himself being such a muddlehead, he couldn't find his Bible. Instead—for I managed to have a cursory glimpse of the inside title page—we took our Oath of Allegiance on a leather-bound edition of Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*...does it not invalidate my claim to citizenship?, I asked her shrewdly. Mrs

T. shook my hand with a hearty laugh and quite jovially. "No! Not in the least, it doesn't!", she said. And endorsed my citizenship.

Without jumping to the end of something I have hardly begun, would you like to ask me how I now feel in my adopted country?

Well, I do not think "adopted" would be the right word. We live in a deadly embrace, fighting for our "identity" being instilled into the other. When I am pacing to and fro in my Music Room—an extension I built to the house—I am as pleased as Punch. Not only because its spaciousness is much to my liking, as it is crammed with ormolu clocks and "important" bronzes we have hoarded throughout the years, but also because of the past literary connections of the house.

For this is no ordinary house, it was the headquarters of the *Catholic Herald* and its formidable Proprietor and Editor-in-Chief. Count Maurice Anthony Michael De La Bedoyère was, after Chesterton and C.S. Lewis, the best and most distinguished essayist of the day. The very thought flatters me no end that his three most important monographs[1] were written under my roof, in what later became my first floor bedroom—I am now using his drawing room as a study.

But let's face it: whose "roof" was it where his books, oozing of pious—and mine of impious—scepticism, were to be written? Whose house was it, is it, or will it be?

For it seems bricks and mortar are by far more indulgent as to the drift of the books written in their cavities, houses are altogether much more broad-minded to puny mortals who may boast for a few years of their "ownership"; for one might safely say that it's us who are "owned" by these massively built century-old houses, rather than we owning them: bay-windows and inglenooks, gables and turrets may go through a dozen "owners" until they run to seed. By now the leather-bound volumes of Count De La Bedoyère and all those elucubrations of mine: tolerant catholicism and tolerant scepticism in a row, live together in peaceful co-existence.

At the outset, helped first by International PEN and a distinguished essayist, Wayland Young (now Lord Kennet, in the Upper House), we soon found our feet and had our little doll's house, not very far from Highgate Cemetery of Karl Marx fame. My preference was the Georgian part of the Cemetery with no Marxist monstrosity in it. My writing sessions often started with a stroll round it, meditating and making notes. I regarded it as my London *Père Lachaise*, with many a famous name on the tombstones. In 1958, a Budapest crematorium posted the ashes of my Father to me. Soon, to escape her loneliness, my Mother joined us and tried to make herself useful in the house. She did the cooking. Priscilla (Mrs Határ), after a good

1 ■ *Living Christianity*, introducing and legitimizing the notion of doubt in Catholic theology—1954; *The Archbishop and the Lady*, based on the correspondence of Fénelon, archbishop of Cambrai, and Madame Guyon, who was at the centre of a scandal linking her to the Spanish mystic Miguel de Molinos, an excellent study of the sect and semi-heresy of quietism—1956, and *The Meddlesome Friar*, about Savonarola's fundamentalism and the burning of "vanities" by his *arrabiati*, in Florence—1958.

head-start as a waitress, soon became the manageress of a Hampstead restaurant. I myself was employed in various ways, first and foremost as a broadcaster with the BBC.

In those days literary clubs, discussion groups were mushrooming in North London, some of them linked with established Literary Circles, some of them with the Writers' Guild. The one we joined, *Phoenix,* belonged to the latter category and was one of the most conspicuous in our borough. The wife of a prominent railway engineer was our hostess, herself a poet in her own right, and her spacious townhouse in Swiss Cottage, with an L-shaped drawing room seating eighty people, was the ideal place to be the headquarters of such a circle. Our fortnightly sessions—regularly announced in the papers—became quite famous all over Highgate and Hampstead. *Phoenix* invited speakers as well, MPs, famous journalists, retired diplomats, well-known artists, etc; even my former colleague in the BBC, Martin Esslin, once turned up to give us a lecture on the Theatre of the Absurd.

Apart from our regular bulletins, the local papers gave regular reports of our activities. With so many professionals, doctors, head-teachers and artists in our ranks, we were never short of volunteers to deliver lectures on a wide variety of topics from astronomy to African safaris, from the history of photography to the Tuscan renaissance, etc., we even had a medium (quite famous and sought after in his earlier years) who spoke about Spiritualism Revisited. Once Mrs Határ spoke about Edgar Alan Poe, one of her favourites, I myself once spoke on the music of the famous Russian Group of Five, once on Berlioz (with sound illustrations, analysing his orchestration technique with his *Textbook* in hand). Strangely enough, though Hampstead and Swiss Cottage were teeming with Poles, Austrians and Hungarians who had come over right after the war, in our *Phoenix Club* we were the only newcomers with a Continental flavour (let alone accent), for soon enough we shod all the *habilliments* of "refugees", and felt and behaved like any of the rank and file.

Mind you, there was no shrewd calculation in it, no social climbing, no wish to disappear and be reborn in the Anglo-Saxon world, a feat bordering on the impossible, for as soon as we opened our mouth, after the first syllable the show was given away—there was no doubt about our Central European provenance. It just so happened that the Club was serving a twofold purpose in our lives and proved to be immensely *useful*. In next to no time our English improved effortlessly. Speaking/listening no longer felt tiresome. We picked up anglicisms, colloquialisms, idiomatic sayings, proverbs, curses, exclamations, regional accents, Scottish, Irish brogue, Welsh lilt, cockney rhyming slang, journalese, Knightsbridge parlance, body language—the lot—just as we came to drink our tea with milk and love it. And, apart from being taught English and/or Englishry in the Club, that gathering was an easy way to acquire friends, widen the circle of our acquaintances, to nurture close links with likeminded people. Our catchment area through the Club extended as far as Finchley, Hampstead Garden Suburb, St John's Wood, Westbourne Grove, Islington, and so on, far and wide in London's *A to Z.*

I spent 10 to 12 hours a day working, all three of us did. Yet I never regarded it as drudgery. I always had second jobs, sidelines (running concurrently, like jail-sentences, with my main BBC job) to be able to set some money aside. Do not forget we had no fall-back cushion, no "heirlooms", no house and contents left to us in a legacy, no rich uncle to park his secondhand jalopy on our doorstep as a present. We had to fend for ourselves, to amass the wherewithal of life: we had to improvise life and build it up as we went along. Our friends over there in the Old Country have no inkling how hard we had to fight for what we achieved. Do you realize that, for six years, as a fully qualified architect and expert on Budapest properties, I was attached to the Foreign Compensation Commission, in the capacity of their official adviser, attending many a court case, being instrumental in many an arbitration? Did you know that for twenty years I was resident tutor at the MoD as well as the FO, training soldiers and diplomats before they were posted to Budapest? True, I was greatly helped by my Mother, originally herself a teacher by profession, and even more so, by my Wife, who had an inborn mastery and inclination to teach, and whenever I went for my lecture tours in the States and disappeared for two or three months, she took over, and her evening and weekend leisure time was filled deputising for me—did you know that? And, last but not least, with all these sideline activities parallel to my BBC job, that's to say writing my scripts, my fortnightly "Column", and while broadcasting, being in charge and manning the helm, you may ask where on earth did I find time to write my plays, novels, poems, a sequence of essays in history and philosophy? Well, it's a mystery to me too, but as far as I can remember, writing, the activity closest to my heart, was pushed onto the margin all my life. Squeezed into the gaps. Time for it had to be stolen from my night rest and/or crammed somewhere in between this and that. I myself cannot figure out how my oeuvre grew to such staggering proportions on the shelves.

It's a success story you are trying to tell me, isn't it?—you may ask.

Well, yes and no. With reservations and misgivings. For I have a sorry success tale to tell.

Undoubtedly, I had my highlights, like my *succès d'estime* over there in Paris, thanks to Maurice Nadeau, a distinguished *eminence grise* in contemporary French letters, (he wrote a comprehensive reference book on surrealism), who published three of my novels in French translation and I could show you a plethora of French paper cuttings, critics singing my praises. But all this came to an abrupt halt, for everywhere there was a Hungarian Mafia active whose God-given task was purported to be to "stop me", and both in London and in Paris stop me they did. Poetasters whose talent was minute, yet with an ambition of Gargantuan proportions, would-be writers whose greatest asset was a built-in writer's block. These, green as they were with envy watching my Hungarian readership growing in Canada and the States along with the number of my publications, did their Hungarian best to thwart me from having anything published in English. No wonder that one of my friends

of Fleet Street fame, Colin Welch, one time Editor of *The Daily Telegraph*, who was trying to sell one of my essays (in English, on Eurocommunism), cried out in utter desperation, "By Jove, you must have some very powerful Hungarian enemies in the BBC and elsewhere, for wherever I try to promote this excellent book of yours, I come face to face with the same stone wall..."

Never mind, this kind of jealousy is a professional hazard. My touring of our diaspora in Western Europe, the States and Canada made it possible for me to compile a file on fans and admirers who were willing to cough up the money and send a cheque in response to my circulars whenever I started to advertise one of my new books. This most valuable card-index of names and addresses increased to well over a thousand and peaked in the early eighties; and that was the basis of my publishing venture, along with my IBM Composer on which I set my books, for no printer could compete with my "union rates".

A non-profit-making venture, which became a going concern churning out a good number of books, all expenses covered (by pre-publication sales), including printing and postage: such a venture in a diaspora scattered from Stockholm to Toronto, was a near-miracle and the dream of all emigré writers. I had a follow-up of critical appreciation in all emigré papers and, though few and far between, even in the Old Country; in one of the Budapest literary monthly magazines appeared a lavish write-up on my collected poems (*Gossamer Bridge*, 1970)—its author, a brilliant essayist and a maverick, Mátyás Domokos, was duly reprimanded; and I had a readers' response of sorts too, filling my letter box to the brim. Expenses did not come from my pocket, I could count myself lucky.

But there was always that fly in the ointment: no royalties.

I remembered Dr Johnson's quip, "No man but a blockhead ever wrote, except for money."

And then, one day, Mrs Határ suddenly remembered Alan Ayckbourn's play, *How the Other Half Loves* (1970), the title of which was a variation on the common saying "how the other half lives". Skipping over a copy of *Books and Bookmen*, my wife blurted out ironically, "See, how the other half *writes*". She meant no harm and never realized that this was a stab in the back. She had thrust the knife right in and gave it a twist. I never recovered.

Utterly downcast, I went on musing, analysing my predicament during many a sleepless night—here I went by the grace of God, a "successful" emigré writer. Yet I write my books, I set them myself, I do the art work, I take the art work and the setting to the printers to do an off-set job and the binding, I do the book-keeping, I store my books, I parcel them one by one and I cart them myself to the post office...

Whereas the Other Half, the Real Ones, the way they write is different. They write their books but the rest is done by someone else, advertising/setting/printing/publishing/distributing/posting, etc., is done by the Publishers who, for a *mere* manuscript, pay them handsome royalties, enough to keep them in clover and allow them to write on.

I was obsessed with my shame, the stabwound never healed. Only once had I the sweet taste of real royalties when my novels in French translation were published in Paris; but as to my own publishing, at every juncture I was threatened by bankruptcy. Any minute the whole thing could come to an abrupt halt, for instance when I published my "esoterics", a philosophical monograph on *Cosmic Unconcern*, my three-volume *Aeolian Harp*, or when my 1,000-page *Golgheloghi* came out, a cycle of nine full-length plays about the spectacular Second Non-Coming of Christ on doomsday. Yet, to my amazement, soon they all were out of print, sold to the last copy and I was saved till the next book. A one-man-band as ever was—that was me: a one-man-band frantically trying to catch up with all that *Temps Perdu*.

There was, though, a very threadbare silver lining to that menacingly dark cloud on a sky completely overcast: I became a household name. I was inundated by letters and manuscripts from young writers, messages and greetings from fellow-writers from the Old Country, and a constant stream of books to be reviewed, which I did (what I praised in my Book Column on the air was selling like hot cakes); through my broadcasts (BBC and, later, Radio Free Europe). I became well-known all over the land and some even called me "the Hungarian counterpart to Alistair Cook", for my Letters From the West were recorded, transcribed and distributed. Also, the stray copies of my books smuggled home made quite a splash, with their solemn black and gold covers, their clean presentation and their setting worthy of the Oxford University Press. In comparison to communist state publications they looked like "luxury editions"; even high officials of the communist literary establishment started to flatter me and ordered copies of my Aurora publications, and nobody guessed that I was no more than a one-man-band.

Somehow I managed to grin and bear it. I found a way to live with my built-in despondency and went on trying hard not to look the other way where the Real World lay, English Lit. and *Books and Bookmen*. Somehow I did not want to be reminded "how the other half writes".

To change languages would have been as hard as to change horses midstream, I was too old for that. All my previous endeavours to write in English and hawk around what I produced ended in dismal failure. I was like a castaway on a desert island, complete with a typewriter, an IBM Composer, unlimited paper supply and bed-and-breakfast. Or like riding a satellite and writing in Hungarian in Outer Space—where "writing" meant secretion, a physiological reaction of my system which went on, I couldn't help it.

Philosophy was the sheet-anchor of everything I ever committed to paper; that was what gave to my oeuvre an even keel to float on, and a centre-board to steady its high rigging. I was never a graphomaniac, a daily 3-4,000 words is my watch-word but doing it for sixty years it yields a great deal. All this having been written in Hungarian, by the centripetal force of the language belongs to Hungarian literature and, in a way, it may prove to be a salubrious antidote to its inborn parochialism.

Having spent nearly four decades on the cultural promontory of London, I was more than anyone else fully aware of what it looked like from the "outside", Hungarian literature that is. A medium-size corpus of an East European literature, a late-comer with an inflated ego, hopelessly narcissistic and its glorious past studded with distinguished mediocrities hailed as luminaries, all this entrenched in a firm belief of unsurpassability. That was the literature I was to embrace: a literature touchy and peevish, thin-skinned like a haemophiliac, pining away for world-wide recognition and cherishing noble latitudes for Revelations.

And still, I had my soft spot for individual writers who lived and worked in its entanglement like escapologists, and I had no doubt in my mind that on my return this will be my lot too.

What more can I say? Our *annus mirabilis*—1989—has happened, the dreams of independence fulfilled, some other, lofty dreams shattered. Well-weathered and hardened through trials and tribulations, ready for all peripeties, I am content in my den up in Wimbledon where I and my house (Hongriuscule, i.e. Little Hungary) became a landmark. I am well-known on the hillside, being greeted when having my *mille passi*, by all and sundry, schoolboys and octogenarians alike. Quite unexpectedly, I had my *redivivus* in the Old Country too, I was greeted and fêted, showered with distinctions and prizes; wherever I went my face and, especially my voice, was recognized, my 35 years spent in talking to them on the air did the trick.

A dozen of my books have been published or reissued, there was plenty of basking in the sunset (for that's what it is for me, my sun is setting), being interviewed on radio and TV, swallowed and regurgitated, exegeted and commented on. Not long ago, I was even "knighted"—made an Honorary Member of the Academy, that is. To my recollection, the number of *immortels* in the French Academy is forty: and if the Hungarian counterpart of it has the same limit, it is quite a distinction. Yet what *is* immortality? To be remembered for a fourscore of years: to be read for a couple of decades. It is one way of slowing down the process of withering away, a kind of solemn, collective self-delusion. To my surprise, I became a thesis in colleges, I am being taught in universities; but to be published *in toto* and to be really, truly digested in full—that's another matter. There were signs that some of my younger, up-and-coming fellow-writers find hard to swallow a competition which parachuted from abroad into the heart of their market-place, and their reassuring rubbery smile is contradicted by their icy glances. Some of the younger generation contest my "reintegrability" in their neo-chauvinistic, newly-postmodernized, fake-folksy, arch-avantgard literature, and rightly so. For every generation prefers to listen to their coevals, blocking the striplings besieging them from below and silencing the oldies who might steal some rich pickings and muddy up waters through their "gerontocracy"—that's the way all literatures work.

All this doesn't disturb my stoic serenity the least. As to my "reintegrability", I too have my misgivings. All I can hope for is some sort of rediscovery, a comeback in

fifty years' time, when all those generations willing or unwilling to listen, blocking the pathways at the bottom and on top, will be safely in their graves, their *steles* marked in golden lettering, *Abiit ad Plures*. Then, and only then I might have a ten per cent chance to be heard again, some gimlet eyes giving to my works a close reading.

And what if I don't pull it off? Why—then, the rest is silence.

And since there is no English Publisher on the horizon to threaten me with the offer of a contract, here I stop, although I could easily spin it out to half-a-million words. For what I left out was the very gist of it—to quote Rabelais: S.P.Q.R., *Si Peu Que Rien*—my Life. Mine has been a rather chequered one, crammed with prison years, jail mutinies, death sentences, near-misses, encounters with demons and weirdoes, the Harrowing of a Secular Hell. But why repeat what I have already done with the help of my investigative interviewer, that Emeritus Professor of Hungarian Literature, Lóránt Kabdebó. The first volume of my *Autobiography*, see it for yourself, supposed to be by now in the shopwindows of all bookshops all over the place, with Volume Two and Three to follow.

By my inborn and burnable heresies, by my bluntness and by some historical rectifications, which won't go down well with certain big shots whose vital interest is to undo their past, my three-volume *Autobiography* may turn out to be the Scandal of the Year; but scandal is the stuff literature thrives on. Who cares? Publish and be damned.

My greatest gratification in old age is the fact that after so many lean years when literature was a priestly calling and I its hierophant for a pittance, finally I too can have a taste of what it means to be "real", instead of being a free give-away in print and on the air, as do all "blockheads" for nothing. I too can join the Parnassian company of *The Other Half*, the One which was writing all the time the way writing should be done: someone else is doing the setting/printing/binding and distributing and I am being paid for it. And thus Mrs Határ's pride can be restored.

What I am sending to you is a *mere* manuscript. Thanks for setting and printing it. Greetings.

Hongriuscule, the 30th of June, 1993. ❧

Mátyás Sárközi

The Play's the Thing

Ferenc Molnár—The Making of a Playwright

In the booming city of Budapest a child was born on the 12th of January 1878. He seemed healthy and strong, his proud father, Dr. Mór Neumann, soon began to think of him as the future heir to his medical practice. Little did he know that within twenty years, as Ferenc Molnár, his son was to be celebrated in Hungary as a master of the pen, and not much later to become an internationally acclaimed writer, to this day the best-known Hungarian playwright.

What made Budapest boom from the early 1870s up to the outbreak of the Great War? With the establishment of the dual monarchy of Austria and Hungary in 1867, old animosities were more or less forgotten, so much so that during the troubled periods that were to come later (the great depression, fascism, the Second World War, communist oppression) this *belle époque* was usually remembered as the "good old times of peace", and the ageing Emperor Franz Joseph (and, of course, King of Hungary) was looked upon in retrospect as a father-figure, as if he had had nothing to do in his youth with the crushing of Hungary's 1848-49 revolution.

By 1878 capitalist vigour allowed Budapest to catch up with Vienna and to become a true second capital. This was accompanied by a surge in all the arts. John Lukacs notes in his excellent *Budapest 1900*, that the building fever and financial prosperity were the consequences of a self-confidence that had much to do with the Magyar temperament, in so far as the deep-rooted pessimism of the Magyars is frequently punctuated by sudden bursts of appetite for life. According to another of his observations, the well-maintained balance of Budapest's sudden evolution was due to the healthy conservativism of its older, Hungarian-German bourgeoisie, which had a moderating influence on the rampant enthusiasm of the important new Jewish middle-class, so over-responsive to all kinds of novelty. But the Jews were also ready to adopt Western cosmopolitan ideas—suitable vehicles for the formation of a new literary style by young writers, including Ferenc Molnár.

Mátyás Sárközi,
a grandson of Ferenc Molnár, was born in Budapest and has been living in London since 1956. He works for BBC World Service Radio, has published three volumes of short stories (in Hungarian), and is at work on a life of his grandfather.

Feri Neumann (he Magyarized his name to Molnár in 1896, when his first newspaper articles appeared) had a happy childhood in his father's comfortable house, near the less fashionable end of the Grand Boulevard. When he was three, his sister Erzsébet was born, an ugly little girl, often the object of Feri's cruelty—as she tells us in her memoirs.

The little boy was clever, imaginative, had a percipient mind; at the age of six, he was able to write a well-composed message on pink toy letter-paper to his mother, away on a family visit. The letter ended with a piece of journalistic information: "A strong wind caused much damage in Buda. Regards to all."

Erzsébet was first in a long line of women whose close attachment to Molnár proved to be a mixed blessing. There was enough warmth in the family, so it is not easy to find a proper psychological explanation to account for a streak of nastiness in the boy, which Erzsébet had to endure, tempering indignation with admiration. However, in general, they both had happy childhoods—on Margaret Island a pony-cart was hired for them, they went to swim in the charming Lukács Baths of Buda, or visited their grandmother on the other side of Pest, always a merry occasion, as she awaited them with hot coffee, home-made potcake and, in the winter, apples baked on top of the stove. Dinner-parties were fairly common too, the hissing gas lamps threw a friendly light onto the red plush upholstered furniture and Aunt Lizi played the piano singing *"Du, Du, nur Du allein..."*

In 1887 Ferenc, previously tutored at home, was enrolled in his father's old school, the Calvinist Gimnázium, which was readily open to non-Calvinists, even to non-Christians. It soon became obvious that he was a bright boy and an excellent linguist. So too did his interest in journalism and the theatre manifest itself very early. In 1892 he produced a hand-written family news-sheet (entitled *Progress*) with such sensations as "After a short stay Grampa returned to Arad", or "The next issue will not reach you because our distributor has gone down with whooping-cough." Later he published a more serious newspaper, lithographed in twenty copies.

The good-looking, self-assured, black haired, dark eyed, somewhat stocky boy developed acting ambitions as well. The first piece, performed by the paper cut-out figures of his best friend's toy theatre, was rather childish. Molnár recalled it many years later, when writing on his theatrical beginnings:

"As my father was a doctor, we had a stock of medicines in the house and one day a dark blue medicine glass had got broken. By putting a candle behind a piece of glass we were able to produce blue light on our stage. The characters of my drama jumped about, swimming in blue and shouted 'Ho-ho, it's my turn now!' They did not say much more as, at the time, I placed much less emphasis on a good dialogue than I do now."

Only two years after that, when Molnár was sixteen, a more grown-up show was produced for the grand opening of the Révai Book Palace, and he played the part of Captain Dreyfus (as a travelling book-salesman) in a humorous sketch. Hungary's most celebrated novelist, Mór Jókai, was in the audience and after the performance the young actors lined up to be introduced. Molnár was enthralled by the great

man's presence but when it came to his turn, he could not kiss the hand that had written such brilliant prose because Captain Dreyfus's large wax nose, which he was still wearing, prevented this act of reverence.

After completing his studies in the Calvinist School, Molnár did think of becoming a journalist and called on the editorial offices of the *Pesti Hírlap*. However, the editor was away, hunting. In any case, journalism was considered by Molnár's father too frivolous a profession. His son, with a first class baccalaureate, was destined to study something serious, such as medicine or law. So, in the autumn of 1896, the cheapest room was taken out for the young man on the second floor of a *pension* in Geneva's Avenue de Florissant, and Molnár became a law student at the university. Not for very long. In this unlikely setting he started off on a career as a journalist and a writer.

There is a manuscript in the Hungarian National Library, written by a Hugó Csergő in 1928. Entitled "How Feri Neumann Became Ferenc Molnár", it gives a journalistic account of the writer's early years and was actually sent by Csergő to Molnár to be checked. Csergő, a good friend and fellow playwright, totally forgotten now, must have heard most of the stories from the man himself and there was little to correct. However, Molnár added some interesting marginal notes.

Although his father had opposed a career in journalism, there were three people who did encourage him to write. One was his bookish mother, the second his former literature teacher, and the third, a curious character indeed, one of his father's patients, Péter Heim. In Geneva they were both students at the university, the eighteen year old Molnár reading criminal statistics, the sixty-year-old Heim reading French literature and history. He had been the Hungarian Post Master General until his retirement, a very competent man, who played an important part in setting up the country's inter-town telephone network. Heim adhered to the philosophy that life begins at sixty, and went back to university as a mature student to pursue his life-long interest in French culture. It was Heim with whom Molnár had long walks by the lake, discussing his ambitions in life. The young man had too many talents. Some of his framed oil paintings decorated the pension's dining room, he wrote poems in French and sent his humorous sketches to Budapest newspapers. These diverse talents included music too, and a Geneva music firm had published a waltz of his, *Printemps*.

Heim saw the danger involved, and he advised Molnár to stick to one thing only—writing. To write even if this would interfere with his studies. Nevertheless, he did remain an industrious student for a while; when he saw other national groups, even the Japanese, form student fellowships in Geneva while the Hungarians had none, Molnár organized the seventeen Hungarians into a *Burschenschaft*.

Csergő's account of Molnár's formative years contain a somewhat delicate surprise. Most biographers mention the year he spent in Geneva, but few make a mention of the fact—bearing Molnár's *nihil obstat* on the manuscript mentioned—

that the young man, with a room on the Avenue de Florissant paid for by papa, rented another place out of his own pocket-money. There he could entertain girls without anyone knowing.

It was obvious that Molnár's law studies were destined to be cut short. With the *feuilletons* he sent to various Budapest newspapers he established himself as a journalist. But in sober Geneva he could not find much to write about. Of course, Paris was the obvious answer, with its whirl and its boulevard theatres. Budapest readers eagerly lapped up Molnár's Paris dispatches, reviews and reports, which were witty and full of sharp observation.

Within a short time Molnár joined the staff of a newly launched daily newspaper, the *Budapesti Napló*. There he had found a fatherly mentor in the paper's energetic editor, József Vészi, a man who liked his journalists to have literary ambitions. The job and the good fellowship of his young and bright colleagues were entirely satisfying to Molnár. He was altogether much happier in the newspaper's offices than at home, where his mother was mourning the death of a recently born daughter, teenage Erzsébet was constantly practising on the piano, and he had to act as the man of the house, because the doctor, escaping from all this, spent most of his evenings in clubs and cafés.

Vészi wanted Molnár to be his star reporter. He sent him to Vienna to cover the funeral of the murdered Empress Elizabeth, and he commissioned him to edit the paper's Christmas Almanach. Interviews with visiting foreign celebrities also fell to Molnár. His usual working hours were from five to nine, but eager to see his articles in print, he returned at ten and stayed until dawn when the first copies of the paper started to roll off the presses. He worked in the so-called "big room" with six other journalists. To secure some peace, Molnár built a kind of shack in one corner out of canvas sheets. Even closeted in this fortress, he found it very difficult to concentrate on quality sketches or witty essays, so he took to spending the mornings in the Café New York, up in the gallery—that gallery which is still frequented today by writers and journalists for the same purpose. (However, in Molnár's times, the waiter could be asked for a supply of paper, pen and ink, as well as for credit.) The ambiance of the New York was just right. It was built by an American insurance company as a uniquely pompous and grand place, with twisted marble columns and with romantic frescoes adorning the ceiling. Although it was open twenty-four hours a day (the owner had ceremoniously thrown the keys into the Danube) in the afternoon a military band entertained the guests, making it difficult for the writers to work and thereby to occupy most of the tables at coffee-time.

Mornings in the New York, afternoons spent listening to court cases or scribbling away furiously in the press gallery in Parliament, evenings and nights back in the office, the early hours often taken up with drinking with friends—all this needed a very good constitution. And Molnár had other chores as well, such as translating novels from the French and adapting French boulevard plays to the Hungarian stage. (When he was later awarded the Légion d'Honneur, it was not so much in

recognition of the enormous success of his own plays in France, but more to reward his work as a translator.) Needless to say, Molnár learned a great deal of stagecraft while working on these adaptations.

Soon Vészi sent him on a longer stay in Paris, promising that the paper would print every word he sent them. Just to be on the safe side, Molnár asked his father to finance the trip as well. Within a day and a half, he had arrived in Paris, knocking on the door of a room in the modest Hotel Jacob, where his best friend, the cartoonist and painter Jenő Feiks lodged. They were old school-mates; in fact, it had been in the Feiks's basement that the *Blue Cave* had been performed with the aid of the broken medicine bottle. Feiks's hotel room in Paris was on the fifth floor with a romantic view over the rooftops of Paris, and he was happy to share this simple abode with Molnár. Apart from his reports, Molnár was working on a novel as well. The first chapters he had completed in Geneva and now he went on writing *The Hungry City*.

His daily routine in Paris was rather odd. From four in the morning until ten he worked, by candle-light until dawn broke. Then he retired to sleep. Waking at seven in the evening, he went to see a play with Feiks or visited a café. After the cafés closed at one thirty, they stalked the streets, waiting for the bakeries to open. Some served coffee with freshly baked *chausson de pommes*. This was their first breakfast at dawn, the second came at seven in the evening. Breaking this routine Molnár often spent hours rammaging through the stock of his favourite *bouquinettes*. The cheap paperbacks he bought were later put into his dazzlingly rich library, every volume bound in tooled leather. Stendhal's *Le Rouge et le Noir* was always to remain his favourite. Another way of passing time was attending lectures, especially those given by Bergson or Leroy-Beaulieu.

He certainly knew Paris very well. The Paris Baedeker, Molnár's version, was well-known in Budapest:

"Lunch at Henry is a must. Order hors d'oeuvres, a meat dish, gateau, black coffee and a glass of cognac. Medium prices at 25-30 francs. You could also lunch at the Boeuf á la Mode on the rue St. Honoré for 18-20 francs. Just once have dinner at Lerue, Place Madelaine (35-40 francs). When eating in the Brasserie Universelle it is important to try the Coupe Jacques. After the theatre go to the Place Pigalle, order no more than a bottle of champagne at the Abbaye de Thélème and just sit, sit and see the world whirling round. For antiques visit the Quai Voltaire, spend an afternoon at the auction in the Hôtel Drouot and have a look at the interesting metro station at the Opéra. Afternoons: just one visit to the Gare d'Orléans, one to the Palais de Justice to hear a court case. Do not miss the Place de la Concorde, and there is an interesting bridge between the Trocadero and the Eiffel Tower. Try to get tickets to theatres and the opera, see a few cabarets and all the shows you possibly can."

On an autumn day in 1898, the bad news arrived from Budapest that his mother was very ill and Molnár's Paris sojourn was over. He found his mother weak, unable to leave her bed. Grandma sat at the bedside, knitting furiously. Erzsébet

returned from school. Within days, the doctor's wife, still not forty, was dead. Uncle held on to the bannister in the hall crying, while grandma was pacing up and down, whispering between her teeth every time she passed Erzsébet: "Who knows? Perhaps your father will marry a fourteen year old..."

Molnár's output was amazing. He was still only twenty when, despite an enormous amount of journalism and theatrical work, he had completed his first novel, *The Hungry City*. The hours needed to write were gained by cutting short his sleep.

Those were the days when registered journalists could travel free—first class—on most railway lines. This privilege Molnár sometimes used for a good sleep. He climbed on a night train heading for a far-off destination, found himself an empty compartment, slept away hundreds of miles and then returned to Budapest the same way.

In the Café New York, where today a portrait of Molnár hangs on the wall, he usually joined the "literary table" of the novelist and playwright Sándor Bródy, who was a patient of his father, knew all about the young man's personal problems and decided to treat him like a sixth son (he had five), and was always ready to give advice on all matters, ranging from unfaithful women to literary style. There was much that was literary in this café. The menu did not mention them, but a writer or a journalist could order "literary ham" or "literary sausages"—smaller portions than usual, at a much lower price. In a lesser-known book of his enormous oeuvre, the great Proustian chronicler of the epoch, Gyula Krúdy, painted a vivid picture of night life in the Budapest cafés (of which there were around four hundred in the city at the time.) A page or two describes Molnár and his friends. Elastic-sided boots had just become fashionable, so the young troop was soon nicknamed "the gaiter wearers". They dined at the New York, then set off to the Café Helvécia on Andrássy út to take in the scene: girls of the night having a wretched good time with middle aged drunks. Then—according to Krúdy—the gaiter wearers relaxed with a coffee, right opposite, in the Café Français. By day-break they met again in the Café Millenium to find out what the morning papers had to say. From there, the hardiest returned to the New York to order breakfast.

In his book, Krúdy mentions Molnár as the most important figure in the group. "Molináry" or "Muli" was liked by everyone. He was loud, witty, provoking others into affection and praise for him. He showed no respect towards pillars of society and knocked down taboos like a bull in a china shop.

Of course, it was entirely a different matter to set out to write a novel about Budapest with all its intrigues, politics and its capitalist echelon. *The Hungry City* was not a novel of urban poverty, as the title would suggest. It was the story of hunger for money. The plot is simplistic, nor is the book very well written. Why was it then received with such enormous interest after its publication in 1901? Because it dealt with certain burning contemporary issues: dirty politics, corruption, social inequality and, last but not least, Jewish assimilation and antisemitism. Another element that lent a special importance to *The Hungry City* was that it was a novel

written by a Budapest writer about Budapest in a new style and language. In this sense Molnár was the forerunner of a popular new literary genre in Hungary.

A successful writer by the age of twenty-two, Molnár enjoyed his fame enormously (and found it painfully hard to bear when it quit him during the last decades of his life, spent in American exile.)

Just about this time, Molnár's friend Miklós Ligeti was commissioned by the government to sculpt yet another bust of Franz Joseph, King of Hungary. When the King came to Budapest, he visited Ligeti's studio to sit for him. There was not much conversation but to break the silence, the King asked, "How are the Hungarian sculptors doing?"

"Thank you, Your Majesty," was the answer, "Pretty well."

"And the painters?"

"Thank you, Your Majesty, likewise."

"And..., how about literature?"

"We have," said Ligeti, "a young writer, Molnár, who is very promising."

A brief pause followed. Then Franz Joseph opened his mouth. The sculptor expected him to say "I'd like to read something by the young man." But His Apostolic Majesty, the Emperor and King, Europe's richest monarch, remarked with a cutting undertone of reproach, as if he disliked the idea, "I hear he's making money."

He was. Lots of it. But he toiled very hard. No doubt, after the success of *The Hungry City,* Molnár fortified his position as the darling of Budapest's café society, but success brought respect, too. His private life became more orderly. Now he lived in a separate apartment which he had been given by his father on the third floor of an apartment-house he owned. There he created elegant surroundings with antique furniture, hundreds of books, oriental carpets and a bust of Dante. Friends came to discuss art or politics and, on Saturday evenings, when the doctor was usually away in his club, they all moved downstairs to the parental home, where there was a grand piano and young Victor Jacobi, a budding composer of operettas, could play and sing his new chansons. Sundays also provided special programmes: his editor, József Vészi, used to invite eligible bachelors, selected from the staff, to his summer house where, over and after rich meals or during afternoon teas, they could amuse the family, particularly his four teenage daughters.

Once again Molnár had gone for a week's rest in Geneva when his friend László Beöthy wanted to get hold of him with great urgency. He had been appointed Director of the National Theatre, and as he began preparing the following season's programme, he found that there was a desperate shortage of modern Hungarian comedies. Beöthy had read Molnár's humorous sketches in the *Budapesti Napló* week after week and, as he put it in his letter, he was sure that a man blessed with such sharp powers of observation could come out with a popular play, written in the same vein. To overcome any possible hesitation, a 400 crown banking order lined the envelope—twice the amount of Molnár's monthly salary as a journalist. Beöthy

knew that Molnár had never written a play before, but he also knew what he was doing. Within weeks he received the script of an amusing comedy, a play that brought with it the promise of many full houses. *A doktor úr* (The Lawyer) was Molnár's first work for the stage, and—as he mentions in a letter many years later—without this commission he would perhaps never had written any. Ironically, it never saw the stage of the National Theatre, because within a year after his appointment, Beöthy's gambling habits had grown to such unmanageable proportions that even a generous state salary was inadequate to cover his debts, and he had resorted to some manoeuvres which soon led to his downfall.

This is why, on the 28th of November 1902, the National's new rival, the Vígszínház, opened its doors to a first night audience of *The Lawyer*, a three act farce. Clara Györgyey, in her scholarly study on the writer, argues that the idea of the plot might have come to Molnár from Tristan Bernard's *The Only Bandit of the Village*, in which a lawyer who catches a thief is also featured. However, Molnár's plot is by far the more complicated.

The Vígszínház was perhaps better suited to stage Molnár's farce than the National. The elegant neo-baroque building had been completed a mere six years earlier, designed by the Viennese architects Fellner and Hellmer, and it still sparkled like a gem. The first showing of *The Lawyer* was destined to be a success. Vészi saw to that, and so did Molnár's young friends, influential journalists, but soon it became clear that it did not need to be promoted that way. Audiences loved its witty dialogue and plot.

The first to congratulate Molnár behind the scenes was his father, but as the doctor grabbed his hand a grimace flickered through the young man's face. Years later he explained the cause of this reaction in his book, *Companion in Exile*, providing at least one clue to his complexes. As Molnár saw it, his father could not be entirely happy without the thought in the back of his mind: "Why did Feri grow up to be a celebrated author, why not our darling little László, that bright little first born boy, who died as an infant?" (This is called *intruder complex* by Freud.)

From that day to the end of his life, Molnár had no financial worries and could always afford to live in great style.

József Vészi's summer house at Dunavarsány on the Danube was a delightful place. Though not grand, it was spacious enough to put up overnight guests and Vészi's own large family. At weekends the coachman had to drive to the railway station ten or fifteen times to collect guests or to return them to the evening train. From June to September Molnár spent almost every Sunday at Varsány, enjoying Vészi's lavish hospitality, intelligent conversation with fellow writers, including the celebrated poet Endre Ady, while being in the company of the Vészi girls. He was courting Margit Vészi, a buxom and intelligent nineteen year old, who had an unquenchable thirst for art and literature. At the time she was attending the studio of Sándor Bihari to train as an artist, and not only paintings but a slim volume of short-stories and some newspaper articles bore her name.

On her journeys to Paris Molnár was her shadow. And on the 10th of May, 1906

Ady wrote to his muse, his adored Adèle: "Some friends returned from Paris. They speak enthusiastically of Feri Molnár and Margit. He is a cryingly happy groom, and the wedding is set for the twentieth."

There is no evidence as to whether he really was a "cryingly happy groom", as most of Molnár's personal correspondence disappeared during the war, but the wedding did take place on the twentieth of May and the young couple occupied an elegant apartment on the fashionable Népszínház utca. No sooner had they moved in, that their quarrels started. Margit was a spoilt young woman, while Molnár simply could not break with his old lifestyle, of sleeping until noon, going up to town after a late breakfast to return only in the early hours of the morning. He consumed a great deal of spirits (on one occasion he had twenty glasses of chartreuse in the Café Palermo) and he was violent when drunk, beating his young wife. Although she became pregnant within a month, the beatings did not stop. After the attacks his drunkenness usually wore off, to be followed by a phase of self-pity. Then he buried his face in his hands and began to weep, moaning like a child.

Soon it became evident that the marriage would not last. During the fourth month of her pregnancy, Margit Vészi left Molnár and moved back into her parents' home, nursing a deeply hurt pride and a little-finger which had been broken by Molnár during a row. The finger remained crooked for ever.

As a self-prescribed therapy, Molnár needed to throw himself into some kind of large-scale work and he set to writing a book, returning to one of his favourite subjects (apart from the intrigues of love)—childhood. Accordingly, in a matter of weeks, he wrote *The Paul Street Boys*, a gem of juvenile literature, as enjoyable today as it was at the time it was written in 1906. (The English version has been unavailable for decades but Corvina of Budapest is planning to reprint it in the near future.) The scene of the story is a derelict Budapest building site, a favourite playground for a group of schoolboys, who, in the book, fight a heroic, West Side Story-kind of battle for it.

Some ingredients he took from earlier sketches, like the idea of the *Putty Club*, which must have had its origins in Molnár's childhood. At the time Budapest's streets were full of hackney cabs and their windows were often broken. When the glass was replaced, putty was used to hold it in place. Molnár and his schoolmates scraped out the putty while it was soft and formed a "club" treasuring the putty-ball which gradually grew larger. The boys took it in turns to chew the putty to keep it malleable. It is a sign of the book's immense popularity that the phrases *gittegylet* (putty club) and "to chew the putty" became part of the Hungarian language, the first meaning an organization which, by its nature, cannot be taken seriously, the second a meeting where, despite long speeches, nothing substantial is being said.

The book became a world-wide success, translated into fourteen languages, and it has been filmed twice. In 1934 under the title *No Greater Glory,* directed by Frank Borzage, it was a prize-winner at the Venice Festival, and in 1968 Zoltán Fábri filmed it as a Hungarian-American co-production.

So, a farce, full of masterly puns, spiced with a certain amount of social

comment; a play on what kids are like (*Józsi*). Both were successes in terms of the popular theatre. But surely not at all satisfying when an intelligent young playwright, one who knows the international scene—Ibsen, Strindberg, Schnitzler, Shaw, and Oscar Wilde—begins to think about his own posterity. How to break the mould? Molnár needed to write certain things out of his system: his failed marriage and his not then fully recognized yearning for an innocent-looking young actress, Irén Varsányi, who played the role of the amorous schoolgirl in *The Lawyer*.

As it happened, the weather provided Molnár the opportunity to go ahead with the experiment. The winter of 1906 was unusually hard, it looked as if it would never end. To cheer themselves up, a group of "scribblers" spent the weekend on Budapest's Margaret Island, in a charmingly old-fashioned hotel. Soon after their arrival, it began to snow in earnest and by the following morning they were cut off from the outside world. For a week Molnár sat in his room, and wrote the first scenes of *The Devil*, the play that made him world-famous. By the time the road had been cleared, he found the small hotel such an ideal place for writing that he kept his third floor rooms there until he had finished his manuscript. The manager of the Vígszínház liked the new play and he was prepared to stage it within six weeks. There were only two months left of the season to establish the performance. Molnár therefore was determined to bring the play to a rousing success. He personally helped with the direction, and boosted the production by borrowing an entire artist's studio for the first act from his friend, the fashionable society painter Lajos Márk, and a stunning red leather upholstered suite from the president of the Journalists' Association.

The inspiration for *The Devil* came to Molnár after he had seen a performance of *Faust*. In his interpretation, Mephisto was a human being with an evil power to control the fate of those entangled in his web. Molnár used his idealistically romantic ego to create the character of an artist in love, while at the same time he was also drawing upon his inherent inclination to indulge in intrigue in order to present the Devil as a mysterious, arrogant but cynically witty person. He dedicated the comedy to Gyula Hegedüs, an actor ideally suited to play the part of the Devil, who, with his extraordinary presence, could be spine-chillingly mysterious despite his unassuming looks.

After the summer recess, *The Devil* was back in the repertoire. The world famous company of the Italian actor Ermete Zacconi was in Budapest at the time, and Zacconi went to see *The Devil*. Hegedüs thrilled and fascinated him. He wanted the role. The same evening he acquired the rights, during the night the play was translated into French, and Zacconi completed the Italian adaptation. He began touring with *The Devil* in Turin in 1908 and brought it to triumph all over the world. During the winter of 1908, four New York companies staged it simultaneously, two in English, one in German, and one in Yiddish. Soon the American producer Henry W. Savage took it to London, to the Adelphi in the Strand, but unfortunately its run was cut short by the Lord Chamberlain.

