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Mark Frankland

The ghosts of Europe return

They are like characters from one's distant youth, or from a play seen long ago and barely remembered. There is the Pole, devout in the defence of national honour; the moody Hungarian, pre-occupied with the survival of his culture and his race; the Czech democrat, straightforward yet with a knack for slyness. The traveller in East Europe rubs his eyes. How can such figures from the past re-appear in countries that half a century ago were mangled in Hitler's war, then swamped by the Soviet flood? How did it happen that the new socialist world, about which so many boastful words were spoken, could vanish so quickly to reveal this new but apparently familiar cast of characters?

The socialist world was supposed to have produced a new breed of East European: an industrial proletariat, swollen by peasants from the land; the peasants that remained, cured of the age-old desire for land by assignment to state or collective farms; a progressive intelligentsia, loyal to socialism. Most important were the new leaders, who not only talked but often looked like their Soviet patrons, which was not surprising for many of them were also peasants propelled to power by supposedly proletarian revolutions. Usually these men did their best to rule their countries in the Soviet manner. In the early years, while Stalin was still alive, they conducted purges and show trials, and backed them up when necessary with prison camps and executions. They used the same violent language of public debate, and observed the same tedious but menacing public rituals. Inheriting societies many of whose structural bones had been broken by war, they themselves broke the remaining sound limbs and shoved the lot into Soviet splints. Polish men still kissed the hands of women. East Germans retained their native diligence. But as social beings they were categorised and organised in ways that had little to do with their respective national pasts, and everything to do with Stalin's tested system of social and political control. Priests were transformed into propagandists for "peace". Boy scouts and girl guides became the pioneers in toggles. Old political parties with honourable and not so honourable traditions were applied as make-up to the grim features of one-party rule. Trade unionists doubled as factory cops.

This new world in the East seemed frighteningly different to people in the West—the Iron Curtain helped see to that. Inhabitants of the British Isles, accustomed to living behind a strip of water, were least likely of all Europeans to appreciate the violence that this new frontier had done to the continent. For Britons in the first years after the war to cross the Channel to France was achievement enough. There can have been few people in London or in Edinburgh who really missed not having easy passage to Budapest and Warsaw. Wrong about Hitler he may have been, but Neville Chamberlain was probably

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right, in the eyes of many of his fellow countrymen, about Czechoslovakia being a faraway place. After the war, and until very recently, an Englishman driving through West Germany and Austria could feel that the Iron Curtain that prevented him going further east was as natural a barrier as the Channel. And so in time it came to seem to many young West Europeans, too, though not to their elders, or to any young person with a scrap of historical knowledge.

That ingenious line of posts, watch towers and wire was in fact as savage a blow to the natural order as the diversion of a river or the amputation of a leg. It challenged geography, history and economics, and yet at first seemed to challenge them successfully. The east-west border acquired the inevitability of a natural phenomenon, like a new mountain range that, together with the Alps, Carpathians and Pyrenees, would finally pin the restless peoples of Europe into their allotted space. This new frontier erased previous history. To the east of it, men put red stars on top of ancient buildings and by this simple act seemed to turn stone witnesses of a European past into props for a future scripted in Moscow. Behind this new border traditional economic links, plain from a glance at any map of railways, rivers and roads, were broken off with the wilfulness of a little boy re-routing the track for his toy trains.

The Soviet undertaking in East Europe was so audacious that it persuaded many people it would succeed. And in time the division of the continent became almost convenient to the western half because, in the end, it brought security. Once the worst of the Cold War was over, and arms talks between the super-powers had reduced the likelihood of any but accidental nuclear war, the west could appreciate that the Iron Curtain and the Pax Sovietica that reigned behind it had calmed a once dangerously unstable continent. The incorporation of East Europe into the Soviet empire had obliged the west to maintain its own unity, which in turn fostered the conditions for unimagined prosperity. The Iron Curtain had also cut the West free of the poorest, most disputatious and disputed part of the continent. The Germans had at last been tamed: tied down in two different alliances, they could no longer move anywhere or grow overwhelmingly powerful. National conflicts that for generations tempted the peoples of East Europe to seek advantage in every international crisis had been frozen. Poland, for the first time in two centuries, looked secure within its borders and therefore was, in this sense at least, no cause for worry to its friends. Old disputes—the problem of Transylvania, the Macedonian question—appeared to have become exotic chapters in history books that few bothered to read.

There were others in the west who had always welcomed this new East Europe as an antidote to what they disliked in their own societies. Industrial Europe had long dreamed of socialism, without being entirely sure what it would be like. Many people had soaked up enough Marx to suppose socialism was inevitable. They had wanted to believe Moscow's claim that 1917 brought it to the Soviet Union, and a good many continued to believe this in spite of evidence, from the 1930s on, of Stalin's crimes. The Soviet domination of East Europe after 1945 served to strengthen their belief. Was it not progress, albeit heavily disguised as the Soviet army, that was moving inexorably westwards? Far from being a break in East Europe's history, the Soviet occupation was seen as the start of a new wave of history that grew organically out of its past. This wave that had begun in the east was moving west and could not be stopped. The language of socialism made the belief easier to sustain. However you defined it socialism was usually

taken to mean the public ownership of the means of production. Well, the people of East Europe had claimed their nation's wealth for their own. Mills and factories had been nationalised, stock exchanges turned into museums. The aristocrats and the church had lost their great estates. Money, instead of dominating men, had become the docile creature of central planners who themselves surely symbolised the most rational government mankind had yet known. There were blemishes, of course, but wasn't it enough to be going on with? If this wasn't socialism, what on earth was?

What came to be called socialism's mistakes were excused by these western admirers as the errors of a late-born child, all the more easily indulged because so long waited for. As time passed, though, believers dropped away. Some who applauded the crushing of the Hungarian uprising in 1956 could not stomach the 1968 Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia. But even as late as 1980, part of the West European left could not understand why socialist Poland needed this rebel trade union called Solidarity. The visitors' books of trade union guesthouses throughout the Soviet bloc continued to fill up with the names of well-known union leaders from the west.

In truth East Europe was a confusing place, like one of those puzzle pictures in which faces are hidden in a landscape of trees and flowers. The more you studied the East European puzzle the more these unexpected faces—survivors from the pre-socialist landscape—stared back at you. There is, of course, an element of illusion in all revolutions. Read an account of the Russian revolution of 1917 or what Hungarians may now call their revolution of 1956, and you find, in spite of their very different purposes, the same belief that everyone and everything can change, or be changed, overnight. Revolutions deny the stubbornness of men and things, which is why men dare to make them, and also why they often come to grief.

In spite of their illusions the communist revolutionaries in East Europe were as thorough as could be. They brought about the required transfer of power and pulverised the old ruling groups so that they could no longer present a coherent challenge to the new order. And yet there were things the communists could not capture and could not destroy. On the one hand there was the communists' immense and ruthlessly applied power; on the other recalcitrant human beings strengthened in their stubbornness by national memories and traditions. How the latter held out and eventually triumphed is part of the story of this book. How great that victory was can only be judged if one remembers the power the communists possessed in the first years after their victory in East Europe.

I belong to the generation that grew up when the Soviet empire seemed at its most threatening. News of the outbreak of the Korean war—Stalin's work, one had no doubt—came during the school break and made us pause in our usual fight to get at the tray of Chelsea buns, as though we understood that some of us would grow up to fight in it. Arriving in 1952 at Victoria Barracks, Portsmouth, for national service in the navy, our group of Temporary Probationary Coders (Special) was lectured by the commanding officer on the imminence of war with the Soviet Union. We were about to learn Russian so we, linguistically at least, would be in its front line. Stalin's death we learned of one afternoon after classes at the School of Slavonic Studies in London. A newspaperman at Tottenham Court Road station sung out the news and held up the evening paper for us to read the stark headline. No one supposed it made our conquest of Russian grammar less necessary. Two years later I found myself in East Europe.

It was the summer of 1955. A group of students in Cambridge, wondering how to spend the long vacation, heard there was to be something called a world youth festival in Warsaw. None of us knew what a youth festival was, which was not surprising in view of our age. It was one of a series of *ersatz* events designed by Moscow to show that it was loved by young people all over the world. But it was terribly cheap and that, in the days before charter flights and package tours, was enough. Of Poland we also knew little, though I had come across émigré Poles. That was the striking thing about them: they were émigrés. Poland had tossed them aside, as a bolting horse throws off its rider, and they seemed to have given up all hope of re-mounting. One of these Poles was a count who that summer was wooing a divorcée friend of my family. He showed not the slightest interest in our Polish travel plans. We might have been going to a country he had scarcely heard of. There was another Pole we knew, a fellow undergraduate, who had the same famous name as my family's acquaintance. He spoke English with a drawl, and had once been spotted wearing a bowler hat on King's Parade. As far as we could tell, he had completely freed himself from Poland to pursue other passions. Extremely good-looking, he liked to invite girls to tea in his rooms and appear before them dressed only in a jock-strap.

I had come across a third Pole while learning Russian at the School of Slavonic Studies. Teacher of grammar to our class of Midshipmen (Special)—we had been promoted on leaving Portsmouth—he had been badly wounded flying alongside the Royal Air Force in the war, and survived thanks to skin grafts and an artificial arm. Later I wondered whether he did this tedious job in the hope that one day we might use our skill in a battle to free Poland. Perhaps he imagined us monitoring Soviet radio messages while the British navy released landing craft onto the white beaches of Poland's Baltic coast, in which case one could understand his insistence that we correctly distinguish between the perfective and imperfective form of Russian verbs. These thoughts came later; at that time he was just another émigré. Straight-backed in spite of his wounds, brown hair en brosse, scratching a scarred cheek with the leather-covered fingers of his artificial hand, he seemed a man without a country and with precious little future.