It was thought dreadfully libertine at the time that a woman should appear in a

play supposedly dressed in nothing but a long coat. Some people from the gallery objected, and called for the Lord Chamberlain. And that worthy soon had the play banned. Fortunately, what was considered indecent in Edwardian England, was quite acceptable in the Austro-Hungarian Empire, Germany and in the United States. In Hungary "artistic decadence" had its rightful place.

Molnár's fascination with the stage grew parallel with his theatrical successes. Apart from being an author he became the artistic adviser of Beöthy's Magyar Színház. It was there that he first met the actress Sári Fedák, and came under the spell of her unique personality. She was not particularly beautiful and definitely not as sweet and tender as Irén Varsányi. She was, rather, a rough diamond with an extraordinary sparkle. Within three years an affair blossomed out of their chance meetings, which gradually turned into a constant war of nerves, and ended with a bitter marriage-ceremony for the sake of a properly arranged divorce. In the meantime, Irén Varsányi was still a part of Molnár's life. The young actress was torn between fidelity to her successful businessman husband, father of their two children, and the overwhelming passion she entertained for this dangerous and capricious genius called Molnár. Her husband would not let the younger man win and challenged Molnár to a duel.

In 1908 Ferenc Molnár's short stories were published in a volume entitled *Music*, and one of these was an acrid little modernist tale about thieves, servant girls and fairground barkers. The story, called *Bedtime Story*, (printed on p. 54)was the ideal material for a play, with its strange fantasy world and its surprise turns. It could also carry poetic allegories, and, propped up psychologically with incidents of an autobiographical nature, it could carry human feelings to add to the play's artistry. Molnár chose Budapest's seedy amusement park, the *Vurstli*, as the setting for his tale; here Juli, the housemaid falls in love with the small-time crook, Endre Závoczki, otherwise known as Liliom—the Lily.

While in *The Devil* Molnár used one of the characters, the young painter, to express his own feelings towards a married woman, and used the lines of the Devil himself to unfold his either cynical or wisely philosophical views on humanity, in *Liliom* he wears the guise of Závoczki, the joker, the entertainer, cursed by his bad habits—even beating his wife—but, although unable to declare his love, deep down he was a warm and caring person. The whole drama revolves around wife-beating, the macho image that hides all tender affections, and also the problem of crime and punishment. The play, completed in 1909, was a message to his wife, Margit Vészi, who refused to understand it and they divorced during the following year.

Why was the first performance, presented by the Vígszínház on the 7th of December 1909, with Gyula Hegedüs excelling in the role of Liliom, and Irén Varsányi playing the sweet servant girl, such a flop? The question has exercised many critics and theatre historians, since its revivals have been enormously successful, and *Liliom* became the best-known, most widely performed, and most

highly regarded of the forty-two plays Molnár wrote. There was one year in the 1920s when two-hundred German theatres put on *Liliom* and it has been translated into thirty-two languages. Why did it leave the playgoers of 1909 so bewildered?

Benjamin F. Glazer, its English adaptor, points out that one can expect fantasy in every Molnár work, and already in *The Devil* the natural and supernatural were most whimsically blended. But in *Liliom* he carried fantasy to a length that was unintelligible to contemporary audiences. What did he mean by killing his hero in the fifth scene, taking him up to Heaven in the sixth and bringing him back to earth in the seventh? Was this prosaic heaven of his seriously or satirically intended? Was Liliom a saint or a common tough? Was his abortive redemption a symbol or a mere jibe? The audience took time to adapt to a new theatrical culture and when *Liliom* was revived, it was a success.

Glazer's version at the Duke of York's Theatre in London (1926) received good notices; Fay Compton was Julie, with Ivor Novello as Liliom and Charles Laughton as Ficsúr the burglar. In 1940 it had an important revival in New York's 44th Street Theatre, with Burgess Meredith and Ingrid Bergman. Rodger's and Hammerstein's musical version, *Carousel*, (1945) has given it a further life. (See page 54 for Molnár's first use of the Liliom theme.)

When his wife left him, taking their baby daughter, Molnár resumed his affair with the actress Irén Varsányi, a married woman. This inspired his comedy, *The Guardsman*, first performed in 1910. It is a sophisticated story of jealousy and deceit. Again it brought world success to Molnár, conquering America in a stylish interpretation by Lynn Fontanne and Alfred Lunt, playing together for the first time in the 1924 production for the newly-formed Theatre Guild. In London the National Theatre put on a lavish revival to celebrate the Molnár centenary in 1978. Diana Rigg and Richard Johnson played the theatrical couple, where the husband, in the guise of a guardsman, gives his wife a test of fidelity.

In an earlier London production of the play, in the year of the coronation of George V, Robert Loraine had been cast in the role of the actor-husband. He was a protégé of Bernard Shaw, who read the role and was unhappy with the way it had been translated into English. Out of friendship for Loraine, Shaw revised the guardsman's lines. Molnár was very proud later on to have had such a co-writer. He could be equally proud of his musical arranger. The second act takes place in the box of an opera house, during a performance of *Madame Butterfly*. An orchestra plays behind the scenes. Puccini, who chanced to be in London at the time, attended the dress rehearsal. After the second act he asked to speak to the conductor. The producer was terrified. Was Puccini going to raise the question of copyright and forbid the use of his music? Far from it. He asked to see the score and worked it over for hours because he did not like the way it had been arranged for the purpose, and felt that it should be adapted according to his taste.

Another marital fantasy, *The Wolf*, written by Molnár in 1912, usually rates even

higher than the highly-sophisticated *The Guardsman*. A revival in 1973 by the Oxford Playhouse, later transferring to the Apollo in London, was a great success with its star cast of Judi Dench, Leo McKern and Edward Woodward. Both *The Guardsman* and *The Wolf* are based on Molnár's intricate affair with Irén Varsányi, whose decision eventually to return to her husband resulted in the unhappy writer's attempted suicide.

The Great War interrupted Molnár's playwriting career and he became a celebrated war correspondent on the Galician front in 1914, but soon he was back in Budapest, striking up a stormy affair with the actress Sári Fedák and writing further successful comedies such as *Fashion for Man* and later *The Swan*, a huge box-office success both at home and abroad (filmed in 1956 with Grace Kelly and Alec Guinness.) In 1922 Molnár finally married Fedák in order to get rid of her. He was madly in love with a much younger star, Lili Darvas, and Sári Fedák refused to get out of their way without marriage, divorce, and alimony.

Molnár's most amusing comedy, brilliantly adapted by P. G. Wodehouse for the English stage (later suffering the misfortune to be ruined by Tom Stoppard's over-ambitious adaptation) is based on an incident out of his own life. Molnár and his third wife, Lili Darvas, were staying at the Hotel Imperial in Vienna. She was learning German and when a friend called on Molnár she went on reciting a classical German play in the next room. "I love you! I love you!", her voice could be heard through the wall, and the friend jumped up in embarrassment. But she was simply reading her lines. The incident became the basis of the plot of *The Play's the Thing*.

Ferenc Molnár's income between 1920 and 1930 was over $l million. He used this money in travelling around Europe, playing the tables in Riviera casinos, following his wife's tours with the Max Reinhardt Theatre company and attending premieres of his own works. After the outbreak of the Second World War, at the very end of 1939, he emigrated to America, and arrived in New York on his sixty-second birthday. He moved into Room 835 at the Plaza Hotel, which was to be his home until his death in 1952. Up to 1947, his sad days in exile, during which he had very few artistic successes, were sweetened by the devotion of his secretary, Wanda Bartha. With her and with Lili Darvas, he formed a curious *ménage à trois*. In 1947, however, Wanda committed suicide and Molnár became a broken old man, losing all interest in life.

Molnár's plays are often compared to those of Schnitzler, Pirandello or Noël Coward, but such comparisons are not really appropriate. Molnár's is a unique voice in the history of twentieth century theatre. His stage stories, interpreted correctly, still possess an amazing power and surprise us with their wisdom and humanity. In the West this has always been recognized, yet in his country of birth, theatregoers were denied the experience from 1948 to the mellower 'sixties. Communism was an ideology that was not concerned with individuals and their psychological make up. There is now a renewed interest in him and Molnár is filling Budapest theatres again. ❧

Ferenc Molnár

Early Fiction and Journalism

Bedtime Story

(Short story)

This story is intended for widows to lull their little children to sleep, or for good boys and girls to do the same for their old and weary parents. The story should be read serenely, in a flowing manner—lively for a start, as though it were true; the ending, by contrast, slowly and softly, so that come the end, whoever it is being read to will have fallen asleep.

There was a strange man at one of the stands at the City Park. His name was Závoczki. This Závoczki was quite a scoundrel; he bothered everyone, beat up many, even knifed a few; he stole, he cheated, and he robbed, but all the same he was a very good lad, and his wife loved him very much. For his wife was a simple little servant girl, who until the age of seventeen had been in service with a Jewish family—and then one Sunday, in her time off, she went to the park and met Závoczki, who was wearing two-tone trousers: one leg yellow, the other red. There was a chicken feather in his hair, and tied to the feather was a string whose end was in his pocket; Závoczki tugged at the string so the feather on his head would move. Everyone laughed a lot at this, and the prettiest servant girls got onto the merry-go-round where Závoczki performed this trick. It was here that the simple little maid met Závoczki. She stayed with him all day, in fact, and although she should have been home by ten, she did not even leave at eleven. Instead she stayed in the park all night, and did not dare go home the next day. From then on she stayed with the feather-headed lad, never again to be a servant, and she was so good, so meek, and so beautiful a little maid that Závoczki took her to the registry office, where she became his wife.

The man himself was the biggest scoundrel in all the City Park. By turns he was a sparker in front of the stalls, and he lived for months as a cardsharp. Whenever he stole, he did not work again while the stolen money lasted. Occasionally he was thrown in jail for a few days, and at such times his wife cried all day and all night, and although

■ This and the following pieces, all written before and during the First World War, here receive their first publication in English. "Bedtime Story" is the first treatment of the theme of the play *Liliom*, which later still became the highly succesful musical *Carousel*.

she knew he could not come home from jail, still she turned down the bed beside her own, so it would seem as if he would be home any minute. Závoczki stirred up trouble even in jail, for which he was put in solitary confinement. When this happened, the poor rascal cried a lot, and said over and over again: How unlucky I am! How unhappy I am!

At home there was no money, and Závoczki was ashamed of this. His heart went out to his beautiful, milky-cheeked little servant girl reduced to eating bread crusts, yet so his wife wouldn't know his true feelings, he bawled her out, harshly at that:

"You squander all the money, damn it."

And on such occasions milky-cheeks looked upon him sadly, and nearly cried. Závoczki, meanwhile, raised his fist and said:

"Don't you cry, or I'll knock your teeth out!"

With that he went out, slammed the door, hid in the courtyard and cried bitterly all night. Milky-cheeks dared not even cry to herself, however, because feather-head had forbidden it, and because women are good at restraining themselves. This is how it was. And all day they thought of each other, and Závoczki didn't utter a word about all this. At such times he beat up the concierge, or else knifed a policeman in the back and ran away. He was a short tempered, incorrigibly depraved lout, who had long been ripe for the gallows.

One Saturday it rained, and Závoczki sat in a ditch behind Hermina út with another scoundrel. There, in the rain, they played cards. It was already getting dark and they could barely see the cards; in any case, the rain was washing away the fancy pictures on them. This of course didn't bother Závoczki, for he knew the cards from the back as well, but it did lead the other fellow to call it quits. "Thank you, sir," said the other, and climbed out of the ditch.

"Not fair!" Závoczki cried out. "I cheated and still you won all my money. Keep playing!"

The other man, excusing himself because of he rain and the late hour, said he would gladly grant Závoczki a return bout the next day, then he ran off as fast as he could. He splashed away barefoot in the mud.

Závoczki then pulled forth his kitchen knife and went out way beyond Francia út to the Royal Hungarian State Railways embankment. That was the route taken by Mr Linzman, the cashier at the leather factory, when he took the workers their pay every Saturday night. Závoczki crouched down beside the embankment of the Royal Hungarian State Railways and waited for Mr Linzman, so that he could stab him and take the money. But he waited in vain; for, as he realized, he was late. Mr Linzman had already passed with the money; indeed, he had already returned to town with his empty bag. This goes to show that card playing is an accursed pastime, for it leads one to overlook one's priorities.

So it was that Závoczki climbed up the Royal Hungarian State Railways embankment, two tears running down his dirty face, suddenly pale, his expression easing into a smile, and shouted, "Júlia Zeller! Júlia Zeller!"—for this was his wife's name. And grasping the kitchen knife in both hands he turned it toward himself and plunged it into

his heart. He immediately died, rolled down the Royal Hungarian State Railways embankment, a pack of dirty cards and three white ivory juggling balls in his pocket, the chicken feather in his hair, and on his lips the name of the meek little servant girl: Júlia Zeller! Júlia Zeller!

Závoczki was buried in the ditch, and there was no question of the Archbishop of Esztergom delivering a funeral oration. But his wife was there, in a black dress that she herself had sewn the night before. Everyone in the house tried to console milky-cheeked Júlia, saying, "God is great that He should free tortured little maids from their torturers. You are still young, may he rest in peace, but it's better this way, God is great, you are still young." And Júlia, her sad eyes acknowledging the neighbours' words, nodded repeatedly. She even answered, "Thank you, janitor, you are so good to me, and Mrs Braun, thank you Mrs Braun, thank you Mrs Stufenberger, everyone is so good to me, thank you Mrs Braun." What's more, she even said, "You are right, Police Inspector, it's much better this way, may the dead rest in peace." For Júlia was ashamed to admit to a policeman that a scoundrel like Závoczki could be missed even beyond the grave, for no reason at all, which is really shameful. And already on the day after the funeral she began sewing baby clothes, for she was to give birth the following month.

Závoczki, meanwhile, had been laid to rest that afternoon in the paupers' lot, but he stayed there only until evening. Anyone who knows how things work knows that each evening a green paddy wagon arrives at the police station and it takes those to jail whom the police have diligently rounded up all day. In the same way a big green wagon arrives at the cemetery each night to take away those scoundrels who have died by their own hands. They do not go immediately to hell, but first to purgatory. There they look into what the trouble was about, and where things stand now; for many among them even end up in paradise.

Well, Závoczki got into the green wagon along with the others, the long knife in his heart. Beside him was a watery man, watery for he had jumped into the Danube. Across from them there sat a lady with a rope around her neck—the poor woman had hanged herself. The rest of them bore no outward signs. Instead, there were little bullets in them which they had fired themselves. Away they went in the wagon, bumping out onto Keresztúri út and from there turned toward the prison, in the dead of night. They went on and on until day began to break. Then the horses suddenly picked up their pace, and were soon galloping; Závoczki peered out of a hole and saw that the wagon was going down a very wide road into a valley covered in pink fog. By now the wagon was literally flying, wheels spinning in the air, cities and villages passing by under them. None of this hurt Závoczki, however, for indeed, the knife was in his heart precisely so nothing would ever hurt him again.

Then they stopped. In succession they all got off the wagon, and the police led them to a big office building. There they had to wait in a vestibule where there was no smoking; many of them were spitting, and still there was a smell of smoke. Next

there emerged a bespectacled messenger who called on them in turn. Finally, after some waiting, Závoczki stood before the official.

"What is your name?" asked the official, not even looking up from the columns on the large sheet of paper before him.

"Endre Závoczki."

"Age?"

"Thirty-two."

"Place of birth?"

Závoczki did not answer. The official still did not look at him.

He said:

"Place of birth? Unknown?"

Závoczki nodded. Then the official looked at him.

"You have the right to return for a day, if you forgot anything in life. He who dies as nature dictates, as is proper, has no need to return, for he leaves nothing behind. But the suicide, seeing as how he has not let nature take its course, sometimes leaves something behind, and as a result causes suffering on earth. Answer me."

And the official looked at him sternly, as is customary with a suicide. Závoczki answered:

"I forgot to await the birth of my child. I've been regretting this, not having waited, for I would've liked to see the baby, but now it's too late. This is very sad, but I am a man, and if I have already left once, thank you but I'll stay."

Having said this, Závoczki proudly threw out his chest, looked defiantly into the official's eyes, and his own eyes glimmered just like the kitchen knife that stuck out from his heart.

"Off to prison with you, you heartless scoundrel!" cried the official, and the police grabbed Závoczki, dragged him off to jail, and along the way Závoczki laughed at them, the knife in his heart, shaking his head and yelling, "You're nothing but lackeys, you're cops, lackeys, good-for-nothing lackeys, errand boys!"

The policemen in turn kicked Závoczki, while one of them gripped the handle of the knife so it wouldn't slip from his heart.

For sixteen years Závoczki sat around in purgatory. It is an old wives' tale that the fire in purgatory burns. In fact, the fire there is no more than a rather strong, pink light in which one must sit for many long years, until bad traits are drained from the soul. In time, Závoczki got used to the light, and felt as though he had become purified in it. By then he thought up all sorts of plans, for his heart had been cleansed, and he would liked to have seen his child—why, he didn't even know if it was a boy or a girl. So it was that, one day, a junior clerk walked through the pink fire, asking everyone if they had any complaints regarding the personnel, and Závoczki caught his attention.

"Please, sir," said Závoczki. "Do I still have the right to return for a day for something I left behind?"

"You do," the clerk responded gently, for those who have sat for so long in the fire are addressed more courteously. "Go ahead and apply."

Závoczki applied the next day. The clerk gave him a little slip of paper that said he had a twenty-four hour pass. That done, they took him to the basement and pulled the knife from his chest. In exchange he got a numbered ticket he had to put in his pocket. And he sauntered leisurely away, meandering on and on until he reached the jute works in Újpest. Here he politely inquired the address of the widow Závoczki, who works there. He was told where to go and went on.

Závoczki's wife lived in a small labourer's house, the kind of which there were six next to each other, all identical. It was Sunday morning, the sun shone. The woman, whom Závoczki spied sewing away behind a groundfloor window, was still her old self, a milky-cheeked little servant girl, just that she had aged a bit. On the windowsill were two vulgar red flowers in pots, and behind the flowers hung a delicate little curtain. Nonetheless, beside the curtain there was just enough room to see the woman. Her face was meek and solemn.

Závoczki knocked at the door, and the door opened. A girl stepped onto the threshold. She looked to be sixteen years old, and the man immediately saw that she was his daughter. The girl sternly asked:

"What do you want?"

Závoczki covered his heart with his left hand, so that the girl wouldn't see the ragged state of the jacket where the knife had gone in. He could now return, he felt, having finally seen his daughter. But he had to say something, since the girl asked what he wanted. So it was that he reached into his pocket with his right hand to remove the three white ivory balls, which he had once juggled enchantingly well.

"If you please," he said, "I know all sorts of tricks."

And he grinned, so that he would see his daughter laugh. But the girl didn't laugh. She was a stern and solemn girl, like her mother. She said:

"Please leave."

With that she extended her hand toward the doorknob, to shut the door on this man who looked like a tramp. Her hand was white, her fingers delicate. It was at that moment that Závoczki was overcome by all the anger that the fire had extinguished within him over sixteen years. Bitterness swelled within him like some rising tide. And he hit that little white hand that had reached out to slam the door forever in his face. The girl looked upon him, then reached out once more and shut the door. The key turned in the lock; Závoczki remained outside. His anger having subsided, he was now awfully ashamed for having hit his child. He anxiously looked about and his pierced heart throbbed with pain. So he hurriedly went back where he had come from. Not even he knew where, however, or just which way he was going. But those who have died can no longer go anywhere except back into death.

It was late at night by the time Závoczki arrived back at the big building he had come from. There they knew it all. The porter grinned at him from his booth. Závoczki sank his head and went mutely up the stairs, where he had to sign in. The

clerk was already awaiting him. They took the ticket from him and shoved the knife into his hand. They shouted at him.

"So you are, after all, the biggest scoundrel in the world! You return from the other world only to beat your child!"

Závoczki didn't say a word. They put the knife back into his heart, and he heaved deeply. Then they grabbed him, sat him onto a little iron cart and rolled him down into hell. So it was that Závoczki rolled from the pink fire to the red fire, where until the end of time he will boil and scream with pain. This is what happened to Závoczki.

His daughter, meanwhile, went into the room to her mother.

"A shabby man was here," she said. "He grinned something awful, so I wanted to slam the door shut on him. An awful fire glared in his eyes; they were crying, but his face was laughing. So I reached out to shut the door when he smacked my hand. A real loud smack."

The woman looked down at the floor, as if looking for something. She asked with a trembling voice:

"And then?"

"And then he left. But I'm still shaking, even now. He hit my hand good and hard, but it didn't hurt. As if someone had touched me ever so gently. The feel of his calloused, brutal hand was like that of a lip, or a heart."

"I know", the woman said quietly, and continued to sew.

And of all this they never spoke again, and they lived until they died, and that's the end of the story. Sleep, my dear. ❧

Sketches

Summer. Carlsbad. A luxury hotel. The most expensive. A cafe-terrace before the hotel. Three in the afternoon. The terrace is packed with visitors. The first floor windows are above the terrace. The first floor rooms are the most expensive. A woman leans out the corner window and speaks to her husband, having a black coffee on the crowded terrace.

"Leo, I want to read the paper and I can't find it. Where did you put it?"

The whole assemblage looks up at the pretty woman leaning out the first floor window.

Leo, a well-known Budapest banker, answers with embarrassment.

"I think it's on the nighttable."

The woman disappears from the window. Leo is a bit embarrassed over the big stir. A moment later the woman appears in the second window and speaks:

"Not there."

Leo responds:

"Then I don't know where I put it."

The woman disappears from the second window and immediately appears in the third.

"Didn't you take it with you?"

"No."

She disappears from the third window, and appears in the fourth.

"Not in your pocket."

"No."

She disappears from the fourth window, and appears in the fifth.

"I can't find it anywhere."

Leo answers with embarrassment, for everyone looks up at his wife each time she appears. Blushing, he says:

"Look for it, then."

The woman disappears, reappearing at the sixth, the seventh, and the eighth window, announcing in each that she cannot find the paper. Leo, being a good husband, gets up, goes to the newsstand, buys a paper, and takes it up to his wife. Upon stepping into the room he sees the woman in the lounge chair, reading the paper.

"What is this?" he asks. "So you found the paper?"

"I never lost it," she answers.

Leo stares at her.

"What are you staring at?" She says. "We arrived today, and I had to find a way of letting everyone know that we have four rooms with eight windows, on the first floor." ❧

A horrible dream: I invented ordinary café au lait. I dreamt that I had a fine breakfast: coffee and a roll. Yet I was the only person in the world who had this for breakfast. No one yet knew of café au lait, for I invented it. And I was convinced that if mankind were to acquaint itself with this discovery, it would become the most popular breakfast or elevenses in the whole world, and that hundreds of millions of people would drink it, even several times a day. Hence I ran to a big bank that finances all sorts of enterprises, and managed to get an appointment with the head manager. Having explained that I'd discovered a drink I predicted would be popular, the manager asked me to describe the invention. I had to keep my presentation brief, so I said just this much:

"First you send people to the other side of the globe, where there is a certain shrub whose ripe pods must be gathered. These must be put into an iron vessel and not burned, but rather heated only until they turn black and begin to emit the odour of roasting."

The manager was already looking at me with suspicion.

"Then," I went on, "these half-burned beans must be ground into a powder. But we eat neither the powder nor its remains. Instead, we construct cooking vessels

in which water boils underneath the powder, and the resultant steam permeates through the black powder, secreting from it a blackish liquid that accumulates in a separate vessel and has an acrid bitter taste—indeed, disagreeable."

Now he was focusing wide open eyes on me.

"Then," I continued, "we choose from among the many animals in the world a mammal, more precisely a female mammal. From this mammal we artificially and cruelly extract the white liquid with which it nourishes its young. We put this liquid on a range and heat it up; then we let it cool, not to the point of coldness but only until it has cooled off just enough so it doesn't burn a person's mouth. We take the animal liquid obtained in this way and mix it with the black plant liquid extracted just before."

"Terrible," said the manager.

"Then," I resolutely went on, "so as to make this mixture pleasurable, we go out into a field and sow a certain plant with a very thick root. But it is not the leaf, the flower, nor the seed of this plant that we use to realize our aims, but precisely its root. When its root grows thick we pull it out, cut it up in slices, and putting it in a tray of water we extract its sickeningly sweet juice. We then throw away the root. The dirty juice we thus extracted evaporates until the water is gone and dirt-coloured crystals are left behind. We crush these crystals and, by way of a special process, bleach them white and then transform them into even tinier crystals that come together in a mass. We cut this mass into tiny cubes, put two of these little cubes into the aforementioned black-white, plant-animal liquid mixture, wait until they dissolve, and then drink the whole thing."

"Horrible," said the bank manager "You have a sick imagination. Go see a psychiatrist

"I recorded this dream on paper only because since then I have trembled with terror at the thought of how much struggle would await the inventor who would today be responsible for the world's most popular drink; why, he would have to go like this from bank to bank, making things known and winning acceptance for this complicated concoction, convincing others that coffee will someday be a popular and everyday drink. ❧

I earnestly recommend the following little tale to a dictionary editor who seeks not only a definition for the entry *idea,* but an example to show what can rightfully be called that. (I had the new generation in mind when retrieving this oft-told story from my notes. I am afraid that many of the old are familiar with it.)

Many, many years ago a young journalist was once asked by his editor to take a trip to the provinces to attend an interesting trial as their Own Correspondent. On the train he shared a compartment with a famous old lawyer who had a big role in this case and was likewise travelling to the trial. The old man was among the most interesting of Hungarian lawyers, known best for his ideas for saving a situation. He spoke of the interesting events in his long years of practice, most gladly of those in

which, using some clever ruse, he improved the cases of defendants every sensible person had given up on. The young journalist asked him to relate the best idea of his career. The old man told the following story:

"One day a handsome young man came into my office, and having politely greeted me, started to cry. (Every other client starts that way.) I waited for him to calm down. He briefly related his situation.

'I am a clerk at X Bank,' he said. 'I fell in love with a woman, and embezzled ten thousand forints. In eight days there will be an audit at the bank. Then they will realize what I've done, report me to the police, and throw me in prison. I'm not going to wait for this. I'm the son of a respectable family. Before committing suicide I decided to come to you for advice. Help me.'

'In this case there is just one thing that can be done,' I told him, 'and for this you do not need my expertise. Confess everything to your family and have them collect the money. You, in turn, go ahead and put it back into the drawer you stole it from.'

He again burst into tears, saying: 'My family is poor. I support them. I don't have even one well-to-do relative. I am lost.'

For quite a while I paced mutely back and forth in the office pondering over what could be done. The young man despairingly followed my steps with his eyes, sensing that his fate was to be decided in this brief moment.

Turning to him suddenly I said, 'I will try.'

He wanted to kiss my hand. I then put the following simple question to him:

'Could you embezzle *another* ten thousand forints?'

'Oh yes,' he answered, shamefully lowering his eyes.

'Well then,' I said, 'embezzle another ten thousand forints and bring it here to me. We'll see about the rest.'

Three days later he showed up at my office and put ten one-thousand-forint banknotes on my desk.

'Alright,' I said, 'you are a talented person, you'll make something of yourself yet. For the present, kindly go home and allow me the pleasure of seeing you here again tomorrow.'

I put the money in my pocket and went to the bank manager. I briefly told him the following:

'Sir, your young clerk, Mr. X.Y., embezzled twenty thousand forints from your cash-desk. This will become evident next week. Say you report this person and have him locked up—the bank will lose twenty thousand forints. The young man's relatives are poor. But in order to help the boy, they have sold all they have, exhausted their credit, and at the cost of great sacrifice were able to come up with ten thousand forints, half the embezzled amount. They simply couldn't come up with more. This money is here in my pocket. I, as the family's attorney, propose to the bank that it accept half the stolen amount and let the hapless boy off. If the bank accepts this offer, it will at least recover half the loss. If you do not, I will return the ten thousand forints to the family, and the bank will get nothing.'

The manager accepted the offer without reservation, since—considering the interests of the bank— he could not have done otherwise. He accepted the money and let the boy off."

("There is just one problem with this story," the old lawyer said, finishing the tale, "that it is not true. Nowadays I cannot get to sleep, and at night I always give myself such difficult problems to solve.") ❧

The best advertising scheme I ever saw, I saw not in America but in Europe. I am sad to say I know just the Christian name of the man who thought it up: he was called Toni. Before the War, he operated at a resort where I once holidayed with my family. Back then he wore ragged shoes, but considering the stroke of genius in him, I am certain that today he is called something else, not Toni, and is at the top of some world-renowned corporation. Toni's career began when I went back home one evening and there, before me, was a supper of hare and a bottle of French champagne on the table. My wife explained that a man (this being Toni) had appeared the other day at our place with two bottles of Mumm and a hare. In exchange he asked for five peace-time crowns. My wife immediately bought it all. As for the trifling scruples that arise in the soul of a good housewife when faced with groceries at simply too good a bargain, Toni dispelled them with his pronouncement that a friend of his had shot the hare, and the champagne he'd managed to get at an auction. We ate the hare and we drank the champagne; both were magnificent. A week later Toni again appeared at our place. He brought a bottle of Pommery, a bottle of a French liqueur, and a pheasant. The whole thing again cost five crowns. My wife, being a woman of fine sensitivity, only subtly alluded to the fact that it is stolen goods that are usually this inexpensive, but Toni once again reassured her: a friend of his had shot the pheasant, and the liqueur was from the auctioned-off stock of a bankrupt grocery store. There are no words to describe just how easy it is to soothe the conscience of a passionately good housewife on such occasions. We ate the pheasant, drank the champagne, and opened the liqueur; everything was first-rate. The following week Toni came again, but brought nothing. He came by just to say hello. My wife gave him a slice of buttered bread and a cigar, then he left. He was not seen for two weeks. One evening I came home to see ten bottles of French champagne in the vestibule. I guessed that Toni had again been here. "Yes," said my wife, "Today he went big-time." And I learned the following: Toni had arrived excitedly that morning and said that no less than one hundred bottles of Mumm champagne are available from auctioned-off stock. This would cost a bit more, he said, each bottle being three crowns. (Its retail price at that time was eleven crowns.) Could my wife quickly organize a group of friends to buy the hundred bottles? After all, he said, tomorrow it would no longer be available. She rounded up the neighbours, and some fifteen families joined forces and bought the champagne. This is how we came by ten bottles. Toni got the three hundred crowns, delivered the hundred bottles, requested discretion, and left. A few days later we had

guests, and thus opened a bottle of champagne. My suspicion first arose when the cork didn't pop. The bottle contained nothing but ordinary water, dyed pale yellow. The same went for the other nine bottles and the ninety other bottles distributed among the neighbours. The bottling, the label, and the cork were all in order. No one dared say a disparaging word about Toni. Instead, at that time fifteen husbands said to fifteen wives, "It serves you right." My wife cried for days and kept saying, "It's no longer the money that hurts, but that I brought such ill luck on so many families." For me, however, it was the lost money that hurt; no, I don't feel sorry for families that want to buy stolen champagne cheap, and instead get honestly-acquired pale yellow water at a high price. In my eyes, moreover, Toni had ascended to an ethical pillar, for it was now certain that he had not stolen the bottles of real champagne, but rather sold them at a loss in the interests of advertising. Finally he had sold us his own product, which had just one drawback: it was a bit expensive. This is why I can't stop marvelling over Toni, and why I do not envy him the high position he surely has today, nor his four apartment buildings in Berlin, his villa and yacht on the Riviera, his big American tourer and two small town cars, his bank accounts in Switzerland, London and New York, nor the incipient arteriosclerosis that, considering his life of pleasure, he has probably already been diagnosed as having. ❧

I once overheard two gentlemen on a train argue about free love. I can faithfully relate the beginning of their conversation. They moved about in generalities.

"The institution of marriage is bankrupt, out-of-date, and has become impossible," concluded one.

The other replied:

"That's right."

"This is shown by the many divorces."

"That's right."

"The many families hapless, tragedies, murders, suicides."

"That's right."

After a brief pause, one of them asked what could be done with the present institution of marriage, and the other answered that it must certainly be abolished. The first in turn naturally inquired if you abolish marriage, what would you put in its place? The face of the other gleamed.

"Freedom! Limitless freedom! Men and women alike would freely go about their own business, love whoever they want, as long as they want to!"

But immediately he had a difficult question posed to him.

"How do you conceive of this, my dear sir, in practice?"

So far this has been an authentic record of their conversation. As to what follows, the form, but only that, is mine. The greater part of the copyright, as it were, still belongs to the gentleman talking. The essence of what he said I will faithfully describe. I just happened to arrange it a bit, especially the dialogue; and I thought

through that which he only touched on. So, as they say, I edited his argument. I believed this would someday make for a good scene in a comedy, that I had found a good character in this daring reformer who had discovered such a brilliant alternative to marriage. Nonetheless, the sole result is this dialogue. The question of how he imagined free love in practice, was answered by the daring innovator:

"Quite simple. Let's take an example. A man loves a woman. The woman returns the love. Hence they decide to live together."

The other casts his doubts.

"What do you mean, 'live together'?"

"If a healthy man and a healthy woman love each other, their utmost desire is to live together, to spend their days and their nights together. So they move in together and love each other. They proudly affirm that they have chosen each other. They let the whole world know that they are together."

"How do they let the whole world know? Do they tell everyone they meet?"

"No. They simply put it in the paper."

"Good. Then I can put it in the paper that I live with Miss X.Y. even if the lady does not want to live with me."

"It is quite easy to get around this. Both announce that they want to belong to each other. They announce this."

"In front of the newspaper editor?"

"No."

"Where then?"

"Before some individual who will not forget this, and later, if someone asks, 'Who does Miss X.Y. live with?', he can answer, say, "with Mr Szabó.'"

"And that individual will remember all of the many gentlemen and ladies who daily go to him to report this sort of thing?"

"No. Let's say he buys a big notebook, and in it he always records the names and the date."

"I must admit this is quite a clever and practical innovation."

"Yes. Yet a certain degree of order must be maintained! For we are not animals! The young couple now live together, love each other, help each other in their work, tend to each other in times of illness, etcetera."

"Well then, what happens if, for example, someone else asks the young lady to live with him, because *he* is in love with her?"

"The young lady will simply respond, 'I do not want to live with you, for I already live with Mr Szabó.'"

"This is bound to be tiring if ten or twenty men a day ask the woman if she is still available. And this will occur with pretty women. Couldn't the lady wear something that would let them know immediately that she is already taken?"

"I do not rule this out. It is practical. She could use some title with her name. Such a woman could be referred to differently to those who do not live with a man."

"Now this is clever. A really daring and suitable innovation."

"Moreover, I'll go even further: as long as a woman lives with a man, she could also use the name of the man with whom she lives."

"How? Then you would have to greet the woman like this: 'Hello, Miss cohabitant of Mr Szabó."

"No. That's very long. But I have an idea. This can be abbreviated. You can say 'Hello, Mr Szabó's woman' or, briefly, 'Hello, Mrs Szabó.'"

"Terrific. How practical, how simple, how open and honourable an idea! In other words, the woman would adopt the name of whomever she lives with."

"That's right!"

"I'm convinced. But what happens if, say, the man grows bored with the woman, and wants to live with another?"

"He would simply leave the woman and move in with the other."

"And if Mrs Szabó were not to want this?"

"This would make things a bit harder. Mr Szabó would have to prove that he had good reason to leave her. After all, we are not animals—why, a hysterical man or a hysterical woman might move in with someone else every day. Some little morsel of order must, after all, be maintained."

"What then?"

"If Mr Szabó wants to leave whom he cohabits with, he first goes to the gentleman who recorded their names in the big book, and asks that he erase them from the big book."

"And if Mr Szabó's partner also goes to this man and asks that he should *not* erase them, because she loves Mr Szabó and wants to continue living with him?"

"Quite simple: an impartial individual must decide between the two."

"And who should this person be?"

"They mutually decide on an intelligent and honourable person."

"And if they can't come to terms?"

"Then ... let's say ... maybe the state would appoint an individual to determine whether they are bound to live together or not."

"Terrific! I marvel at the speed of your intellect. You find an immediate answer to even the most difficult of questions, virtually without thinking! I believe, however, that the state would then have to appoint several hundred people a day to rule on such matters. This would be quite complicated."

"I have an idea for this, too. The state would appoint only a few such intelligent persons, and they would always be the ones to make the decision. Every woman and man would go to them for a ruling. This has another advantage; for such an individual will acquire a great deal of experience after a certain time—and the older he gets, the wiser will be his decisions."

"Fascinating! Daring reforms are just pouring out of you! I am curious what you come up with in deciding which of the two should get the little house, for example, that they jointly purchased— if they should split up."

"This, too, would be decided by the state appointee."

"Bravo. Now for a tough question. If they have a child and subsequently split up, which of them gets custody of the child?"

"The state."

"But say the mother doesn't want to give her child to the state? Can she be forced to do this? Where is freedom here?"

"The question is fair. But it's not hard to solve this either—all that's needed is a bit of genius. The same state appointee who thus far decided on the other matters would decide here, too."

"Dazzling, your ideas are lightning fast!"

"Thank you for the compliments. Yet I didn't say all this to show off my intellect, but because I want to prove how obsolete marriage today is, and how easy it is to come up with something far more clever, more practical, and entirely new to take its place. One needs only a heart, mind, and daring to get it done."

"And do you think your ideas could be carried into practice as well?"

"No, I don't. Mark my word, dear sir: mankind ever shudders at reforms and new ideas. Yet one thing reassures me. In the course of slow progress, mankind will nonetheless eventually arrive at the very solution to this question which I have just had the pleasure of expounding to you." ❧

The War Correspondent

Our corps in Galicia, where I was sent in 1915 as a war correspondent, was famous for the magnificent cooking of the H.Q. mess. The corps lay idle for months holding the line in eastern Galicia, in the summer heat. Sometimes there was no artillery fire for days. The staff officers read novels, kept their journals, organized races. And the food improved even more as time passed. There were two tables in the officers' mess: a big one that seated thirty-five, and a small table at which the general presided over ten officers of his staff and me, a guest. There was good food to be had at the big table as well, but as for the small table, it could have taken on any famous Viennese hotel. A young Croat first lieutenant sat next to me who was the dissenting voice in this small group. Once he said to me during lunch:

"The food here is as lavish as it is because we have two chefs, and both are very much afraid of dying. They hope that, by cooking so magnificently, they will be allowed to fight in the kitchen, not in the line."

On Sunday there was always cake. Of the two chefs, one was a professional pastry cook. It seems that he feared death the more, for he performed culinary wonders. Astounding constructions in icing decorated his cakes. Once there was an entire church with small Gothic steeples; another time, a hunting scene comprised of sugar, complete with a forest, a hunter, and a stag. Then there was a

chateau with lights in the windows and a tower from whose top, when removed, there flew out a real bird. And finally, the most beautiful of all: the fortress of Przemysl, all in icing, in ruins and flambé, burning after a bombardment. The general was enchanted. We ate Przemysl, then doused and drank the punch within. The career of the chef was at its peak, as was his assurance of personal safety. The Croat first lieutenant whispered to me:

"Record this in your journal. A proven way to elude mortal danger in time of war: Enclose a live bird in a tower made of icing."

Then the following happened. There was a major there with an unpronounceable name (Spanish or Portuguese), he was the most influential officer on the staff, although he literally hated our boys, most of them Hungarian, with a few who were German. This major had a beautiful big dog that he loved very much. The dog knew a lot of tricks, but the major was most proud that, when shown a fly on a wall, his dog would jump amazingly high up the wall and gulp down the fly. The dog did this so fast that the fly never had a chance. In those lazy days, this was among our regular ways of amusing ourselves.

One day at noon, on my way to lunch, I saw a crowd gathering before the building that housed the mess. Officers stood there laughing raucously. I went over and saw that the dog kept jumping up the wall trying to catch a big fly—but the dog couldn't and the fly did not fly off. The famous pastry cook stood by the wall incessantly cheering on the dog. "Get the fly," he yelled. The funny thing was that the fly was not a real fly; for the pastry cook had drawn it with a pencil on the white wall, way up high. It had a head, wings, and six legs. The dog jumped up in vain about a hundred times. It was already half dead from weariness. The officers laughed, the dog went on jumping, and the chef cried, "Get the fly!" All at once the laughter stopped. The major arrived and saw what was going on. He called the dog, which by then was trembling with excitement and fatigue. Red with anger and with flaring eyes, the major looked upon the chef, who stood in a rigid salute, and said to him:

"You idiot!"

There was a deathly silence. The major held a small cane in his hand, and it quivered like a tuning fork that has been hit. Everyone saw what, for a moment, had been the major's intention.

About a week later came an order from command headquarters that a register should be taken of all non-essential personnel and they be sent to the frontline. It was around then that the artistic cakes suddenly disappeared from our table. The Croatian first lieutenant remarked:

"Record this in your journal. It is a deadly act in time of war to draw a fly on the wall with a pencil."

Were I not copying from my journal but writing a story, I could end by saying that the pastry cook got killed. The truth is, however, that I haven't heard a thing. Therefore I simply recorded the story as I knew it. Let the reader add what he or she prefers. ❧

Late one night—after a first night— the debate was on (as it has been, I think, for several thousand years) between writers, actors, and directors over whether in fact there are stories that can only be told on stage, with the use of actors—stories that the teller can express fully neither verbally or in writing—or in printed form. I took part by relating a few stories and situations that all have a bigger impact when seen on stage than when read in a book. But among the tales, the one that would have best answered the question naturally came to my mind only after the debate was long over, and everyone had gone home to sleep.

One summer afternoon in 1915 on the main street of the village of Podhajce in eastern Galicia, where I spent some time as a war correspondent, I met a Hungarian officer I knew.

"Want to see something interesting?" he asked. "Then come along with me, now. I'll show you a court-martial in progress."

He led me out to the end of the village, a residential area by east Galician standards. There, in the middle of a large and neglected garden, stood a simple single-storey house. Some H.Q. had been billeted there. Several tables had been pushed together in front of the house, under the trees, to make up one long table. As far as I can recall, ten or twelve officers sat on one side of the table, a lieutenant-colonel in the middle. My acquaintance and I stood at a certain distance from the court, so as not to disturb them. Standing before the table was the accused: a handsome man of giant build, a uniformed but hatless Ruthenian Home Guard with a thick black beard. Bottles of soda water glimmered on the table amidst the many papers. The court-martial was noisy, but I didn't understand a word of it, the lieutenant-colonel was speaking to the accused in some Slav language. My guide, who understood, explained what this was all about. This Ruthenian giant had been caught trying to steal his way over to the Russian lines. He was being court-martialled as a spy. We stood there for a long while, watching the scene: a row of seated officers behind the bottles of soda water, and before them, standing straight as a flagpole, the enormous, black-bearded man. My guide all of a sudden tapped my shoulder.

"Look over there," he said, pointing toward the entrance of the garden.

The garden extended to a main road;and beyond the wide gate of the low paling fence encircling the yard was a little wooden bridge over a ditch. A big, brawny girl stood on the bridge—rigid, motionless, watching the court-martial. She was a broad-shouldered, round-breasted peasant girl, wearing a white bodice and the blood-red double apron, common to the region, that covered her underclothing, on both sides, like some red slit skirt. My guide noted that this girl had come here an hour earlier and from the start, had stood there just as motionless, watching, on the same spot. The soldiers knew her: the lover of the accused. (Many already had regular lovers, as the regiment had held this position for three months.)

The lieutenant-colonel rose from the tribunal table and the other officers immediately followed suit. They sentenced the defendant to death. Two soldiers

escorted him into the house. The officers stood around the table, talking. This moment hit me so hard, I had to escape.

"Let's get away from here," I said to the officer, and was already on my way anxiously toward the gate. As we went out through the gate, crossing the wooden bridge, the big peasant girl called out to my companion without a word of greeting, but with a rather solemn expression:

"Please, are they going to shoot him?"

The officer responded:

"Yes."

"Thank you," said the girl, who then turned around, crossed the bridge, and left with slow, even steps. She went off along the white road, with not a single movement that was not necessary for walking. Straight ahead she went, head raised, not even looking back, neither in a hurry nor too slowly. Yet it was this way of walking, this appallingly matter-of-fact departure, this tempo, this rhythm, the correlative bearing of the head, the slow swinging of her arms, the rhythmic sweeping of her skirt, due to her determined steps, that expressed that...

It expressed that which, I confess, I cannot here express; for I feel that that which was beautiful, dramatic, and lyrical in this wordless departure would only lose its bloom with each printed word used to explain it. The sentences with which I strive to approach this unforgettable tableau shatter the perfect twilight silence that enfolds this tale of departure—and which is, after all, an integral part of the experience. We stood on the bridge silently watching how she—offended, as it were, but deliberately—*left* the man who would be shot in an hour. We didn't even move until she disappeared. Yet I feel that if I continue to explain what happened, more time will elapse than it took for this scene to occur. This story—this departure—can, I think, only be acted. It can make for a story, but it is impossible to reproduce it in writing. The essence of the scene was the woman's departure from the now useless male—immediate, unhesitating, wilful and self-conscious, even energetic; it was an unremitting and implacable act that could be expressed only by a movement that perfectly enveloped her feelings. Yet this movement, even in its own simplicity, also included all the conclusions that we, the viewers, drew from it: forever valid laws about the relationship between a woman and a man, the psychology of the peasant, about the individual ashamed of and concealing the injury received—indeed, about the war itself.

Thus we have a moment that Duse could have expressed better than Balzac. If this moment were to have been a theatrical role, however, the author would have given just a stage direction: *"Silently departs."* ❧

Claudio Magris

Danube and Post-Danube

Six years have passed since the publication of *Danube* and ten since, almost by accident—or, in one of those seemingly casual occasions in which a latent process of semiconscious preparation suddenly condenses itself—the idea came to me to write this book. Since then, on many occasions (especially at the beginning, but later as well) and in the most varied countries in which *Danube* was translated, in Scandinavian and South American capitals and in small towns and villages of the Italian or German countryside, people have asked me why and how I came to write a book like this.

It is difficult, if not impossible, for me to answer this question and therefore it might be better not to try to. Every book is cleverer than its author because it has its origins and roots in his deepest memories, in that web of experiences, desires, interests, anxieties, desertions, rebellions, nostalgias of which he is only partly conscious, since they involve clear areas of the surface as well as remote and sunken areas of his personality. The occasion that acts as midwife for a book is some evident immediate cause, but the pregnancy is almost always unclear and mysterious. A writer may be aware of his development and of some underlying motives, but he may never be sure of not ignoring others, and possibly more decisive ones, which elude him.

What is at work here is not the unspeakable mysticism of inspiration, but the spontaneous naiveté with which we live, without constantly uncovering the essential factors of our activities—just as when we produce a gesture, a movement, or a smile, we do not know exactly (and could not exactly tell) what goes on in our body or our face. For this reason the author of a book himself often discovers certain aspects of his work thanks to the remarks of others. Ever since *Danube* was published, for some years that is, I have been receiving letters from a variety of readers, from Italy as well as from

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many different countries: from readers of all sorts, with or without formal education, of all possible ages, and from the most unlikely places, sometimes even hospitals or prisons. Some read *Danube* like an essay, others—by far the larger number—like a novel; some find it melancholic and others humorous: for some, then, it is a book of sadness and disenchantment, for others, despite everything, a book of hope. In this correspondence—which is now a tiring but fascinating assignment, as if I was interminably writing another book—I often discover, thanks to my interlocutors, aspects of *Danube* that I had never consciously considered.

When I set out on my Danubian journey—a journey both external and internal, into reality and into the mind—the Iron Curtain still existed, and beyond it began what was called "the other" Europe. Perhaps (without fully realizing it) I directed the first step of that journey toward cancelling that adjective, "other". I have always been convinced that Europe is not restricted to Western Europe, to France, Great Britain, Germany, Italy, and so on, but that it includes that so-called "other" Europe, Central and Eastern Europe, then forgotten and oppressed, at times feared and renounced. No doubt, Soviet domination was the prime reason for this division, this renouncement or, at least, this remoteness, of Central Eastern Europe, but part of the responsibility lay with the prejudices of the West, which joined in the move to disinherit and ignore this essential part of our European civilization. I remember thinking as a child that Prague, for example, was east of Vienna simply because it was beyond the cultural barrier, and I remember the surprise of discovering that in fact it lay to the west.

The fact that I was born and raised, up to the age of eighteen, in Trieste, must have been crucially relevant in the formation of this sensibility. Trieste is an Italian city hallmarked by a long period of belonging to the Habsburg Empire and the presence of other national and cultural components, from the Slovene to the Greek, and a strong presence of the Jewish element. It was a melting-pot and at the same time an archipelago, a place where cultures met and separated, as it often happens on the frontier, which is both bridge and barrier. I myself absorbed this atmosphere in my childhood and adolescence; to give just one example, my father learnt English from Stanislaus Joyce—and I could give many other examples of my exposure to this world of cultures, Italian and otherwise.

Trieste is a frontier city, sometimes it seems to be made of nothing but frontiers that cut across it like scars. There were times—especially in the immediate wake of the Second World War—when it seemed to be a no man's land between frontiers. The Iron Curtain, the border that divided the whole world and threatened an apocalyptic war, ran a few miles from my home—at least for a few years before Tito opted for neutrality—and I saw it during my walks on the Karst. Up to 1954 Trieste was a Free Territory, which ought to have been governed by a governor who was never appointed and whose appointment, due to sheer negligence, remained on the agenda of the United Nations until 1977, twenty-three years after Trieste had

returned to Italy. In those years one did not know what the future would bring in terms of politics or nationality. One lived in a kind of turbulent irreality, on the periphery of life and history, yet on a periphery condensed by international politics. This state of being on the frontier, with its irreparable contradictions, made one feel with particular awareness the universal problem of identity, that is, the complex and contradictory nature of all identity—individual, cultural, national. This partly explains why Trieste has lived so much on literature and in literature, since literature is the territory where we can go in search of ourselves when we do not know who we are.

It is no coincidence that Joyce found Trieste so congenial: a city that lay, like Dublin, in History's back yard. Thus Trieste had given me, even if I did not realize this for long, a sensibility for, and interest in, Central Europe, for its mixing of German, Slav, Romance and Jewish cultural features. Nor is it, I think, a coincidence that my first book, written between the age of twenty and twenty-four, was on the myth of the Habsburgs, or that later I wrote, among other things, *Lontano da dove* (Far from where), a book on Joseph Roth and the great Eastern-Jewish literary tradition, with its supranational dimensions and its obsession with exile and uprootedness and the ways of resisting these.

After having written a number of books *on* this world, I wrote one that actually comes *from* this world; not a book *on* but one, much more properly, *of Mitteleuropa*. I remember the day when I first had the idea of writing *Danube*. It happened when, in the company of my wife and some friends, I was somewhere between Vienna and Bratislava, near the Slovak border, on a glorious September afternoon. In the surrounding landscape one could hardly distinguish the brilliance of the waves of the Danube from that of the blades of grass in the meadows called *Donauauen*. It was not easy to tell precisely where and what the Danube was—and I think this uncertainty, on an ironic and symbolic key, has great importance in my book.

We had the feeling of being in harmony with that brilliance, with the flowing of that water, with the flux of life. Suddenly I noticed a signpost with an arrow: Danube Museum. Is that thing the Danube only because the inscription calls it that?—we asked ourselves. And those meadows, are they the Danube as well? And we, in this moment of near happiness that we are experiencing, are we perhaps, without realizing it, elements of a museum, of some exhibition? And then the absurd question: why not go ahead, wandering and rolling, as far as the Black Sea? Thus began four years of travelling, writing, reading, wandering, re-writing, reflecting, after the twenty or twenty-five years spent earlier on analysing, studying and interpreting a part of that world—but not on narrating and representing it, as happens in *Danube*.

The title of my book is *Danube*, not *the* Danube; sometimes I found it hard to convince the publishers, in the different countries where the book was translated, to omit the article. That missing article may well amount to a definition of the book.

It is not "The Danube", not a book on the river, its geography or even its history, or at least not only that. *Danube* is a metaphor of the complexity, the contradictory many-facetedness of contemporary identity: of all identities, because the Danube is a river that does not identify with one people or one culture, but runs through so many different countries, so many peoples, nations, cultures, languages, traditions, frontiers, political and social systems.

The book has many characters who do not exactly know which nationality they belong to, people who can define themselves only negatively, being able to say only what they are *not*. There are many characters, for example, who define themselves as Germans when talking to Croatians or Hungarians, but say they are Croatians or Romanians when talking to Germans, and so on. Granny Anka, perhaps the most important character after the narrating and travelling first person singular, embodies—in the story of her life, in her marriages and in her widowhoods, in her feelings and in her prejudices—all nationalities of the Banat, the region between Yugoslavia and Romania inhabited by a variety of ethnic groups. She criticizes severely each and every nationality, without exception; these impartial negative criticisms—if they are really impartial, not forgetting any of the nationalities—may constitute a better basis of mutual tolerance than the complimentary official rhetoric exchanged by the representatives of these peoples on diplomatic occasions. Thus, for example, Granny Anka says to the narrator that she would never have married a Serb, not even one from the left bank of the Danube, one of the best kind in her eyes, but when the narrator asks her, "but you, what are you?", she answers proudly that she is a Serb, and belongs to one of the oldest Serb families. This attitude hides a deep ambivalence: it can give birth to a feeling of belonging to a supranational civilization, like the one represented, despite all odds, by Granny Anka, but it can also kindle that feeling of irreparable conflict between nation and ethnicity which breaks out into fighting and fierce bloodshed, as is now happening in the merciless Yugoslav tragedy.

Danube is a book of travels, and travelling means crossing frontiers, all kinds of them: national, social, psychological, including those internal frontiers that exist inside ourselves, in the diversity of elements that constitute our personality. The traveller of *Danube* travels to meet others, to encounter difference and diversity. The great spatial-temporal frame constituted by *Danube* furnishes him with an extraordinary richness and variety of "others", of otherness. Sometimes he is strongly attracted by these others, by what is outside him; at other times he retreats into himself, into his own fears and repulsions. He tries to overcome this tendency to escape from life, and to overcome this fear of the other and of otherness, the fear which is at the roots of our rejection of and barbarous destruction of others, both as peoples and individuals. Thus the main character of *Danube*, while travelling along the banks of the river and passing through cities, fields, and inns, also performs a journey inside his own lower depths, in the labyrinthical meanders of his own personality, his own unconscious.

Danube is certainly a journey across space, across Germany, Austria, Slovakia, Hungary, Yugoslavia, Bulgaria, Romania; a journey across what was even recently called "the other Europe" and what is now, torn by internal ethnic strife and impeded by the re-emergence of retrograde spectres, so slow in integrating itself into Europe plain and simple, even after the liberation of 1989. The main character of *Danube* passes through a territory in which for centuries many peoples met, mixed or fought; not only the so-called great or famous peoples, protagonists of World History, but also small groups, unknown, forgotten and vanished; not only the Germans or Hungarians, for example, but also the Shokatz, the Bunyevatz or the Nogay.

But the book is above all a journey through time, individual and historical time that flies away and drags with it on its flight individuals as well as cities and empires. The traveller is an archeologist of reality, seeking to see the multiple layers of reality, the stories that have left their mark on the landscape, just like everyone's personal history leaves its mark on his or her face.

From this point of view *Danube* is a hidden and submerged novel, a kind of *Bildungsroman*, as the Germans call it, a novel of formation and of identity; it is a journey, not only through Central Europe, but also and mainly through the Babel of contemporary history, of our present days. The journey, like all journeys, is an Odyssey, an Odyssey in the present. The hero tries to find out whether it is possible to travel through life and history developing and shaping his own personality, finding meaning and values, finding himself through this confrontation with the world and obtaining real experience of the world—or to admit that all this is impossible since during the journey of life one can only get lost, disintegrated by the grotesque reality of our days, discovering only the impossibility of living and discovering that we are No-man, like Ulysses.

The travelling and narrating first person singular is not identical with the author but is a character like those other characters of the book who often accompany him: three or four men and women, and another female figure, never described but often evoked, the undescribable figure of love. This party is at times gathered together, at other times dispersed by their journey through life, as happens to anyone in his or her own story. The book is actually the allusive story of these men and women, of their wanderings, of their involvements and feelings, their moments of happiness or grief, of their escape from others and themselves, of their ability or inability to love.

As in all journeys, the traveller of *Danube* travels for the pleasure of travelling, fascinated by images, colours, sounds, scents, and all that he sees and encounters, but more often than not the journey faces him with situations in which all pleasure is gone. Some of these are terrible moments of individual or historical tragedy, in which the traveller feels completely overpowered. Sometimes the journey creates a feeling of profound integration of the self and the world, but very often it provides

a feeling of inexorable otherness, a disintegration of the self in the mechanisms of the world.

The river is one of forgetfulness, too, and the traveller a little guerrilla fighting against oblivion. He becomes a comic and nostalgic philologist of everyday life, turning to it with a meticulous passion of exactness and a great attention to particulars, whether the object of his attention is the great minster of Ulm or the sum of money, six shillings and twopence to be exact, received from a miller called Herr Wammes, who had sold his trousers to donate the income for the restoration of the church. This means that every unknown Herr Wammes has as much right to a precise reconstruction of his life, to being known and respected, as the great moments and monuments of history. Of course the important thing is not to know whether Herr Wammes got six or eight shillings, but the effort to go out and find the particulars of his fate, including this little event of his life. This belongs to the poetic structure of the book, the traveller's humility and affection for people and things. This feeling is strengthened rather than weakened by those discreet but persistent ways of loving: irony and self-irony.

The traveller knows only too well that he and his companions are nothing in comparison to History, yet at the same time he is aware of the humble but indomitable force of resistance contained in the everyday lives surrounding him. Though he travels through time, he has no nostalgia whatsoever for the political or social systems of the past. The equal attention he pays to stories of the past and those of the present derives from the realization that all human passion, be it felt and suffered today or two hundred years ago, has the same dignity and the same claim to eternity; but that has nothing to do with any sterile nostalgia for the good old days, which actually appear much worse in the book than even the most critical present situations. The book is a confrontation with the present, with the burning changes now taking place in Central Eastern Europe. Remembrance has a great role in the book and means attention paid to life, *Memento Mori*—there are many cemeteries in my *Danube*. It is then, a good way of fighting death, a fight which is ironic, to be sure, because we are aware of our weakness, but at the same time fierce and passionate. The traveller tries to collect and invent life and save it by entrusting it to a fragile Noah's Ark made of paper.

While the traveller is not nostalgically yearning for times past, he is deeply aware of them. The journey proceeds forward but turns back, too, going zig-zag along diverse paths, making digressions and detours. The route of the main character re-creates in miniature the great processes of History, for example the route of German civilization on its controversial march from East to West—originally—then from West to East, during its expansion, then from East to West during the catastrophe, and again from West, towards East with the political and economical re-emergence of Germany.

Danube is, in a way, the story of the great cultural symbiosis of Germans and Jews (the two supranational elements in the Danubian mosaic of peoples), and is the

story of its tragic and sinful end. Though the traveller would like to find joy, pleasure, love, friendship, the colours of the seasons and the flavour of wines, he often finds the opposite, the atrocities of existence and of history, suffering, violence, agony, nothing.

I don't know myself whether the book is one of hope or one of despair; it is not chance that the readers who write to me are of such diverging opinions: one finds the book pessimistic, another takes consolation from it, some see chiefly its humour, others its melancholy. Certainly, the book is a confrontation with nihilism. The narrator experiences in his own person the postmodern crisis of philosophy and the dissolution of values, the postmodern loosening of every strong element and moment of life, the disaggregation of the personality, but he sets against all this an ironical and tenacious resistance, in an inseparable tie of faith and disillusionment. There are a number of catastrophes in *Danube*, but for this very reason the book is also an attempt at making amends to the anonymous victims of defeat, all those defeated who have disappeared in silence, single individuals as well as entire civilizations. History gathers and disperses, things continually lose their identity and become fragmented into an endless plurality. The traveller travels through the shortcuts and dead ends of History and through secret passages that may lead to the goal or to disaster.

Danube is a mixture of imagination and reality. All the particulars described are often taken from reality with meticulous and idiosyncratic precision, but the imagination connects them in a new montage, an imaginary structure that confers a different meaning to them. The traveller describes this world and ends up by recognizing in it his own mirror image, like the painter in Borges's story who paints landscapes, mountains and rivers, only to realize eventually that he has painted his own portrait because his personality consists in his relationship with the world, in the way he sees and feels the world.

An idiosyncratic precision, yes inasmuch as the travelling narrator is an intellectual maniac whose head and pockets are filled with bizarre cultural quotations, with which he attempts to introduce order into the chaos of reality, to control and dominate things, to defend himself from the changes of life and history with paper castles, with barricades of erudition, which are quickly upturned and scattered by real life. Like any passionate pedantry, this one can be tragicomic. For example, the systematic scientific research into the springs of the Danube leads the traveller to the hypothesis that the Danube may actually take its source from an eaves-spout or a tap, that the Danube may not exist, that the amniotic fluids vital for life have dried up.

In the parodistic search for the true source of the Danube, with which the book opens, the anxiety so strongly felt today, the fear of having lost touch with nature and the springs of life and vitality, is mixed with the awareness that our cultural tradition tells us so much about the theories and disputes concerning the origins

of life but precious little about these origins themselves and even less about life. After the publication of my *Danube* the supporters of the "true" source of Donaueschingen and, respectively, of the "true" source of Furtwangen, who happened not to notice that I was pulling their legs, continued their heated battle, often calling on me to bear evidence for their amiable manias and flooding me with materials that document the purity of one and the fraudulent impurity of the other spring, and vice versa.

In return, beside the spring at Furtwangen, next to the famous inscription declaring its authenticity, there is now another, more recent one, aggressively attacking me and protesting fiercely against the hypothesis that the Danube might spring from an eaves-spout or the runnels of the surrounding houses. It is no mean thing for a book to boast of having materially modified the outlook of the world, of having added an object such as that inscription to the inventory of things real.

The Danube is a river of controversies, and likewise, the list of controversies triggered by my Danubian book is endless. There were protests by town councillors, there were corrections suggested by pedants; cultivators of local history were jealous of a flattering adjective attributed to a neighbouring small town rather than to theirs, and there was the more specific jealousy on the part of those who believed they had identified a female character depicted by the traveller. And though sometimes the existence of the Danube is ironically questioned, in the Delta (which doubtlessly exists) the traveller finds a fullness, enchanted and enraptured by nature.

The more the traveller penetrates the Danubian universe, the more he finds himself in an unknown reality that he is unable to dominate with his cultural tradition; up to a point he cherishes the illusion of knowing and therefore understanding, but as he goes further he feels more and more disoriented and less and less capable of comprehending the world—which, by the way, happens to us more frequently day after day, even in a quietly settled way of life. Sometimes the traveller is spurred on by a fury to arrive as quickly as possible, to have already arrived, to have lived it, to be dead in some sense. At other times he travels for the pleasure of travelling, trying to linger on, to make digressions and deviations, to delay arrival forever or at least as long as possible.

Danube is a sentimental journey in the sense of Lawrence Sterne, without obligatory goals or distinguished stations. The inscriptions in taverns and churches, the short novel of a life read on a stone in an unknown cemetery, a story heard by chance, a smile on a face can be more important than the great moments and monuments of history. They are the manifestations of History in the little histories —comic, tragic or bizarre, as the case may be—of obscure existences that remain embedded on the banks of the river; so that the book eventually becomes a kind of Danubian Decameron.

The book has no chance of, and certainly no intention of, being complete. It is not an exhaustive book on *Mitteleuropa* but simply the story of one character's

journey. It is about what he saw and experienced, and not about what he did not see or experience. To draw a parallel with a grand example, in Dostoyevsky's *Idiot,* Prince Myshkin, on returning from Switzerland, remembers only a donkey grazing in the field, even if Switzerland surely has plenty of more beautiful or more important things, from the mountains to the lakes, to democracy, to watches.

Problems and events in *Danube* are embedded in the tangible reality of actual experiences. For example, the German catastrophe in the Balkans becomes the story of a lieutenant; the mixing of peoples in a city—itself of many names, Bela Crkva or Weisskirchen or Fehértemplom or Biserica Alba—in the Banat becomes the story of so many tragedies but also of a parrot who is a polyglot singing in Hungarian and swearing in German; the soul of *Mitteleuropa* is epitomized by Kafka, but also by Ferdinand Thran, an archivist of the iniquities of life, who spent his years writing a *Catalogue of Villainies Suffered*. *Danube* is not a book on *Mitteleuropa* but a journey made to leave behind those *Mitteleuropean* obsessions. This journey is symbolized by the great yearning for the sea; perhaps this is why some countries far away from Central Europe have been able to recognize in it a reflection of feelings and fantasies directly relevant to them too.

The Danubian journey is inevitably a kind of Last Judgment, and also a journey between the world and the writing-paper. The navigator's journal is written on water, the book on the Danube is more than four hundred pages long, from which one could make so many paper boats for the river to carry away. The river is three thousand kilometres long, but the journey is also a journey in the mind or among the four walls of one's own house, for the Odyssey between the kitchen and the bedroom, or between the study and the children's room, is certainly not less rich in hazards, shipwrecks or triumphs.

Over these years *Danube* has more or less toured the world, met with enthusiasm but also controversy, as befits a book that represents life and history above all as a series of misunderstandings and derailments. It has almost become a catch-word, an obligatory point of reference or a commonplace, having practically created a literary genre and stimulated (as the publicity of some other book said) the writing of "equivalent" texts and other travelogues. It has encouraged analogous journeys and invited emulation or imitation or parody, from the aggressive pamphlet by a young lady in Italy some years ago to well-researched and excellent *reportages*, from the parodistic remaking of a novel by Péter Esterházy to the carnival joke *Mitteleuropa* in a Trieste setting. A friend of mine, Giorgio Maggi, has written a burlesque travesty in the name of a whole gang of ruffians who spend their Sundays making excursions to the taverns of the Italian and Slovenian Karst: this burlesque will be called *Vipacco* after the name of the small Slovenian river there. A year ago in Budapest, Enzensberger jokingly congratulated me on these appendixes to my *Danube*; I hope they will continue so that, by dint of these Batrachomyomachias, I can convince myself that I have written a Homeric poem, a Danubian Odyssey.

Books apart, in these seven years it is the world that has radically changed, especially in the Danubian part of Europe. People often ask me now how I judge my *Danube* and how I read it after the great transformations of Central Europe in 1989. This question is a good one and misguided at the same time. A good one, because books do not live in a political, historical, social or human vacuum, nor do their authors. Books and people live in time: greater and smaller changes of life and history leave their marks on the pages of books and on the faces of people. Each generation reads the classics in a different way and each writer reads his own books in a different way in different periods. But the question is misguided because a story is *that* story and not another one: for example, the story of a love of a twenty-year-old man and not the reflexions of this man thirty years later; or, for example, a story that took place in Trieste and not in Budapest, or the other way round.

To be sure, I was shocked and surprised by the rapidity of the changes which no-one could have foreseen (at least not on this scale), not even the protagonists of the changes themselves. I recall a meeting in November 1989, organized by the French minister Lang at Blois, with writers, intellectuals and also politicians from the East participating. A theatre director from East Berlin, who was involved in the great protest demonstrations that were just beginning, had come there for a few hours and said that he could not tell what the outcome of the current events in Berlin was going to be, but that the Wall would certainly remain for a long time. Two days later the wall collapsed and he was eminently instrumental in this collapse. I still believe that *Danube* was confirmed by these historic events because the great winds that were to upset and transform Central Europe are present in it as little gusts or currents of air, as hidden presages. The traveller of *Danube* encounters the disquietude of the so-called "other Europe" on the eve of its upheaval; these encounters are his adventure, the mirror of his destiny.

How would I have written my *Danube* if I had written it at another moment? The question is somewhat ridiculous, as if one asked a poet how he would have written his poem on a certain woman if he had met her thirty years earlier or thirty years later. Still it requires an answer. First of all, if my traveller had passed through the events of 1989 the book would have had a different rhythm. In my book the traveller passes through a multiple stratification of times, the burning present just like the vanished or now-vanishing past, great events and little incidents and misunderstandings; this mixture creates a labyrinthic time.

If the traveller had travelled in 1989, the imperative of current events would probably have absorbed him completely, constraining him to ignore the other dimensions, and would thus have reduced the complexity and variety of the book. It would have become more dramatic, but less epic and less tragic. The course of events would have impressed on the book a single line of tension, a short breathing, a dramatic and one-sided concentration on what was happening at that moment. The violent motion of the surface, of the present, would have overshadowed the wide and many-layered seabed of centuries, the plurality of times, their epic totality.

Danube could not have indulged in those historical meanderings across the centuries and cultures of Central Europe which alone can help us understand what happened in 1989 and especially what happened after and continues happening: the emergence of ancient tensions, of unsoothed rancours and unhealed wounds, centuries old, that now unleash deep-seated and violent hatreds in Central Eastern Europe, and of which the cruel and stupid tragedy in Yugoslavia is an extreme example. In *Mitteleuropa* everything remains present, no passion goes forgotten or put *ad acta.* In all this there is a self-consuming faithfulness to life, a grandiose struggle against forgetfulness, but at the same time a curse that chains the soul to the burning memory of all wrongs suffered, no matter how remote, and to the necessity of presenting the bill and settling the balance. To understand what is going on today in the Danubian parts of Europe one needs to submerge and wander in its past, as is done in *Danube* thanks to the relative calm, irresponsible and Gypsy-like, of that journey. A *Danube '89* could have seen only 1989 and would not have been able, for this very reason, to understand what was going on and what was to happen immediately after.

The book would, furthermore, have been less tragic because its reality, even in its most painful aspects, would have been tinged by a glimmer of hope from those changes. Concentrating on the great and at times awesome events of History (with a capital "H") would have pushed into oblivion those obscure, anonymous and marginal existences whose tragedy is not redeemed by the progress of history. And the tragedy of these obscure existences is a central point of my book.

I was of course deeply struck and moved by the new *Mitteleuropa* born out of 1989. It is not only the joy felt over the fall of totalitarianism and the freedom of peoples; it is also the discovery that one can, after all, change reality. Usually we are all blind conservationists because we think that reality, as we are accustomed to see it, is unchangeable: we do not believe that mankind could regenerate itself. Dubček, speaking to the crowd in Venceslas Square twenty-one years after being shoved aside like garbage, refutes the false realism of so many politicians who only see the façade of the present.

But the disappearance of the spectres of yesterday is accompanied by the mournful reappearance of the spectres of the day before yesterday. In all Europe the conquests of liberties mingle with violent hatreds and nationalisms that might destroy this new Europe, whose Danubian parts, lacerated almost to agony by a feverish exasperation of opposing ethnic identities, again act as a truthful mirror with all their distorting extremism. Danubian Europe, freed from its walls, is again on the way to becoming "another" Europe. It is therefore ridiculous to believe that the defeat of communism has solved all problems. The downfall of communism, which has released so many compressed forces, must not make us forget the need to transform and change the world. There is no "victory" for the West in the events of 1989. My friend Manès Sperber, who had fought against Stalinism, taught us that we must not bask in our victory, otherwise, he said, we become the *cocus de la victoire.*

In his essays written when he was persecuted by the communist régime, Havel defended life and truth against ideology, true values against the reduction of life to a mere mechanism of needs; he defended and underlined the difference between life and its representation. But Western society, with its showcase culture, often celebrates exactly this loss of values, mistaking it for liberation. Appropriately, in one of his essays against communist tyranny Havel asked himself whether that tyranny, with all its falsehood, was at the same time a caricature of contemporary life in general and a warning to the West, showing it its latent destiny. The Danubian continent is once again running the risk of proving to be an ironically and sadly truthful mirror of the world, a laboratory of absurdity.

In Regensburg, on the Danube, stands Kepler's house. In a room of this house they have collected the instruments that Kepler constructed to explore the skies. In the same room, a few yards away, there is another instrument, a very complicated one, which Kepler constructed because, heavy drinker as he was, he wanted to save having to look every so often into the cask he kept near him to check how much wine was left; he therefore invented this contraption which showed the level of wine inside. Some of Kepler's discoveries are universally valid scentific truths, while others have proved to be false. I don't know whether the instrument constructed for the cask belongs to those that led Kepler to truth, or to those that led him into error. I am sure that the few yards that separate, in one and the same room, the instruments that explored the skies from the one that looked into the cask can constitute a journey just as adventurous and meaningful as the journey from the source to the delta of the Danube. At least my *Danube* was born from this conviction. ❧

Translated from the Italian by Ádám Nádasdy

Győző Ferencz

The End of the Word

The Poetry of Dezső Tandori

Anywhere in the world, presumably, for a poet to be caricatured in a daily paper is a recognition of the greatest possible popularity. Dezső Tandori has already secured this recognition; a good ten years ago the late György Brenner published a cartoon in one of the dailies. A passer-by is brushing his hat beneath a tree, teeming with impudent sparrows, and cries out in irritation: "Tandori to you too!" In those years Tandori was tending who knows how many sparrows in his home, and the smallest moments of their lives immediately became the subject-matter of poems, short stories, novels, and radio plays. Never have there been such well-documented sparrows in the history of literature or even of ornithology. Since then, Tandori has changed horses, but is still charging ahead on his unpredictable poetic path with unchanging zest.

At the start no one would have predicted how prolific he would turn out to be. He did not appear to take off at all; true, through no fault of his own. Dezső Tandori was born in 1938, so one would have expected him to first make his name as a poet around 1960. It did not happen that way. At that time people in certain places thought twice before they admitted anyone to the field: the poetry sections of periodicals. After the revolution was suppressed, the authorities, in the process of consolidation, kept a weather eye and a close watch on the spoken word. Questioning the hidden meaning of words, even in verse, hinting at manipulation by words even on the abstract level of linguistic philosophy could not hope to meet with much success. The poets of the older generation who influenced Tandori at the start—Ágnes Nemes Nagy, János Pilinszky, Sándor Weöres—had just begun, after a long period of silence, to return to writing from the exile of translation and children's literature. In the fifties, Ágnes Nemes Nagy was Tandori's teacher of literature at secondary school, with her own reputation in abeyance and a career that seemed to be broken before it had properly begun. Recognizing the quality of the young man' s gift, she encouraged and supported him selflessly. She later

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related how, on the eve of his university en-trance examination, she was so anxious and nervous that she could not sleep, for gaining admission to the university was doubly difficult, and she was afraid his exceptional talent would be wasted, or its development delayed without constant and methodical training. Tandori was admitted to university, graduated, found employment as resident assistant master in a vocational secondary school (as he relates in one of his books of poetry), then worked for a while as a language-teacher. But his emergence as a poet was long in coming.

For some reason his work remained unpublished, although his name was the first to be mentioned when the greatest contemporary writers were asked for their list of young talents. He was befriended by Géza Ottlik—they attended athletic meetings together—, Sándor Weöres dedicated one of the poems of his *Egybegyűjtött írások* (Collected Writings) to Tandori (and a number of other poets), to Tandori, who had not yet had a volume published. His fame preceded him, he was turning into a legend, more or less in the same way his masters had done a good decade earlier. Once again a new kind of poetry was in the making, inaccessible, unpublished and thus not readable, but of an exceptional significance and quality, if the right sources were to be believed.

I hasten to point out that not a single line of these poems had anything to do with politics. Presumably Tandori thought that poetry should serve an entirely different purpose, and it was this that aroused such fierce resistance: that he was different, independent, that he was unconcerned about what was expected of him.

So it was he who had to wait. To avoid misunderstandings: not with finished manuscripts amounting to bulky volumes in his desk drawer. The contrary: there were only a few, delicate poems, hardly enough to make up a slender volume—poised on the brink of utterance, retreating into the silence that precedes, or passing over into the silence beyond, utterance—awaiting publication. A number of these did eventually appear in an anthology introducing young poets *Első Ének* (First Song), then in 1969 the 31-year-old poet's first volume was published under the title *Töredék Hamletnek* (Fragment for Hamlet). It was typical that there were not enough poems to satisfy the volume size the publishers had contracted for. He was obliged to dash off a long poem in prose, a Beckett-type monologue, to fill it out. Curiously, this poem anticipates the subsequent great monologues, but the reader could have had no inkling of them then: Tandori's poems were masterpieces of linguistic reduction. Only Pilinszky and Ágnes Nemes Nagy were capable of saying so much in so few words. In comparison with them, Tandori went further in that he hardly ever speaks about anything but expression through language: the principal subject of his poetry is the critique of this expression. Anyone who keeps such a close and mistrustful watch on the functioning, the working and effect, of language, his tool, is not going to create spectacular and pretentious poetical metaphor- and image-constructs. The poems of "Fragment for Hamlet" gain their distinction from the cautious, reserved manner in which they deal with the images traditionally used with gusto and in abundant profusion in Hungarian poetry. Beside the technical

precision of his predecessors, Beckett's writing and Wittgenstein's philosophy of language must also have influenced him. One thousand two hundred copies of the volume were printed, this collection, or the poems in it, have never been republished since. Yet the book is a focus of twentieth century Hungarian poetry.

Tandori's second volume of poems appeared in 1973: *Egy talált tárgy megtisztítása* (The Cleaning of an Objet Trouvé), a large book with a dazzling bright yellow cover and whimsically lurching black letters on it. Even the letters refuse to be brought into the accustomed orderly line. In the first volume, using language in a traditional way, or rather using it in a traditionally poetical way and displaying unparalleled powers of concentration, Tandori created perhaps the last feasible products of the authentic voice on that undermined borderland of silence and utterance: he formulated the suffocating tragedy of the ontological (and for good measure the political) situation. The new volume brushed aside everything its predecessor had built up with such meticulous care with a bold, sweeping gesture. *Objet Trouvé* (the title customarily used for the volume) breaks down what is left of the familiar forms of poetry. It must break down everything, for the sequence of masterpieces in *Fragment for Hamlet* gave clear proof that that one path could not be followed further. The path stops, there is no going forward, nothing can follow but silence. The poetic personality who puts the world into verse and who is easily defined, as opposed to the world, proved to be a fiction; even the most scrupulous usage of the language he employs constantly draws attention to the untenableness of the poet's role as traditionally regarded, to its own limitations, and to the raggedness of the linguistic web.

In the deconstruction of *Objet Trouvé*, everything is razed to the ground. In a poem, "The loss of amateurism," experience is spectacularly made to break away, become detached from, the poet, grammatically as well as otherwise. The poem tells a relatively simple story, but each line is repeated, doubled: appearing first in the first person singular, then told in the third person. In the second version it thunders into our ears, assaults our eyes with upper case letters. There is no "I", only "He", the "I" is fixed, immobilized into "He" in the poem.The individual self thus moved out of the way is no longer an obstacle to the total breakdown of the language, the poet does not wish to refer the message to himself at any price. The non-traditional, unconventional poetic self re-examines the letters of the alphabet and punctuation marks, in order to create and establish the devices and the means of a new kind of expression. He also takes a good look at the empty page, for that shall be the scope of his new kind of utterance. A remarkable amount of linguistic energy is released in the process of the breakdown. Tandori's scintillating solutions are fresh versions of the tragedy of the existence of modern man, formulated with such ingenuity, such ebullience born of a renewed creative power, that this in itself counterbalances the gloomy intensity with which the problem is raised. There has never been a funnier book about the fiasco of our existence! The yellow book allowed Tandori to break away from the precarious zone of speech and

speechlessness that is so prone to give way under one's feet. His third volume, *A mennyezet és a padló* (The Ceiling and the Floor, 1976) is bigger than the previous two. Ever since, Tandori's books have appeared in quick succession, new volumes of poetry, novels, detective stories, plays, essays, short stories. The poet is present in the pages of almost every periodical and, in the best tradition of Hungarian literature, translates fiction, science, adventure stories with inexhaustible energy.

Since I have spoken about a decade of suppression and the difficulties Tandori encountered in getting published at all, I must also mention that his continuous presence from the middle of the seventies offered the experience of a genuine breakthrough: the voice of dissimilarity, of someone unlike anyone else. Tandori became a one-man institution: invisible as a real person, since his private sphere is no part of literature, he has done away with the personal self. That he puts down in writing every moment, every episode of his objectified life is another question altogether. No one could escape his influence. He has influenced even those much older than himself, his innovations being playfully used by Sándor Weöres, employed by István Vas, and traceable even in the language of Gyula Illyés in his closing years. His poetic voice is so strong, his technique so specific, so anticipating the newest schools and trends, that his work may with perfect confidence be considered a turning point in Hungarian poetry.

Critics usually designate the trend begun by Tandori as the appearance of " the poetry of linguistic criticism", many variations of which have since been worked out and elaborated by other poets, and it has strongly influenced contemporary Hungarian prose as well. The poetry of linguistic criticism is not to be considered as a poetic revolution with a purely theoretical basis; the change in attitude has brought about precisely definable linguistic changes. Tandori created and generated a new kind of idiom in the literature of the last twenty-five years.

The notion that contests the possibility of linguistic expression has been ripening and making its influence felt since the appearance of modernism, and seems to be undermining the belief in the integrity of the articulate person. Such thoughts were adumbrated long before adequate linguistic devices to express them developed. Tandori did his utmost to form and perfect this language, but he did have predecessors. Behind him were the poets of *Nyugat* at the beginning of the century, then from the thirties there was Lőrinc Szabó. It was the first modernists who tore the language of poetry away from nineteenth century rhetorics; it was Lőrinc Szabó who elevated into verse the rugged rhythms of everyday speech. There were others who developed an original, powerful, rich poetic language, but the utilizable language of Hungarian poetry to come was shaped by these poets, it was their work that proved continuable. Tandori did something that most other poets were reluctant to do. For the poet, wanting to put into images his experience and view of the world, condensing it into a linguistic vision, must of necessity resort to the weighty, bulky, tangible layers of language. He tries to find always the right, the more precise, the more exact, the more appropriate word. Words that mark, that

transcribe concepts. Nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs. But the moment that expressibility has itself become doubtful, the moment that the poet wakes up to the truth (if he wakes up to the truth), that the weighty, tangible layers of the language, regrettably, are incapable of conveying a precise image of the experience, the words that denote concepts suddenly become empty: become mere words, no more than a veneer of phonetic form. One can juggle with them, force them to combine, converge, emphasize, exaggerate, in order that they should after all somehow cover the slice of the world one desires to put into words. It is possible for a while to hide, to conceal the emptiness, the void, by creating a hullabaloo, the effort will prove vain in the end: the words will trickle down lifeless. Tandori stopped trying to find fine words or fair. In *Objet Trouvé* he found that the relativeness of our existence, the changeability, the inconstancy of our connection with the world, and last but not least, the profound uncertainty of linguistic expressibility may best be transcribed by those components of the language conventionally considered as "padding", prepositions, grammatical words: conjunctions, articles, pronouns, postpositions, independent suffixes, and certainly not through traditional poetic images. As Lőrinc Szabó gave free rein to unpoetical utterance, so did Tandori give free rein to the grammatical conjunctions of speech. In this way he created a poetic language in which truly anything, even nothing, becomes expressible.

If in the beginning Tandori's writing threatened to be constricted into silence, the funnel now widened. From this bell-mouth volume after volume gushed forth, each significant in its own way. After *A mennyezet és a padló* (The Ceiling and the Floor), *Még így sem* (Not Even Like This), *A megnyerhető veszteség* (The Loss that Can Be Won), *Celsius*, and *Feltételes megálló* (Request Stop) are all chiselled into cycles, or may be called unified compositions or long poems. Tandori practices the art of writing that once more has become possible with supreme skill. Sonnet cycles, Villonesque ballades, self-developed stanza structures show his unparalleled sense of form and alternate with loosely woven, surging prose poems. Now that poetry does exist, that poetical language has been proved an illusion and does not block the path, everything may be told. Even the moral burden of expression changes, it is the moral duty of the poet not to continue creating a poetry that models the world falsely and is thus false itself. With the aid of prepositions he can tell, however, and this is the only way he can tell, of the impossibility of expression, thus, paradoxically putting an end to it.

In this new interpretation the act of writing has become the work of art itself. There is the risk that the reader will accept this fact and in this case will no longer be interested in the work itself, will no longer be curious to see the product of the act of writing. It will be unnecessary for him to see it, since he is aware of its meaning. This risk is averted by Tandori's mastery of style and, above all, by the fact that, time after time, a concentration of masterpieces in the traditional, literary sense of the term emerges from the process of the act of writing: the great poems that constitute condensation-points. Tandori has found certain objective equivalents to

set the act of writing in motion. His art may accordingly be divided into periods. For some years after *Objet Trouvé*, the protagonists of his poems and prose were bears, Teddy bears, koala bears;—Winnie-the-Pooh figures to some extent. It was with them that he played his card-games and button-football championships, keeping his readers informed of the results. He himself, a kind of father-figure, directed the teams which supplied him with day-to-day subject-matter. The poems of *The Ceiling and the Floor*, the short stories in verse of *Itt éjszaka koalák járnak* (Here Koalas Walk at Night) denote this period. This was when he wrote his first novel, *Miért élnél örökké?* (Why Should You Live Forever?) in which he tells, indirectly confesses, that to renounce the traditional means to eternity, that is the conceiving of children, was a deliberate decision on his part; the great experiment, the living-within-one's-oeuvre, demands a different way of life. And in truth the bears signify withdrawal: they are anthropomorphized toys, serious toys, the experimental subjects of an adult artistic existence. With the bears he modelled a new community and recorded every moment of that community's life, recording at the same time his own act of writing, complete with typing errors; from the letters a world was built, limitless despite its confinedness.