It was hard to connect these men with the Warsaw we woke up in one Sunday morning after a slow train journey across Europe in a wooden-seated third class carriage. The city, re-built on ruins so complete that there had been talk of abandoning it and starting a new capital elsewhere, seemed as much a triumph of communist will as the festival itself. Large parts of old Warsaw had already been reconstructed from the rubble. By re-building Nowy Swiat, Krakowskie Przedmieście, and the Old Town, the communists had claimed possession of the city's past and tamed it. These old-new streets and squares were museums in which history was safely locked up for display. Communist will-power achieved another, more modest, miracle with our incohesive group. Aside from a party of young communists, we were only inquisitive students, and yet before long we were turned into a progressive British delegation. Together with more genuine delegations from other countries we marched up and down the Warsaw streets and across the Poniatowsky bridge to attend rallies in the sports stadium on the other, Praga, side of the Vistula. What we did there mostly was shout "Peace and Friendship", the motto of this and all succeeding world youth festivals. To the unsuspecting onlooker we were peace-loving youth, flesh and blood evidence that in the West, too, life was developing as Marx and Lenin had predicted.

These goings-on amused rather than annoyed us. But there was also something awesome about them, as there was about the newly built Russo-Gothic skyscraper, a present from Stalin to Poland, in whose shadow some of the festival's activities took place. Later one would see this so-called palace of culture for what it was—a gift of incomparable malice. At that time it impressed as a barbarian act of will, standing like a great Soviet boot in the heart of Warsaw to proclaim the durability of the new order. No one who saw it could doubt that the communists had come to stay.

Over the years this impression of a Poland taken firmly in hand by communism began to change. It was as though the mind had snapped a photograph that needed time to develop. The festival with its marching and slogans, its tenacious communist organisers and the unpardonable skyscraper faded in the memory while other events and people came into focus. There was the morning of our first day in Warsaw. After the shock of an East European breakfast of bread, cheese and pickled cucumber, we went outside the school we had been billeted in to find a crowd of young Poles waiting for us. Without asking what we wanted to do they led us to the centre of the city and, to our surprise and the young British communists' horror, brought us to a church. It stood at the end of a broad, dog-legged street of reconstructed palaces and churches, echoes of a neo-classical past washed in pale northern light. The Poles led us up steps to a porch before the church door, where a large statue of Christ carrying the Cross lent out into the street below. We went inside. Priests were celebrating mass. The church was full. Men and women unable to find a seat knelt on the stone floor as easily as if it were a pillow of velvet.

The Polish communists were at that time still trying to cut the Catholic Church out of Poland as a surgeon removes a tumour. In 1950 the government had confiscated all church property. Now, five years later, it was still throwing priests into prison. For the last three years even the Primate of Poland, Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński, had been forcibly confined to a monastery in the distant Bieszczady mountains. By bringing us to this church only recently re-built from ruins, our new Polish friends were showing that even the communists with their phenomenal will-power had not yet succeeded in tugging out Poland's Catholic roots. The world outside Poland might be impressed by the appearance of "progressive" priests who wanted to cooperate with the communists, or by the fellow-travelling Catholic organization called Pax, for which the Soviet NKVD had picked a Polish ex-fascist as leader. It was less easy to mislead the Poles with such tricks.

Another image that came only later into focus was that of a bronze medal that lies today on my bookshelves. Its reverse side bears two dates: 19.10.1813 and 19.10.1913. The front depicts a handsome, melancholy-looking man wearing a uniform that buttons at the neck. His nose is aquiline. A long cleft chin rests on the edge of the tall collar. He had brushed his hair forward over the brow in the Napoleonic manner.

Prince Józef Poniatowski, says the inscription, and the letters continue like a halo round his head: *Bóg mi powierzył honor Polaków. Bogu co oddam*. "God entrusted me with the honour of the Poles. To God I give it back." I cannot remember who gave me the medal, though there may be a connection with an evening spent drinking vodka mixed with cherry brandy out of tumblers. Neither at school nor at Cambridge were we taught to search British history for lessons practical or inspirational for the present day. People had favourite periods. Some preferred Cavaliers, others Roundheads. There was a natural division between enthusiasts for Burke and for Tom Paine. But to look in the past for a map to the present would have seemed ridiculous, making as little sense as retreating

down a hill when you are already approaching the top. Being English was poor preparation for understanding that few nations, and certainly not a single one in East Europe, see their history as a gradual ascent to ever sunnier plateaus. It needed time before I could read the medal's message in the way its unremembered giver surely hoped it would be read.

Józef Poniatowsky, nephew to Stanislaw Augustus, the last king of Poland, like many other Poles threw in his lot with Napoleon in the hope of liberating his own country after it had been swallowed up by Russia, Austria and Prussia at the end of the 18th century. He was a great general, leading the advance guard of Napoleon's army in the march on Moscow, and commanding its rear throughout the perilous retreat. Trapped and wounded in the battle of the nations at Leipzig, Poniatowski realised that the Polish cavalry under his command was doomed and chose honourable defeat. He rode his horse into the middle of the river Elster and drowned. He died on the 19th October 1813. Poland still did not exist as an independent country when the bronze medal was struck a hundred years later. It was meant as both memorial and inspiration.