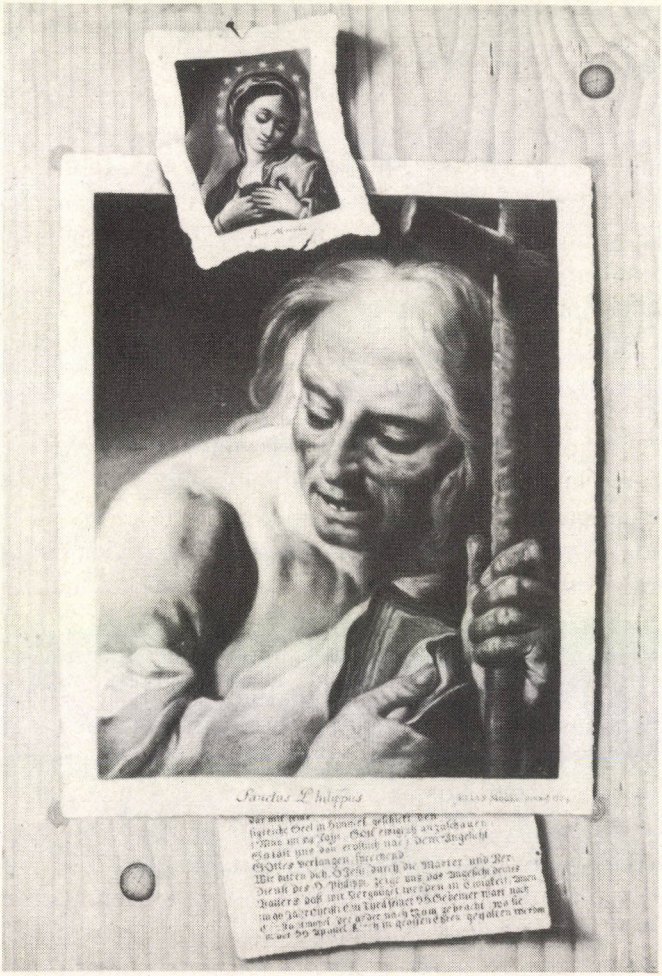
The life of the bears, however, was the product of the writer's imagination. Tandori had to give this up too. A writer does not create thus. He may use certain accepted literary configurations, may write or ruin sonnets, compose or crush Alcaic stanzas, spectacularly throwing prose-dust where one would expect to see verse, but he must *find* his subjects and not *invent* them. The bears were replaced by living creatures as sparrows moved into Tandori's home and works. Real sparrows, who mapped out the poet's daily life, who had to be taken care of: the blind sparrow to feed, grass to be picked, vitamins to buy. Tandori studied books on ornithology. The sparrow would be an easy prey for symbol-hunters: the sparrow is grey, nondescript, a creature of the flock, uninteresting, simple, and plain, something like Whitman's leaf of grass: the common man, the man in the street whom the American poet glorified in dithyrambs. There is no question of this in Tandori's case. The sparrow is not a metaphor, not a code-name, the sparrow is nothing but itself: a sparrow. The sparrow is a living being, the events of a sparrow's existence—which may be termed genuine occurences—need not be devised by the poet; his task is to record them with inexhaustible linguistic and formal ingenuity. Before criticism could have pointed an accusing finger, demanding to know why a poet should waste his talent on a lot of sparrows, now when human suffering escalates in this our twentieth century, the green movement began to gain ground in Hungary too. It turned out that to save city-dwelling sparrows was the equivalent of protecting and preserving the natural environment. The sparrow is nature itself, and thus Tandori continued to make notes on his little protegés like a Thoreau in the city of Budapest. Szpéró, Auntie Pipi and the others have become as well-known as the most popular romantic heroes.

After fifteen years devoted to sparrows, Tandori lamented the death of his birds

in beautiful poems. Then suddenly he began to send reports from race-courses abroad. That was the latest change: after the bears and the sparrows came the horses. Racing for him is not a source of income, nor does it manifest a passion for gambling. After the deadly serious connection with birds, it is rather like a koala championship, but with living participants, as in the world of sparrows. Tandori now creates his own limitlessly open model of the world out of the close order of the race-course. As in the case of the bear and the sparrow, the horse is not a metaphor either. The horses that figure in his works exist, with concrete names, are the real winners or losers of real races. The poet, the vehicle of recording, of expression, takes his typewriter along with him to Freudenau, to Epsom. The crop of the race-course period, a volume of prose poems *Koppár köldüs* (The Bare Beggar, 1991) raises to a new level the creative linguistic breakdown carried out in *Objet Trouvé*. But it seems as though he has reached the limits of the possibilities that broken down language affords. In the prose poems that relate his adventures in Copenhagen-Paris-Cologne-Düsseldorf the accents are not marked, the deliberate corruptions of the text and the distortion of the fundamentals of grammar all suggest that language, poetry, is unfit for use as it is. The text defies reading even on an elementary level. The poet takes his reader further than ever before: will those who followed him through the sparrow-diaries, the currents of the sparrow-poems, be able to accompany him this far? What are these—cryptograms that must be deciphered? And if one succeeds in deciphering them, what does one gain? The volume is a paradox on the existence of literature, for it is still capable of communicating basically important things, about conventional feelings—homesickness, for example. The homesickness of the roving poet. Homesickness for his flat in Buda, or for the conventions of literary expression?

Few poets have undertaken a poetic experiment on Tandori's scale, or carried out one with such consistency, in the twentieth century. Joyce's name is the one that comes to mind. We could say that the way in which Tandori subordinated everything, his whole existence, to his experiment is indicative of the self-destructive intrepidity of the great romantics. Enthralled by creative poetry, the romantic poets foreswore their lives by instilling, engrafting it in their work. Tandori's sacrifice is as great. His poetry is the poetry of fate, the only difference is that he recognized that personal lyricism has been discredited. Thus he carries out his experiment while objectifying his fate. On the surface this experiment seems to involve nothing but demolition and destruction.But its results are by no means end-products of decomposition. Surprisingly, it is the disjointed, mutilated domain of the language that yields the poems which attest the prevailing reason for the existence of poetry. Beautiful poems that eternalize the destiny of human existence, pure poetry that is expressed in an unmistakably original voice. The culminating points of this lyricism come out of a linguistic medium which is formed with a stylistic art that Tandori keeps alive by the continuous act of writing. Everything that he writes encompasses the completeness of his world, which is why it is great poetry, emitting

the high-voltage of true lyricism. The confines of these culminating points are undoubtedly illimitable, unpredictable. In this Tandori's oeuvre resembles the otherwise so very different poetry of William Blake. The total system can only be understood on the basis of difficult, not easily accesible works. And there are always the quotable, citable, notable, learnable poems, the anthology pieces which one can safely predict will always assure Tandori a prominent position in the history of Hungarian poetry. His significance is assured by the fact that he writes poetry fit for use as literature, consumable, memorable. But that was the whole point of the experiment: to prove the validity of poetry. ❧



ZOLTÁN HASZNOS

Elias Mögel: Trompe l'oeil with Devotional Pictures
(St Philipp and the Virgin Mary). 1773. Oil on canvas, 64 x 44.5 cm. Bishop's Palace, Vác.

Dezső Tandori

Poems

Translated by Bruce Berlind

"As if I'd Be Stocking Sackfuls of Sawdust in the Storerooms of my Memory"

" Mintha zsákszám fűrészport tárolnék emlékezetem raktáraiban"

We were talking about the nature of reminiscing, a
(I can no longer recollect what time of day it was)—and you said
you often felt as if—(and then locations
came next, locations already known to me,
dates, events)—and yet I answered
yes, I've often felt that way, what's more, I've even
felt that (because that feeling that will be discussed
here—have I said that already?—is not quite recent), as if,
but then (I don't know even that anymore). I'll have to begin
over again somewhere else. When—and this summer it'll be six
years, I mean if it were not so seasonally linked,
I'd say that—(trouble is, now, as I'm
setting this down, it's already been eight years!) So, when that summer
(and perhaps some intemperately torrid temperature could compel
even that notion to modify?)—So: I walked down to
that plot of land (on the shore of the well-known lake; there it was;
why I'm saying it this way will be clear in a moment; that's the first thing
that I know for sure about this story), what I'm saying is as I was
walking down to the lower end of the plot, and the guests
in the holiday house didn't disturb me a bit, I waded in
beside the reed bed I'd known since I was four years old, but ...
then let's not begin it here, but right at the end, right there.
I waded in a good way, I could've been up to my waist; I stopped, there
right in front of me was the opposite shore, with the press houses, the grape-
hills; each and every press house, hill, tree was there, everything.
And I said: "Behold, the well-known lake..." And hightailed it home

by the evening train. (The first day, still virtually a stranger to you,
I wrote you a card on a tin table puddled with rainwater
next to the self-service warehouse. The lunch
was nothing to rave about either; and I mainly recall
the cloudy periods, those...) Although there was brilliant
sunshine, as I stood there up to my waist.—But why go
into details, we'll soon go down there together, the two of us,
and that strictly speaking not once-and-for-all-time dealt with
location will likewise soon say something to me,
as it did to you, and so forth, contrariwise.

Now and At the Hour of Our Death

Most és halálunk óráján

For advertising purposes: (designation of locale; who knows
which one; why would he know; at all: who; point of time, even
in this sense this is standard: anyone thinking of
any point of time guesses right; it's at best that
the street, square, or park becomes superfluous around
the point of time, the outlandishly green vehicle turning
the corner: the whole season around the point of time, the non-
irregular season; the, along with the city, not
singular, rainy month, rainy day, part of day, hour, minute
—and so on.) We had a certain kind of drink under
a swinging sign board advertising the certain kind of drink
in the garden part of a certain place called "Madeira";
no, not the garden part, that was in the back, opening on the park;
where we sat was a small space cordoned off with wattled
wire fencing from the path leading to the park and surfaced with
flagstones, there were tin or sheet iron tables, the tables
mostly wet, the wattlework chairs wet, after the rain.
Or am I recollecting an occasion
when we did not sit down at the Madeira?
No matter, the advantage of the two kinds of memory right now is two kinds
of memory; the advantage of the duplicate mention is that the second one
can happen without quotation marks—here and at other times with the
omission of the pure point of time alongside the contingencies.

An Otherwise Unoccupied Swimming Pool in 1965; A String of Similes

Egy különben üres uszoda 1965-ben; hasonlatsor

As if in an unoccupied swimming pool where only
maintenance men, mechanics, street sweepers,
idle ticket collectors, snack bar attendants hang out,
only office underlings, possibly
the management itself; and one or two amateurs like me
who got there who knows how and who
don't talk to each other, at best we're collectively
objects of indifference to the specialist staff,
bored as it is even with the professionals; as if
all alone in the morning at the deep-water end of
such an unoccupied practice pool, I were practicing
the racing dive, something I've been
unable to master for nearly thirty years.
And so it's as if this wouldn't be me,
as if I'd consequently be practicing with somebody,
so I'm again and again for a moment completely
alone, as among sycamore leaves and a tide of
spittle, other insignificant filth,
chucked-up bugs, my head pops up after
one of a number of by now perhaps not
entirely unsuccessful dives; but quality
won't cut any ice here, besides the whole thing's
just a string of similes. As if someone
would want to repudiate existence, but I'd
be insisting, as a father taking his such-and-such
son to practice the racing dive. Or other things.

1976711/b

The wind is blowing, the wind I onetime troubled over
so intensely; and now I'm glad of it, since it recalls
the time of those long gone struggles
when it still blew riotously through my hair,

and that was important. As if now I were
catching at the trees; it's never possible
to look back even at a leaf-size wind. I'm able
to look at what is, at things that occur

so many times that they can't be themselves
once only. What am I to do with the leaves,
the wind, the looking; and, when it touched me

for the first time, with what the wind began
to do; and whether indeed it touched me; this one
blows now from a time that never will catch up with me.

Day, Night, and Onward

Nap, éj s tovább

Mother, I failed to visit you very often
—It's that kind of thing one understands too late—
in the hospital ward when you were all alone;
I'd have to be born again to set that right.
And I'd need another life to believe that what
was already up can now be down again.
I can't be censured anymore for that;
I'm versing from it, myself, an object lesson.

If I could be, just with this, alone some way!
...If I could only hunker down in a bathroom, where
I can conjure up my childhood even today.
Excuse for a high fever—yes, it's there!
You write it! And it won't be cheating, my fever's
actually there, it shows on the thermometer.

(In the up-and-down bobbing society/solitude there's
nowhere left I can absent myself from, mother.)

For me to be truant from something, here are the houses,
the old ones, here's the Castle, over on the other
side the schools; weekday-evening-some other-silence
encircling me with a neighbourhood all one colour.
A place gives evidence against whoever
settles there finally, for me the place is evident.
Will I some day be carried, feet first, away from here?
It's only that this year's snow will be last year's winter.

I realize now, of course, that you'd be the last
to sanction something—anything at all—
that could put me in such a mood. I didn't protest
enough; with you either; that you know well.
Already I can hear you saying: What's the good it'll
do anyone? And what can I say then: Is There
Something Hurting You—? Me too, how did I feel
then, when I had to, about one thing or another?

I haven't even the desire to express myself,
I'd answer you, responding to the little cunning, so,
with cunning; that the point of my poem is nothing else
than that the afternoon is something I too
have to get through. Once again I can see you
shaking your head; we sit in the afternoon
together, listening to the news on the radio,
maybe dance music on the midday programme—

It's that kind of thing, you see, that plays for the birds
at our place every day for a full half day!
Well, that's how I'd play the trickster... And what's the good
meddling with things that are history? I'm okay,
mother. Like day, night, and onward. What I mean to say
is everything's fine. Before you died I fed you.
I see and who can see—and must we?—
farther than where this winter fog is now.

Dezső Tandori

Baalbek Hotel

(Short story)

Everything—happened in Worcester! That everything had to happen there. On Friday, January 3rd, 1993, in Worcester. What do I have to arrive on Saturday for? What for? Well, never mind.

I read "Yesterday's results, Worcester." And then again, "continued from page 7." And in the meantime, the stations: Hatton Cross (the kind of name one would give a horse, what next! How dare they make fun of me), the three Hounslows (the three Hounslows!), Osterley (good, an Easterish atmosphere, kind of), Boston Manor (memories of coming back from the Balaton in one's teens!), Northfields, South Ealing (and they can all go and...!) and then, Acton Town. And Acton Town's still nowhere yet, nor Hammersmith, no Barons or Earl's (Court), and Hyde Park Corner—which is Pooh Corner for me, Winnie-the-Pooh! —won't be coming up till after. Not to mention my stop, Holborn! I run through yesterday's results. In a *Sporting Life* someone left behind. I picked it up at the airport.

"At the airport he picked up a"

Everything happened yesterday. (An aside. Chiswick's nowhere. Chiswick... A stud farm's what it calls to mind. Say. A chicken farm. Chirp. Chiswick's nowhere, it's only natural. It's on another line. Leading to Wimbledon or somewhere, Richmond, say. In the meanwhile it is growing dark, we were an hour late. The runway was coated with ice in Budapest. They were melting the ice cream off the wings of the plane.)

Three circles over London in parentheses. The sun. As I say, it does not want to set. It is still up there. That deck-chair cloud, a black deck-chair before a very empty sky. Heathrow does not give us permission to land. We view the sun three times. Sun, do you know you are about as tranquil as a wild beast's eye? And you there, my dear cloud, are like a deck-chair someone's slowly, blackly folding up. Folding up blackly into the empty sky.

And down below, on a plush-upholstered chair, forgotten and left behind, Worcester. One should have arrived the day before.

Should have been born earlier. Everything happened yesterday, nothing will happen now. Not to me. Gay Ruffian! With what assurance did Gay Ruffian win the Grimley Novices!

I know Gay Ruffian from the year before last. I saw him on Channel 4. And Kiwi Velocity... Well, under thirty, but still. And Quinzii Martin! Odds at 7O! (Compared to 1O always, but here they say it differently, something you've got to get used to; why should I have to get used to it, what good will it do me? Sam Susam's gone, at 18O, he got us placed and Tchoutchou! oh, Tchoutchou left us as a five-year-old... Samu's gone, true, after thirteen years...but it was they who ran for me now in Worcester, and Spero, whose full name was Martin Sparrow.... they're gone, all of them, I'll show you the world a handful of...)

My room faces the Post Office Tower, and a row of buildings spiked with concrete pipes. A real city landscape. The tower reminds me of our Christmas tree; down below in the terraced residential quarter, I find the Safeway supermarket, cheapness itself, bitter lemon is cheaper even than in Pest, 5O pence! I buy a bitter lemon and it makes me think of the cyclist Lemond, and Chiapucci, from the summer, there are other things, from a doorway someone tries to cadge a smoke and some change off me, I hand over a couple of cigarettes, no money, I look at the Post Office Tower through the bitter lemon bottle, everything happened yesterday. It's over, done with. Nothing will happen now. Worcester, and its over.

Next morning I wake to falling rain, linger over my toast, why shouldn't I have two cups of coffee. Upstairs I take a swig of vodka and I'm off. For Kingsway, Great Queen Street, Long Acre. These are streets. These streets again. Here they are, one after the other. It's quite interesting, the way—they are. And what houses. A streak of black running round on a level with the first floor, Samuel Scudegar, brewer. Vertically, on the rounded corner of the building, from the roof to the pub, gold letters on a black sign-board tell you all you have to know about the last four hundred years of Samuel Scudegar's establishment. Well then...! (But look over there, the shade of pink they picked to paint that little house with the jutting, angled Edward Hopper eyes! Fantastic! And next door to it, that grey one! Perfect.) It's of no consequence anyway, it happened yesterday, it'll never happen to me here, seven futile days. All the same, I'm going to get a copy of *Sporting Life*. I cross Covent Garden Market. The last time the police had had Wanted posters stuck up everywhere for some underground station murderer. The police I know from Agatha Christie books. The market's deserted, the pubs are all closed, it's raining, of course, it is against the law to drink in public before eleven o'clock. I take a swig at my bottle of vodka. Let's see.

Towcester and the Edinburgh Steeplechase. That's all I needed. Though I for one am not intimidated by hurdles and steeplechases. Oh no. I've had plenty of opportunities to get used to them. At Auteuil, Enghien. What's more, here I don't have to listen to Topo D'Azaray relating his Enghien experiences. Here I can really be by myself. Unencumbered.

Here the question is, what's going to happen today, what does the day hold in store? Nothing, that's what. Let's have a look anyway.

I take a look, and I'm nearly home, and there's a bookmakers on Kingsway that

happened to catch my eye. I am partial to betting shops. Is that why you went there, to hang around betting shops...?! Well, for that too. It's a simple, clean little place. Sixteen monitors. It'll be there, every quarter of an hour, live. Towcester and Edinburgh, but to what purpose? To what purpose, for me? I take a swig. Don't bother about the odds. What you've got to watch for is what kind of reception they get, and the sequences. What happened, say, after the third race, respectively, and what can be expected in Towcester and Edinburgh, successively. Nothing can be expected.

I pull my brown-and-dirt-blue robber's cap down to my nose. The wind would whip a hat off my head. I took leave of the Post Office Tower, now grey, with a sip of bitter lemon.

It is only in the betting shop that I take a closer look at my paper, and see that there's Southwell too, gallops on the all-weather dirt track, not grass but "sand", which does not shake beneath the horses' feet, no knees and elbows broken because of ice, and so on. The jockeys' silks are "portrayed" in colour. I am very happy. This means that at times there will be no more than five minutes between the broadcasting of each race. Twenty races altogether, so...? I should have been here yesterday. Have done with it, one way or another, once and for all. Have done with this.

Have done with this. And then what?

There is no time to brood in the betting shop. There are things to be done that can't wait . Picking a stubby little blue pen. Taking a look at the "early-bird"-odds. Well and good, but what will happen in Edinburgh at 2.3O p.m. is no concern of mine —yet. It is now 12.4O. True, Towcester is about to begin. There's about a dozen of us in the shop. Mostly leaning against the wall or rushing to the cash-desk, while I commute between the monitors and the wall boards, trying to make out the legion of numbers with my weak eyes. My mind's eye is wandering about inside.

Inside my head, say. At such times the mind's eye must wander, indeed it must, but must not penetrate too deep. Must understand the surface of initiatives? Relay certain contingencies. Is it possible, then? For the time being I'll just wait for Towcester to be "off". And it is. For example Grace, the name of one of my oldest bears. Beauchamp Grace. Of course his odds are only 15 to one, but still. Where do I want to start, where? Beauchamp Grace is not good enough for me. What do I want? A Samuel Brewer palace? Or what? Edinburgh's gone. Alright, so I hadn't reckoned with Trianglot. Evens, so far. But I've got to do something. Cythiere, why isn't Cythiere good enough for me? It makes you think of "hetaera" in a way, a little, why isn't a hetaera good enough for me? I wait. My head burns, red-hot but dry. The preliminary perspiring outside is long over. My eyes sizzle like neon lamps. Beside me a whispering, soft, endless, male: "Come on, come on, Chickabiddy, come on, Chicky!" I take a quick look at him, he returns my stare bashfully, a hefty red-faced so-and-so. A docker? A butcher? "Well...", he says, spreading his arms wide. I am reminded of Chiswick. From two years ago, when it was all a matter of

life or death, that ghost station somewhere near Acton Town. The end of the world ! There's Chiswick, and Chiswick is not on the line to the airport. Riding into nothingness... I am done for.

I am done for, that was what I felt. More of this later.

It gives you something to go by, predictions like this on the monitors. "The betting in Southwell...the odds...Miami Bear 8 to 1, Dagobertin (the new French horse!) 4 to 1, Melder Prince 20 to 1, Wakashan 7 to 2," and so on. Southwell. Not bad as a starting point. I remember leaning over the head of this guy to get a better look at the map painted on the wall of the tube. Chiswick was nowhere. I am done for, simply done for. But then why is everybody sitting around with suitcases and flight-bags between their knees? At six in the morning. What is this? Have I died? Chiswick can't be on this line, and it isn't, and...

And then Celcius. And then, in Southwell, on the all-weather dirt track, suddenly, Celcius. Over to the machine that spits out the slips... out with the little blue pen... put Southwell, 1.25 p.m., Celcius. To win. I wrote a book titled Celsius once. Celcius. Pussy, that is Sparrow. It's a trick, Pussy, right? Celsius. Celcius. They are calling out his name. Celsius. I glance at my butcher pal. Hm? Hm. I go out. I am incapable of remembering that the door opens inwards. Outside: a succession of restaurants. Light-minded people living easy lives, pure hearted, fair-minded, leisurely, purposeful—accompanied by ladies—proceeding, useful, confer, pay court, eat, stare, are, read the papers. Outside—there's me. Outside every world. Inside on the monitor, Celcius will appear any minute, will not take the lead straight away. There are two types of horse. The first will pull ahead at the start of the race. That is the only way he stands a chance to win. This type is rare. Perhaps if he stayed with the rest of the field it would be impossible to bring him out at the turn into the straight, say. The other type is quite the opposite. Sometimes you never even hear its name during the race. And then, at the turn into the straight... or even later... suddenly, he's there, there, and...

Back!

I go back to the betting shop. Burst in. And...

"...aaand Cash Point, Cash Point takes the lead, and three lengths behind him Extra Beat, Extra Beat and Hot Star, Senator Snuggy, Grazember, Tropenina following close behind..." Good Heavens, if I had thought this over properly! I saw Sparrow again last night , my Sparrow who is dead and because of whom I dragged myself here at all for the first time in 1988, saw him beside the Post Office Tower in the form of the morning star last night... Hot Star, and now...and Grazember, but that's impossible, I can't be Grazember... or rather that is what I am, a scoundrel, for being capable of forsaking Sparrow, Hot Star, for Celcius! But...

I am burning up like tinder! And Extra Beat pulls ahead, Extra Beat, and I—Celcius is nowhere, Celcius is nowhere, and Extra Beat, with Hot Star close behind, and Lo Stregone is coming up! Lo Stregone comes up and takes the lead, now he is giving the running order, Celcius is seventh, his rockets have been fired. Celcius'

rockets. Celcius is sixth, still a furlong to go. Lo Stregone is finished, Grazember and Hot Star are nowhere, Tropenina and Extra Beat are fighting to the finish, and Celcius, how the shit did Celcius get right in the middle, how the shit! Butcher and I are pounding each other's backs; a gentleman in a raincoat and gym shoes is gliding about and praying. Celcius, yes, Celcius...

"...and Celcius finds a gap between Lo Stregone and Hot Star and comes up on Tropenina, tries to oust her, and Valfinet comes up on the outside. Valfinet is coming up and Extra Beat is finished. Valfinet and Celcius, Celcius and Valfinet... Celcius, Celcius and Valfinet, and Celcius is half a length ahead, Celcius and Valfinet, Celcius... and Celcius wins!!!"

Well then, since everything is hot, let it be Dizzy. To win. I don't even know—yet!—how to put down a horse to place. (You have to write "tote" and "place" under his name, that's how.) Let it be Dizzy, because of those good long talks and such with e.p. on the telephone, let it be Dizzy. From Towcester.

(And in the evening, as I look out on the Post Office Tower and see the evening star, I say: "Thanks, Sparrow..." Two wins in one day. Dizzy won too. It's like a dream come true. Not much of a dream, but come true all the same. I take a sleeping pill. To have a good night's sleep to cap it all. In the morning I have trouble crawling out of bed to go down to the continental breakfast. But at least there's toast to go with it, that's good, and here's my old pal, Hobble Joe the black factotum, coming in from the reception desk; the amiable Ugandan is bringing me a festive extra portion of coffee. Hail is beating at the windows of the restaurant. It is Sunday, the betting shops are all closed. I have to wait a day. Make the most of my bus ticket. In the end—rambles. But the space beside Saint Paul's, a small park in other words, is fine. I sit down on a wet bench. Pick a blade of grass and slip it with the greatest difficulty into Samu and Sparrow's photo-case. The lump on my hand is drenched and swollen. Never mind. I am out in Hammersmith, though I had no intention of coming here, I appear by the colour-coated pier of a local bridge, appear like Celcius... this is the way I shall say it from now on. Then over to the South Bank, and with a little bus, this seems to be the Sunday bus around these parts, back to the Round Pond, in other words back to the vicinity of Hyde Park, where Beckett's Murphy took care of a dachshund for a living. This reminds me of the ditty we made up about Samu, our sparrow: "Samu's a sausage, but Bologna's no birthplace of his..." And so on. Mush up to the ankles. But—no more about this, not now. I think back, a day is enough now to think back and remember how it was? To adapt Wittgenstein: "You never have the foggiest about anything that doesn't give you the shits," knead it into a turd: "Nor about anything you don't give a shit about!"

Well, that's the betting shop!)

I find myself in front of Samuel Brewer's. The pub is closed. I take a short cut across a back alley that is alarming, even in daytime. Adam and Eve Court. Well, naturally. A witty name for a street. Nooks, crannies, stairs, I pound on one of the steps, it reverberates. Black sacks standing in puddles. With "Litter" written on one of them, litter.

Let's get out of here!

On second thoughts, no. This Adam and Eve Court will be good for something. You can piss against the wall. "Wholesale", spell out the letters on the shop-window thick with grime. I am soaked through. Wholesale. There are plenty of public toilets on the northern side of Hyde Park with hot running water and hand-driers, each better than the other. But this is a different kind of neighbourhood. I pick out a fine little William Hill betting shop opposite Berrogate Hought House for tomorrow. To have something in reserve, just in case. And it was worth it!

(Though there are as many betting shops here as there are bus-stops in Budapest, as I have written elsewhere.)

The number of things I have written elsewhere. A fit of the blues comes over me this Sunday morning, after it is all over, home again once more. After all that happened at home, again. Once more, again, truly... once more with some kind of chance. That maybe it won't be like that, perhaps.

That black Sunday afternoon in London: just like this dawn. But, and there's the difference, I would soonest push the hands of the clock forward, Monday, late noon, arrives. A *Sporting Life* under my arm. No wind. So checked jacket—and a hat on my head.

The lights are burning. I am burning, dry as tinder. Glencloud is running. I bet my... I never know anything in advance. When the sequence of numbers on the monitors intersect... when I'll hear what Leicester, Plumpton, Lingfield promises. (Then it turns out that the rain has washed out Plumpton. And Leicester. So all that's left is the all-weather-dirt track, the cinder-track Lingfield. Never mind! It makes my job easier. Only six races. And if, of the six—only two...)

And the champion jockey falls with Merano! In the meanwhile I've had two to place ("tote-place!") but now the untouchedness is over. And I give Katabatic a try. A safe tip. I still remember Katabatic's great win in 1991. There are four horses running. A classic field, this. And Katabatic, after a hard struggle...

"... And it's Argo and Katabatic, Katabatic and Argo, and they are over the last hurdle. Katabatic and Argo, Argo is finished, Argo is finished and Katabatic is one length ahead, and there are fifty metres to the winning post. Fifty metres to the winning post, aaaand coming up between them is Victor in Two Minds, Victor in Two Minds coming up, Victor in Two Minds... Katabatic comes in second."

I bury my face in my hands.

Next day, as I am feeding the sparrows and wrens in St James's Park and, in the intervals between sparrows, also the blue tits and great tits alighting on my hands with walnuts brought from home, next day I look for a swankier betting shop. And it's high time I made that dead cert bet on Emma O'Gorman. Everything went down the drain on the first day. Martin's Lamp... of course, Martin's Lamp is still here today. And Emma O'Gorman! It was with Emma O'Gorman that everything was lost. Her father's name is vaguely more-than-vaguely familiar. From Paris, from János Tandari. And when they came over to visit, Larissa, his daughter spoke of Emma

O'Gorman. And of Vicky-Whoever-it-was. German, anyway. Furler, that's it. But this Emma O'Gorman is here today. Won three times in a row. I've got to give her a try!

This betting shop on Jermyn Street is like a big bank in the City, old-time, like an antiquated tailor's in Bond Street... Gilded corkscrew columns, plush armchairs, everything. And Martin's Lamp is running, Martin's Lamp, too hot a favourite. Let's take a look, while the burning lasts, at something else. I've got a bottle of Australian wine with me now, which is bad. It is bad to have wine with you at the betting shop. All you need there is the dry burning. The knowledge that everything was lost yesterday. That there's no hope. That it's time to take a look at Ascali Fiscal and Emma O'Gorman's horse.

As I am translating Omar Khayam in my evening hours, with my back to the Post Office Tower, for as long as I can stick it, the word "wine" bears special significance. That Omar Swiggum is always drinking. Because of him I back Billy Boru instead of Martin's Lamp. He has a good track record. He's nowhere. Until the last bend. And then...! He comes in a proud second behind the easy winner Martin's.

But that's nothing. Ten pence is all he wins for me. And Emma's horse makes the photo-finish... Everything was lost the days before... The horses that Emma O' Gorman had...! With odds of 8 to 1, 6 to 1! Now there are three of us fidgeting on the plush. A relative of an owner, a steeplechase jockey with a broken arm, and me. And Soba Guest, Emma O'Gorman's horse, wins after all, in a photo finish. We pat each other's heads and swear eternal friendship.

Outside, the rain. At Picadilly Circus I surrendered to the tube after all. A nice brand new station. Then my room. Then the Safeway supermarket. Stop a minute, stop! That is what I tell myself. Push Omar aside. The Post Office Tower: hidden behind a curtain of rain. There is nothing to seek. No path to follow. Nothing's gone wrong yet. The odds are even—better than even. Two more days still. And yet: tomorrow it could all be lost. The whole thing. What, exactly?

I don't know. I buy some gin. I shouldn't. The only thing that's necessary. The only thing that can be necessary. "Anything that doesn't... not about that." True, "Anything you don't ... not about that either." No more sleeping pills. It's sleeping pills that make things go wrong, so I'll sleep lightly tonight, so what.

Like two years ago, at the Baalbek Hotel.The Baalbek Hotel was where I hit the bottom, the ultimate depths.

There, it was all at once quite clear what it's like when everything can be lost. One last stunt—and you're done for.

I missed the plane that morning. Miscalculated. That time, too: it was the rain. I shouldn't have had a cup of coffee. I shouldn't have watched the rain. The park that Virginia Woolf used to watch. Where their house was laid in ruins. Where her diaries. Shouldn't have stopped to ponder, in the wind, holding my hat, over the bank of the Ouse... the stick stuck into clay... and Virginia, her coat laden with stones in her pockets, swimming downriver, no need even to swim. I shouldn't have miscalculated the running-time of the tube.

But it happened, all of it. "You've missed it," said the clerk at the airport check-in, burning dry as tinder, said it with grace, however, and rewrote my ticket for the next day as easily as you'd fill out a tote slip. And that was that.

As far as she was concerned.

Back to town. That's what it meant—for me. And Friday, it was a Friday then too. What should I do? I had twenty-three pounds and eighty-seven pence. First things first: find a place to sleep. It's easy to say, when I'm telling the story: "because you know the place so well". That I'd known that the Baalbek Hotel existed at all. Like one knows about Dunwoody (who lost me three races the next day in Jermyn Street) or about Emma O'Gorman or Katabatic (thanks). It hung there around Paddington Station, two years ago, I saw it every day in passing. Ten pounds a night. It was the only place I could go to.

All the other hotels started at sixteen pounds.

At the reception desk someone was gobbling up stew with the gravy running down his tattooed arm. I hesitated. I had to fork out five pounds for the key.

I went up to my room. It was on the first floor. It seemed to be the fire-escape too, but I'm not sure. Four metres high, with cracked hammered glass window-panes. A wardrobe from Outer Saltladder Street, a cabinet-and-shelves from a defunct company office, and a radiator from the tool-shed of a chronic ward. A washbasin where the hot water tap dribbled water on the cracked porcelain, and the whole basin threatening to come off the wall if you so much as touched the cold water tap. Two iron beds, clean sheets, grey horse-blankets. I did not examine the spots. I plumped down on the bed.

It was Soba Guest, Emma's horse, that reminded me of this room. And that I was a guest there. Not that I'd ever have forgotten.

I read the Xeroxed paper Sellotaped to the door (Yale lock! Ha-ha!). It listed the dangers threatening to befall me under eleven headings. It would moreover be advisable to leave my passport—against a receipt (for a consideration?)—at the desk. At the desk, here?

I could not even call home. The telephone at the reception desk, so I heard, was not to be used for calls, though they would take a message. I had to find a place with a pay phone where I could be called back.

Oh yes, and in my room, in addition to all things previously listed, there was a black plastic bag plopped-plumped down in the corner. A plain black plastic bag with "Litter" written upon it. (Rubbish.)

My ashes, already. The remains of my body. Or whose rubbish, litter, and why, until when? The twelfth point: I could be killed.

I could be, here. I had a closer look at the toilet. At the end of the passage. Walked in and walked out. It's easy to crack jokes about defecation. I don't want to have to shit here. I pee, as usual, into the wash-basin. That's just what it's for.

Nothing else, not here.

I knew I would not be able to sleep that night. Went out to eat. Eighty pence's

worth of (soggy) chips. I shared them with some kind of bird. And there was the bottle of Australian wine. I had hardly anything left over. Underground fare to the airport, 2 pounds 80. I found a hotel with a pay phone, called home. A fine drizzle was falling.

I dashed into a betting shop on Star Street. I bet a pound, plus ten percent tax. I lost. What I had left would buy me two bottles of bitter lemon. In the morning, when I get back the deposit on the key back from the Baalbek Hotel, I'll be rich. I may even be able to afford a beer at the airport. (I forgot about the eleven o'clock rule.)

But one's got to get to the airport first, right?

I assessed Paddington. Paid three stations a visit. Learned and knew by heart: Circle Line, change for the Picadilly Line at Gloucester Road or perhaps South Kensington. But shall I be able to accomplish all this?

Shan't I oversleep and not wake up in time to leave?

I musn't oversleep. I must lie beneath the horse-blanket and sheet and think of wild things, gentle things... Must not sleep. Mustn't fall asleep. If my alarm-clock topples over, it won't ring. I can of course ask the night porter to wake me. But if he should fall asleep? Get drunk? Be playing chess? Forget? Not give a shit?

I went back several times to the Baalbek Hotel. In the meanwhile, reserved rooms in various other hotels—!!!—for next year, etc. Drank my first bottle of bitter lemon. Went home at ten o'clock at night with the second, the last.

One thing I knew: "my Paddington station" would be opened at half past five in the morning. I had to be there. On the dot. I would get my five pounds back at the reception desk —and what if I didn't? For I no longer had 2 pounds 80 for the fare. Buy the ticket... change... pass through Acton Town, find the right train... and so out to the airport.

I fell asleep at half past two, though I was unaware of it, or at a quarter to three. Thereabouts. I woke up at half past four.

To panic.

I stared at the black bag. As though I'd been cremated, I was already inside. Push-ups against the wall. My bottle of bitter lemon was finished long ago.

At a quarter past five—down to the night porter. He needn't bother with waking me. Back to my room. What if the night porter were killed in the meanwhile? What if he were kidnapped? What if he decided to have a quickie? How was I going to get my five pounds back? How was I going to get my ticket?

Pulling my brown-and-blue robber's hat down to my eyes, turning my checked jacket inside out and pulling a tattered sweater over it—I set out into the London night, the quarter-past-five dawn.

The cleaners, scum-coated, were opening the iron grate. I wormed my way in through the opening. The booking clerk was polishing his copper saucer. I had my ticket.

I found another lonely bird like me, also on the way to the airport... We changed. At a good distance from each other.

And then—Chiswick. I saw the sign that read: Chiswick. Which was impossible. Chiswick is not on the line that goes to the airport. There is no such thing as a horse that is not entered suddenly coming out, coming out at you moreover, at the turn.

Chiswick came.

But the rest of it you know already. I am home, because, since then, I have arrived once more. Again.

From where, and to where? Where did this all begin?

And where is it leading to?

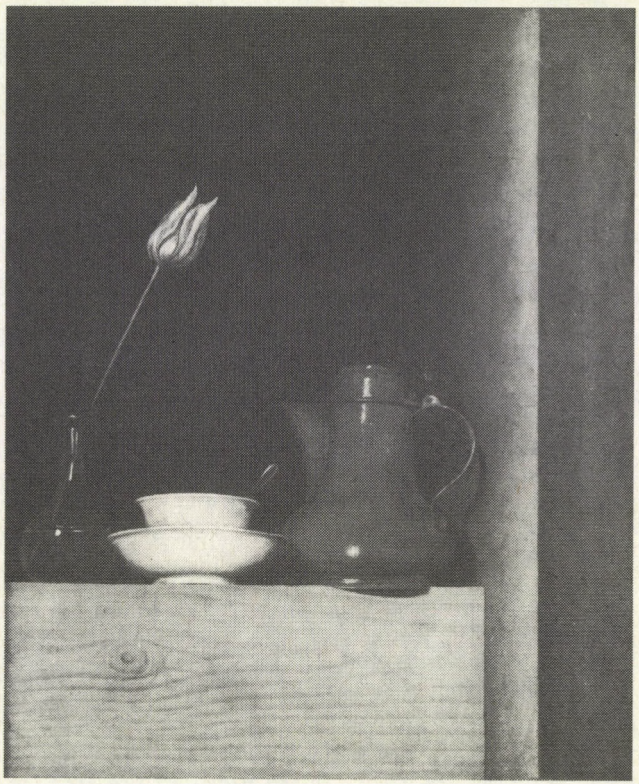
"Who will gather his horses, once they have fallen..."

What do dead eyes, walnuts pattering down, rap out? I saw them shoot Mr Chiswick under the canvas at the bend.

Saw him, later, in slow motion, go down, down, down, without a tumble.

And the Three Hounslows came and stood around him. ❧

Translated by Eszter Molnár



ZOLTÁN HASZNOS

Anna Maria Punz: Still Life with Tulip and Coffee-Pot, 1754.
Oil on canvas. 54 x 44 cm. Österreichische Galerie, Vienna.

Ignác Romsics

The Austro-Hungarian Empire and Surviving Ethnic Tensions

The Habsburg Empire was the result of a long historical process with changing principles of development over the centuries. The first stage in its evolution was the year 1288 when the Holy Roman Emperor, Rudolph of Habsburg, bestowed Styria and Austria on his sons. In the centuries that followed, another four or five major steps were taken, and their consequence was the Habsburg Empire taking on the shape in which it is remembered up to this day.

The second major event was the Battle of Mohács, fought in 1526. With the loss of that battle to the Turks, and especially with the death of King Louis II, Hungary and Croatia come into the possession of the Habsburg dynasty, and, through inheritance—or, if you like, through astute dynastic marriages—so did the Bohemian crownlands. In the case of the latter this meant an immediate and *de facto* takeover, while in the case of Hungary one can only speak of a *de jure* coronation coupled with an ongoing struggle for the throne. The overwhelming part of the Hungarian lands were actually taken over by the Habsburgs only as a direct result of the Peace of Karlowitz in 1699, after the Turks had been driven out of the country. That, in fact, was the third major step in a process as a part of which, after some temporary expansion toward the West, the frontiers of the territory possessed by the Habsburg dynasty, German in origin, shifted toward the East. The last major territorial gains came from the first partition of Poland in 1772, when Galicia and, with it, other Polish and Carpathian territory passed to the Habsburg Empire. In addition, the Bukovina was seized in 1775. After the end of the 18th century, the Empire hardly changed in total size. Some territories were lost, the Austrian Netherlands, the later Belgium, in the Napoleonic wars, and, in the course of the unification of Italy, Lombardy and Venice, however, territories were meanwhile seized in the Balkans. In 1878 the Habsburgs occupied Turkish Bosnia-

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Herzegovina, which was formally annexed later, in 1908. All these territories combined added up to a rather large area: a total of 676,000 square kilometres with a population of 49 million in 1910, without Bosnia-Herzegovina, and 51 million together with the new province.

The fifty-million-strong population of the Habsburg Empire, or more exactly, the Austro-Hungarian Empire, as it was by then called, was, however—and this was one of the most peculiar features of that state—ethnically and linguistically mixed and heterogeneous to an extent that had been, and remains, unparalleled in the history of Europe except perhaps for the Balkans and Russia. Not counting Armenians, Gypsies and Jews, who lived largely in diaspora, and were not accurately taken into account by the censuses of the time, 12 distinct ethnic, linguistic and religious groups lived within the frontiers of the Empire. Their relative size to one another can be seen in the figures for 1910: out of the 50 million, 24 per cent were Germans (12 million) and 20 per cent Hungarians (10 million). Czechs were third in numbers (6.5 million, i.e., 13 per cent) and Poles fourth (5 million, i.e., 10 per cent). Ruthenians (or Ukrainians) were fifth at 4 million, making up 8 per cent of the population. Sixth were Serbo-Croats, the two ethnic groups making up 3.5 to 4 million together, with a large majority of Catholic Croats and only a small minority of Orthodox Serbs. The two million Bosnians—Muslims, Croats and Serbs—should be added, too. Next to the South Slav group in the order of magnitude came the Romanians (3.2 million), Slovaks (2 million), Slovenes (1.2 million), and finally, Italians, 0.7 million accounting for a mere 1.5 per cent of the total.

The big issue was the form of government and the administrative structure suitable for such a huge and heterogeneous population, permitting smooth operation but acceptable to all ethnic groups. From the beginning of the 19th century, when the national and ethnic problem first emerged in a modern form, to 1918, when the Empire ceased to exist, numerous attempts were made to answer that question; more than fifty ideas, suggestions and draft proposals are known of. Consequently, the number of attempts at creating typologies, to categorize these plans according to various principles, is also quite remarkable. And, as always, each of these typologies have their faults; there are always "misfits", sub-groups which cannot be squeezed into any of the categories. Obviously, my own attempt at such a typology will not be perfect either, and will not cover everything, but may be acceptable as a summary of existing types.

Of the four or five major categories in terms of which these drafts can be classified, one was the centralistic model. Examples are Joseph II's reforms between 1780 and 1790, then, after the revolutions of 1848-1849, Prince Philip Schwarzenberg's and Bach's (Minister of the Interior between 1848 and 1852, after whom a decade of absolutism following the crushing of the 1848 Hungarian Revolution in Hungary was named) and Schmerling's (Minister of State,1860-1865). Had he not been assassinated by Gavrilo Princip in 1914, Archduke Francis Ferdinand may possibly have followed in the same tradition. According to this model, the Empire

ought to be run, without any regard for ethnic, national and historical differences, from a single centre, in the same way as France was being run from Paris. And, of course, in the German language. Under the specific conditions of the Empire, this model was never successful in the long run.

The second major group consists of proposals or attempts aimed at federalizing the Empire. Within this category, three sub-groups can be established. One took its starting-point from historical and political traditions, looking for regions where, in the late Middle Ages or thereafter, forms of state had already existed on which federal units might be based. One of the branches of Illyrianism belonged here, basing itself on the Croatian statehood of the past, on the "Triunite" Kingdom of Croatia, Slavonia and Dalmatia. Another was the "Trialism" of the Czechs, which took the pre-1526 Bohemian-Moravian statehood as its starting point. The same model was basically characteristic of Hungarian political thinking—that of Ferenc Deák and József Eötvös—as well. It was that idea which led to the so-called Dual Monarchy in 1867, within the framework of which the integrity of the historical Hungarian state, as it had existed before 1526, was restored.

The second sub-type of the federalist approach turned entirely on ethnic features rather than on historical and political traditions. The idea was to convert the Empire into a federation of as many areas as there were linguistic units that could also be separated on a geographical basis. One of the first of these proposals was worked out by the Czech Frantisek Palacký who designated eight units of this kind in 1848-1849. The Slovene Kraučič was a great deal more radical. He divided the Empire into 14 imaginary units, without even considering Hungary as a separate unit on its own. The most thoroughly thought-out proposal for the federalization of the Empire, however, was Aurel Popovici's. He was one of the leaders of the Romanian National Party in Hungary, at the beginning of the 20th century. He designated 15 territories based on the ethnic principle. From a Hungarian point of view, an interesting element in his proposal was that, beside a central Hungarian territory and a Romanian Transylvania, his plan also called for a separate Szekler Land.

As the third type, there were the federal plans which represented something in-between, a transition between the two previously mentioned sub-types, the historico-political and the ethnic variant. They drew on both of these ideas but did not consistently carry them through. There was good reason why it was Hungarians who were most productive in working out such combination-type proposals. With some irony, one might say that Hungarian political thinkers were very enthusiastic about federalizing the Austrian-Czech-Polish regions, but much less so where Hungary's possible federalization was concerned. Nevertheless, in my view, the plans elaborated by Baron Wesselényi in 1848-1849, and by Oszkár Jászi in the spring and summer of 1918, can be regarded as highly positive and forward-looking. Jászi would have divided the Empire into five units: a German Austria, Bohemia, Galicia, Illyria, and an "historical" Hungary. He wanted to grant a broad

range of collective rights to the national minorities, the major ethnic groups in Hungary, including the three-million Romanians and the two-million Slovaks, but he did not consider the possible federalization of his own country either.

The third major type of reformist ideas comprises those that considered the achievement of cultural and personal autonomy as a road leading toward the future. The Austrian constitutional experiments of 1848-1849, (Kremsier) as well as Kossuth's reform plans had already considered such ideas, but they were consolidated as a complete system only in the thinking of the Austrian Social Democrats at the beginning of the 20th century. The substance of Karl Renner's and Otto Bauer's thinking was that they made a radical distinction between state, government and citizen on the one hand, and national community, national-cultural autonomy and identity on the other. In the case of the former, no relevance was attributed to ethnic and linguistic identity at all, and the administrative units of various levels were to be based on a geographic and economic rationale rather than on ethnic division lines. Where religion and ethnic identity were concerned, however, every community, indeed, every individual, would have had the fullest possible autonomy in every respect and on every level. This would have resulted in the development of a dual structure giving ample scope both to the centralistic requirements of a modern state administration as well as to ethnic regionalism. It is rarely mentioned, so perhaps not entirely irrelevant, that current ideas on cultural autonomy by personal right (as in the Vojvodina) go back to these Social Democratic plans.

Finally, in the fourth place, mention must be made of the proposals aimed not at the transformation, but at the breaking up of the Empire. The objective of these plans was not to prolong the existence of this curious form of state but to find out what to replace it with. The first ideas of this kind were conceived around 1848-1849. In Poland, Prince Adam Czartoryski, among the Romanians, Nicolae Balcescu, and of Hungarians, the exiled Lajos Kossuth as well as Klapka and László Teleki should be mentioned in this connection. They are the best known among those who wanted to replace the Austro-Hungarian Empire by a Danubian Confederation which would have lacked the Empire's German part, but would have included some other nations and lands between the Germans and the Russians. These plans lacked realism in their own time. They always came too late, and were offered by the defeated to the victors—usually from exile.

Of all these ideas, only one was realized in 1867, as a result of 1848-1849 (and, of course, also in consequence of the Prussian victory at Sadowa): the Dual Empire. Following the other models of government, it remained operative for more than half a century, until the end of 1918. It was frequently described by anti-Habsburg propaganda and, in its wake, by one of the schools of Hungarian historiography in recent decades, as basically a formula for double oppression. In the German-Austrian half, national minorities were oppressed by the Austrians, and

the national minorities in Hungary were oppressed by the Hungarians. There is some undeniable truth to this. On the other hand, reality was much more complex. For one thing, several cases are known where a national minority was actually oppressed, within the same unit, by another nation which felt oppressed itself. The dualistic system had certain subsystems as well, thus it was not simply supported by two pillars but the pillars had further supports themselves. One of these subsystems or additional supports was the Croatian-Hungarian Compromise, which granted territorial and political autonomy to Croatia within St Stephen's Realm ("historical" Hungary), with a legislature of its own. Its government may not be appointed by that legislative assembly, the *sabor*, but there nevertheless was a government and a Croatian administration and government. A similar system of favours, if on a lower level, was granted to the Poles in Galicia. No such privileges, however, were enjoyed by the Czechs, who wanted them very badly. Small wonder then that the chief advocates of the transformation of the region into a number of nation-states, Masaryk and Beneš, were both Czechs. This is one of the points which demand a refinement of the "dual oppression" theory. The other is that in many cases "subjugated" ethnic groups or national minorities also tended to "oppress" other nationalities if they had the opportunity. The Italians, for instance, who had wanted badly to have a university in Trieste but got a single faculty in Innsbruck instead, unashamedly oppressed the local South-Slavs in Dalmatia who made up 95 per cent of the region's population as against the Italians' mere 5 per cent. In the same way, the Poles, while fighting for further privileges for themselves, would not hear of collective rights for the Ruthenians of Eastern Galicia. The best-known example, of course are the Hungarians, who were always discontent with what they were granted by the Austrians but became just as ungenerous vis à vis their own national minorities.

It followed inevitably from the evolution of the Empire's ethnic groups into nations that in place of the Empire's dualism, some new construction, supported by several pillars, would have had to be found and introduced sooner or later. Although Francis Joseph I and the Hungarian Prime Minister István Tisza clung to this structure, it was seen as self-evident by the politicians and rulers of the future that progress must be made. This was also what outside powers, especially France and England, expected of the Empire. One cannot tell of course what would have been done, and whether if something had been done, it would have proved viable. All plans for the transformation of the Empire were, as everybody knows, swept away by the storm of history, which created in their place the pattern of small successor states which, though badly shaken in the last two or three years, by and large survives to this day.

What was the cause of this change, of the reorganization of the Austro-Hungarian Empire into small states called "national"? Was it the failure to cope with national issues or were great (and small) power interests involved? Obviously, these questions cannot be answered simply yes or no. The complex processes of history

were involved, in which various tendencies coincided, strengthened each other, and resulted finally in what was, and still is, called the Versailles Settlement.

One of the existing tendencies that must really be considered was obviously the growing national awareness of the nations of the Empire, or more precisely, the changing nationalism of the élites' into mass nationalism. That inner factor, and the circumstance that it remained unsolved, must certainly be emphasized (and I have done so in the foregoing). In addition, however, there existed two other factors which also were of decisive influence on the fate of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. One was the circumstance that, parallel with the gradual departure of the Turks from the Balkans, a process which lasted through the entire 19th century, along the southern and eastern frontiers of the Empire there emerged two new states—Serbia between 1830 and 1878 and Romania, between 1867 and 1878—exercising a growing attraction for their brethren inside the Empire: the Serbs of the southern region (as well as for other South Slavic peoples later on) and the Romanians of Transylvania. Both states carried out much propaganda so that Romanians in Hungary should orient themselves toward Bucharest rather than Budapest, and that South Slavs should regard Belgrade as their cultural centre instead of Zagreb or Ljubljana. This was one of the external aspects which demonstrably influenced the future of the Empire.

The other external factor may simply be called great power interests. With regard to that, two things must be pointed out. First, that the withdrawal of the Turks created a vacuum in the Lower Danube area and the Balkans. Two great powers, Russia and Germany, aspired to fill that vacuum beside the Empire (which, of course, also had its own ideas about "civilizing" the Balkans). The aspirations of Tsarist Russia in the Balkans go back to the time of Catherine the Great. These plans had undergone a metamorphosis by the beginning of the 20th century, but their main thrust remained the same: to control the Straits and their hinterland. This affected the Austro-Hungarian Empire both directly and indirectly. St Petersburg made no secret of its claim on the Ruthenian-inhabited areas of the Danubian empire. It also had a tendency to promise Transylvania to Romania and Bosnia-Herzegovina to Serbia.

Beside Russian expansionism, which had a long history in the region, a new expansion made its appearence, that of Germany. It had developed more aggressive variants and less aggressive ones. However, there was no difference between them from the point of view that both regarded the Austro-Hungarian Empire and the Balkans as parts of a future German *Mitteleuropa*. As long as the Habsburgs resisted these two expansive aspirations—and this is the other circumstance which must be emphasized with regard to great power interests—Britain, and especially France, regarded the survival of the Danubian empire as a guarantee of the European balance of power and hence in their own interest.

The question was whether—and when—these three tendencies, the internal one, i.e., the desire of the national minorities within the Empire to obtain more

rights, the irredentist propaganda of the small states along its frontiers, and the interests of the great powers would coincide in a way that together they would bring down the Austro-Hungarian Empire. The time when this happened was at the end of the Great War. Therefore all questions about whether the Austro-Hungarian Empire disintegrated or was destroyed are oversimplified and also artificial because, as I have explained, the final result was the outcome of the coincidence of several tendencies. Thus it cannot be said for certain that the disintegration was inevitable, an act of fate, nor can it be called purely chance, an "industrial accident" (*Betriebsunfall*) of history, to use a term much favoured by German historians.

Few things support this thesis better than the fact that up to the spring of 1918, the Allies, Britain, France and the United States, about to be victorious, remained undecided as to whether to modernize and federalize the Austro-Hungarian Empire or to turn it into nation-states. As long as France and Britain saw a chance that the Austro-Hungarian Empire might resist Pan-German aspirations, they refused to support Seton-Watson, the French Slavists (Louis Leger, Ernest Denis) and especially Masaryk and Beneš, in their endeavour to establish anti-German Slav states on the marches of Germany, replacing the pro-German Austro-Hungarian Empire.

Thus, up until the last stage of the war, along with the notion of destroying the Habsburg Empire, there existed another view which would have retained it as a medium-size European power as a countervailing force. As part of this, a number of officials and politicians of the Allies wanted to federalize the Austro-Hungarian Empire. It is very characteristic of this circumstance that in the spring of 1918, when Oszkár Jászi worked out his federalization plan, the American peace preparatory committee, which had been in session since 1917 and had also drafted plans on the look of Europe and the Danube Basin after the war, put forward a proposal which, interestingly enough, closely resembled that of Jászi. Comparing the two proposals, the only difference between the two is that in the American plan, unlike in Jászi's, Transylvania figured apart from Hungary, as a separate region with a Romanian majority. Otherwise there was no significant difference between the ideas of Charles Seymour, the Central Europe expert of the future American peace delegation, and Oszkár Jászi, the future Hungarian Minister for National Minority Affairs. Nor did, of course, President Wilson's famous fourteen points propose the dismemberment of the Empire, only the guaranteeing of national autonomies within it. The turning-point was the spring of 1918. Two events took place then, which made the idea of independent nation-states generally accepted and final. One was the signing of the German-Russian peace treaty at Brest-Litovsk on March 3, 1918. From the viewpoint of the western powers this meant the loss of their principal eastern ally, and also that the road was open for Germany in the north nearly up to St Petersburg and in the south to the Crimean Peninsula and the Black Sea. The other major event was the failure of Austro-Hungarian attempts at obtaining a separate peace, which the Allies had interpreted as a chance that Vienna and Budapest might not fall completely under German influence but would be able to keep their independence

and sovereignty. In May 1918, when representatives of the German and the Austro-Hungarian Empires signed an economic agreement reminiscent of a Customs Union in Spa, that chance vanished. The agreement was taken by the Allies, not without reason, as a sign that in the times ahead the Austro-Hungarian Empire would not counterbalance the Germans. On the contrary, it would be allied to Germany, and together they would expand as far east as it was possible. Almost at the same time, in April 1918, the oppressed peoples of the Danubian empire held a congress in Rome. This demanded secession from Austria-Hungary more resolutely than ever before, and this time their demand was also supported by the future victors of the war.

From the summer of 1918 on, the question was no longer whether Austria-Hungary would survive. It was where the frontiers of the states established in its place would be drawn. There was now almost complete agreement among the victors that independent national states should be founded on the territory of Austria-Hungary. There were differences, however, about the exact location of the frontiers of the nation-states. It must be said that when putting forward their territorial claims, the former national minorities showed no more restraint than, say, representatives of the Hungarian imperial idea had done at the beginning of the century. It is commonly known that the Romanians would have liked to expand right up to the river Tisza. Less well known, however, is the fact that according to Czech proposals submitted to the peace conference, Vác, Balassagyarmat, Miskolc and the Bodrogköz region would have gone from Hungary to Slovakia, and it was seriously considered that a Slav corridor should be established between Bratislava and Zagreb. The Serbs wanted to extend the new South Slav state to the Baranya coal basin, and the Croats claimed the region of Klagenfurt and Villach in Austria. As for the Poles, beside certain Baltic areas, they also demanded control over the Ukraine, or most of it, right down to the Black Sea. As far as aspirations at the cost of other peoples are concerned, none of the nations of the region have any right to point a finger at each other. Every nation, some sooner than others, produced its own dangerous dreamers who, when given the opportunity to speak, or worse, when they achieved power, usually found a political basis to rely on.

It must be pointed out, though, that most of the exaggerated demands were rejected by the Allies. The frontiers that were finally established were the result of compromises between the immoderate claims of the region's small peoples and the fairer proposals of the great powers. Thus the declared principle of ethnic, national self-determination did have a role, even though in many cases—listening partly to the arguments of the former minority leaders—the representatives of the great powers accepted certain economic and strategic considerations. Beside the hopelessly mixed ethnic make-up of the region, this was the other reason why in most cases the emerging new states were anything but ethnically homogeneous nation-states. On the contrary, nearly all were burdened with large ethnic minorities. Moreover, precisely the four states meant to be the backbone of the new settlement,

that is, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, and Romania, were those that had especially large minorities. In these four countries the ratio of national minorities was between 28 and 34 per cent, not mentioning the fact, which was soon to become evident, that the coexistence of Czechs and Slovaks, Serbs and Croats, Croats and Slovenes was far from being without problems.

Before 1914, out of the 100 to 120 million people inhabiting the large region between Finland and the Mediterranean, some 50 million were members of minorities; after 1920 this figure fell to 32 million. The new arrangement was only that much better from an ethnic point of view than the one before. The most numerous of the new national minorities were the Germans. Their total in Czechoslovakia, Poland and elsewhere added up to some 6 million. The size of the Ukrainian or Ruthene minority reached 5 million, and that of the Hungarians, 3 to 3.5 million. There were 1 million Bielorussians in Poland, 600,000 Turks in Bulgaria, 4-500,000 Albanians in Yugoslavia, and 350,000 Bulgarians in Romania. The size of the Jewish population was a special question. The number of those speaking Yiddish and practising their religion was estimated at 5 or 6 million; to this figure must be added the number of those already assimilated or wishing to assimilate. If they are all taken into consideration, then the largest minority of the region were the Jews. Since, however, they had no desire to establish a nation-state in this region, and also, the majority identified themselves not as an ethnic but a religious group, they obviously fall into a different category than the so-called national minorities.

As a consequence of the imperfection of the national boundaries, the peace of the region was at least as threatened by ethnic tensions after 1918-1919 as it was earlier. That Hungary had border disputes with every one of its neighbours is all too well known in Hungary and abroad. Let me therefore mention the less well known example of Poland, which had a dispute with Lithuania and actually fought a war with it, a conflict with Soviet Russia with which it also fought a war; a disagreement with the Czechs settled in Poland's favour in 1938, and a conflict with Germany, the outcome of which is known to everyone. Bulgaria was struggling in a similar situation: it had a claim against Romania because of the Dobrudja, a dispute with Yugoslavia over Macedonia and with Greece because of Thrace. Thus, with some exaggeration it may be said that practically every new state harboured resentments against every one of its neighbours because of imperfect national frontiers. During the Second World War, in 1942-43, the American specialists making preparations for the establishment of the latest "New World Order" pinpointed over thirty zones of tension in Europe, 29 of which were within this region, that is East and Central Europe.

The victors were themselves well aware that the national settlement they created in 1918-1920 was, to say the least, imperfect. The earliest criticism of their own achievement appeared in certain memoirs published from the mid-1920s onwards. In fact, when examined closely, even the protocols of the committees of the peace conference contain sentences which clearly show that some of the experts had few

illusions about how enduring the settlement was likely to be. In these circumstances, the question as to how to control the situation, how to prevent a repetition of the tragedy, was crucial. Two methods were outlined.

One was cooperation between the newly created or restored states which, in the thinking of some of the braver spirits, would have involved even the establishment of a confederative structure stretching from the Baltic region to the Adriatic. However, it soon turned out that because of conflicts, not only between victors and vanquished but also between victors and victors, such cooperation would never materialize, and even if it did, it would not work. Poland was entangled in a war over territory with Lithuania as early as 1920, and, as a result, what emerged in the Baltic region was not cooperation in opposition to the Germans and/or the Russians but a Latvian—Polish alliance opposed to Lithuanian—Estonian—Russian cooperation. As for the Danube Basin, in this region the Little Entente, established in 1921 by Czechoslovakia, Romania and Yugoslavia, confronted Hungary. Moving further to the south, there were lasting ill feelings between Bulgaria and its neighbours. The latter established a Balkans Entente in 1934. To all these can be added the various alliances against the *status quo* established and controlled by Italy, first of all that between Italy, Austria and Hungary.

All this meant that a complete system of states in friendly and good neighbourly relations with each other, stretching from the Baltic to the Adriatic Sea was, because of disputes in the region, simply impossible to establish. Even what was actually done worked only as long as the international power relations of 1918-1920 were still valid. As soon as the balance of power established at the end of the war tipped, at the beginning of the 1930s, it turned out that they were unfit for precisely what they were chiefly meant for, i.e. for halting Germany. From the mid-1930s on, the entire region depended on the umbilical chord of the German economy, regardless of the political sympathies of the countries concerned.

The other method worked out was the minority protection principle. This idea had already been mentioned earlier, for instance, at the Congress of Vienna in 1815, at the time of the establishment of Greece in 1830 and at the 1878 Berlin Congress. (In the last mentioned case precisely over tripartite Poland.) Nevertheless, the historical moment when this was most systematically thought over and worked out was the period of peace settlements following the Great War.

Minority protection rules made it possible for everyone to choose his citizenship. (Trivial as it may seem at first sight, its importance becomes at once clear if one considers the situation after the Second World War, the millions of displaced persons, and those without citizenship all over Europe.) Everyone could stay where they had lived before, if they wished, or could opt for another country according to his nationality. If they chose to stay, then, at least in principle, they could not be discriminated against because of their descent, language or religion. This was more or less equal to the level of minority protection provided by the Hungarian National Minorities Act drafted by József Eötvös and enacted in 1868. Beyond that, the

minority protection rules attached to the peace agreements granted, in some cases, also the possibility of cultural, geographical and political autonomy. In our region this was proposed in two cases. One involved the Szeklerland and the Saxons of Transylvania, the other the Sub-Carpathian region which had formerly belonged to Hungary. The Hungarians of the Szeklerland and the Saxons in Transylvania were promised cultural autonomy, and the Ruthenes of Sub-Carpathia a broad regional and political autonomy. These expectations were, in principle, accepted by Romania and Czechoslovakia; however, they consistently refused to put them into practice.

If these principles and rules were not observed, the injured parties had the right to appeal to the League of Nations, the predecessor of the U.N., for legal remedies. The petitions were investigated by a committee, which, if the grievances were found to be justified, submitted them to the council or general assembly of the League of Nations. At those forums positions were adopted, and the accused party, if it did not agree, could then turn to the International Court at the Hague as the highest international court of appeal. The court, however—and this is of utmost importance—had no sanctions to apply with its rulings, or more exactly, the only sanction was the power of public opinion. Thus the decisions of the court at the Hague did have a certain moral weight but, in general, no real political consequences. To mention a few Hungarian examples only: up to 1929 various organizations submitted 33 petitions on behalf of the Hungarian minorities in the neighbouring countries, out of which 18 were found justified by the League of Nations. However, they brought no real change in the life of the Hungarian minorities. In the same period, 9 petitions were handed in against Hungary because of its treatment of the Jews. The result: a minor and largely formal mitigation in 1928 of the *numerus clausus* introduced in 1920.

To sum up, it may be said that owing to the imperfect separation of nations and the resulting ethnic tensions, the lack of regional cooperation and the lack of sanctions attached to the minority protection rules, the Versailles system survived for less than 20 years. The life span of the Habsburg Empire, on the other hand, if counted from the Peace of Karlowatz, was more than 200 years, and if the last third of the 18th century is determined as its starting point, some 150 years. Compared to that, the twenty-year life span of the Versailles system was pitifully short, and that of the so-called *Pax Germanica* between 1938 and 1945 even shorter, less than ten years. It cannot be doubted that compared to these two, the forty-five years of the *Pax Sovietica* was clearly long. But only when compared to them. By historical standards, it was not long at all. Even if the three periods of the various 20th century attempts at a rearrangement are combined, they add up to less than half of the time in which the Habsburg Empire provided a home—a shack for some, a palace for others—for the peoples of the Danube region. Pál Teleki, a Hungarian politician of the interwar period, was right when, at the end of the 30s, he said in a lecture that what had been established in place of the Austro-Hungarian Empire was nothing but a huge question mark.

The answer is still being sought. ❧

Lieve Joris

Looking Back at the Melancholic Revolution

What did I know about Eastern Europe when I sat in the train to Budapest in the early summer of 1989? Not very much. I had been to Poland once. I was living with a Polish immigrant in Amsterdam, a city that was to both of us a place of immigration, since I was born in a small village in the Flemish part of Belgium.

A few months earlier, I had seen a TV-programme in which four intellectuals and men of letters—George Steiner, György Konrád, Gabriel Garcia Márquez, and Jorge Semprun—talked about their lives. All of Holland fell in love with Konrád, who was drinking Tokay wine while he talked about his youth in the village of Berettyóújfalu and the war that made him flee to Budapest. Berettyóújfalu—a difficult name that was, but by the end of the eight-hour programme everybody in Holland could pronounce it.

Konrád had a wonderful voice that meandered through a rough, cruel landscape. He had a great sense of humour, and a deep understanding of how history shapes people's minds. When I heard him talk, the borders between his Europe and mine seemed to grow vague. It was as if in that other half something of myself was lying, of which I was not aware yet.

Here was a man who had lived and suffered, and who had come out a humanist, even though the hardship he went through would have turned others into beasts. It was Konrád who put me on that train to Budapest. I wanted to see the city that produced men like that. I was fairly hopeful that I might find a world that would not really be unfamiliar to me. And how familiar it was. I had planned to write an article—I would write a book.

As a traveller I knew the experience of going back in time, but never did I travel so deeply back into my own

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Lieve Joris,
a Flemish writer living in Amsterdam, has published five books about the Arab World and Africa. Back to the Congo *was translated into different languages. Between 1989 and 1990 she spent a year in Hungary and wrote* De melancholieke revolutie *(The Melancholic Revolution), Meulenhoff, 1990.*

European subconscious as I did that year. The streets of Budapest took me in immediately. Pictures of an older, slower Europe came to life; smells of the past, of my grandmother's eau de cologne, of coffee being ground at the entrance of the supermarket. I was so overwhelmed that even the red stars that blazed at night on buildings and in shop windows gave me a feeling of excitement—as if Christmas was coming.

But it didn't take long before this idyllic image started to crack. I stayed with friends who lived along Bajcsy-Zsilinszky út. The night I opened the window to let some fresh air in, I will always regret: I woke up in the morning, car fumes hanging in the room.

And so, through the cracks, I slowly started to see other things: decaying buildings, misery, old people coming down from the hills of Buda to sell fruit and small bundles of flowers they had picked in their gardens, counting the money they received over and over. Having come from a society where the weak are protected, that was a tough sight. Throughout the time I stayed in Hungary, I never got used to it.

I had come full of excitement about the changes that were taking place, but the people in whose house I lived had other concerns. Iván, the 18-year-old son, was a genius at special effects for science fiction movies. His room was full of the bleeding corpses, robots and space-shuttles he had designed. He wasn't interested at all in what was happening around him. He dreamt of emigrating to America, where he hoped to find the right plaster to make his monsters.

I have never been particularly interested in politics. My way of entering into a new society has usually been through the arts, and thus in Hungary I went searching for the writers. Their tradition of gathering in coffee-houses seemed to have passed, but I did find a café where men of letters would meet every week, the same place where writers had gathered in the twenties.

The men I'm talking about were the staff of the magazine *2000*, a literary monthly that was trying to find its way on the slippery path of the changing Hungary. There was a sense of history, a notion of ritual to their meeting. They sat at a table with a white damask tablecloth, on the ground floor of the Café Hungária, overlooking the German tourists in the well below. Their faces were the colour of paper from staying inside too much, they had beards and moustaches, and smoked a tremendous lot. One was an expert on the writer Dezső Kosztolányi, another spoke six languages, from Latin to classical Greek and Farsi, a third dreamt of having seven white suits like the American writer Tom Wolfe. They were, in their own way, and within the limits the past forty years had imposed on them, Middle-European cosmopolitans, and proud to be that.

The owner of the café respected their weekly ritual and gave them a reduction of forty per cent on their consumption—otherwise they could not have afforded to sit here, and there was a simple beauty and continuity in that too,

since their colleagues had had the same reduction in the twenties.

So there they were, gathering stories for their next issue, while Imre Nagy, the leader of the 1956 uprising, was being reburied, and western observers were invading their country to see what would happen next. There was excitement in the air, Budapest was a place full of journalists. I was one of the invaders, and as I sat at that table in the Café Hungária, I could not but wonder how long the sanctity of an informal meeting like that could be kept in a place that was so rapidly changing its habits.

One day the American photographer Helmut Newton came to Budapest, wanting to catch the atmosphere of that changing city, and somebody took him to the Café Hungária to meet the pale gentlemen of the magazine *2000.* Helmut Newton, a name quite known in the world of photography, but they hadn't heard of him and were a bit annoyed when he asked them if he could make a group portrait.

As soon as they had reluctantly agreed, his two assistants brought out their lights and changed the surroundings into those of a film studio, while Newton started to stage them like a movie-director. One had to smoke more than he usually did, so that the air would be full of the thick fumes of his cigar, the other had to stand up and look natural, a third to lean over the table and look straight into the camera. They did so, glancing at their watches, mumbling and sputtering under their moustaches and beards, feeling quite ridiculous. Weeks later they found out, by talking to a friend who was a photographer, that they had made the acquaintance of one of the stars of American decadence, whose normal fee for a portrait was 20,000 dollars.

The incident is quite innocent compared to what would happen later. And yet it struck me at the time and it stayed with me as a significant scene. How gracious these men were when they sat together in their own world, how clumsy and helpless they became when exposed to the limelight of western society. These conserves of the old Europe, who impressed me so much by their knowledge, how ill-equipped they seemed for the adventure that was about to take place in their country.

They were men of a generation that would not always live through the transition easily. What they hoped for in a freer country was to write openly, to bring out a magazine that would be read by many, to be able to find the books they wanted. What they would get were translated bestsellers about Michael Jackson, aerobics guides by Jane Fonda.

Of course already then there were some people who knew how to deal. One of the editors of *2000*, the one who dreamt about Tom Wolfe and his seven white suits, was going on a scholarship to America soon afterwards, and left his friends a detailed plan of where and when he could be reached.

Iván, the 18-year-old genius in special effects for movies, had meanwhile started working in Hollywood and sent his father a picture of the secondhand Toyota Corolla he had bought.

György Konrád was no exception in this world, I soon found out. Péter Nádas, Miklós Mészöly, they were writers who talked about philosophy, literature, history, science—intellectuals in the old sense of the word.

I must admit that amongst them I often felt a superficial writer. Some of them wondered how I could write a book about their country without knowing their language, without having studied their history in full detail. They made me feel a bit of an American, although when in America I feel very much a European.

What is this "American" feeling I had? I think it was due to a certain simplicity that comes with not having lived deep political turmoil in one's own life, on one's own territory; of not needing the detailed knowledge of history for survival. Americans move a lot and with great ease. They have a tradition of uprooting themselves, of burning the past and starting anew. The mentality of my Hungarian friends was the exact opposite.

Their sense of history charmed me at the beginning, but when it became clear that the old regime would not hold, and new movements and parties were emerging every day, I sometimes felt my own mentality to have certain advantages. Not having been brought up in a troubled society, the things I saw didn't awake old traumas. I could look at them as they presented themselves to me, without the weight and symbolism they had for the Hungarians around me, a weight that in the coming months would become so heavy that it turned people inward, clinging to their own values, preventing them from changing.

Travelling, seeing different societies, has helped me to take a certain distance from my own values, my own background. It taught me to understand and empathise with people who are different. Most Hungarians I met had been denied the possibility to travel. They were filled to the brim with the knowledge of their own history. It was hard for them to look at who they were with any distance.

Let me try and give an example. Not long after my arrival in Hungary I travelled with three Hungarian friends, a writer, a scholar and a photographer, to the east of the country. When we reached the small town of Fegyvernek that evening, I was astonished by the contrast between the bright lights of Budapest and the complete darkness that surrounded us now. I knew this gap between the life in the capital and the countryside from journeys in other countries. I knew it from the Third World.

We were city people with city habits and so we went out, looking for a café. One of us had a flashlight, the others walked silently behind him. Ten o'clock at night, Fegyvernek was fast asleep. It had rained the days before, the sandy streets had turned into mudpools. The houses were barely visible in the dark, for all I knew they were huts. "This is like Africa!" I whispered.

My friend shone the flashlight in my face. "What did you say?" It had been a playful remark, and we joked about it later on, but I could feel the hurt pride of

my companions, their sense of loss at being situated so far off the centre of the world. To be compared to Africans, barbarians! They asked me how I had travelled there, in that jungle, and if it wasn't dangerous for a woman alone. To think that I could associate anything I had seen there with Hungary was abhorrent to them.

The next morning, as we were leaving Fegyvernek, we passed an open lot where a group of people were gathering around a wooden table. Curious, we tried to see what was happening, and discovered that the whole table was covered with bottles of beer. It was the beginning of a bright day, we travelled on in good spirits, but the image of these hollow-eyed people stayed with me. The difference between the intellectuals in the car and the total lack of sophistication I saw through the window, was striking. That day I would continue to see similar images. My friends seemed to be oblivious to them, they pointed out baroque churches to me, and birthplaces of their favourite poets.

I thought about the Polish writer Ryszard Kapuściński, one of the few men in Eastern Europe who has travelled and written widely about the Third World. He said he always felt completely at ease in Africa, for it reminded him of his childhood in Pinsk. He, too, found it hard to talk about his travel experiences when he was in Poland. Once, when he came back from a long African journey, his father looked at him and said: "Hot down there, isn't it?" After that he considered the subject closed.

Kapuściński always criticized journalists for staying in the capitals of the countries they visited, talking to intellectuals and not going to the countryside to see what was underneath. If I had stayed in Budapest, I might have had a totally different idea of where I was. Travelling in the countryside deepened my perspective and prepared me for what was to happen in the coming months.

I had directed myself to the writers in Hungary, but soon the writers got involved in politics. Péter Nádas, who writes with the delicacy of Proust in times which aren't Proustian at all, had fled to the countryside to work, but one saw him in the city more and more. Konrád became an active member of the SZDSZ, the Free Democrats; others found themselves spending more and more time at the headquarters of the MDF, the Democratic Forum.

I wouldn't want to repeat the clichés of that time, according to which the SZDSZ represented the intelligentsia in the cities, while the MDF took care of the countryside. I would just like to share with you a few observations and explain where my loyalties lay and why.

Konrád introduced me to a few friends from the SZDSZ, and soon after meeting them I was surrounded by a bustling group of people. I immediately felt at ease with them. A family they were, they had lived close together during the opposition years and were just coming out in the open. They still carried the warmth of the nest.

Meanwhile, they were part of an international movement that had contacts all over Eastern Europe. When one of them got back the copying machine that the Hungarian police had confiscated years before, he immediately smuggled it to his samizdat friends in Czechoslovakia.

They had links with the West as well. They had been influenced by the sixties, as I was. They had ideas about personal freedom and individualism which I share.

If I had stayed in Budapest, I might have thought that the liberal atmosphere that hung around these Free Democrats, represented Hungary. My journeys to the countryside had made me suspect that this might be different. When I accompanied the Free Democrats on campaign tours, I could see this even more sharply.

Once I went eastwards with Rozi and László, two leading SZDSZ-members. As people walked into the *Kultúrház* of Püspökladány, they looked at László with awe. He resembled his father, who had been killed by the communists. And yet as he stood there, tall, strong, dressed in jeans and a leather jacket, his voice thundering through the room, he looked more fit for riding on a motorcycle than standing there talking about privatization and the Warsaw Pact. The public consisted mainly of farmers, their shoes were muddy, their faces worn. No bigger contrast was imaginable.

Rozi, who was born in a village in the East and knew the mentality of the people, made some remarks later on about László's wild hair and the way he was dressed, but he waved them aside. He would even continue to wear boots and jeans when he became a deputy.

László was an architect, an artist before he came to politics. Others were sociologists, scholars, illegal publishers. In their opposition days they had been living dangerously, taking risks, being extreme. That type of life hadn't really prepared them for the diplomacy and calm they needed now. But there they were: they felt they had no other choice.

As a journalist and writer who was trying to catch the feeling of that particular era in Hungarian history, I could of course not limit myself to the people I felt closest to. Soon enough I became curious about the MDF, a party that seemed to appeal more to the attitudes that prevailed in the countryside, and that was gaining considerable importance.

My friends didn't really understand my eagerness to know the other side: what was I searching for? Anything I wanted to know, they could tell me. But I wanted to find out for myself, I didn't want to become a partisan of one group, I wanted to strike a balance.

It wasn't easy to get inside MDF circles. They had a rather defensive attitude towards western journalists. They suspected them of being biased.

Let me describe a trip I made with a group of MDF sympathisers. It was late

December 1989, Ceausescu had just been overthrown and convoys with food and clothes were going towards Transylvania to help the Hungarians there. Berettyóújfalu, an intimate name attached to Konrád's history, suddenly became the bordertown where trucks gathered before crossing to Romania.

Humanitarian and psychological support for ethnic Hungarians who were living in Romania, I could understand that. But as I sat in the car with one of the convoy-members, I started to feel slightly ill at ease. When I spoke about the two million Hungarians in Transylvania, he corrected me and said there were many more. I knew the number he mentioned was exaggerated.

We were travelling through a region where Hungarians and Romanians were both living. My companion seemed to look only at the Hungarian side of things, as if the revolution had only freed them. The Romanians were another type of people, he said, they were not real Europeans.

I am not used to looking at things that way, but I recognized it vaguely—there is a trace of this type of thinking in my own past. It came to me through the stories of my father, who as a youngster had been full of the feuds between Flemish and Walloons in Belgium. Very little remained of that in my own thinking. The only time I ever encountered it was when, in my early twenties, I went to Liège, a big industrial city in Wallonia. I stayed with Walloon colleagues and one night I had dinner with a group of their friends. We talked and drank and talked, until somebody suddenly looked at me and said he had never known that there were Flemish people like me.

"Then what had you thought we were like?" I asked him. Everybody started to talk at the same time. The Flemish were farmers, they said, they were big and round and, well... rather dumb. The clichés rolled over the table and suddenly, me too, I remembered all kinds of stereotypes about the Walloons. They were workers, they drank and didn't care about God, their cities and rivers were infested with pollution. We looked at each other and laughed. We realized that these ideas belonged to the past, that we had common concerns, common interests that went beyond these petty fights.

And here I was, so many years later, travelling through Transylvania with somebody younger than myself, for whom these ideas were quite alive.

The examples I just gave may seem rather extreme. I chose them to show you my dilemmas of that time. On the one hand, the wild liberal in the leather jacket, on the other, the petrifying ideas of this young man.

While the gap between the two main parties was widening, I started to regret certain attitudes of my friends. Wise men they were, but very unpragmatic, unable to make compromises. They wanted to win, it seemed to them the only way to accomplish something. They didn't want to share power.

In those days I often felt like a go-between. The longer I stayed, the more I was meeting Hungarians who weren't meeting each other anymore. Once the

possibilities for fundamental change became apparent, old traumas came to the surface and blurred the vision of a common future. That was the time when the title of my book, *The Melancholic Revolution*, came to me.

It was a tough time, a time when everybody discovered that the changes would not come easy. People had dreamed in small rooms, they had gathered against a common enemy. Suddenly the limits of their dreams became apparent. The fights for power were harsh, each party was unwilling to understand the motives of the other. Slander, paranoia, hysteria, the air was full of it. Little remained of the euphoria of the first months.

When I had sat at that dinner table with my Walloon compatriots and we had suddenly remembered the clichés about each other which were stored up in our subconscious, we had laughed. Those were the issues our fathers had fought over—we felt free of them.

I could see this type of freedom in Fidesz, the party of the youngsters. They weren't stifled by the past, they hadn't had time for big dreams, they hadn't piled up their ambitions for forty years, they hadn't got their hands dirty, they couldn't be tainted by the slander that the big parties submitted each other to. They could look towards the future.

On election night in the spring of 1990, I went from one political party office in Budapest to the other. It was a revealing experience. In the heat of the moment, and with the result of the elections becoming clear, people confessed what their ambitions had been. I discovered I had friends who had dreamt of being ambassadors and ministers. Only one of them would eventually get a high post: he became the mayor of Budapest. He had fought with the police in his opposition days. One of the first things he had to do was to send the police to Keleti Pályaudvar, where a group of poor people were sitting on the rails in protest. He has had many more dilemmas since then. I wonder if any of his friends still envies him.

I do not want to hide from you that I was rather disappointed with the election results at the time, that in spite of the distance I had tried to keep, I had had my own dreams. But it didn't take long before I could see that the outcome was probably quite fair, and that it reflected the mood of the country. Further developments in the East have shown us that the Havels haven't won in the long run. Eastern Europe seems to have another phase ahead.

Recently one of my Hungarian friends, a sociologist who became a deputy in parliament, passed through Amsterdam. He had some time off and when I asked him what he would like to do, he said he had always dreamed of riding through Amsterdam on a bicycle. And that's what we ended up doing.

I discovered that even though he had never been in Amsterdam, he knew quite a lot about the atmosphere of freedom and rebelliousness that had

prevailed in the sixties and seventies. He had longed to be there at that period, but it hadn't been possible. He was in his mid-forties now, but I felt he was young at heart, a man who hadn't forgotten his dreams.

While cycling along the canals he started to hum the latest tune of Tamás Cseh, who in former days had sung a melancholy song about youngsters travelling on a Comecon-train, where the sun was shining on a cheap East-German earring. When I asked him what the new song of Tamás Cseh was about, my friend smiled. It was about a young man, he said, who had fallen in love with the daughter of a communist bigshot. He told the girl he was sorry: her beautiful face and breasts were of little value now that her father had fallen out of grace.

I had known my friend in frantic days, in moments of despair, hysteria even. I could feel a certain quietness and acceptance had come over him now. His old fears hadn't disappeared. He was worried about the rising tension amongst the ethnic Hungarians in the Vojvodina, he expressed concern about the occasional outbursts of nationalism in Hungary, about the attacks against people who were not *echt Ur*-Hungarians. Cosmopolitanism had become a suspected term, he said.

And yet, while we rode, I felt he was more at peace with himself than before. He talked about sessions in parliament, imitating some of the politicians we both had known. He was proud of the social laws that had been passed thanks to the efforts of the parliamentary committee he belonged to. As so many, he had been forced into politics. After two years, I could sense it had become part of his life.

The brother of Iván—the young man who went looking for the right plaster and ended up in Hollywood—had been to Holland once. He loved Amsterdam and was astonished when I talked to him about crime, homeless people, drugs, about the limits of tolerance that we seem to have reached. He had idealized us, he thought we were perfect.

When I arrived in Budapest I had some of that dreaminess. I was looking for things we have lost and seemed at first to find them everywhere: the euphoria of unlimited change, the purity of politics. By the time I left, I had become more realistic.

I believe in a universal culture with universal values. But if we look at Eastern Europe, it might be a a luxury to think in those terms. Maybe it is understandable that people who have been denied their authenticity for a long time, who have been forced to be a member of an amorphous international community, long to go back to small, homy values.

And yet it was Konrád, a man with a much broader vision of the world, who had called me to Hungary, and amidst all the disillusions of that year, I remember men like him, who were concerned about the fate of their country, yet unwilling to be swept away by internal fighting, hysteria, xenophobia. For in this lies the future of Hungary: to be open to the world, not to be guided by fear, or the belief in its exclusiveness. ❧

The Genetic Code of the Socialist System

An interview with János Kornai

"I feel anxiety about publishing this book: I am not sure if there is anyone today who cares about the recent past, about the collapsed previous regime," you write in the Preface of your new book.[1] *More and more people are fed up with the mulling over of the grievances of the past, and instead ask that attention be concentrated on the future. Is there any point in bothering with the discussion of a period in history that is over and done with?*

It is not possible to think about the present and the future in a responsible and judicious way without a thorough understanding of the past. The past is with us in hundreds of ways: in the predominance of state ownership and in the various forms of bureaucratic coordination; in the large systems of redistribution and in the divisions between the formal and the informal economy; above all, the past is with us in our thinking, in our prejudices and expectations. Those who lived under the socialist regime cannot get over this experience simply by saying a few superficial words; to get this experience out of our system, we have to talk it out thoroughly. As for the young, those who are students now and the future generations, this book may become for them a documentary of the age—testimony on the great twentieth-century experiment which started with high hopes and went terribly wrong. There are many who, quite understandably from a psychological point of view, are filled with passion, outrage and hatred when they talk about the socialist system, others are overcome by nostalgia when they talk about it. My approach, and the tone of the entire book, is different. I have tried to examine the past in a calm and objective manner.