Most East Europeans see history as unfinished business. It is as though the centuries have bequeathed them a pile of examination papers that have been failed—albeit often, as in Poniatowsky's case, heroically—by previous generations. Each new generation must take another shot at the old problems in the hope of conquering them one day. Seen in this light the history of East Europe since 1945 is less of an aberration. The struggle for independence that developed throughout the nineteenth century and was won, briefly, between the two world wars, had to be taken up again in the second half of the twentieth, long before the old exam papers had been forgotten. When in 1989 Hungarians were free again to take to the streets of Budapest to celebrate the anniversary of the revolution of 1848, their demands echoed point for point those drawn up then by the poet Sándor Petőfi.

Determination to continue the struggle of ancestors was the hidden message in our visit to the Church of the Holy Cross and in the gift of the bronze medal. Had I understood it at the time, it would have seemed a desperate boast. What Pole, even, could have then foreseen that a mere thirty-two years later another plaque would go up on the same church's walls to rival the one that marks the urn containing Chopin's heart? This new plaque is on the Western wall, by the Christ bent beneath the Cross. It records a meeting in the church in 1987 between Pope John Paul II and the Polish intelligentsia which took place during Karol Wojtyla's third papal visit to his country. His first visit, a Polish writer suggested, had been "Poland's second baptism", proof more powerful than even Poles can have dared hope for of the durability of Poland's marriage to the Catholic Church. The legacy of Józef Poniatowsky and others like him would also emerge in a thousand different ways. Some candidates at the elections in June 1990 used a three word motto in their campaign propaganda—Bóg, Honor, Ojczyzna. That was Poniatowsky's motto. After four decades of communism Poles were again being asked to respond to the cry of "God, Honour, Fatherland."

The journey to Poland ended with another omen that we also needed Polish help to understand. We left the country on a train that would go south into Czechoslovakia and re-enter the West in Bavaria. Before crossing the first border, we stopped at the Silesian city of Stalinogród to be given lunch by local young people. It was meant to be the final celebration of the youth festival, but when we had eaten together and the train began to pull out of the station the young Poles lined up on the platform and chanted in unison „Ka-to-wi-ce! Ka-to-wi-ce!”

Katowice was the town's old Polish name. To shout it aloud in public in 1955 bordered on treason against socialist Poland. Stalin might have been dead for two years but his successor, Nikita Khrushchov, had yet to make the secret speech that set off the first explosions under the dictator's granite reputation. The first of Poland's anti-communist revolts, the Poznan riots in which seventy four workers and policemen would die, was still a year away. There was only one person on the train who could properly appreciate the scene at Stalinogród-Katowice station. Stas, a Pole still in his teens, had joined us in Warsaw with the intention of smuggling himself to the West.

We had come across his elder brother Alex first. Alex was an early specimen of Soviet bloc dissident. There was something of the wide boy in him and a great deal of what Stas, years later, would describe with the American expression "shit-raiser". Alex regarded the youth festival as a marvellous harvest sent his way by stupid communists, and we were part of his catch. The brothers' father, a well-known journalist and diplomat, had died in a car crash which the family suspected might have been arranged by the communist secret police. Their mother was convinced that their background robbed the boys of any hope of a decent future in Poland and supported Stas's plan to escape.

Taller and more easy-going than his brother, he was just as casually dismissive of the brave new world he was supposed to be living in. The first idea was that one of our group, of Stas's height but with only very approximately the same features, would give him his passport, engineer an invitation to stay behind when we left, and later declare the passport lost. This unoriginal plan was dropped, not before Stas had dyed his hair black and made a larger burn on his hand with a cigarette to imitate the passport owner's birthmark. Instead he just got on the train in Warsaw as though refusing to accept that he was locked up in Poland like the rest of his fellow countrymen. It was dangerous enough for him to stay on the train while we were in Poland, for his English was poor and there was the risk that one of the young communists might turn him in. He was still in our carriage that evening as the train approached the Czech frontier.

There are not many places to hide in a railway carriage. Sometimes, there is space under the seat cushions but we were in third class and sitting on wood. There are spaces, too, above the ceiling panels in train corridors but there was no way Stas could climb into one of those unobserved, and the border guards were anyhow equipped with little step-ladders so they could climb up and poke around behind the panels. But the trains of forty years ago had luggage racks made of net, which on long journeys could be turned into tolerable hammocks. A rug on top of the netting, then Stas (luckily as slim as he was tall), another covering over him and then a girl pretending to be tired and ill—with such simple tricks, we discovered, was it possible to cross a frontier in Stalin's empire.

The Polish frontier guard asked the girl to come down, but was told she was not feeling well. Perhaps it was Polish gallantry; more likely we were saved by the illusion created by the festival we had attended. We were not potential body smugglers. We were progressive youth, friends of People's Poland. The guard, who was no older than us, hesitated and moved on. Our magical identity from the festival and a little juggling with passports got us over the second border with almost as little trouble. As the train crossed into Germany, Stas went into the corridor and danced.