The socialist system was born out of ideals that were truly high-minded. How then did it turn out to be a cul-de-sac *of history, the cause of terrible suffering to so many?*

The socialist system that actually emerged became deformed, and eventually collapsed, because it desired to eliminate three fundamental social institutions: pluralistic democracy, private property, and the market. In my book, I try to show that the attributes of the actual communist systems cannot be derived from the personality traits of various great historical figures—of say, Lenin, Stalin or Mao—nor do they arise from the histori-

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1 ■ *The Socialist System: The Political Economy of Communism* (Princeton University Press and Oxford University Press; Princeton and Oxford, 1992). In Hungarian: *A Szocialista Rendszer: Kritikai Politikai Gazdaságtan* (HVG RT, Budapest, 1993).

cal and cultural heritage of the Soviet Union, the world's first socialist country. The "genetic code" of the system was stored in the Communist Party itself: in its striving for hegemony, in its ideology, and in its programme, which aimed to abolish the capitalist market economy and to establish a command economy controlled by the party state. Politics was not derived from the nature of the economy; on the contrary, the political structure was the decisive factor. The Communist Party maintained undinted power by a combination of persuasion and terror. When this was shaken, the system collapsed.

You write that you wished to "grade" the socialist system through the criteria of certain fundamental human values. In view of the nostalgia that some now feel, it seems reasonable to ask what marks the socialist system gets?

My main objective was the description and analysis of the actual system. (The term "positive science" is generally used to describe such an approach.) This makes up by far the largest part of my book. In addition, however, I also studied the system to find out to what extent it met various ethical postulates. These postulates included such items as individual freedom, material welfare, equality, a life free of anxiety. Let's go through this list item by item. The socialist system definitely failed the test where liberties and human rights were concerned, the most important values according to my value system. No matter how far it is from the perfect political form, parliamentary democracy scores incomparably better in this respect than the socialist system. The socialist system did not fail in social welfare, although its grade is not much better than a simple pass. It should be pointed out that it was in this area that the pioneers of socialism, and later those in charge, made the boldest promises. They promised higher productivity and faster growth, accompanied by a higher standard of living than in the capitalist countries—even if not immediately, but after a transitional period. These promises, repeated over and over again, were never fulfilled. Fifty or seventy years should have been a sufficiently long period of transition; the opposite of their claims turned out to be true. In spite of spectacular—temporary and partial—successes for the socialist system, the superiority of the capitalist system was obvious in the long run, in production and technological modernization, as well as in the area of material welfare. At the same time, however, objective assessment does show that in other "subjects" the socialist system achieves better marks. For those citizens who kept clear of politics, the system guaranteed material security, full employment, and job security. The system of redistribution, which was to some extent egalitarian, was also regarded by many as a positive feature; certain basic services, even if they were often of an appalling standard, were available to one and all. In my book I try to show that these "grades" were largely, although not entirely, independent of the actual leadership, and basically derived from the fundamental features of the system.

It became apparent relatively early on that classical socialism has serious deficiencies, and it was the recognition of this fact that led to reforms. But why were the reforms insufficient to prevent the failure of the system?

That was the great paradox of the reform movement. In the first part of my book I discuss the classic form of the system, as it was before the reforms. Regardless of its horrible and disfunctional features, it was a coherent structure. The various parts fitted; blind enthusiasm and terror complemented each other, as did state ownership and strict centralization, or the strategy of forced growth and the shortage economy. The re-

forms, which the second part of the book discusses, one by one, removed the building blocks of this delicately balanced construction. Or perhaps even more appropriately, they blasted away some of its corner stones. One such corner stone was the abolishing of private property yet, little by little, private property covertly came back in the form of the secondary economy. Another corner stone was the bureaucratic system of central planning, which the advocates of market socialism wanted to replace with the market. Hence, it was not a matter of the reformers making mistakes: the reform movement itself was bound to end in failure because basically it tried to maintain the domination of the Communist Party and of government ownership, while introducing certain elements of political liberalism and market economy. This amalgam could not last; its internal antagonisms necessarily led to the system's disintegration. It is another matter altogether that the reform movement, although unable to live up to the expectations of its supporters, still became a great progressive force. It was a training school which mentally prepared a large number of people for the change of political system, in a way foreshadowing several important institutions of a pluralistic democratic system and market economy. And even more importantly perhaps, it had a kind of disintegrating function, without which the old system might never have collapsed at all.

The one-party system of communism was irreconcilable with a market economy. But will the market be able to make progress if the predominance of state ownership continues? Indeed, isn't it possible that this feature of the system could derail democracy itself?

History tells us that in a properly functioning and well-established pluralistic parliamentary democracy, private property is the dominant form of ownership. For this reason, everyone who values democracy should support a wide diffusion of private ownership. However, the converse does not hold. The dominance of private ownership is not a sufficient condition for democracy. The preponderance of private property is quite compatible with an authoritarian regime, involving various degrees of repression, and even with a fascist totalitarian state. Your question, therefore, does refer to a very important connection. A ruling elite is always tempted to hang on to power at all costs. The powerful influence of an extremely large sector of state-owned firms, when coupled with the hyperactivity of an inflated administration, might become a political power itself. Quite remarkably, there are a number of capitalist countries, both in Asia and in Latin America, in which a narrow political elite and the top officials in the administration and in the state-owned firms form an oligarchy; these are precisely the same countries in which democracy has had difficulties in taking root. In the interest of truly decentralizing and marketizing the economic sphere and democratizing political life and society, the reduction of the state sector and the limitation of the bureaucratic activity of the state are strongly recommended.

Earlier you confined your interest to the description and analysis of economic processes; since the transition you have also appeared in the role of economic advisor. Isn't it a riskier role, considering that the correctness of suggestions can be checked in retrospect, and they can also be compared to later suggestions, opening up the possibility of your being charged with inconsistency? Take your Passionate Pamphlet, *published in 1989, (in English:* The Road to a Free Economy, *Norton, New York, 1991) in which you recommended that firms owned by the state should not be liberalized and should continue to be treated strictly as budgetary institutions. This advice was not heeded and*

the state-owned firms now have to survive in the market. At that time you warned against rapid privatization, now you want to speed up privatization. Isn't there a contradiction here?

I take the risks that go with giving advice. However, I do not think that I can be blamed for my suggestions not being put into practice. I have good feelings about writing that little book at the time. If you were to pick up this pamphlet now, read it with the mind of a reader in 1989, not with your present mind. When I wrote it in 1989, everybody around me was still talking about the need of ownership reform in the state sector, possibly replacing government ownership with some kind of self-management. I spoke out, in plain words, for the development of the private sector and the revival of the middle-class, urging the bureaucracy to give the green light to the expansion of private property. All this is self-evident today, but it was not so obvious then. *The Road to a Free Economy* was the first book ever written in that spirit in this part of the world. It was widely discussed and translated. None of my works has been translated into so many languages: eleven so far, with the twelfth, Chinese, coming out soon. Events since have shown that everything I said about the private sector was correct, and my prediction that the coexistence of the two forms of ownership would last for quite a while also turned out to be true. I did not believe in some kind of trick then, and I still do not believe in it today, by way of which the government sector could be privatized at one stroke. I warned against an irresponsible, and potentially corrupt, form of privatization, not against a rapid one. I am still against that today. This is not at all in contradiction with my other criticism, made nowadays, looking back at the way followed in the last three years, that the progress made in the field of privatization has been too slow, and I would like to see a much faster rate. One or two of my original critics picked on a point of secondary importance, concerning my treatment of the state sector. My suggestions in this respect were incomplete; I rewrote them for the first foreign edition. Nevertheless, my instincts did not fail me: I foresaw the danger that managers of state-owned firms were, perhaps, not going to act in a way that one would expect either of genuine owners or of managers controlled by real owners. Today there is a widespread and legitimate criticism concerning the squandering of state property. Perhaps we would be better off now if my advice on the legislation of parliamentary control over government property had been taken then.

Since the end of 1992, you have been advocating a kind of half-turn, in other words, replacing an exclusive concern for macroeconomic equilibrium with more emphasis on economic growth. Isn't it dangerous to give such advice to a government which has flinched from introducing important but unpopular measures, while being susceptible to popular illusions about economic growth?

I tried to express myself clearly and unequivocally. I suggested a half-turn, not a complete U-turn. Much more attention should be paid to the effects that fiscal and monetary policy, legislation, newly established institutions, and any other regulations have on both short term and long-term growth. It would be a grave mistake for the financial authorities to try to justify irresponsible moves by twisting my argument. There is a constant danger of inflation rising again, which would cause immense problems. The present government bears full responsibility not only for what is going on in the country now, but also for the state of the country after the elections, when it will hand over power to the next government, whatever the composition of that government might be. ❧

Györgyi Kocsis

András Róna Tas

The New Higher Education Act

On July 13 1993, after several days of debate, the Hungarian Parliament passed new legislation on higher education.

The first university in Hungary was founded in 1367 by King Louis the Great, of the House of Anjou. This university, in the south-western city of Pécs, was, according to contemporary custom, licensed to teach "all the arts and sciences" with the exception of theology, by Pope Urban V. The 1993 legislation marks a turning point in the long and stormy history of Hungarian higher education, though its true significance can probably be judged only in hindsight. I shall attempt to outline the issues the legislation addresses, what is new about it, and the points at which it links with the development of higher education in Western Europe and North America.

Before 1949, higher education in Hungary essentially followed the German pattern: the basic unit of a university was the chair, and these chairs made up faculties. Chairs were headed by university professors (*Ordinaries*). There were also professors without a chair, termed extra-ordinary, and the university could grant the title of titular professor to outside persons. The Hungarian system also included the position of *Privatdozent*, who were not members of the salaried staff but enjoyed the *venia legendi*, the right to lecture on a given subject.

The communist take-over in 1949 meant not only ideological but also organizational changes in education. Higher education came under control of the central apparatus of the Communist Party, whose decisions were implemented by the relevant ministries, themselves repeatedly reorganized. This practically put an end to university autonomy.

A system of academic degrees on the Soviet model was introduced; there were no more extra-ordinary or titular professors or *Privatdozents*. A National Scientific Qualifications Commission was set up, which, under the supervision of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, awarded the degrees of "candidate of science" and "doctor of science". A number of research institutes, functioning under the Academy of Sciences, were established, and in many cases (though not everywhere) this implied the separation of research from teaching. University teachers were classified in a hierarchy of four steps: teaching assistant, lecturer (*adjunktus*), reader (*docens*), and professor. In 1957, the universities were again granted the right to

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award doctor's degrees. Medical practitioners, veterinary surgeons and lawyers received the title of doctor automatically with their diploma; in other faculties a dissertation had to be submitted (which was additional to the requirements of the primary degree). A special regulation stated that university doctorates had no rank in the hierarchy of academic awards. In 1984, this situation was changed and university doctorates (*doctor universitatis*) were admitted to the hierarchy. This meant that up to the enactment of the new Higher Education Act, an absolutely unique situation prevailed in Hungary, with a hierarchy of three postgraduate degrees: university doctorates, candidates and Academy doctorates. Corresponding members of the Academy were chosen from the Academy doctors, and full members from the corresponding members. This actually meant a five-rank system, the lower two degrees of which could be obtained by passing examinations and presenting a dissertation, and the third required a dissertation only. The Academy had a set number of members, and vacancies were filled by election.

The process of breaking up the old universities and setting up specialized ones was started in 1949. Some of the new universities came about by granting independent status to certain faculties of the old universities, others by raising some colleges to university status. Others again were new institutions. They included five medical, six agricultural and three technical universities. In 1993, there were thirty separate universities in the country, five of them church institutions, restarted after 1989. In addition, there are more than sixty specialized colleges in the country. In the academic year of 1992-93, these approximately ninety institutions of higher education were attended by approximately 90,000 full-time students, which clearly shows the state of fragmentation of Hungarian higher education. Furthermore, in some faculties an important role was played by evening and correspondence courses. These were usually of a lower standard, though in principle, their diplomas were of equal weight. In terms of the number of students attending institutions of higher education, Hungary figures somewhere near the bottom, rising to the middle rank as regards the number of those completing their courses. This is explained both by the limited number of places and the tough entrance exams, and by the low drop-out rate. More than 90 per cent of students (more in some faculties and fewer in others) complete their degrees.

A course at a specialized university generally ran for five years, four years at specialized colleges and polytechnical colleges. In most of the faculties of arts and sciences, two majors had to be taken, as well as supplementary general subjects, chiefly ideological. Institutions of higher education all included independent institutes of Marxism-Leninism, which provided compulsory ideological training. Russian was also made compulsory everywhere.

Central control was accompanied by dual control within the institutions. The decisions of institutional and local party organizations were implemented by the institutional councils and the rectors or directors of the institutions concerned.

Despite the drastic changes brought about by the transformations in 1947-49, the high standards of Hungarian universities were maintained in many places, especially in the natural sciences and in technologies of less ideological relevance. Talented young students gathered around scientists, who retreated into their work. A slow improvement was also evident in the overall situation from the mid-1970s onwards, when many scholars were given the opportunity to attend international conferences and to participate in research projects abroad. From the early

1980s, this was also possible for a growing number of young people. Despite the negative effect of central control, restrictions, low salaries for teachers and academics, the brain-drain, and also the need to conform, which curbed innovative thinking, the situation did not drastically deteriorate. This was due to the fact that teaching and research was one of the important areas of the "little freedoms", and therefore, despite all difficulties, it attracted the talented. In consequence of all this, by the time of the political changes in 1988-89, Hungarian higher education, with the exception of some of the social sciences, was up to international standards.

In 1989-90, important changes took place in higher education, in conjunction with the political ones. Institutions regained their autonomy, party organizations and ideological faculties came to an end, the heads of the universities constituted a Hungarian Rectors' Conference, those of colleges set up the Hungarian College Directors' Conference, and the directors of the Universities of Art also established their own organization. Higher education, however, had to face new challenges. There was an urgent need to establish a new legal framework for higher education, which had to be coordinated with the legal status of public education, specialized training, the sciences, and the Academy of Sciences. Financial support had to be given a new basis. All the inner tension in higher education had to be defused.

The challenge of autonomy

Institutions of higher education have to be assured autonomy, while the responsibility of the government, which provides the finances, cannot be denied. In countries liberated from communist rule, this problem touches particularly tender spots. State dominance has always been a determining factor in Eastern Europe, and this was carried to extremes by the communist system. Therefore, at the time of the changes, autonomy was not a question of "merely" the freedom of education and research: it was a political issue, and, indeed, a key to the transformation of the social structure, something without precedent. Autonomy also touched on two other problems. The heads of the institutions of higher education had been appointed by the previous system. Some of them recognized the inevitability of change, and some of them even furthered it in their own way, but the fact was that they had not been elected in a democratic way. At the time of the changes the issue was, therefore, whether it was proper to assure autonomy before dealing with the legitimization of the new leadership. Two options were open: either to suspend temporarily the autonomy of these institutions and put commissars appointed by the minister in charge, or to legislate promptly. Both alternatives were tried in other Eastern European countries, but results were not up to expectations. Hungary managed to avoid both of these inadequate methods. The institutions worked out democratic procedures, often *ad hoc*, and elected executives everywhere. This has legitimized autonomy for the period of transition.

It was more difficult to find a solution for the other problem concerning autonomy. Having regained autonomy, the unviable small institutions of the greatly fragmented previous system, and the specialized universities that had not grown in an organic way, started to fight for survival. New legislation was to deal with this problem, and this proved most difficult.

The unity of teaching and research

Research naturally did take place at universities over the past decades, but from a financial and organizational point of view

the research institutes of the Academy were in a more advantageous position. The sort of major investment, which, in the late 1960s, led to a leap forward in European and American higher education, did not take place in Hungary, but due to the concentration of resources and special allocations to the newly founded institutes, the overall infrastructure was generally better in the research institutes of the Academy. Their organization and their smaller staff numbers offered a greater chance for travel grants, and for a long time, salaries, too, were higher. Since the National Scientific Qualifications Commission was controlled by the Academy, the staff of the institutions of the Academy had better conditions for obtaining higher qualifications, and teaching did not take up much of their time. This state of affairs brought about an understandable tension between higher education and the Academy, which was further heightened by the communist regime's aim of dividing the Hungarian intelligentsia. Incomes policy was also used for this purpose, raising the salaries and other emoluments now of one category, now of another.

After the political restructuring, the need to change this situation inevitably emerged. The Hungarian Rectors' Conference and the Academy, which had also regained its autonomy, took several steps together towards resolving the problem. Consensus was easily arrived at on the need to put an end to the old system of academic qualifications. The universities had to be granted the right to award higher degrees. Two problems, however, were left unresolved: how to ensure that degrees awarded by the fragmented, small specialized universities maintained their standards, and if possible, raised them; the second was what the future of one of the higher degrees, that of Doctor of the Academy, should be. The solution for this second question was also left to the new legislation, and the solution arrived at is not fully satisfactory.

Improving of university research standards is primarily a question of financial resources. It proved relatively easy to channel new resources, subsidies and credits from the West into higher education. World Bank credits, the PHARE programme, the TEMPUS programme, and other development projects went a long way. The most important of the restricted domestic resources has been the National Scientific Research Fund, which, following the model of the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft, has become an independent institution supporting research. University institutes can enter open and public tenders with equal chances; the conditions were assured by special legislation. At the same time, there are funds which expressly support higher education and the research carried out within its framework, and these can only be applied for by institutions of higher learning. Due to problems associated with the political changes, however, only small sums are available and this frittering away endangers their effective use. Indeed, the very future of the allocations is uncertain, making long-term planning for research impossible. The new act is meant to tackle this problem as well.

Academic research institutes can no longer be isolated from teaching. The idea of incorporating these research institutes in the universities had few, though clamorous, supporters. It was again left to the new act to work out directives for a co-operation that will be more than empty declarations without obligation to either party, and which take into consideration local interests.

The structural model of higher education

Apart from some minor—though not insignificant—differences, there are today two basic models of higher education. To sim-

plify somewhat, in the one current in the English-speaking countries, the student, after completing the first level, is awarded a bachelor's degree; this is followed by the master's degree. The third phase is basically research leading to a doctor's degree (PhD). The other model may, for simplicity's sake, be called the continental one, and as an example, I take the German system. Here the universities base their programmes on scolarly disciplines, as opposed to the colleges (*Fachhochschule*), which, after shorter coursework, offer specialized diplomas. In the German system, after completing a university course, students can obtain a doctor's degree (*Promotion*). Here, university teaching appointments presume *Habilitation*; while Anglo-American higher education applies no such formal system, and tenure is obtained within the framework of a regulated process. After the political turnover, a lengthy debate ensued in Hungary on which of the two models should be adopted. This not only called for a careful consideration of both models and their variants, but it also had to be taken into account which model would be current in Europe, especially in the European Community, of which Hungary, as an associate member, aims at becoming a full member before the end of the century. A further consideration was which system would grow out of the present forms.

The draughtsmen of the bill on higher education opted for the continental model, but took over certain elements from the Anglo-American system, and also took into consideration those changes which the European Community countries are still in the process of preparing for.

Democracy, competence, and the internal structure of institutes

Various systems exist for the administration of institutions of higher learning. The ways and means of coordinating democratic and competent decisions, however, must be found within one and the same system. It is an open question everywhere in the world whether the head of a university should be an executive manager charged with efficiently operating a large institution, or whether the post should go to a scholar, whose personal prestige determines the strategy of the institution. The composition of the governing body and the scope of its authority are also open to debate. Either a body is elected by the university, or persons are chosen by the citizens who maintain the university, or a combination of the two. In all cases many different techniques of election or delegation are possible. Another open question is what share students should have in decision-making. During the drafting of the bill all three issues were seriously discussed and the solutions arrived at are the outcome of the historical situation and of compromises. Arguments in favour of an executive-type head are persuasive, but not under Hungarian conditions. Over the past fifty years, the universities have produced many eminent scholars, but no adequate university administration. In the difficult period of transition, decisions closely affect conceptual questions, and the decision-making mechanism is still unstable. University teachers generally have more trust in their peers than in an outside administrator who, if inadequate, would be difficult to get rid of. This is a familiar problem in American universities, which have been employing manager-presidents for quite some time. At the same time, given the current conditions of social change, universities do not have enough experience to predict what kind of manager one of their members will prove to be under entirely new conditions. Consequently, in 1990-91, new executives were usually elected only for a year, a period that could be extended

to two-year cycles. The new act is a step ahead in this direction as well.

Agreement was also reached that those maintaining the universities as well as their "consumers" must have a say in decision-making. The question only remained on what level this should be. The representation of the interests of maintainers and consumers has not yet been properly organized in Hungary. Ninety per cent of the institutions of higher education are state-owned, but nobody suggested direct government participation in their governing bodies. The state universities of the European Community countries and of the U.S. receive only 50 to 70 per cent of their revenue from government resources; this proportion is more than 90 per cent in Hungary, and non-central resources are incidental and sporadic. Still, the act has managed to allow for the consideration of the maintainers' interests without infringing on the institutions' autonomy. The representation of the "consumers", the direct participation of commercial and industrial, local administrative and employees' organizations in the decision-making bodies, has not been dealt with so far. It is desirable, however, to set up consultative bodies associated with the institutions, and the new law does allow for this. The role of these bodies is to grow with the passage of time.

Student participation in decision-making has increased all over the world, particularly after the great student revolts of the 1960s. Students, however, seem to have been forced into retreat everywhere, and the influence and number of their representatives in decision-making bodies has been diminishing. In Hungary, students have played a positive, dynamic part in intramural changes, and they have obtained for themselves a significant, even if not decisive, role in the bill.

State and non-state institutions and per quota support

In the socialist system, the budget of universities and colleges was determined by what was called the budget bargain. It was the power of the institution, or rather the influence of the patrons of the institution, that decided how much the given institution was to get, and the use of that money was determined down to the last penny. After the launching of the new system, a further deterioration of the economy and the worsening financial position of the exchequer made it necessary to look for new ways of distributing the dwindling amounts of money. These can be only gradually established. Since one of the objectives was to boost the number of students, a rise in the number of students was almost the sole justification for greater running expenses. This brought along the introduction of per quota financing, that is a system where state support depended on the number of students and the subject they studied. This appeared in conjunction with the appearance of non-state universities, mainly church institutions. Unlike in many other countries in Eastern Europe, in Hungary private universities and colleges only exist in an embryonic stage. In the absence of church property and funds, church universities and colleges also demanded state support, and this contributed to the need to work out a system of grants closely tied to the number of students. The principles of this have been incorporated in the new act.

The mushrooming of church and other religious institutions of higher education created serious problems in the period of transition. Under the terms of an act passed by the new Hungarian Parliament, 100 persons suffice for the establishment of a denomination, and each registered denomination has the right to maintain educational institutions and to ask for financial support

for them. The new act had to spell out the conditions necessary for a non-state institution of higher education to be recognized by the state. State support—on a mandatory basis—can only be granted to church and private institutions if they have been recognized by the state.

The new Higher Education Act: political bargain and compromise

The Higher Education Act was prepared over a period of two and a half years. In addition to the parliamentary draughtsmen, numerous groups, lobbies and political bodies participated in drafting the bill. It was much debated in many places, with all the participants aiming at a compromise. This in itself served as a useful school for a democratic reconciliation of interests. By the final phase of the debate, few questions were left open. The act did establish the highest bodies for university autonomy. The Hungarian Rectors' Conference, the Hungarian College Directors' Conference, the Chair of Art University Rectors and the national organization of student self-governing bodies have set up a joint association, which has been legally registered, and which was intended as a forum where the autonomous universities could try, as a first step, to solve their internecine conflicts. This association, however, did not find a place in the text of the act. The students' organizations insisted on *at least* a one third share in the governing bodies of the institutions; the final text speaks of *no less than one quarter* but *no more than one third*. The organization of university teachers wanted more than half of the membership of the governing bodies to be made up of senior university teachers; the final text gives them *at least* one third. The trade unions wished to continue the practice of offering permanent appointments from the start to junior teaching staff as well, special proceedings being necessary for dismissal. Neither the government, nor the rectors, nor even the students supported this. A compromise was reached. Present staff continue on a permanent tenure basis, but those to be appointed in the future will be given contracts for defined periods.

Following such preliminary discussions, the bill was submitted to the government. There were differences even among the coalition parties. The main point of dispute concerned ministerial control of educational institutions. The situation was that e.g. the medical universities were under the control of the Minister of Public Welfare, of the Christian Democratic People's Party, and the agricultural universities under the Minister of Agriculture, of the Smallholders' Party. Even the financing of the universities came under the budgets of the ministries concerned. In the end, the government reached a compromise. The issue would be decided by Parliament, with MPs having the final word on whether all universities should come under one minister, the Minister of Education and Culture, or whether the earlier arrangement with three different ministers, should continue.

Next, the bill was presented to the parliamentary parties, and although conciliatory talks had been held previously, the text adopted by the government became officially a draft bill at this point. The bill submitted by the government contained 126 paragraphs, and more than 800 amendments were moved. Herein can be seen the significance of a thorough debate and, on the other hand, certain deficiencies in the rules of procedure of the Hungarian Parliament. The Cultural Committee of Parliament debated the amendments for several days. The Alliance of Free Democrats, the largest opposition party, requested greater autonomy for higher education, with special regard for the private universities and colleges

to be established later. The Federation of Young Democrats, however, preferred a variant closer to the American model. The Christian Democratic Party wanted to strengthen the position of church-administered higher education. Several MPs were of the view that higher education should be furthered by giving it priority over the Academy and even, if need be, to the Academy's detriment. Other proposals were meant to ensure a special status for art education. The Socialist Party wanted to ensure legal guarantees for easier admittance to universities. Several amendments put forward by the opposition were accepted by the government parties, and in return, opposition MPs withdrew quite a few amendments. Finally more than 500 amendments were presented to Parliament, of which about a fifth were adopted.

The final vote at Parliament saw many paragraphs of the bill meet with unanimous support. These included a number of key elements. But the majority of the paragraphs, and consequently the act as a whole, was only carried by the votes of the three government parties, the Democratic Forum, the Christian Democrats and the Smallholders' Party. On the question of leaving the medical and the agricultural universities under separate control, the majority of the Christian Democratic and the Smallholder MPs did not support the position taken by their own parties. This means, that with enactment, on September 1 1993, all institutions of Hungarian higher education are under the control of the Minister of Education and Culture. For technical reasons, the financial aspects will come into force only on January 1 1995.

Outsiders were surprised by the consensus that could be achieved, that is that the Higher Education Act, unlike the Public Education and the Academy of Sciences Acts, not to mention other legislation, was largely exempt from party political controversy. According to independent observers, the act as it stands is acceptable in structure and sound in many of its details, but it does contain a few elements that will be obstacles to the necessary transformation of Hungarian higher education.

Definitions in the Act

The Act speaks of state institutions of higher education and non-state institutions recognized by the state. There are two types of institutions: universities and colleges. The establishment and functioning of a university is subject to the following conditions: it has to be equipped to provide basic education of a minimum of four years' in at least two disciplines, specialized extension training, research, as well as offering postgraduate courses leading to higher degrees and *Habilitation*; senior university teachers must have a doctor's degree and *Habilitation*, and junior university teachers doctor's or master's degrees. A college must be qualified to offer a curriculum of at least three years' and be suitable for research activity. Senior college teachers must possess a doctor's degree (PhD). State institutions of higher education can only be established by Parliament, and non-state institutions only with the consent of Parliament. A master's degree will be introduced at the art universities and can be obtained by following courses after regular university training. The English *Master*'s degree is the equivalent of a Hungarian university diploma following a course of at least four years, and the *Bachelor*'s degree of the diploma granted by colleges. At the same time, a university can confer bachelor's degrees as well if it holds college-level courses. Universities are given the right to award PhD degrees in certain faculties, after a three-year extension research training. They are licensed to grant *Habilitation* in faculties which have the right to award doctor's de-

grees. For awarding doctor's degrees and *Habilitation*, the law has set up outline conditions, with directives on how to fill it out by further government decrees; based on these, the details are to be worked out in the university by-laws. Universities and colleges can also run specialized extension training, which confers special diplomas.

National institutions of higher education

The institutions concerned function according to strictly outlined spheres of authority. As pointed out already, Parliament can set up or wind up institutions, and it also decides on their development plans and budget. This means that the basic financial decisions are left to MPs. University rectors and professors are appointed and relieved of their duties by the President of the Republic. In old-time Hungary this was the right of the king. All questions which the law defines as of national significance and thus calling for more detailed regulation, including the awarding of doctor's degrees and *Habilitation*, the establishment of faculties and departments, and the main rules of the functioning of national institutions of higher education, are regulated by the government. College teachers are appointed and relieved of their duties by the Prime Minister, who also appoints and relieves college directors, and appoints the members of the Higher Education and Scientific Council and the Hungarian Accreditation Committee.

The new act has set up three new institutions. The Higher Education and Scientific Council (HESC) acts as an intermediate body between the autonomous institutions of higher education and government. Its chairman is the Minister of Education and Culture, with seven of its twenty-one members representing the government, eight the institutions of higher education, and one each coming from the scientific research institutes, the Academy of Sciences, local governments, employers, professional bodies (chambers), and employees' unions (trade unions). According to the intention of the legislators, this council serves to provide a forum for the government, higher education and its consumers. The Council must express its position on every important financial, development or organizational question in the field of higher education; it is an advisory body for the minister, and should the minister submit to the government an opinion differing from that of the Council, he is obliged to enclose the Council's opinion as well. The Council operates in special and functional committees and has its own secretariat. All kinds of professional interests have to be reconciled by this body.

The second of the new institutions, the Hungarian Accreditation Committee (HAC) will control the standard of training and academic work, and take a position on all issues concerning quality and content, including the establishment and recognition of universities and colleges, setting up faculties and departments, qualification requirements, and regulations concerning doctor's degrees and *Habilitation*. The Committee decides which faculty of which university has the right to provide doctoral courses and award doctorates and *Habilitation*. It is to regularly—at least every eight years—examine the standard of all the institutions concerned, and should the standard not meet requirements, it moves a resolution for the withdrawal of the right to conduct examinations, or even the winding up of the relevant institution or the withdrawal of its state recognition. HESC is the advisory body of the Minister of Education and Culture, HAC—whose chairman and members are appointed for three years by the Prime Minister on the recommendation of the relevant bodies—is not subordinate to any government body. Half of its members are drawn

from higher education, and the other half from independent research institutes. It works with the help of special committees and expert consultants. As determined by the Act, HAC must have foreign consultants among its members. According to plan, it will have an advisory committee of foreign experts, some of whom will be full members of the HAC.

It was the aim of the legislators to establish separate bodies to decide on questions of quality, and on financial and organizational issues. This means that *quality* has been separated from *need*. Quality is an inherent attribute, while need depends on resources and market requirements. The allocation of resources is a matter of policy. In the case of education and science, it is practical to align the two spheres, but quality should never be judged only in terms of need. Quality, must have its function, but it is not certain whether quality will have an immediate function in every case.

Membership in one of the above two institutions, HESC and HAC, excludes membership in the other, but the two institutions must maintain close co-operation.

Finally, the third of the new institutions, the Council Co-ordinating Interests in Higher Education, deals with social questions, questions concerning wages and other relevant issues. Members come from trade unions, the government and the bodies responsible for the autonomy of the educational institutions.

The three bodies of the representatives of the institutions concerned are the Hungarian Rectors' Conference, the Chair of the Art University Rectors, and the Hungarian College Directors' Conference. They consist of the heads of these institutions.

Autonomy and management

Institutions of higher education enjoy autonomy in teaching, training, artistic activity, research, and scholarship, and this autonomy can only be restricted in cases and in the manner detailed by the law. The rules for the functioning of the institutions are determined by the institutions themselves. The statutes have to be submitted to the minister in charge, who, however, may only examine their legality. Student self-governing bodies function as part of the university self-governing bodies. A university is headed by a rector, a college by the director, and the scope of action of the council of the institution, and that of the rector or director-general, are separate. The institutional councils recommend persons for appointment as rectors and director-generals, and also as university and college teachers. These also decide on the budget, management and property of the university. No less than a quarter, but no more than a third, of the members of the institutional council are student representatives, and at least a third are senior teachers. The departments must also be adequately represented. The rector and members of the institutional council (with the exception of students) are elected for three-year terms, and their appointment can be extended once. Students can be elected for at most two years.

Universities consist of faculties, colleges may consist of faculties. University faculties are headed by deans. The faculties have faculty councils, whose membership is made up along the same principles as those of the institutional council.

The institutions may have other organizational units as well, as for example institutes, research teams, etc.

Integration

The Act provides for cooperation between the various institutions and research institutes. To further such cooperation, associations can be set up, which function as legal

entities. The associated higher educational institutions may gradually turn into a new, uniform, independent university, and a special measure of Parliament is needed only for the last phase of this process.

This opens the way for the re-integration of specialized universities into full universities. The Act stopped just short of formulating this, however. An annex to the Act lists the 25 state and 5 church universities, 34 state and 25 church as well as four foundation and private colleges that function in the country.

Accreditation

Perhaps the most important process in the transformation of Hungarian higher education is set down in Section 122 of the Act, which reads: "Following the coming into force of this Act—by June 30, 1998 at the latest, all higher education institutions must be accredited employing a uniform procedure. After June 30, 1998, higher education institutions may not operate as universities without fulfilment of the requirements stipulated in Section 3 of Paragraph (1)."

Section 3 of Paragraph (1) of the Act sets down the requirements which I mentioned.

Parliament will establish or recognize new institutions in the country only if they satisfy the relevant conditions. This means that the 103 institutions referred to will have to undergo quality assessment, a control intended to be severe, during the coming four years.

The situation is somewhat different concerning the functioning of foreign institutions of higher education in Hungary. Their functioning in Hungary is subject to the condition that they be officially recognized in their country of origin. If this is the case, the Minister of Education and Culture will decide on granting the right to function.

Development of Hungarian higher education

Section (4) of the last Paragraph of the new Act lays down that before December 31, 1994, the government has to submit to Parliament a bill on the development of higher education. Since parliamentary elections are scheduled for early summer 1994, the submitting of this bill will fall to the next government. The first version of the draft, however, has been completed, bearing the title *Hungarian Higher Education up to the year 2000.* The study marks out the priorities and the most important financial conditions for development.

That legislation will make minor corrections of the present Higher Education Act possible. Right now, however, the government and the Minister of Education and Culture have to formulate the decrees prescribed by the Act, and then the Act itself and the decrees that accompany it will have to stand the test of practice and of time. ❧

Pál Lővei

Celebrating the Central European Baroque

The Virgin Mary column in Prague is roughly at the same distance from Crete as from the shores of the Iberian Peninsula, from the shores of Ireland, or from Lapland. In 1661 a copper-plate etching for a thesis-sheet used for the university examination was published by Count Johann Friedrich von Waldstein, a future Archbishop of Prague. On this sheet, the monument is shown towering at the precise centre of Europe. Above, in the celestial sphere, are more than fifty saints, each one the patron saint of a country, seated or standing on the clouds in peaceful accord, from Saint Olaf of Norway to Saint Januarius of Naples, from Saint Casimir of Lithuania to Saint Patrick of Ireland. Life is shown as going on its daily course within the boundaries of the continent, in the various countries identified only by their coats-of-arms; people are shown busy threshing, mining, taking all the fish in the Black Sea with a single sweep of their net, buying and selling and bee-keeping, and skating on the frozen seas around Scandinavia. The animals, too, are shown in peaceful harmony, except perhaps for a bear, having trouble with the bees of a bee-hive. Everything is in harmony in Europe, and, at its heart, in our region too.

Actually, the column—an Early Baroque masterpiece by the Bohemian artist Jan Jirí Bendl, erected in 1650 at the order of the Emperor Ferdinand III—did not symbolize an idyll: the angels shown fighting wicked devils and dragons, together with Maria Immaculata towering above them, directly refer to the defeat of the Protestant Swedes, who had attacked Prague, held by the Catholics, in 1648; it also served to remind the onlooker of the Battle of the White Mountain of 1620, and the rapid re-Catholization that followed the defeat of the Estates of Bohemia by the Habsburgs. The subsequent history of the column, in the main square of Old Prague, is edifying: it was hit by a shell in 1757, when the town was besieged by a Prussian army, and had its fate sealed in 1918, a few days before the declaration of Czechoslovakia's independence, when this symbol of Habsburg dominion

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was demolished by the people. The remnants of the column are displayed in the wonderfully arranged lapidarium of the Czech National Gallery, reopened in Prague in the summer of 1993, after a quarter-of-a-century hiatus.

In this part of Europe, monuments are being erected and pulled down with renewed vehemence nowadays. The Peace is disturbed by nationalist skirmishes, wars in some places. This alone would warrant attention to a series of exhibitions, in which, for the first time in the region, various countries set out to introduce the international aspects of a period of style, the Baroque. In the course of the preparations, two of the organizing countries, Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia, fell apart, a war still being fought in the territory of the former. In spite of all that, a major project came to pass, though not always as originally conceived. The above described etching is on display in one of the Prague exhibitions.

The idea of presenting the Baroque in Central Europe as part of an international series of exhibitions was suggested by the Italians in 1990, in harmony with the Baroque programmes of UNESCO and the Council of Europe. The agreement was signed in 1991 by the member states of the Hexagonale, at the time Austria, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, Poland, Hungary, and Italy. Of all the countries in the group, which, in the meantime, has changed its name to the Central European Initiative, only Austria was able to stage its exhibitions (in Trautenfels and Schlosshof) between May 1992 and May 1993, designated as the "Central-European Year of the Baroque". The corresponding exhibitions in Prague, Poznan, Warsaw, Zagreb, Székesfehérvár, and Budapest opened between May 1993 and June 1993, the exhibition in Bratislava is due to open in the autumn of 1993, when the Zagreb exhibitions will have a second showing in Ljubljana. The two exhibitions planned for Northern Italy were cancelled. The Italians, from whom the whole idea originally stemmed, confined their efforts to the publication of a four-hundred-page itinerary in English presenting the most important Central European Baroque centres, and written by art historians from the various participating countries.

It would be too easy to be mocking on how often things turn out in this way in this part of the world but, as the Italians can demonstrate, it is not only in the new democracies of Central Europe that the ride can get bumpy. The actual quality of the material shown does, in fact, compensate for all the delays, uncertainties and anxieties. Moreover the participating countries have shown that, when working with a jointly-agreed programme, they are able to arrange a series of cultural functions, the elements of which add up to a new whole that transcends borders and politics and gives an account of a common past. Furthermore, the places of origin of the exhibited items extended across Transylvania, Scandinavia, Germany, Lithuania, Ukraine, and Byelorussia, with occasional references to the Baroque art of Latvians, Jews, Baltic Germans, and the Saxons of Transylvania. The seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, with their own political divisions and wars, religious conflicts, dominations and subordinations, all amid the flourishing of the

international Baroque, provide several analogies with the similarly messy cultural and political life of Central Europe today.

The success, of course, was primarily one for art and scholarship. The nearly three thousand exhibits, together with the material of the associated local exhibitions, provided a thorough picture unprecedently rich either as a museum display or as a publication. The catalogues, mostly bulky, will be indispensable to future research. The Austrian catalogues are in German, all others are bilingual, in English, and the language of the host country.

Conceptually, the exhibitions could not have been more different. This was partly due to the limited financial resources available in some of the countries, and partly to the differences in their approach to history: from thematic and international to the art of national and regional. However, even in exhibitions of the latter type, the organizers could not ignore facts such as the international traffic in works of art and artists; the supranational family connections, property interests, offices held, and knowledge of languages of the aristocracy; nor could the integrative role of the religion be ignored, most notably, that of the Roman Catholic Church. The few-thousand-strong sample of Baroque art and other exhibits illustrated, by way of *pars pro toto*, the variegated yet thoroughly interconnected cultures, and history, of Central Europe in the period.

The exhibitions testified to the support given by the House of Habsburg and the Catholic Church to the Counter Reformation, lavishly complemented by art objects, also to the patronage of the aristocracy and the artistic taste of burghers. The art of the monasteries built, or rebuilt, in Baroque pomp in the seventeenth and eighteenth century was well represented; so too was that of bishoprics, another major art patron, as well as art associated with flourishing places of pilgrimage and the parish churches built in their thousands.

With their libraries and collections in the natural sciences and art, the monasteries in the vicinity of the Austrian exhibitions (Admont, Sankt Florian, Kremsmünster, Heiligenkreuz, etc.), all of which formerly were engaged in important cultural missions, offered valuable additional programmes. Prague, an outstanding example of a Baroque royal residence, provided a splendid background to the Czech exhibition. The public, especially in Bohemia and Moravia, was able to visit dozens of Baroque chateaux and palaces, all wonderfully restored and with their original furniture. The original chateaux theatres (Český Krumlov, Litomyšl), the family collections of paintings, galleries of ancestral portraits, (Vranov, Valtice, Slavkov, Jaroměřice, the bishop's palace at Kroměříž), and the parks all helped to bring the exhibits closer to real life. In Bratislava and Székesfehérvár, rows of Baroque houses and the parish and conventual churches were natural settings for many local displays. (In Hungary, following a hundred and fifty years of Turkish occupation, the centres of towns were all rebuilt in the eighteenth century and are hence Baroque.) Evidently, the exhibitions served to underline the connections and the similarities, as well as illustrating the art of larger geographical regions; nowhere did the organizers try to focus on a single art centre, such as Vienna or Prague.

The Austrian organizers continued an approach they established some time ago for their *Land* exhibitions. That at Trautenfels was also the 1992 *Land* exhibition of Styria, amply supplied with notes and maps, information and additional material on history, everyday life and, even, the natural sciences. The other extreme, a kind of élitism, was manifest in the purely art-historical approach of the two Hungarian exhibitions. Objects were selected according to strict criteria permitting the display of only the outstanding Baroque works of the region. The Hungarian organizers worked on the assumption that the very arrangement of the exhibits would speak for itself, leaving visitors to their own devices in discovering connections between exhibits related thematically or stylistically or through their date of origin. The guiding principle of the Croatian exhibition was social stratification; the range of exhibits spanned from the material environment the aristocracy surrounded itself with, almost down to folk art. The organizers kept to the present borders of Croatia, which are very different to those of the Baroque age. Although the original idea was the presentation of Central European portrait-painting in general, the exhibition in Warsaw was limited to Polish historical personalities, regardless of artistic merit. The governing idea of the Prague exhibition was strictly art-historical. Only one aspect of Baroque art was singled out, that is art collection, and even that was based exclusively on the collections held in Prague.

The difference in approach—and in financial resources,—also determined the number of works lent. The Hungarian organizers, who faithfully kept to the original guiding ideas, borrowed a large number of works from foreign countries, thus getting themselves involved in very serious difficulties concerning finances, security and transportation, not to mention the bureaucratic ordeals associated with such transactions. On the very last day before the opening, a surprising collection of largely unknown paintings (24) arrived, loaned by the Brukenthal Museum of Nagyszeben (Hermannstadt-Sibiu), Romania; further spectacular works were borrowed from Ljubljana, Warsaw, Pozsony (Bratislava-Pressburg), Prague, Vienna, Graz, Salzburg, and from two chateaux in Slovakia: Hontszentantal (Antol) and Bajmóc (Bojnice). Good use was made of the diocesan and parish collections within Hungary, and some lesser known treasures outside Budapest were also included.

Due to the country's turbulent history, Poland's art treasures have been dispersed over a wide area, with the result that the museums of Byelorussia, Ukraine, the Baltic states, Scandinavia, Germany, and Austria were all asked to send works to the portrait exhibition in Warsaw. The pieces contributed by the local collections were all fairly well known from the permanent exhibitions of Wilanow and Lazienki, nothing new or sensational being disinterred from the store rooms. The sculpture exhibition in Poznan was primarily based on works produced in Silesia and Lemberg/Lvov (now in Ukraine). The "well-tested" Austrian exhibitions were based on the country's valuable collections; in addition, works were borrowed from a number of Western European museums (Madrid, Brussels, Antwerp, several places in Germany, Florence), while some art treasures from Slovenia, the Czech

Republic and Hungary were also included. The Croatian exhibition also brought together pieces from a number of locations, but the organizers there relied exclusively on Croatian material. Bearing in mind the current conflicts within the territory of former Yugoslavia, it is itself a major achievement that the cities of Dubrovnik and Eszék (Osiek), having just lived through a long siege, as well as Újlak (Ilok), a town in the immediate vicinity of fighting, were able to contribute works of art. The Prague exhibition was also based primarily on the collections of the host country, most notably on the material of the National Gallery of Prague.

The series of exhibitions opened on May 1, 1992 in Trautenfels, restored for the occasion, with a show entitled "Joy and Sorrow" and subtitled "Baroque Art—Baroque Life". This exhibition presenting scholarship, culture and art in the seventeenth and eighteenth century was, in several ways, less than inspiring. Occasionally it used panels that were too simplistic: the idea of presenting the clothing and way of life of the nobility and of the peasantry side by side, contrasting the embroidered dancing shoes and wooden clogs, the inlaid cabinets and the roughly cut wooden chests, the ornate porcelain vessels with wooden plates, was, to my mind, banal. The modernistic elements of the settings and installations, such as the idea of illuminating the frescoes with blue neon light or of hiding them in pitch-black darkness robbed the public of the kind of atmosphere that lavish Baroque decoration created. It was hardly an excuse that the numerous halls of the castle still presented many properly lit frescoes; major examples of Central European mural painting painted in 1670 by Carpoforo Tencala, a Northern Italian artist. It was both misleading and tastless to display the valuable Baroque garden sculptures of dwarfs alongside some ugly twentieth-century counterparts on the cornice of one of the halls. It is doubtful whether the Superman-scene inserted between two paintings was truly a good example of the continuing influence of the vertical order of the Baroque world view, as suggested by the accompanying note. And it was equally doubtful whether the public gained any valuable information from the display of half-a-dozen items of neo-Baroque furniture, paintings and jewelry alongside original Baroque works or from the inclusion of a picture-postcard published as a supplement to a feminist magazine, showing a "superwoman" in front of a Graz background as an example of the ironic representation of the hierarchical world view of male heroes, as propagated in the Baroque. What was meant to be eye-catching, in fact, discredited, the neo-Baroque, and turned the end of the exhibition into a parody.

The exhibition in the eighteenth-century Baroque chateau of Schlosshof in Lower Austria was entitled "Plumage and the Imperial Crown—the Baroque Image of America in the Lands of the Habsburg Empire". It also linked with a series of shows commemorating the 500th anniversary of Columbus's landfall in America, and the location itself provided an illustration to the theme. The growing fascination with the exotic and the advances made in geography were processes that took place

concurrently and enjoyed the support of the Imperial Court and the aristocracy. The Catholic Church also showed an interest, although from a different perspective, namely in the conversion of the indigenous population. Initially, tobacco, pepper and cocoa—commodities that originated in the Americas and which eventually became articles of general consumption—were delicacies to which only the rich had access. The stuccoed relief above the fireplace in the "coffee-hall" of the chateau showed an Amerindian woman drinking chocolate. On the walls around it, contemporary etchings illustrated the eighteenth-century habit of collecting exotic animals and plants, mostly native to the Americas, as exemplified by Prince Eugéne de Savoye, at one time the owner of the chateau, Marlborough's ally, a general victorious in the Turkish wars. Elsewhere, tapestries showing parrots and tigers against the background of tropical vegetation, the allegorical representations of the four cardinal points, and the motifs of tropical animals and plants—rhinoceroses and coconuts on various objects and paintings—formed a thematic unit in harmony with the background. With Rubens "The Allegory of the Four Continents", paintings by leading masters of the Austrian Baroque, a series of tapestries entitled "Les Nouvelles Indes", woven in Paris between 1774 and 1778, and the wonderful selection of items by Augsburg goldsmiths, this was definitely the most unusual of all the exhibitions; it was a well-thought-out and well-received display.

The theme for the Zagreb exhibition "From Weekdays to Holidays—The Baroque in Croatia", was social stratification, complemented by a few other important aspects of life at the time. The various sections bore the subtitles, The Aristocracy, The Untitled Nobility, The Patricians of Dubrovnik (Ragusa), Soldiers and Arms, Leisure Activity, The Guilds, and Religion and Religious Festivals. The range of genres and articles was broad: sculptures and gravestones, musical instruments, hunting and army weapons, patterned leather tapestry, paintings, wooden sculptures, furniture, and embroidery all featured. The complexity of influences on the region was clear in the various exhibits: in the portraits of the Viennese artist Johann Michael Militz as well as in pictures by Anton Cebej, a painter from Ljubljana, and of István Dorfmeister, who was also active in the western parts of Hungary; in the organ made in Styria as well as in English, Augsburg, Nurnberg, Vienna, Delft, Meissen, and French porcelain and also in Bohemian and Silesian glass. The Dubrovnik section was something unique, displaying powerful links with Venice and Italy, including sedan chairs made in Italy and a somewhat naive seventeenth-century oil painting, a bird's eye view of the harbour, an eighteenth-century silk and velvet toga and navigational aids, the poet Johannes Gondola's (1589-1638) portrait, a manuscript of his epic *Osman*, and a mid-eighteenth-century portrait of the Jesuit philosopher Rogerius Boscovich. The latter items served to underline the fact that it was the dialect spoken in Ragusa that was eventually, in the nineteenth century, to provide the basis of the Croatian literary language. The section on religion also featured some outstanding works, including cherished pieces from the Treasury of

Károly Bebó: St Michael, 1749. Lime wood, painted, gilded, silvered, 180 cm. St Michael's Parish Church, Mogyoród.

ZOLTÁN HASZNOS

Girolamo Pesce: The Martyrdom of St Januarius, 1727. Oil on canvas, 262 x 193 cm. Vác, Diocesan Library.

the Zagreb Cathedral, such as the embossed silver altar antependiums made in 1721 by the Viennese artist Caspar Georg Meichl. Another special treat was the Holy Sepulchre backdrop from Klostar Ivanic, with its construction resembling the serial stage backdrops of Baroque chateau theatres. Hungarian visitors could find portraits and family trees from the common past of Croatia and Hungary—members of the Festetics, Draskovich, Erdődy, Zrínyi, Nádasdy, Gersei Pető, Zichy, Eltz, and Althan families—of special interest. There is also a seventeenth-century series of portraits, forty-six pieces altogether, representing the kings of Hungary, with later additions up to Joseph II. Apart from the slight puzzlement caused by confusious between the old and current borders of Croatia, the Zagreb exhibition made a very good impression, presenting some material that had never been shown in public before and contributing some unusual rarities.

The Czech, "Artis Pictoriae Amatores—Europe in the Baroque Collections of Prague", included six parts: The Baroque Collections in Central Europe; The Intellectual World of the Bohemian Aristocracy in the Age of Baroque; Baroque Collections in Bohemia; The Czernins as Art Collectors and Patrons; The Collections of the Nostitz Family; and The Society of the Patriotic Friends of the Arts. After the comparatively less extensive, introductory sections, the bulk of the exhibition was made up by two collections: one of seventeenth-century Italian works originally owned by the Imperial Ambassador to Venice, Humprecht Jan Czernín and his family; and the other collection on Jan Hartwig Nostitz, the Chancellor of Bohemia, and his son which was completely reconstructed. The final section was devoted to the activity of a society established in 1796 by enlightened members of the aristocracy and by intellectuals determined to stop the sale abroad of works of art and to put an end to the "declining standards of artistic taste". With a public exhibition in the Czernín Palace in Prague, the society laid the foundations of the National Gallery of Prague. In 1648 the art treasures of Emperor Rudolph II were carried off by the army of Queen Christina of Sweden. (A few years ago a huge exhibition of these art treasures was held in Vienna.) What served as a model for the aristocracy was the collection founded on the orders of Ferdinand III by his brother, the Archduke Leopold Wilhelm. Most of the material from this collection was later taken to Vienna, and then moved on to Dresden.

The exhibition of both the Czernín and, especially, the Nostitz collection, was evidently preceded by serious scholarly preparation, illustrated as it is with old inventories and auction catalogues. Nevertheless, this part of the display, as indeed the entire exhibition, occasionally turns somewhat monotonous, in spite of the high quality of the material, especially that of the Dutch paintings.

The paintings in the Budapest exhibition, "Cross-roads—Baroque Art in Central Europe", gave the towns of North and South Germany, Holland, Italy, Sweden, and France as the place of birth of the artists, Vienna being their most usual place of death, occasionally Pozsony (Bratislava) or Prague. In several sections of the

ANDRÁS RÁZSÓ

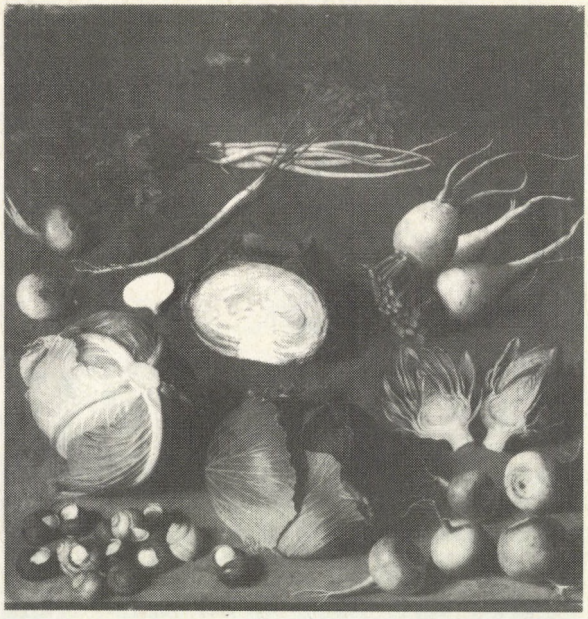
Johann Felpacher: Apellés Painting the Beautiful Pancaspe. 1638.
Oil on oak-panel, 111 x 162 cm. Museum of Fine Arts, Budapest.

ZOLTÁN HASZNOS

The Pécs Sketch-Book, no. 20.
The Beheading of St Barbara. 1695. Red chalk, 32,5 x 20,5 cm

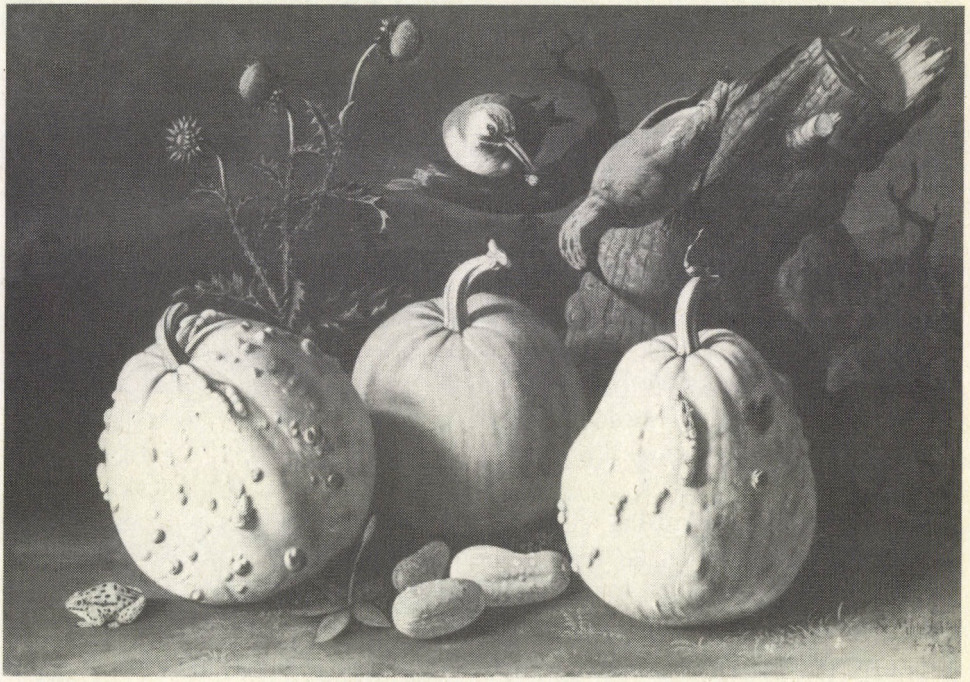
exhibition, the stylistic and thematic variety of the art of the period was splendidly shown. The eight seventeenth-century thesis-sheet etchings, some of them extremely large, were aimed at the Turkish wars and at celebrating the House of Habsburg. (These two issues were, in fact, always interconnected.) They also referred to a number of important university centres and Jesuit colleges of the period: Prague, Vienna, Kassa (Košice), Nagyszombat (Trnava), Graz. Engravings of displays of horsemanship and operatic performances at the Court in Vienna and small oil paintings by Jan Thomas, a pupil of Rubens, as well as the portraits of the Emperor Leopold I and the Empress Margarita Teresa in theatrical costume, were all conceived in the pompous surroundings of the Imperial Court, and were very different from the representations of the emperor as portrayed in the contemporary thesis-sheets at the moment of triumph over the Turks. The dozen self-portraits by various painters, all painted between 1638 ("Apellés Painting the Beautiful Pancaspe" by Johann Felpacher) and 1790 ("The Painter and his Family" by Johann Martin Schmidt [Kremser Schmidt]) were an impressive group. (Similar portraits and studio interiors were also shown at the exhibitions in Prague and Székesfehérvár.) The series of splendid sketches, painted by some of the best eighteenth-century masters of Central Europe, provide a glimpse into the process of artistic creation, as do Johann Lucas Kracker's sketches in ink and the Sketchbook of Pécs. The latter, which was discovered only recently, causing considerable surprise, contains patterns for sculptors from the last third of the seventeenth century. Their unique, or rarely seen, depiction make some of the large altar paintings stand out: "The Virgin Mary, Patroness of Hungary, in a Cape" (1666-1667, from the Parish Church of Árpás), "The Martyrdom of Saint Januarius (Girolamo Pesce, 1727, Vác, Diocesan Library), "Saint Francis of Solarno Baptising the Indians" (Johann Lucas Kracker, 1770, Eger, Archdiocesan Seminary), an altar painting with the representation of the "Mother of Wisdom" (István Dorfmeister, 1781, Sopron, Saint George's Church).

"Metamorphosis of Themes—Baroque Genres in Central Europe" was a colourful and varied exhibition, set out in Székesfehérvár at three neighbouring locations. In the town house of the Counts Esterházy, animal-shaped faience vessels and porcelain trays decorated with animal figures were displayed in a room recently restored in all its splendour, decorated as a winter garden in 1770s with tropical and subtropical flora and fauna. The charming still lives with animals, which were displayed in the adjacent room, occasionally directly referred to the robin and butterfly motifs of the mural. Two pictures painted in the first half of the eighteenth century in Nagyszeben (Hermannstadt-Sibiu)by Franz Michael Sigismund von Purgau, showing luxuriant vegetation and crawling fauna, and a landscape with birds, painted in 1704 by Johann Rudolf Byss and on loan from Prague, deserve special mention. (During the preparations for the exhibition and the compilation of the catalogue, a classification of the genres, more particular than any previous attempts, was carried out, with special emphasis the animal representations.) The Esterházy Palace offered the wonderfully intimate atmosphere necessary for the



Tobias Stranover:
Still Life with Cabbage,
about 1700.
Oil on canvas, 80 x 77 cm.
Muzeul Brukenthal, Sibiu.

ZOLTÁN HASZNOS



*Ișt*ván Izbighy Vörös: Still Life with Three Pumpkins,*
a Cucumber, and Two Green Woodpeckers.
1734. Oil on canvas, 67,4 x 96,4 cm. Národní Galerie, Bratislava.

optimum display of the still lives with animals, landscapes, and hunting scenes. There were two other locations: one housed the battle scenes and genre paintings, and the other accommodated an exhibition of still lives with plants and of portraits. Further outstanding pieces were borrowed from Sibiu (Nagyszeben), including two still lives with plants, painted in the early eighteenth century by Tobias Stranover, and Martin Dichtl's pair of paintings showing a peasant couple (1669). Together with the other matching pairs of paintings from Sibiu, these works suggested that before being acquired by the Brukenthal Museum, based on Baron Samuel Brukenthal's (1721-1803) collection and library, they had probably been owned by some other aristocratic family, who had tried to achieve the effect of symmetric decoration of the walls. Similar matching pairs of paintings were "supplied" by some of the bishop's palaces in Hungary, including those of Vác, Székesfehérvár and Veszprém. Another striking work was István Izbíghi Vörös's painting, made in 1734, showing gigantic pumpkins and a cucumber, lent by the Slovak National Gallery of Bratislava, accompanied by another work from the same painter, a still life with a pitcher and a lobster, on loan from the Hungarian National Gallery. A large number of the still lives, genre paintings and battle scenes are owned by private collectors, evidence of the lasting popularity of such works. The still lives on religious subjects deserve a special mention: the paintings "Trompe l'oeil with Devotional Pictures", "Trompe l'oeil with the Picture of the Virgin of Czestochowa" by Elias Mögel (1773), "Vanitas" by István Dorfmeister (both painted in the second half of the eighteenth century); and faience crosses using skulls as pedestals, made in Holics (around 1770). The seventeenth- and eighteenth-century portraits are of different types: early and late catafalque pictures, the official, larger-than-life portraits of sovereigns, portraits of children, portraits of officials working at their desks, and the portraits of artists. The organizers succeeded in putting together a colourful exhibition for the three different locations.

Even art historians were to discover much that was new at the two Hungarian exhibitions. This included new attributions or previously unknown works of art, held either in private collections or in provincial parish churches, in bishops' palaces largely inaccessible to the public or in the store-rooms of museums. (Nearly one-third of the objects at the exhibition in Székesfehérvár were being publicly shown for the very first time.) The various themes of the exhibition were based on earlier monographs (catafalque pictures, thesis-sheets, portrait galleries, devotional pictures, works depicting the fight against the Turks), oeuvre-catalogues, some already published, some still in preparation (Maulbertsch, Kracker) and successful exhibitions (the portraits of aristocrats, convent works), by making extensive use of the catalogue systems of both the museums and the professional institutes, requiring a great deal of effort and much care in the case of those works that are largely inaccessible. The exhibition clearly helped to boost the reputation of the small group of Hungarian scholars engaged in the study of Baroque art.

The exhibition in Poznan, was called "Theatre and Mysticism—Baroque Sculpture

between East and West" was the only one to be devoted entirely to sculpture. Only a small section of Central European Baroque sculpture was covered, the work of sculptors in Poland Minor (Lemberg/Lvov) and Silesia, whose influence was felt in the greater region of Bohemia, Moravia and Hungary. This appropriately reflected the two major trends of Baroque sculpture: the classicist and the expressive school.

Large and miniature portraits of the great figures in Polish history were assembled for the exhibition "At the Meeting Point of East and West" in Warsaw, works produced in the two painting centres, Gdansk and Cracow. They are embedded in the shared past of Poles and Lithuanians, in the ethnic and religious confusion of a peculiar geographical environment, amalgamating Eastern (Russian-Byzantine) and Western traditions.

The exhibition in Bratislava, which has not yet opened at the time of writing, also covers an important theme "Saints in Central Europe".

After surveying these exhibitions, there is a certain sense of disappointment. The absence of Northern Italy must be regretted; the fact that the exhibitions in Zagreb, Prague and Budapest featured a large number of works by Italian artists is scant consolation for the cancelling of the two exhibitions in the Veneto. Architecture as a whole was completely ignored. (That was what one of the Italian exhibitions was meant to cover.) To some extent, the splendid Baroque location of some of the shows made up for this deficiency. Furthermore, the Baroque in Central Europe had no awareness of the current borders of the countries making up the Central European Initiative. Thus a Bavarian (Passau, etc.), a Saxon (Dresden) and a Prussian (Berlin) exhibition, not to mention a separate Transylvanian exhibition, were sorely missed. The latter deficiency was partially remedied by material from Transylvania being lent, thanks to arrangements between the Hungarian organizers and their colleagues in Sibiu.

In Hungary whole series of musical and theatrical progammes took place. In fact, "Baroque Festivities in Hungary" was organized by various travel agencies. The musical and theatrical events (in twenty-five locations known for their Baroque monuments) were given far greater publicity than the exhibitions, which were, largely, poorly advertized.

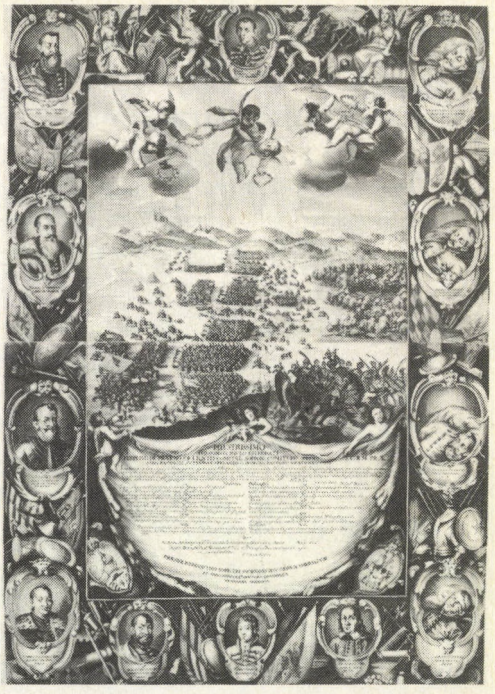
Folk art played a subordinate role in the central exhibitions. In Zagreb, the only items that could be so classified were the doors of organ-cases decorated with floral ornaments, painted by unknown Pauline monks, a few relics of the guild system, and some Haban vessels displayed in the section presenting the material culture of the petty nobility. In Trautenfels, there was a larger collection of folk votive pictures, accumulated at various places of pilgrimage. To bridge this gap, a number of satellite exhibitions were held in Hungary. An exhibition in the Ethnographical Museum in Budapest was given the title "The Baroque in Hungarian Folk Art"; "The Baroque Relics of Folk Religion in Zala County" were on display in the Balaton Museum in Keszthely. An ecumenical exhibition of religious art, "The Baroque

Religious Art of Hegyalja", was arranged at Sárospatak in north-eastern Hungary. To some degree it was based on ethnographical material, as was "The Baroque Art Treasures of the Diocese of Vác" itself.

The catalogue of the exhibition in the Ethnographical Museum called attention to the problematic nature of the links between folk art and the Baroque, also underlining some of the difficulties involved in defining categories and in determining the boundaries of the period and the genres. In Hungary, where the gap between the lower and upper classes was enormous, the peasantry took over far fewer elements from the Baroque than was the case west of Hungary—in Austria, Southern Germany and Bohemia—where the peasantry tended to be more middle-class; nevertheless, through the trade which connected distant regions, devotional pictures painted on glass by Czech and Austrian craftsmen found their way into the houses of Hungarian peasants, too. The devotional pictures of places of pilgrimage locally and abroad, together with the associated bondieuserie, were distributed over a wide area. This was effectively illustrated by the twenty processional banners painted on wood, displayed side by side, which originally had belonged to the Roman Catholic parish church of Celldömölk. These shields, painted on wood in 1748, are decorated with pictures of the Virgin, copied from the devotional pictures at various shrines. A similarly spectacular collection was that of title pages of the annals of the Calvinist College of Debrecen. Using its own pieces, and borrowing from other institutions, the museum tried to present items from as many parts of the country as possible. This rich material was arranged under the headings of Catholic Religious Folk Art, Baroque Elements in Village Architecture, Guilds and Craftsmen, Furniture and Home Design, and the Baroque in the Protestant Churches. The display could also be regarded as a programme for research and exhibition of the immediate future; it called attention to the need to deal with subjects such as places of worship, places of pilgrimage, the funerary traditions in Hungary.

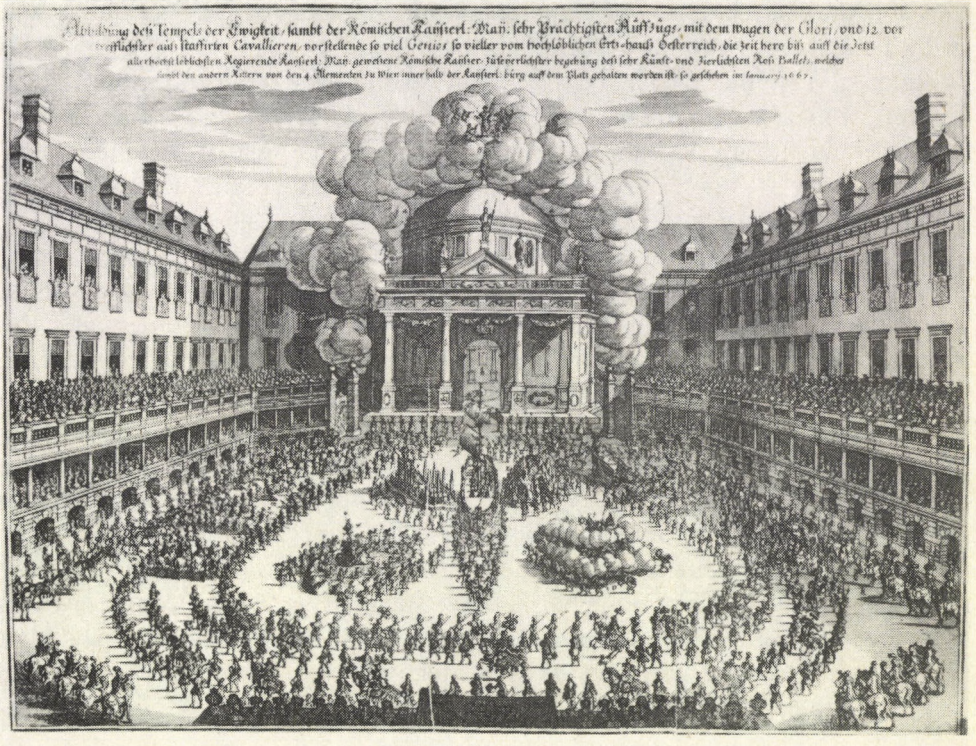
The region known as Tokaj-Hegyalja and the southern part of Zemplén County has always been a clearly identifiable geographical unit due to the life of the inhabitants, some economic factors (wine and grain production, trading) and the unique climate. The organizers were therefore justified in their choice of theme for the Sárospatak exhibition on religious art. Several denominations are common in the area. The Calvinist College of Sárospatak was an important educational centre. In the eighteenth century this area was one of the most important centres of Jewry. In Tokaj, Orthodox Greek merchants built wonderful houses, lavishly decorated with mural paintings, and a magnificent church. The Jesuits erected sumptuous sculpted altarpieces in the larger centres. But Greek Catholics (Uniates) and Lutherans were also present. In a number of towns and villages as many as three or four different religious communities lived peacefully side by side. This diversity in religion was accompanied by a similar ethnic diversity. The inhabitants included Hungarians, Germans, Ruthenians, Greek merchants, and Jews. This was also the core of the estates of Prince Ferenc II Rákóczi, the leader of the Rákóczi Rebellion

The Battle of Vezekény and the Esterházys. The Thesis-Sheet of Mihály Benyovszky at the University of Nagyszombat. 1654. Xantus János Museum, Győr



The Temple of Eternity. Scene from the Horse Ballet Performed in the Burghof in Vienna. 1667. Hungarian National Museum, Historical Portrait Gallery, Budapest.

ZOLTÁN HASZNOS



(1703-1711); later aristocrats of German stock, who had remained loyal to the House of Habsburg, were given estates there (for example the Trautsons). The traditionally strong cultural relations with Transylvania, together with the ethnic and religious connections of the Ruthenians and the Jews, also added to the colourfulness of the region. In addition to wooden and stone sculptures of fine quality, mostly acquired from Lőcse in Szepesség—Leutschau in the Zips—(today Levoca in Slovakia), there were folk carvings by local masters, many devotional pictures including icons, both of the traditional type and the new "Baroque" sort (some made in Kiev), lavishly decorated liturgical objects used in the ceremonies of the Greek Catholics, the Calvinists and of the Jews. These include silver and pewter objects as well as embroideries with Renaissance features. All in all, they successfully conveyed the same message that the central exhibition intended to impart: the possibility and the importance of coexistence and cultural interaction.

Dénes Csongor's private collection of Baroque engravings in the former town house of the Count Zichy family in Győr demonstrated a rarely seen harmony between location and exhibited objects. The discovery and restoration of the row of halls decorated with seventeenth- and eighteenth-century mural paintings was one of the spectacular achievements of ancient monument protection in the 1980s. In two of the halls, decorated with murals of biblical and gallant secular themes, the corresponding archetypes in the form of engravings by German masters were put on display, admirably conforming to the main idea of the central exhibitions through their revelation of the supranational character of the Baroque, while allowing a glimpse into the process of artistic creation.

In addition to the official and the satellite exhibitions, others linked up, either entirely or in part, with the programme of the Baroque Year, if not expressly than at least thematically. An exhibition of the works of the Austrian sculptor Georg Rafael Donner was held, first in the autumn of 1992 in Bratislava, then in the summer of 1993 in Vienna. This successfully filled some of the gaps that were left in the sculpture exhibition at Poznan. In the castle of Forchtenstein, in the Burgenland, still owned by the Esterházy family, dozens of large portraits in an ancestral gallery are on display in their proper setting in the halls and staircases—a rare treat in the territory of historical Hungary! In early 1993, the city of Zagreb commemorated the five hundredth anniversary of the founding of the Jesuit order, instrumental in the development and propagation of Baroque religious art, through an exhibition in the best traditions of the city. The exhibition of seventeenth-century Italian paintings—mostly material otherwise confined to the store-rooms—in the Museum of Fine Arts in Budapest might give some consolation for the cancelled exhibitions in Italy. "From Velasquez to Murillo—the Golden Century of Andalusia" was the title under which paintings were shown in San Giorgio Maggiore of Venice. Comparing this with the still-lives lent by Sibiu, Bratislava, Vienna and Budapest for the exhibition in Székesfehérvár one can claim that the latter were every bit as memorable as the celeriac painted by Juan Sánches Cotán or the jars by Zurbarán. ❧

Miklós Györffy

Returns and Farewells

Géza Ottlik: *Buda,* Európa, 1993, 366 pp; György G. Kardos: *Jutalomjáték* (Benefit Performance), Ab Ovo, 1993, 203 pp; Tibor Cseres: *Kentaurok és kentaurnők* (Centaurs and Female Centaurs), Magvető, 1993, 255 pp.

Given all the present sensations in politics, sports, crime, and the like, literature is not expected to produce anything of real interest. Now, at least for the remaining readers, a true literary sensation has occurred: the publication, three years after his death, of Géza Ottlik's novel *Buda*. What counts as a sensation is that the novel was really being written, in a way one might even say, that it was finished. Ottlik had been working on it for decades, ever since the completion of his *Iskola a határon* (School at the Frontier, published in 1959); though its existence was known, as a few selections had already been published, it seemed to acquire a legendary stature, with the passage of time, a kind of unknown Balzacian masterpiece rather than a reality. Up to his death Ottlik himself kept it secret how he was progressing with the work, and put off the curious. It has turned out that Ottlik did actually write *Buda*, and he only did so with great difficulty, in agony, beset by doubt, and in the last decade of his life, struggling with the problems of his craft as well as the burdens of solitude and ill-health. At the same time, he was also spurred by public recognition and expectations, and by the easing of political pressure. As a result, he left behind a manuscript that amounted to a bulky novel, and according to the novelist Péter Lengyel, who edited the text, had arranged in its final order. "The novel has reached us in his own typescript with corrections and cuts, which are always unambiguous. Every word in this book is by Géza Ottlik. And every word of Géza Ottlik's work entitled *Buda* is included in this book."

Buda is the sequel to *School at the Frontier* in more than one sense. It carries on the story of the cadets of the *School*, Medve, Bébé, Szeredy, and others, from the point where the previous novel left off, and adds some new characters. In some ways it continues the narrative method of *School*, expanding it radically. *School* portrays a world closed both in space and time—four years in the lower forms of a military college which marked the students for a lifetime. Everything outside the school, even the parental home and

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Buda, seemed distant, unreal and invalid. *Buda* begins with—and in a certain sense is always about—the students. After completing these four years, they return to Buda, to civil life; from this moment on, as if they had returned from a war that had toughened them up and bonded them as friends, they start living as civilians. True, they still attend military school for another four years, this time the upper forms of the military college and, after taking their matriculation exams, most of them continue at a military academy; these institutions, however, are in the capital, near civilian life, and are much more "civilized" than the school near the frontier, which more openly laid bare the true nature of life. Furthermore, a growing role, alongside memories of school, is given to memories of life outside school, in Buda (and Pest), which are narrated as digressions with increasing freedom and extravagance.

However, and particularly in the beginning, the "school at the frontier" still haunts one; though not explicitly set down as images of memory, it allows its almost mythical significance to be expressed not only in references to the previous novel but in the new work as well. This, in fact, is one of the problematic aspects of *Buda*: to what extent does *Buda* stand on its own as a novel and to what extent does it depend on *School*? Of course, *Buda* could be simply the second part of *School*, a continuation not only in the generic sense, but in terms of plot in the narrow sense of the term. However, certain aspects—precisely the subjective enlargement of the role of the school, the repetitions and comparisons—seem to indicate that in the new book too, Ottlik needed the image of the school, set apart from *Buda*, as a point of reference. This, of course, can necessarily be realized only in a fragmentary manner, and, since the reader willy-nilly relies on his knowledge of the earlier novel, the legend and reputation of that novel will inevitably contribute to the notion of the school as a mythic primal experience, one might say a previous, separate, life. In *Buda*, Ottlik is struggling not only with the subject he is writing about but also with *School at the Frontier*.

This must be one of the reasons why *Buda* starts in a fairly halting, hesitant way, fumbling with repeated effects. The book opens with around a dozen short chapters, each of a few pages, which appear fragmentary and sometimes interchangeable, and in fact do not really convince me as being the beginning that Ottlik considered as final. Overlaps and repetitions do occur later, too, and it is not always clear whether these were meant as recapitulations and variations of, as it were, musical motifs, or varieties on certain sections which the author had formulated in different ways, but which exclude one another. Nevertheless, after a certain juncture, *Buda* still sweeps the reader along, taking him into a genuine narrative world. In the masterfully elaborated longer chapters, the actual story and its multiple contexts are created through an associative technique, alternating remembered chronological planes, and a subjective, reflexive narrative point of view. Bébé, the narrator, is essentially the writer himself, even though Bébé will become a painter, and Ottlik's problems as a writer come through in the novel as Bébé's problems as a painter. The essence in both cases is naturally the same: how is it possible in artistic representation to grasp that nameless something which originates from subjective experience, and which invests the object to be described (or painted) with a surplus that is different in every instance to this subjective experience. In Ottlik-Bébé's interpretation, it is precisely the infinite aggregate of these different personal surpluses, or a common fragment of them that can be lived through intuitively, which have to be portrayed. It is through this

method that he tries to evoke individuals, situations and moods, perhaps most memorably his homes, his mother and his wife. This is true for women in general, not as love objects but as creatures who "hold one's head when one is throwing up", beings who are always at his side, ready to help, but who remain almost unnoticed.

Bébé is bonded in a similar way to women as he is to some of his fellow students—eroticism, sexuality, love are completely lacking in Ottlik's universe, or rather, only appear when sublimated into a shy friendship, into camaraderie. The paramount value is solidarity, the esteem for the integrity of the other one. This is what the students have learned in the military school, an institution which was meant to inculcate just the opposite. They have also learned the kind of loyalty and persistence with which Ottlik-Bébé laboured, right up to his death, on a work that expressed his most profound personal truth.

The return of György G. Kardos also amounted to a minor sensation. Kardos came to the forefront of Hungarian fiction in the 1970s with a trilogy of personal inspiration on the first Arab-Israeli war, novel and catching both in content and form. This was followed by fifteen or so years of silence, only broken by the ironical notes of a journalist. His new novel, *Benefit Performance,* is set in 1951 in a small Hungarian town. These days one inevitably expects a novel on such a subject to offer a bold exposure of the crimes of Stalinism. In *Benefit Performance*, however, the Rákosi regime merely serves as an extra patch of colour. Kardos looks back upon this time as if its historical significance had been no greater than the present always is to contemporaries, as if the early 1950s had been an arbitrarily chosen period of time in Hungary, when, as at any other time, people were of different dispositions, motivated by the same banal feelings and strivings as at any other time. All this can best be presented in the traditional way in literature: by drawing characters and telling the stories of men in the street.

Most of Kardos's small-town characters are provincial actors who are compelled to create a theatre that accords with Zhdanov's cultural policy, that is if they want to make a living in their chosen craft. Directions issued by the party authorities have little real effect on hopelessly mediocre and provincial troupers who, at the same time, are held together by traditions and myths which mean a separate world to them. Convention, cliché and intrigue continue to play the major roles in this world. As well as featuring actors, directors, theatre managers, prompters, and the like, Kardos also looks beyond the theatre in portraying the other institutions and individuals of an imaginary, yet thoroughly typical, small Hungarian town.

At first the structure seems to be loose and arbitrary, with the successive appearance of new characters, episodes and anecdotes, and digressions in time as well; one is almost left with the impression of reading a string of stories only held together by the setting. But slowly the outlines of the time limits surface: a day from morning to night, and a kind of a plot is discernible, the story of Jóska Kassák, the old actor, who lives in terror of being pensioned off, of getting the sack and of dying, and his terminally ill wife, Ilona Nyuczky, once the leading lady, now the prompter.

Jóska Kassák plays the part of Sokolov, a guards major, in a Soviet play entitled *Attack at Dawn*, which turns on a dramatic scene in the Great and Glorious Patriotic War. A simple, ordinary actor, Jóska Kassák is only interested in success and looks to stormy applause as the curtain comes down as his final refuge. True, the applause is that of soldiers who have been ordered to attend the theatre and

applaud at the command of an NCO What counts for him, however, is that he is needed. During the morning rehearsal of *Lilac Time*, the operetta which makes use of Schubert's music, in which he plays Daddy Tschöll, he feels far less secure: a new young director, recently arrived from Budapest as a young man favoured by the party, noticeably picks on Kassák for his outworn hamming.

In digressions from the plot, Kardos tells the story of the married couple, sad as a whole, but with its moments of beauty. The recollection of the day when the Kassáks, in the company of fellow actors, go to Budapest for the funeral of a legendary provincial theatre manager and then on to a kosher eating-house in the Erzsébet District, is a story in its own right. In a touching passage, the couple, to wind up this excursion to Budapest, put up at a hotel, disused and standing empty, where they spend the last unclouded, happy hours of their lives.

Jóska Kassák and Ilona Nyucky know precious little about the world, not much more than what can be seen on the horizon of plays in the repertoire of provincial companies. All they know about the proletarian dictatorship in all probability is that their time-tested histrionic gun-powder goes off in it as well. Their fellow actors also see the new regime through the tulle curtain of cheap successes, of a sham, shabby dreamland. Since the "cultural revolution" had so far only been able to marginally affect the provincial theatre, the small town itself has not yet undergone a major change comparable to the earlier fifty years when urban middle class ways took root. Kardos seizes the exact moment when the remnants of the old way of life are still alive and visible, when aggressive meddling was still not able to fully wipe out the effects of spreading middle class ways of thinking in the provinces, and when the apparatchiks and measures of the new order still appear as a clumsy foreign body in this ambience. The actors and the small-town characters meet and participate in one and the same medium, at a point where all of them appear as fallible small-timers who were not asked when and under what conditions they wanted to live. They try to live their only life somehow or other. After all, this is their benefit performance.

In the novel, splendid, lively and funny passages alternate with less successful ones. Kardos assigns an important role to the anecdote, a typical means of dealing with such small-town themes in the Hungarian realist tradition in fiction. This anecdotal portrayal somewhat loosens the coherence of the work. Furthermore, some of the characters are only sketched in outline, and therefore appear as stereotyped nonentities. Sometimes one feels that the author relies on the humorous anecdote and sharp one-liners he remembers or noted in his time rather than on the laws of his material. These objections, however, should be judged in terms of Kardos's virtuoso writing and superior knowledge of facts—*Benefit Performance* remains enjoyable reading even where it is carried along only by the sweep of routine or the surprise ending of the relevant anecdote.

Tibor Cseres marked his last novel, *Centaurs and Female Centaurs,* as a tragico-satire. The tragical overtone mostly comes from the fact that the highly regarded writer died a few days before this year's Book Week, the scheduled time of publication. But, at least according to the author's intention, the story of the chief character, Szabolcs Pető, a bigwig of the Kádár era, has a tragical tinge. Pető is the president of a fictitious Economic Development Council, and also a member of the Central Committee of the CP, but in his declining years, well past retirement age, and at the time of the Prague Spring in 1968 and the soft-pedalling of the new economic

mechanism in Hungary, he has long stopped believing in what was termed existing socialism. Indeed, he even openly proclaims his heretic views. He writes unasked for letters and reports to János Kádár, in which he elaborates on his views about the failure of the system, his disapproval of the occupation of Czechoslovakia, and his suggestions for a separate Hungarian road. For quite some time, these petitions seem to be having no effect, but then the home security machinery gets moving and makes easy meat of Pető, by now gravely ill.