It seemed a rare adventure, but it was nothing of the kind. Stas was an early link in a long, sad chain of escapees from communist East Europe. In the following year, 1956, tens of thousands of Hungarians would leave their country after the failure of their

uprising. Twelve years later it would be the turn of Czechoslovaks and also of most of Poland's remaining Jews. This stream of refugees was at first taken as evidence of the victory of the new order. People like Stas left because there was no place for them and apparently never would be. The communist rulers were pleased to see them go, for it seemed safer to dump this human rubbish in the West than to store it at home. Nevertheless the new regimes still feared that the émigrés might be dangerous. Not for nothing did the Polish government ban the works of Joseph Conrad, whose championing of fidelity even to a lost cause was seen as encouragement to anti-communist resistance. East European governments through their embassies in the West kept close watch on émigré communities, and, in the case of Bulgaria, were prepared to kill outstanding or troublesome personalities among them as late as the 1980s. Czesław Kiszcak, a young officer in Polish military intelligence sent to observe Britain's large Polish community after the war, was to become a general and the mastermind of the martial law imposed in Poland at the end of 1981. Eight years later, as minister of the interior, Kiszcak would negotiate the return of Solidarity to legality and so unwittingly prepare the way for the final defeat of communism in Poland. The communists' fear of Conrad had proved justified: a lost cause can become a winning one if enough people remain faithful to it.

Ever since the Russian revolution people had argued about whether it was better to leave a communist country or to stay. There seemed greater strength in the argument of those who stayed because so many of those who left continued to wonder whether they had done the right thing. Pride in staying, whatever the price, and scorn for those who left, was expressed by the Russian poet Anna Akhmatova when, as an elderly woman, she looked back on her life in the Soviet Union she had determined never to leave.

*No, not under foreign skies
Or under foreign wings' protection.
I was together with my people,
Where they, to their misfortune, were.*

As time passed it turned out, just as the communists feared, that many of the émigrés had not really gone away. Their faces became plainer and plainer to see in the puzzle picture of the supposedly new East Europe. The Polish historian Adam Michnik was one of the first to understand why. In Poland, too, where many educated men and women were brought up by their families in a tradition of resistance, it was natural to suppose that those intellectuals and artists who left Poland were little better than traitors to the national cause. But Michnik discovered that this emigration performed an important function. It acted, he said, as the lungs through which Poland and the rest of East Europe could draw in badly needed fresh, free air from the outside world. Identities and values under assault from the communists at home could be protected and developed abroad. In this way East Europe lived two lives, one confined within its geographic frontiers, the other spreading out over the great web of emigration in West Europe and North America. Little magazines and struggling printing presses developed so fast that by the 1980s no one doubted the most important publishing houses of Czech literature were in Canada, not in Prague. Even those exiles who seemed to have no use, or to be lost for ever in the past, probably served a purpose because the ecology of an emigration, like that of a forest, is a complicated matter: a necessary mixture of the living and the dying. The Polish

government-in-exile in its "castle" in London governed nothing at all, but its existence, however artificial and even comic, reminded people that the communists had taken power unconstitutionally. The maimed pilot, who taught us Russian grammar, was part of this rich and indispensable émigré forest and so too were the pair of counts, the old one and the young, however obscure their function in it to others or themselves.

Beginning in the 1970s a different sort of East European began to turn up in the West. Some stayed; others came to work for a while and then went home; the luckiest just popped across for the shopping. The governments of East Europe were less sure about the desirability of letting them go than it had been about losing the post-war refugees, but they had little choice. The regimes of East Europe were beginning to have intimations of the economic disaster that would contribute so powerfully to driving them out of power. Daunted by the continuing world revolution in economics and technology, and falling deeper into debt with the West, they realised that the Iron Curtain no longer performed the function they had expected of it. Far from being a protective wall around a socialist paradise, it was becoming a shaming divide between decline and prosperity, with the East Europeans on the wrong side of it. Previously despised western émigrés were transformed into desirable partners by the magic of hard currency. George Soros, a successful Hungarian-American financier, was allowed to set up a foundation in Budapest to repair in many ingenious ways the damage forty years' isolation had done to the country he abandoned as a young man. Polish businessmen returned to Warsaw from the West and, though hobbled by restrictions, were given a chance to show off the skills they had learned abroad.

Stas, too, went back. He was given a visa in the summer of 1979 for John Paul II's first visit home. We stood together one warm evening in Kraków outside the archbishop's palace while thousands of young Poles sang songs for the Polish pope who listened to them from a balcony, he as reluctant to go to bed as they to end their performance. Eleven years later Stas was married (for the second time) in the church of the Holy Visitation on Krakowskie Przedmiescie, not far from where he met the British students who, without giving the matter much thought, helped him to leave Warsaw in 1955. Thirty-five years—forty-five if you count from the war's end—is the best part of a man or woman's life. They cannot be recovered any more than the wheel of history can be made to turn full circle. The familiar characters who have returned to East Europe are therefore not entirely familiar. It is an illusion to suppose that Poles, Hungarians and Rumanians have thrown off their socialist masks to become the same people they were fifty years ago, as though nothing had happened in their countries during that time. They may, like their ancestors, be patriots but they cannot be patriots in an identical mould. They can sing the same old songs but they will hear a different meaning in them. They have undergone a searing experience. Victims of the most ambitious revolution man has yet known, they are the proof that this revolution, and the heavy bundle of ideas and hopes that fuelled it, were flawed, that the devil's work emerged from what once had seemed a gift from heaven. No one knows what lasting effect this experience will have on the survivors and their countries. All we know is that they have fought free of that malign revolution with something like a revolution of their own. How they did it is the story of this book.

Democracy has no nationality

András Sütő in a television interview

What can I say about our present cares and struggles? I don't even know where to begin. But perhaps it would be instructive if I confined myself to recent developments.

Marosvásárhely (Tirgu Mures) is the city in Transylvania where feelings run highest today on minority rights. Here we have the greatest number of student demonstrations, discussions at the university, the greatest number of student strikes, and it is in this town that you can see best what terrible and turbulent passions have been brought up from the depths by the process that started in the country at large, and with which our demands for national minority rights are linked.

The other day we celebrated March 15th at Marosvásárhely for the first time in forty years. A gala evening was put on at the local Palace of Culture and the next day wreaths were laid at the memorial places. We had also invited the leadership, the Rumanian members of the municipal leadership. We had to note with disappointment that none of them turned up at these celebrations of ours. Then we were forced to experience with the same disappointment that the participants of a demonstration after the celebrations, Rumanian youths, a group about 30-40 strong, crashed into the Bem House, stamped up to the balcony and tore down the Hungarian Embassy's wreath because it had a red-white-green national ribbon. They put in its place another flag, the Rumanian national flag. Or take this morning, when we had a bitter discussion at a meeting of the RMDSZ (Hungarian Democratic Federation of Rumania) executive about our present duties, in circumstances where the Vatra Romaneasca organization is daily calling rallies that end in scandalous punch-ups, and when they are doing everything in their power to stifle the local student movements for Hungarian schools.

This organization, the Vatra Romaneasca, called a rally following the March 15th celebrations to protest against a few Hungarian signs that had appeared in town. In the window of a chemist's shop, the Hungarian *gyógyszertár* appeared in addition to the Rumanian *farmacie*. It was terrible to experience yesterday afternoon that 1,500-2,000 persons were capable of gathering in front of a lone Hungarian word, and how they roared against that word, how they were able to interpret such things as a Hungarian assault on their manly and their national honour.

Let that be. But I also experienced, in connection with you who arranged this interview on the part of Hungarian Television, that is, I was horrified to see how the camera was

András Sütő's words were broadcast on March 19th 1990, the day a howling mob subjected him to a savage beating, leaving him with several broken bones, and requiring surgery in the United States in an attempt to save the sight of his left eye.

knocked out of your hands, how you were attacked by vandals, and it is no exaggeration to say that you could easily have been literally beaten to death but for a few tough Hungarian workmen who were present.

Could it be that their consciences weren't clear—obviously they were scared of the cameras—were they afraid of international public opinion? They beat up other journalists too, were they ashamed of what they were doing?

I can't decide, for they keep saying proudly and loudly that all they are fighting for is their rights, and only to prevent the Transylvanian Hungarians from getting into a position where they could oppress them again, as the Hungarian state had oppressed them, they maintain, for a thousand years.

It is regrettable that this should have occurred in a situation when one can state that the Hungarian community in Rumania has not been granted, in actual fact, a single right enacted in law except the right, announced in principle and in general terms, that they may fight for their rights. We have now reached a state when the Hungarians in Rumania have started their struggle for their equal rights, having been given permission to do so by declarations of principle. One of the local versions of this series of struggles is what is known as the dialogue, which is beginning to become something of an end in itself; I mean, what the government, instead of decreeing rights taken away by decrees by decree, is doing in fact, in its insecure position, is seeking a solution by offering a dialogue to the whole country over minority rights too. What this means in actual fact is that the government leaves the matter of the nurseries to the nursery kids, the cause of the restoration of Hungarian secondary schools to the school kids—Hungarians and Rumanians—to fight it out between them; it leaves the issue of the university to the university students, bilingual signs to the decisions of the particular body and so on and so forth, turning in this way the whole of Transylvania into a forum to discuss rights which could be granted right away, in a practical way, by issuing decrees.

I do think, and this is my personal experience too, that the trouble is that this cacophony can be called anything but a dialogue. This is our own submission and we are putting it forward day after day, and all we get in return usually is booing, catcalls, shouting or serious accusations. The accusation in this case now says that the intention behind our national and legal demands is really one of wrenching Transylvania from Rumania. Naturally, it is not only difficult but impossible to explain to them that through the restoration of the Bólyai Secondary School, the restarting of a Hungarian-language school of long-standing, we do not in any way want to tear Transylvania out of Rumania. The debate continues and will obviously continue, while our demands are unchanged and remain timely, and even as we are talking, thousands of Rumanian youths are out in the streets demonstrating and shouting insulting anti-Hungarian slogans.