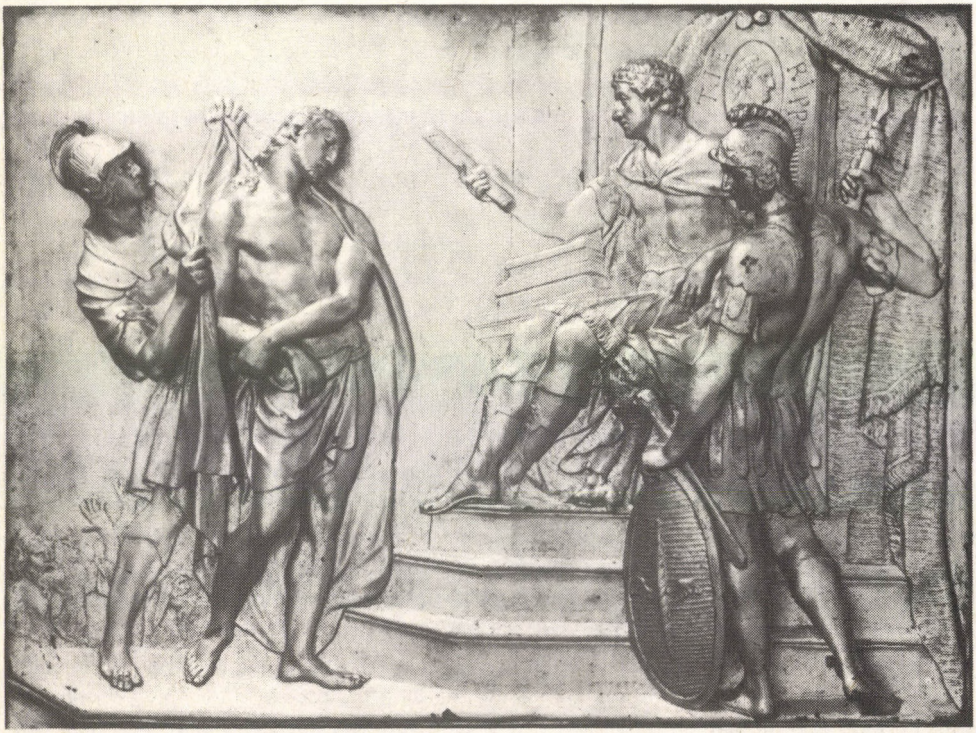
Pető is not only a clearsighted mind, a "reform economist", a graphomaniac correspondent, and an amateur historian, but—like most of Cseres's characters—a great womanizer, far from impotent when about to turn seventy, and a slave to sexual daydreams. Apart from composing political messages, he keeps detailed minutes of the sexual jousting in the office, which he passionately inquires into and of which he takes his share to the best of his abilities, though due to a prostate complaints to a growing extent only in his imagination.

So Pető is an old lecher, a centaur. He might be called a satyr as well, as the tragico-satire of the subtitle seems to hint at. It is true that there it is a question of satire, and satire is unconnected with satyr, (it may be connected etymologically, but not semantically). The Latin *satira* originally meant a full dish of hotch-potch, a medley, only since Horace's *Satires* has it meant a poem ridiculing vice or folly. Cseres's novel has a satirical layer as well, though his satire is fairly vulgar. But here satire mixed with tragedy seems to mark Pető as an old satyr and the novel's genre as a satiric drama. In Greek mythology, the satyrs were companions of Dionysus, and like the centaurs, were part human, part animal, with the legs of a goat or a horse, their name, *satyroi* meant "the full", that is being in a state of erotic excitement. Well, Pető is such a satyr, and his story is a kind of satyr drama.

Unfortunately, however, this derision, this Dionysian fullness and satirical disrespect is evident in the rough-and-readiness of the novel rather than in its style. Pető's character itself is made up of arbitrary and unmatched elements. His hot-blooded temperament has nothing to do with his graphomania—and his passion for taking notes is only a pretext for Cseres to use his character to fill the novel with glosses. Nor is there a connection between Pető's professed views and his public function. Pető sets forth his views to his highest superior as if he were unconnected with the system. After all, he must have done something to have been appointed president of such a council. But the novel tells up nothing about this. We are told that Pető was born a Jew, had been conscripted into the forced labour service during the war, and had joined the Communist Party as a fruit of this experience but he had immediately seen through its real nature, and left it. The monologue that sketches his life only takes one to this point, and leaves the period between 1945 and 1968 a blank spot in Pető's biography. So his critical analysis springs fully armed from his brow, without any antecedents. People who lived through those times, even if only the 1960s, will scarcely feel shaken to learn that the state security organs did not turn a blind eye to a leading apparatchik's musings that were more suited to a samizdat publication. So there is nothing tragical in the figure of Pető, not even his cancer of the prostate. Still, little by little, Cseres begins to commiserate with him as intensely as if he had modelled the character of himself. This perhaps is really the trouble, that personal prompting is mixed in him with the portrayal of a political type, a type that even surfaces in another model: the politician who commits suicide in protest against the occupation of Czechoslovakia.

The portrayal of the secondary characters even more clearly reveals the incoherence of Cseres's satyr drama and the incongruity of its elements. The women would all be ready to eat their fill of Pető's full dish, yet one is supposed to be sorry for them for their afflictions. Cseres uses harsh colours to portray both lechery and defencelessness. At some points the narrator seems to have strayed into another book: the Master tries to favour one of his colleagues, the pure but uncared-for Cornelia, by assigning her father, a forester of the old school, to the mapping of the country's acacia stock. This enables the author to go into a lengthy discourse on the prevalence and economic use of the acacia. Pető's numismatic skill serves as a pretext for deviations into numismatics. These motifs have only tenuous links with the subject.

This frivolous medley of heterogeneous and incongruent elements might be considered a post-modern satyr drama, were it not a novel by Tibor Cseres. Listening to these elegiac, sentimental, and occasionally dissonant notes, one can establish the intention that at the end of his life, by way of a farewell, Cseres tried to write a bitter satire. However, his personal message and concern, which did not always fit the subject and the tone, gained the upper hand and did not allow the birth either of a real Cseres work or of something different. ❧



ZOLTÁN HASZNOS

Georg Raphael Donner (?): Christ Before Pilate. After 1735. Plaster, gilded, 44,5 x 58,5 cm. Dobó István Castle Museum, Eger.

László Ferenczi

When Does the Past Begin?

John Lukacs: *The End of the Twentieth Century and the End of the Modern Age.* Ticknor & Fields, New York, 1993. 291 pp. 0 395 58472 8.

"The twentieth century is now over. It was a short century. It lasted seventy-five years—from 1914 to 1989. Its two main events were the two world wars. They were the enormous mountain ranges that dominated its entire landscape. The Russian Revolution, the atomic bomb, the end of the colonial empires, the establishment of Communist states, the domination of the two world superpowers, the United States and the Soviet Union, the division of Europe and of Germany: all of these were the consequences of the two world wars, in the shadow of which we have been living. Until now."

Thus opens Lukacs's latest book. (Lukacs interprets a century to be a more or less identifiable historical unit. Century in this sense was first used by Voltaire in his *Siècle de Louis XIV.*) Most of Lukacs's earlier books studied the history of the 20th century at a time when it was not yet clear how long this century would last. (Present problems, or at least some of them, also derive from the fact that no one had been prepared for what happened in 1989.) In earlier works Lukacs questioned the completed past, though he was always prepared to draw bold conclusions for the present. In his latest book he addresses himself to a present that has just begun, though he naturally looks to the past for causes and explanations, drawing freely on the material of his earlier books.

This new work asks what options are open to the new century. What will be the consequences of 1989? Lukacs does not shilly-shally, he argues that it is wrong to think that "the twentieth century is over because the cold war is over [...] The twentieth century began with a bang, in 1914—the Big Bang, of which the Russian Revolution in 1917 was but one of the consequences. The main political force in the twentieth century has been nationalism, not Communism."

Thus Lukacs defines the basic idea of his book and indeed the problems he chooses to deal with. He goes on with the same emphasis: "I am a participant historian, unable to avoid thinking what is happening now. (Knowledge is neither objective nor subjective—that Cartesian separation is both illu-

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sory and outdated. Our knowledge is inevitably personal, and participant.)"

Lukacs has never before been as personal as in this book, not even in his autobiography (*Confessions of an Original Sinner*, 1990). The autobiography was primarily interested in reconstructing the past. For this present work the fundamental question is "what is happening now". This new work escapes easy classification, it is something of an historical essay, part political meditation, part autobiography, and part journal. These are the ruminations of an independent mind, who believes in a personal God, of a historian of wide experience, fond of paradox, for the sake of which he sometimes even sacrifices moderation. It begins in 1989 and leads on to 1992, but it could end at any time. Lukacs examines a present which is in a state of flux, while looking back on his own past, quoting long passages from earlier writings—often without explicit reference.

Lukacs left Hungary in 1946 to settle in the United States. Though he had no links with Hungarian emigré organisations, he maintained a close friendship with Béla Varga, the Speaker of the first post-war Hungarian parliament, for whom he felt a deep respect. In 1990 Varga was invited to attend the opening session of the first freely elected Hungarian parliament and Lukacs accompanied him to Budapest. In this book he describes the journey and Varga's opening address. He also describes meetings with leaders of the new government, several of whom are old friends. The months that have passed since Lukacs finished his book have borne out some of his predictions and refuted others. Thus, Czechoslovakia split peacefully. On the other hand, after the recent elections in Lithuania, the new holders of power peacefully stepped down, acknowledging their election defeat. Lukacs feared that some of those who had come to power in the region in 1989-90 would hold on to it even if defeated in future elections.

In his *Confessions* Lukacs called himself a reactionary. "A reactionary is made, not born," and he added, "a reactionary considers character but distrusts publicity; he is a patriot but not a nationalist; he favours conservation rather than conservatism; he defends the ancient blessing of the land and is dubious about the results of technology; he believes in history, not in Evolution."

While fully maintaining his reactionary attitude, and without being guilty of inconsistency, Lukacs now terms himself a European American and a European Hungarian. An anxious patriot speaks of resurgent nationalisms. Lukacs refers back to parts of his *Confessions*. He spent the Second World War years in Hungary. Even as a child he saw Churchill as the real, consistent adversary of Hitler. His whole intellectual world and range of emotions are determined by this Churchill-Hitler opposition. He points out (and not for the first time) that even in 1944, Churchill reassured de Gaulle that the Russians would be unable to digest their Eastern European conquests. It was also Churchill who, as early as the 1950s, predicted that the Russians would be compelled to leave Eastern Europe in the foreseeable future.

Lukacs reacts to the liberation of the European satellite countries after 1989 with unalloyed pleasure, but he makes no secret of his anxiety. He discerns signs that Hitler and National Socialism will be re-evaluated, that Hitler, and not Churchill, will serve as a model for certain people in Eastern Europe. He points out that it was Hitler who had created an independent Croatia and an independent Slovakia. He does not feel much sympathy for the Croats, remembering how much they had contributed to the break-up of the Austro-Hungarian empire.

Lukacs's anxieties are boosted by historical analogies. The disintegration of the Spanish empire led to major wars between England and France. It is impossible to fore-

see the consequences of the disintegration of the Soviet Union. The more so as Lukacs emphatically reiterates a view he has elaborated earlier: that the American century has come to an end (*Outgrowing Democracy: A History of the United States in the Twentieth Century. 1984*). One of the last chapters of his new book is set in the White House. On October 18, 1990, President Bush gave a dinner in honour of the Hungarian Prime Minister, József Antall. Lukacs was among the guests. He describes the pomp, but adds: "I feel that all of this opulence only masks—or, more directly, it does not correspond to—the decline, and to the decline of the very cohesion, of the United States. Of course the guests, especially the Hungarians, do not know this. [...] This is how a state dinner may have been in the palace of the Roman emperor in the third or the fourth century A.D., not in the first and second."

Much is being said about the end of the American century. Nearly twenty years ago, a photograph went round the world of people hanging on to a rope ladder on the roof of the American embassy in Saigon, trying to get onto the last helicopter. For many, this press photograph symbolized the end of the American century. For Lukacs, the symbol was a state dinner he attended in the White House. But is a comparison with the third century A.D. perhaps not a little hasty? Such comparisons, it will be remembered, were fashionable in Europe after the First World War. In more general terms, is it not too hasty to speak of the end of the American century?

In 1946 Lukacs left Hungary because he did not want to live under a communist regime imported by Russia. In the United States he encountered anti-communism, and this shocked him. "I have criticized the ideology of anti-communism often, the insidious inclination to consider it as if it were identical with patriotism." Anti-communists were speaking about the communist menace instead of attending to the real goals and options of the Soviet Union and the Russian empire. According to Lukacs, communism had not strengthened, but weakened Russia. "Anti-communism at a safe distance is self-satisfying; it may even be turned to personal and occupational profit. Of course this is not true of people who lived under communism ... Their opposition to communism is admirable."

For Lukacs, the cold war was the result of a mutual misunderstanding, and it ended much earlier than communist and anti-communist propaganda allowed one to notice. Lukacs calls attention to a sentence which has been often overlooked in George Kennan's famous 1947 article: "If anything were ever to occur to disrupt the unity and efficacy of the Party as a political instrument, Soviet Russia might be changed overnight from one of the strongest to one of the weakest and most pitiable of national societies."

And Lukacs adds: "This is happening now. But there are also Bismarck's wise words: Russia is never so strong—or so weak—as she seems."

Lukacs cites another dictum attributed to Bismarck, that it is of decisive importance that Britain and the United States speak a common language. (Lukacs quotes this statement, supposedly made by Bismarck not long before his death, in his book on the history of America in the 20th century.) So, for this American historian of Hungarian birth, it is of decisive importance for the United States as well that the prevailing language there is English. Lukacs puts no trust in the future of the European Community (a further source for his pessimism), and one reason for his skepticism is the absence of a common language. It is not that he considers a variety of languages as a fatal

obstacle, for in this context he refers to the example of Switzerland. However, contemporary Switzerland is the outcome of several centuries of development. The cold rationalism of the Brussels bureaucrats cannot bring about a common Europe, he writes.

Lukacs quotes almost word for word the parallel he had drawn earlier between Wilson and Lenin in his book on America: "Yet—such is the irony of history—the ideas of this pale Presbyterian professor President were more revolutionary than those of the Bolshevik radical from the middle Volga region." In that 1984 work, Lukacs was highly critical of "the idea of national self-determination", it having proved most useful to Hitler and African dictators in the first place. He is still not in sympathy with "the idea of national self-determination", but in the wake of 1989, he has added new elements: "Wilson's propagation of the idea of national self-determination helped to bring about the destruction of entire empires in 1918. Seventy-odd years later the idea of national self-determination is destroying some of the very states that Wilson helped to create: Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia, for example. It has also destroyed the structure of the Soviet Union, that inheritor of the old Russian empire. Communism is dead, but national self-determination is very much alive." (Is it perhaps not rash to speak about the death of communism?)

Lukacs is fond of coincidences. He mentions that Lenin and Wilson died within ten days of each other in 1924. However, he makes no mention of the fact that the Bolsheviks, once in power, issued their peace proposals three months before Wilson's Fourteen Points. Even if it is not absolutely certain that the Fourteen Points were a conscious and deliberate answer to the Bolshevist proclamation, the fact of the coincidence certainly deserves attention, for both appeals exercised a joint effect in the months and years after February 1918.

I have mentioned that in this new work Lukacs repeats the claim made in his 1984 book, that Wilson was more revolutionary than Lenin. In his new work he presents another paradox: "the century's radical revolutionary was neither Lenin nor Chairman Mao but Adolf Hitler." (The claim is featured on the book's dust-cover.) In one chapter he speaks of Franz Jägerstatter, an Austrian Catholic peasant. In April 1938, Jägerstatter was the only man in his village to vote against the Anschluss. Resisting all kinds of pressure, he refused to serve in Hitler's army, and was executed in 1943. "He had refused to serve in the German Army, not because he was a pacifist, not because he was an Austrian patriot, but because of his Catholic convictions." Lukacs adds: "Earlier I said that Hitler may have been the greatest revolutionary of the twentieth century. But Jägerstatter was a revolutionary too—in the prophetic sense, in which the great French Catholic poet and visionary Charles Péguy wrote, even before the First World War: 'The true revolutionaries of the twentieth century will be the fathers of Christian families.' In this sense the true revolutionary was Jägerstatter, not Hitler."

Let me try to translate Lukacs's words into my own. Wilson exercised a more profound effect on the history of the 20th century than did Lenin. Hitler signified a greater danger to mankind than did Lenin or Mao. The real hero of the century was Franz Jägerstatter, who rejected power even at the cost of his life. But whether or not I rightly interpret Lukacs, I do not understand why the term revolutionary has to be used in each case.

My intention had been to write a notice of Lukacs's book, rather than offer comments, or a critical judgment. The book is difficult to review, since practically every sentence deserves attention. Lukacs's many

self-quotations, some literal, some of substance, from earlier works, based on decades of study, add to the difficulty of summary judgment, as does the fact that his observations on current events are always interesting.

I do not feel entitled to comment on, criticize, or judge the book. Tocqueville, one of Lukacs's masters, wrote that despotism collapses if it wants to change for the better. Ever since the beginning of the Gorbachev era, I have repeatedly asked myself whether Tocqueville's prophecy would come true. At the same time I relied overly on historical analogies. Now, at least since the time of Peter the Great, Stalinism and Gorbachevism have been alternating in Russian history, sometimes within the reign of a single tsar, such as Alexander I, as Tolstoy lays it out for us with an eerie modernity in *War and Peace*. It should be said that Gorbachev's "retreats" were predicted by Henry Kissinger. In the mid-1970s Kissinger said that by the early 1980s the Russians would gain the upper hand in the arms race and would turn highly aggressive. The world must weather this period, because by the mid-80s America would take the lead and the Russians would be forced to retreat. (As far as I know, even Kissinger was not counting on, at least at that time, the disintegration of the Soviet Union.) By analogy with the great Scythian withdrawal as described by Herodotus, I took Gorbachev's retreats to be the preliminaries to a counter-attack. That is why I do not feel competent to criticize the substance of Lukacs's views.

Nonetheless, a few comments may be permitted. Lukacs considers Khrushchev's notorious address to the 20th Congress in 1956 and Gorbachev's activity as singular manifestations of the Russian sense of guilt as described by Dostoevsky. He considers it a sign of greatness in the Russian people that they gave up a world imperial role without a word of protest. Such an interpretation of the facts is possible but so is another, namely that the steps taken by both Khrushchev and Gorbachev were determined partly by the power struggle within the Kremlin and partly by the international political situation. (One could even argue that the purges that started in 1936 had, at least in part, an explanation deriving from international politics. Stalin wanted to make his system presentable by demonstrating that he had renounced the export of the revolution. In 1936, news that Béla Kun had turned up in Spain caused alarm in the West. The easiest way to quell anxiety was to liquidate Béla Kun.)

Lukacs points out that never in the course of history have Russian and American soldiers shot at each other. This, however, is of interest to people in America rather than in Russia. No one has ever asked the opinion of the Russian people, either on the day of the Peace of Tilsit (which brought the war between France, Russia and Prussia in July 1807 to an end) or in August 1939, when the Ribbentrop-Molotov pact was signed, or at any other time.

Lukacs emphasizes at the beginning of his book that "our knowledge is inevitably personal." I could not agree more. Lukacs's personal knowledge is of "self-satisfying" anti-communism, mine of "self-satisfying" communism, whether it meant a conviction or a mere slogan. I agree with Lukacs that Stalin (and his successors) always subordinated the international communist movement to the interests of the Soviet Union. This, however, did not turn it into a less formidable weapon. ❧

Paul Merrick

At Long Last

László Dobszay: *A History of Hungarian Music.* Corvina, 1993. 236 pp. Ft 745. 963 13 3498 8. In English.

Twenty-five years ago, and still today, many music students learned the history of music using one overall summary—Donald J. Grout's *A History of Western Music*, and three textbooks—*Music in the Middle Ages* and *Music in the Renaissance* by Gustave Reese, and *Music in the Baroque Era* by Manfred Bukofzer. All such books have one feature in common: the mainstream of "Western music" is in reality European music, but within that, Eastern Europe is given a separate section. Of course, Liszt does not count in this context as "Eastern Europe", but as one of the Romantics; neither does Haydn, although he lived in Hungary. Bartók sometimes figures as mainstream Europe, sometimes as part of the Eastern European appendage—an obvious anomaly to those musicians who consider him to be the single greatest musician of the 20th century, and the last composer in history who can be ranked alongside Beethoven and Mozart. And of course, folksong was not included, being relegated to the specialist activities of a science enjoying the repellent misnomer of ethnomusicology, a discipline largely dismissed as either hocus-pocus or Marxism, but probably both.

Obviously Bartók's contribution to the study of folksong was neither. And obviously any student discovering Bartók for the first time immediately had his interest aroused in the country that produced him. At this point disappointment set in. The music of Hungary, indeed the existence of any music other than Liszt, Bartók and Kodály, remained an inaccessible area of study, because there were no books about it in English. Add to this the Iron Curtain and the impenetrable Hungarian language, and we have a situation where Hungary, one of Europe's greatest musical nations, was condemned to virtual isolation, and the rest of the world, as a consequence, remained ignorant of the background that produced one of its most admired cultural products.

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This summary, like all summaries, contains most of the truth, but omits some of it. In this case the omission is a book, *A Concise History of Hungarian Music* by Bence Szabolcsi, first published in English in 1964 by Corvina Press. The Hungarian original, *A Magyar Zenetörténet Kézikönyve,* first appeared in 1947. A new English edition in 1974 contained a new section, "Hungarian Music since 1945", by György Kroó, but the sections on the earlier periods contained no new information, the text of the original being based on the state of Hungarian musical research as it was in about 1950.

Hence the importance of László Dobszay's new book, which contains an outline summary of the whole of Hungarian music history, incorporating the results of musicological research done during the last forty years, and which were not available to Szabolcsi.

Dobszay's book itself is of deceptively small dimensions, a paperback of just over 230 pages. But the text is concise and scholarly, not "literary": every sentence contains data and information. Each chapter begins with a summary of the general historical background for the non-Hungarian reader, then plunges straight into the music. A feature of the book is the large number of music examples in a small space: these are not numbered, but a quick count produced about ninety, varying in extent from single line quotations of folksong to a page of orchestral music reproduced in short score. These figure as part of the text, and are carefully chosen to illustrate a point and be representative. This contrasts with Szabolcsi's book, where the music examples appear as a thirty page extra "book" at the end, with no direct reference to them in the main text.

The history of music in any country is inseparable from the vicissitudes of its political life, and in Hungary's case a great misfortune befell its musical life in the 16th and 17th centuries, when the Turks occupied the country for 150 years. This in practice meant the absence of the Western musical development centred upon a Christian culture, namely Renaissance polyphony and its successor, the Baroque declamatory style. During these years Hungary was divided into three parts, the central part under Turkish rule, the Western part aligned to the Habsburgs, and the Eastern part forming the independent principality of Transylvania. However, it would be wrong to conclude there was no music—the period produced a musical culture of its own, distinct from the Western one to some extent. This forms Chapter 4 in Dobszay's book, "The Period of Turkish Occupation (16th and 17th Centuries)", and includes 18 music examples, each of a different form or genre, including in fact some polyphonic music of the Renaissance, a Vesperal of 1571 from Pozsony, in what then constituted Hungary. Over the centuries the borders have changed—for example where Bartók was born is now in Romania, and the territory Hungary now occupies is one third of its former size. The practical answer to the problem is to call Hungary what Hungary was at the time under discussion. As a result, some of the music discussed in the book was composed in towns now in other countries, for example Slovakia or Romania. In fact, any foreigner who learns to read Hungarian and then browses through the bibliographies of musical lexicons and periodicals will be struck by the fact that for decades the writing of Hungarian musical history was blighted by the problem of "what is Hungarian"—and by extension who is Hungarian, often at the expense of investigating what was actually written where and when, i.e. what lay in manuscript in libraries and archives. There are for example articles on Kodály's "Hungarianness"—not that this is called into question, but they represent an attempt at closer definition. There is even a science called in Hungarian *magyarságtu-*

domány, often given the Latin name *Hungarologia*, and whose English translation, if it could exist, would have to be Hungarianology. This wondrous intellectual pursuit is not an invention of Socialism, but has existed for 71 years. Even Liszt suffered from it, much Hungarian Liszt research in the thirties and forties concentrating on his "Hungarian" music and style. Dobszay gives this question a fairly wide berth, sensibly assuming that "Hungarian music" means music written in Hungary as a contribution to Hungarian social and musical life. Of course this is complicated in Hungary's case by the presence of foreign musicians, for example in the 18th century, particularly in aristocratic residences. The list of names in chapter 5, "The Baroque and Classical Periods (18th Century)", includes Franz Anton Pauman, Gregor Joseph Werner, Joseph Haydn, J.N. Hummel, Michael Haydn, Joseph Bengraf, Valentin Deppisch, Franz Krommer, Anton Zimmermann, and Georg Druschetzky. So it is refreshing—and in one case very exciting—to find a purely Hungarian composer who is (a) unknown (b) very good and (c) not mentioned in the New Grove Dictionary. That composer is Benedek Istvánffy (1733-1788). Istvánffy's father was organist and musician at the Benedictine monastery of Pannonhalma, an impressive building on a hill in the middle of Western Hungary not far from the city of Győr, where his composer son eventually worked at the Cathedral, whose library houses the manuscripts of his surviving works, namely 5 motets and 2 masses. These are of interest because they represent that transitional style between late Baroque and early Classical. There was an orchestra at the Cathedral, and many of Istvánffy's works, including the masses, are for soloists, choir and orchestra. Some motets have been recorded by Hungaroton (SLPD 127733) and any musician would be surprised at their musical quality. They are melodically attractive, rhythmically lively, well constructed works with superbly orchestrated accompaniments and passages of good counterpoint. Sadly none of the masses have yet been printed, which is an omission in the repertoire, as there are very few good settings dating from this period, added to which nobody outside Hungary can be aware that such music was being written in the 1760's by a real Hungarian composer. These masses should be recorded and published (some of the motets are printed in the series *Musicalia Danubiana* volume 3, published by the Hungarian Academy of Sciences).

Istvánffy to some extent represents a casualty of Socialism, which did not exactly encourage an interest in church music. Indeed, some of his music having been published, it was difficult to find a choir good enough to sing it. Here we encounter one of the real paradoxes of Hungary's fame abroad as a singing nation inspired by Kodály's ideas. The style these choirs sang in, and for which they acquired a justified international reputation, has become quickly outmoded to some extent due to musical developments outside Hungary. The rise of the early music movement and the consequent devotion to "authenticity" has produced a need for groups who can sing medieval and Renaissance music. Also it is no longer acceptable to sing Mozart's Requiem with a large Radio Choir and Symphony Orchestra—the Classical repertoire itself now demands a different style of performance. Istvánffy falls exactly into this category, and the choir on the recording mentioned earlier is the Schola Hungarica—which, far from specializing in 18th century music, in fact gives regular authentic performances of plainsong in the highly original and convincing style developed by their director, the author László Dobszay. Dobszay is Hungary's leading expert on mediaeval plainsong, and has made a number of recordings of Hungarian plainsong for Hungaroton under the title *Magyar*

Gregorianum. The performance style he has evolved is based on his studies of the interrelationships between Hungarian folksong and plainsong varieties found in Hungary, for he is at the same time the director of folksong research at the Bartók Archive in Budapest. Which brings us back to the beginning—Bartók and folksong.

Hungarian folksong research is a huge subject too extensive to summarize in a single chapter, but suffice it to say that whereas Bartók and Kodály were concerned with the problem of cataloguing the various types of song melodies—and disagreed over how it should be done—modern scholars have tried to establish the historical antiquity of the different types of songs, thus aiming at some sort of chronological picture of their development. Dobszay gives a brisk and thorough introduction to the different types of melodies found, with examples, at the beginning of the book. The medieval period then offers some insight into the interaction that took place between folksong and plainsong, again with examples. This period takes two chapters, which are followed by the chapters on the Turkish occupation and the 18th century. After this come the 19th century and the 20th century. In the former there is a clear description of what the so-called *verbunkos* style is all about, plus information about Liszt, Erkel, Mosonyi and other composers. Similarly, in the following chapter Dobszay gives remarkable succinct but dense summaries of the careers and music of Bartók and Kodály, along with a fair selection from the myriad post-war modern Hungarian composers.

His treatment of the demise of Socialism deserves a mention at this point. He acknowledges the many positive features of the system, in particular the wide-ranging state support of the arts and music. Many of the achievements and much of the research work whose results appear in the book were carried out by full-time musicologists supported by the state, a situation fast becoming a luxury in the new Hungary. But the negative side of the system he sketches succinctly, citing the deleterious effect on composition, the ostracizing of Bartók as cosmopolitan and pessimistic, the banishment of Stravinsky and Schoenberg from the concert hall for ten years, the prevalence of political songs and a superficial cult of folksong instead of choral masterpieces, and the disappearance of amateur music-making, chamber-music clubs, music-societies, and of course church choirs. As we know, this eased up after a time until it seemed in the eighties that Hungary could have the best of both worlds—cultural freedom with state patronage. Which means that at the moment Hungarian music is in a state of shock, as the profession wrestles with the sudden dwindling of state support due to lack of finances, and the need to find sponsors and learn self management. A recent casualty of the new influx of capitalist competition is the firm of Hungaroton, who have recently been declared bankrupt. This could be a tragedy for Hungarian music. All the recordings cited in a discography and a generous (mostly Hungarian) bibliography at the end of the book are on the Hungaroton label, and if they disappear there are no alternatives. Only Hungarians perform their own folksongs, 15th century congregational hymns and epics, 16th century verse chronicles, 17th century dance music, 18th and 19th century *verbunkos* music, operas and *Magyar nóta*, and 20th century Kodály and Bartók, as they should be played and sung. It is in their blood. Dobszay's book has come at a time when Hungary is finally a free country, a democratic country, and an open country. But it is not a wealthy one—except intellectually and culturally. And this culture is part of European culture. It should be known. All music students in Britain and America who study the history of music need to read this book—and hear the music on those Hungaroton records. But they had better hurry. ❧

Kálmán Pataki

The Trouble with Oscar

An interview with Ferenc Rófusz, Oscar-winning film-maker

Twelve years ago a Hungarian maker of animated films, thirty-five years old at the time, received an Oscar for a three-minute work, The Fly. *Although the success was not totally unexpected, it had an explosive effect. The film-maker had been invited to Hollywood for the prize-giving ceremony. The trouble was that in his place—with the invitation in the name of Ferenc Rófusz and his wife in his pocket—the general manager of Hungarofilm, the state film distribution company, flew to Hollywood to attend the ceremony and tried to grab the prize that later had to be taken back from him in his hotel room with the aid of the police. The Oscar brought nothing but trouble to the man who had won it. Now, Ferenc Rófusz is a Canadian citizen and this interview took place in his home in Mississauga, near Toronto.*

I worked for two years on that film. I knew we were doing something nobody had done before, but we couldn't tell how the public would take to it. The first festival we sent it to was in Ottawa. When all two thousand people in the auditorium started to scream half a minute after the screening began, I didn't know that they were expressing their approval. The film received two prizes and, from then on, won at all the festivals it appeared in.

How did you get to Ottawa?

We bought the air tickets with help from the family plus loans, since we were practically living on what my wife Edit earned as a child-minder; she took care of three or four children. My income at the time, and even later, was less than five thousand forints a month, about half of what an unskilled worker made.

The Fly *was soon afterwards nominated for the Oscar.*

They notified me that it was among the first three. However, I was not able to travel to the prize-giving ceremony, even though I was invited. The film studio would not pay for the flight and the hotel, and we could not put together the money to cover them. The funny thing was that Hungarofilm sent someone to the ceremonies every year, whether or not there were Hungarian nominees. These people had a good time out there for a week. Anyway, that year Comrade Dósai, the general manager of Hungarofilm, went in my place. He went to the American Motion Picture Academy and asked if he could take the Oscar. He was bluntly refused. By the way, he was putting about the story that there was some problem with my documents and that's why I was unable to come myself. This was even announced onstage—I have the origi-

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Edited version of the interview published on 22 July 1993, in the weekly Magyar Narancs.

nal tape. Even that didn't stop Dósai, once the results were announced, from stepping onto the stage, taking the prize and making a speech of thanks for it as Ferenc Rófusz. Unfortunately for him, there were some people in the audience who knew me personally. In the end the Oscar was taken off him with the help of the police. Well, this was much better publicity than having everything go smoothly. The *Los Angeles Times* put the story on the front page. *Impostors* was the headline, which was not funny for Dósai.

How did you learn that you had won an Oscar?

Edit was listening to Free Europe early in the morning, they were broadcasting the ceremony live, which had been postponed, incidentally, because that was when President Reagan got shot. Edit woke me up, shaking my shoulders. Feri, you made it, you made it! I didn't even understand what she was talking about. And then my heart started to pound.

What happened later at home? What happened to Dósai and what happened to you? Were you offered the manager's position?

When Dósai came home after the scandal, he handed me back my invitation to the ceremony that he himself had used. He was punished in a typical way. He was sent to Rome for five years, to head the Hungarian Institute there. He had probably never been there before. On the other hand, I was expected to shut up and not to make a fuss. But I told my piece on the radio, on TV and to everybody who asked me. Somewhat later the American Motion Picture Academy sent me a letter through the American Embassy, asking me to receive the Oscar personally. A month and a half later, I got the air ticket; still, it was not as huge a thing as receiving the Oscar at the actual ceremony would have been. I didn't know yet what was waiting for me at home. The functionaries got angry at me because I got angry at them. The joke—the lesson—began. A film series had at last turned up that I could have made good money through, but they took it away from me. They said it was not worthy of me. I was sitting in the cafeteria for months on end. Two of my film projects, *Gravitation* and *Dedla* were accepted, but I didn't earn anything through them, they were just made for festivals.

Did The Fly *bring you financial success?*

Some people still think that *The Fly* made me rich, because in other countries if you win an Oscar you're fine for some time. Not because you get so much money, but because so many job opportunities come up that you make money willy-nilly. I could have made money if I'd gone abroad. I was offered the opportunity, I didn't even have to draw, they only wanted my name on the film, for the publicity. They would have paid for my apartment, my car, my kids' education, everything. But I had my dreams, my plans that I wanted to realize at home. I thought it was a Hungarian business. Three years later I realized it was not so. Pannónia, the studio where I worked, did not want to make a penny out of the success. The *apparatchiks* did not care about anything but travelling. Two and a half years passed and then I said to myself, this cannot go on, you will die of hunger here. In 1984 I went to work in West Germany. I didn't want to defect, I had not been beaten up by the police, I was not persecuted by anyone. At Pannónia they didn't even ask what the matter was with me. They just wanted me to leave. I signed a contract with the Concert Agency, *Koncertiroda*, as a musician.

Come on! What instrument did you play?

The Concert Agency was the only institution that had the right to send Hungarians abroad under contract, usually singers and Gypsy musicians. Someone bought a story of mine and the Agency made quite a bit of money out of it. Pannónia could have done the same. From then on I had to pay money

regularly to the Agency for allowing me to work abroad, and, imagine, there was an item in the contract that said I was supposed to pay a fee for the maintenance of my instrument. I told them that I was sorry but I had no viola, no cymbalom, just a pencil. I lived in Cologne for almost five years and I learnt a great deal. For example, I learnt that you get a cheque only if you deliver good quality work and to the deadline. In Hungary we are able to do lots of things excellently, up to world standards, but if we finish something after the deadline, what happens? Nothing, we get our salaries anyway.

How did you get to Canada?

I realized that Germany was not the centre of the world for animated film-making. I was invited by the biggest studio in Canada. I was going to arrange my passport anyway, because in Germany I had to extend my visa every half a year and I couldn't put down the name of any studio. This was the best solution for the children as well. Three months later I opened my studio. Nowadays I mainly work in Los Angeles.

What does success mean here?

In the last six years I've won many awards. Right now I am working on an anti-war film with a Canadian writer. When we finish, it will be shown at festivals and on all the television channels. In the meantime, I've been making advertisements and series. This gives me financial security and leaves me enough energy to produce more serious work. Success here is different from success at home, it has a different structure. At home, for example, what Marcell Jankovics or Csaba Varga did at festivals was success. Here success is if you can create a studio, if you bring a production together, if people are satisfied with you everywhere from San Francisco to Los Angeles, from Los Angeles to Toronto. If you can call anybody and he will trust you and call you back. You cannot disappear. This is success here. Another thing I came to understand here in Canada was why we in Hungary could not make internationally rewarded films. We draw at a very high standard, we know everything about the craft, but we cannot produce professionally. Here in Canada we cannot have even one shot more than had been planned. In Hungary, on the other hand, everything was flowing and flowing; time as well as material. Disney created the right system fifty years ago and things have only been refined since. After the Oscar, Hungary could have become a second Korea in the animated film business, but we Hungarians were so proud we nearly burst. To become slaves? To let them exploit us? No way! At the time, I myself was shouting things like this. And in the meantime, all these talented guys went from Pannónia and the other studios to everywhere in the world.

When were you last in Hungary?

Not for the last six years, I haven't the time. My family, they have been home. It's been ten years now since I left. Once, when I was on a visit to Hungary, I went to Pannónia with a project, but they said that they had no free capacity. Later I learnt that they had practically no work at all. Which means they would have worked with anybody but not with me. They haven't recovered yet from the shock of the Oscar.

Have things ever not turned out the way you wanted them to?

After some time you learn that not all your projects are accepted, even if you have invested an enormous amount of time, work and money. So what? One has to take that into account too. Life goes on.

In Hungary, people regard this as a failure.

Oh, how many of my projects were rejected! But that's something that shouldn't make you miserable. I think failure for me would be if my films were not satisfying. I have learnt that it's no use getting hurt. Here people don't fight with each other, even

though there are situations when in Hungary someone would punch somebody else. Here they don't. Neither in Canada nor in San Francisco, because you don't know when that person will be your boss or you his boss or when you will work together on a project. We live like professional sportsmen, we put personal grudges aside. In Hungary everybody is out to get each other, there are too many conflicts over nothing.

You have mentioned quite a few times how talented Hungarian film-makers are. What would you do if you had the opportunity to work with them in Hungary?

I would think that it is risky. First, because—even though there are a lot of new talents—most of the people I used to work with have scattered in all directions. And, as far as I know, those who were managers in my time are still in high positions. Problems of quality and deadline would come up inevitably. In any case, it would be interesting. I often think of how this or that could be done at home. But Hungarians now want to get rich quick, they name prices that make Western businessmen pass out. I know a Canadian who exported a Hungarian product that was very successful, so he ordered twenty times the original quantity. How did the Hungarian company react? If you want it that much, I'll raise the price. Nothing came of the deal, as a result. In Canada, if somebody orders more, he gets a price reduction, not a price increase.

What do you miss from Hungary?

My wife Edit and I are different in that. For me, it practically doesn't matter where I am, provided I have work. My friends, yes, I miss them. István Szabó, Péter Müller and the rest. Being with them gave me energy. Here they really know how to squeeze out everything from you, they peel you. How to make up for it is a problem. That is why those who come from Europe have a great advantage, because they've got a fresh way of thinking and more ideas.

How do you make up for it?

It's very hard. I'm still living on the experience I gathered back at home. ❧

Letter to the Editor

Sir, —Jack Thompson of the BBC criticised my use of the word "ethnic", in a comment on my article on Yugoslavia that you were kind enough to publish in your Winter issue (Vol. 33, No. 128.). Mr Thompson takes me to task on the grounds that "ethnic" means "racial" and that there is no racial difference between the South Slavs of former Yugoslavia. I agree with his latter point, but I must disagree with his proposition that "ethnic" is identical in meaning with "racial", regardless of the fact that Mr Thompson's dictionaries tell him otherwise. He is probably unaware of the fact that over the last twenty years the word "ethnic" has come to be used to designate collective identities marked by various factors of shared consciousness, notably including language or history or religion. Crucially, this consciousness is a subjective experience—an ethnic group is properly so called when its members define themselves as belonging to the same group. "Race" is different. It concerns myths of common kinship and these are coupled with physical differences, like skin pigmentation. I suspect that Mr Thompson's dictionary compilers have yet to catch up with this change in usage in the relevant anthropological, political science and sociological literature.

George Schöpflin
London School of Economics

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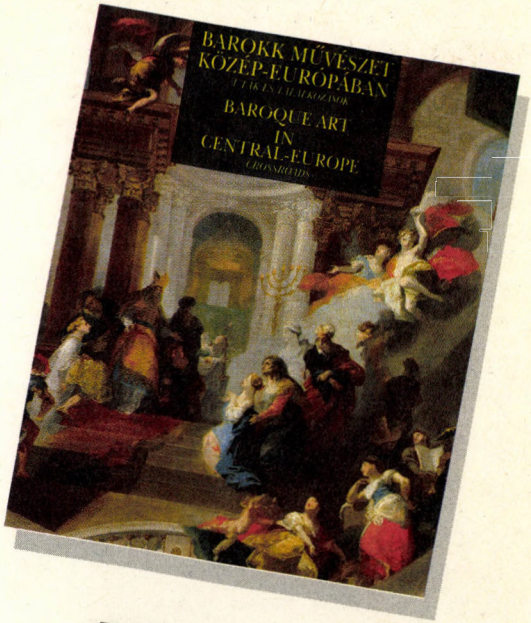

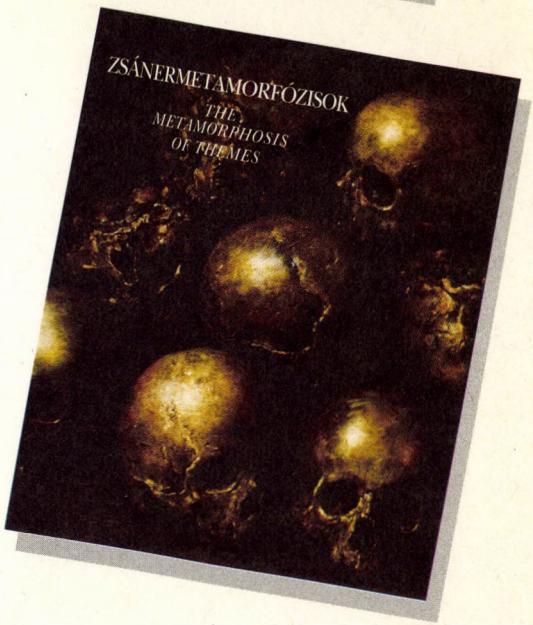

The two exhibitions in Hungary presented a unique selection of Central European Baroque art. They were arranged in the Central European Year of the Baroque as part of a joint programme. In Budapest 200 works were shown and 180 in Székesfehérvár, some from public and others from private collections. Every one of them is reproduced in the bilingual (English-Hungarian) catalogues, which also contain biographies of the artists and scholarly studies.

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Nenad Čanak, the pacifist who was enlisted by force, was the first to speak about the knife, known as hrvosek *or* srbosek, *which is passed from hand to hand among the soldiers. If a Serb kills a Croat, he takes away the latter's knife, the handle of which is decorated with notches. He knows that a Croat soldier has murdered a Serb with this knife. Then he goes and butchers another Croat, and he cuts a new notch in the handle of the knife. If he's killed by a Croat, the latter takes away the knife and stabs a Serb with it. In this way the number of notches on the handle increases, and the knife passes from hand to hand, as it did in the Tito relay race on Youth Day. The handle had once upon a time got stuck in the rock of the one-party system, then the rock crumbled, the knife fell to the ground. The bunches of flowers flew to the feet of those who carried the baton, the enormous celebration went on and on: the nations of the country, the country, the Ministry of the Interior, and the army danced, the comissars saw to it that the splendid festivity went without a hitch, and in the meantime the knife started to live its own life. The growing number of notches turned into the symbols of ethnic war. What a morbid thing it is that the soldiers christened it Tito's baton. Part of the ritual is that the blood is never wiped off it. This is a contract sealed with blood valid to the end of time.*

From: *Balkan Testament*
by László Végel, p. 3.

131

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