We have sent a strongly worded protest to the Rumanian government, to Parliament and we are demanding that the government should give armed protection to the minorities in Transylvania. We also intend to demand that should this protection fail to be provided for the Hungarian masses, especially in those areas where they are in a minority—I'm not thinking of the Székely country—we'll have to resort to other action, one of the things we are considering is UN observation in some form or other to supervise this process. Otherwise there is a very real danger of pogroms.

According to information I received today, that is, March 17th, 17 persons were injured in the course of the demonstrations. This should not be interpreted as a clash between

Hungarian and Rumanian crowds, because hardly any Hungarians took part in these demonstrations, what happened was that some of those who spoke Hungarian on the pavements or on the road were attacked, men, women, children and old people, and quite a few of them were seriously injured and taken to casualty wards. It is to be feared now that the official Rumanian media will inform the public that the Marosvásárhely Hungarian masses are really to blame for everything. Today I was shocked to learn about a Rompress release that the events, which could be called tragic, occurred yesterday because a Hungarian woman chemist simply removed, scratched out, the Rumanian sign from the chemist's shop and replaced it by a Hungarian sign. She allegedly said, after displaying the Hungarian sign, that in future she would serve only Hungarians and Hungarian citizens. When examples of fabrications as blatant as this and downright lies can be associated with the official Rumanian media, Rompress in this particular case, then our concern seems justified that our minority struggle will be pretty long yet and we'll have to explain our record many times over, again and again, in the future.

What else can I say?

A national convention of Hungarian youth organisations is taking place today. The young are still confidently and stubbornly, in all forms and with all possible means, political means I should emphasise, attempting to regain something of the rights we lost, to build up, among other things, the network of our national schools once again. These young people have asked me if I would send them a short message if I can't be present in person at their deliberations, and now I'd like to quote to you from this address because in it I speak not only of our hardships but also of what we can still trust in, which are those positive developments in the country which give us some comforting hope. Well, in this brief letter I speak to the young about the revolution having cut off at least two of the heads of the seven-headed dragon but some heads are all alive, baring their teeth, belching forth flames and one of them belches the flame that is called privilege, based on ancient priorities. On the sovereign rights of many thousands of years. It was one of the pet theses of the bullet-riddled dictator. But do not believe that there no longer are Rumanian historians of European stature and thinking who have been silenced to this day for their objective, impartial views. We must trust that these Rumanian historians will have their right to speak restored in the new order of things. Another head of the dragon belches forth the flame that is called linguistic imperialism. Let me say that we had, and still have, Rumanian friends, poets who have learnt the language of Vörösmarty and Petőfi for the sake of good translations. This spirit will continue to oppose the theory and exercise of chauvinist linguistic imperialism. It is a small band, but their presence is still very comforting. The third dragon head belches forth the flame that is called enforced assimilation. The chief instrument in this were the schools deprived of the rightful use of our native language. We will certainly restore these schools in accordance with our justified demands. This process, that has already started, evidently has its setbacks and reversals. Indeed, in some places, it seems impossible, as you know all too well. But it is unstoppable because the demands of Europe's largest national minority cannot be hid under a bushel and because we have faithful allies in this, too.

The fourth head of the dragon belches forth the flame which could be called unjustifiable suspicion against our rightful aspirations for equality. Even shortly before his execution the dictator stressed, if only to prolong his ignominious rule for no matter how briefly, that the country's territorial integrity was in danger, Hungarian revisionist

forces wanted to annex and conquer Transylvania. Need we reiterate that just as every word of his, this too was a damnable lie serving only to mislead the Rumanian nation? And even more despicable was the accusation that the strivings of the Hungarian minority for equality of rights had this motive behind them. And the dictator still has bastard offspring alive. They continue to spread this false charge, this childish lie about us. It is deplorable that it can still mislead many people, setting them against us. But we must know that the more determined our position is that the Hungarian community in Rumania, along with the nations of Europe, respects the state borders that came about after the Second World War, the greater are the chances that these suspicions harboured against us can be dispelled.

Finally, the fifth remaining head of the dragon belches forth the flame that we could call excess minority privilege, differential treatment at the expense of others, of Rumanian citizens. Need we say that such inclinations towards hegemony could hardly have developed among us during our existence as a minority in the past seventy years? Need we say that we never wanted to be more equal in a democratic equality? That we conceive of our natural human rights as the right of all living beings to water and air, according to the long-established laws of the European nations and national minorities. The fanatical opponents of our rights, but even some of our honest partners in the debate sometimes think that there is a European democracy and within that a special Rumanian democracy too. If anything, democracy has no nationality. Human equality has no special national variety. It is one and indivisible throughout this planet. We hold ourselves to that as the intellectual heirs of the best minds of the past and present, as the supporters of humanism.



The pogrom in Marosvásárhely

András Sütő's taperecorded journal entry

András Sütő has been keeping a journal for several years. During the revolution in Rumania and later, at the time of the pogrom in Marosvásárhely, he didn't have time to write in entries. The author, who was badly beaten up, dictated the text published below using a tape recorder. An authentic account has thus been recorded of the tragic events. The tape was made available by his son-in-law, László Cselényi, a television director.

At noon Dec. 22 1989 I was in bed with a fever and was awakened by the voice of young people from my sleep. Outside my home a crowd of some three hundred young people had gathered, throwing bunches of flowers into the yard, or handing them to my wife through the window, while chanting an invitation to me to go with them to the main square of the city.

Then they put me in an ambulance, surrounded me in a protective circle against any possible attack by the Securitate. They pushed my head down, respectfully but all the more resolutely, in case it should be the target of a bullet. I was deeply moved by the thoughtful generosity of the youngsters.

In the main square of the city, from the window of the Palace of Culture, I addressed a crowd of about one hundred thousand, who made on this occasion a noble profession of faith in the brotherhood of Hungarians and Rumanians. I too spoke of the Hungarian and Rumanian young people who fell and shed blood together for the overthrow of the dictatorship. And I also said that the blood they shed together could strengthen, more than anything else, a brotherhood that we needed so much in Transylvania, the common land of Rumanians, Hungarians and Germans.

I was seriously disappointed in this hope. After the Vatra Romaneasca, which styles itself a cultural organization, had appeared on the political scene in Marosvásárhely, precious little remained of the fraternity that we'd seen in Marosvásárhely at the time of the December revolution.

I am not saying of course that Vatra had succeeded in turning every decent Rumanian into a rabid anti-Hungarian. It is rather that it had intimidated even the Rumanians and forced a considerable part of the Hungarians to defend themselves through its terrorist manifestations and violent actions in February and March of this year, when the atmosphere became so tense between the two communities following demands for the restoration of Hungarian schools and the reopening of the Hungarian university.

Vatra has always chosen aggressive, violent means in response to the Hungarians' peaceful demonstrations with books and candles. They made it their regular practice to transport men into the town from Rumanian villages some 40 km away in order to throw them into battle according to prearranged plans, using cutting and stabbing implements against the Hungarians.

It was learned through many sources that these Rumanian peasants had been fanaticised in the most despicable way by the spreading of rumours that their Rumanian brothers were being massacred in Marosvásárhely or that Transylvania's re-conquest by Hungarians had already started. In their fanatical state and especially under the effect of lavishly distributed drink, these villagers would then set on the Hungarian inhabitants of the city with the most brutal savagery.

They did the same on March 19th too. Who the organisers and instigators were on that particular day of the attempt to murder Hungarians on a mass scale will only be possibly determined by an impartial and rigorous investigation. The fact is that the same forces were at work as those behind the earlier atrocities.

On the morning of March 19th a small crowd of Rumanians were gathering in front of the County House and the City Hall chanting ancient, absurd slogans: "We shall die, we shall fight, we shall never surrender Transylvania!" I call them absurd because no threat has been made against Rumania in this respect on the part of any country whatever.

The crowd was swelled by Rumanian peasants brought in by lorries from the countryside; it then forced its way into the County House and forced two important Hungarian leaders to resign in public. Since the two (Előd Kincses and Attila Jakabffy) had been on the executive bodies of the county as elected representatives of the Hungarian population, it is natural that the workers of the towns should have mobilised themselves at the news of their replacement.

Some of us at the County leadership of the RMDSZ (Hungarian Democratic Federation of Rumania) took a view of the situation that the matter of the two Hungarian leaders forced to resign should be clarified not on the streets, and certainly not by way of violent clashes, and at the expense of innocent lives.

Personally I was strongly against directing unorganised workers to oppose the challenge of the wild, uncontrolled and bloodthirsty crowd that had in the meantime grown to four or five thousand and was armed with all sorts of cutting and stabbing weapons. Therefore around 4 p.m. I made a short speech from the window of the RMDSZ headquarters to those 150 to 200 Hungarian workers who were anxious and willing to come to our rescue, emphasising all the time that unnecessary bloodshed was to be avoided at all costs.

By that time, however, the Rumanian crowd had arrived in front of the headquarters and surrounded it. About seventy of us were trapped in the building.

We could still have made our escape in the turmoil but only one by one, so we decided to stay together in the rooms of the headquarters, and that none of us inside should be left to himself; we would escape together or die together.

The bloodthirsty crowd demanded that we should be handed to them so they could hang us there on the spot. "Give them to us, let's hang them!" That was one of their war cries. The other was this: "We shall die, we shall fight, we shall never surrender Transylvania!" (It is typical that the request of the Hungarians for the establishment of a nursery school drew the same response: "We shall die, we shall fight, we shall never surrender Transylvania!") That is the kind of dialogue we have in Transylvania these days.

They also shouted that László Tőkés, Károly Király, Előd Kincses, András Sütő and Bolyai should be hanged. The latter is the father of the famous mathematician who had died in 1856 and whose name is borne today by the almost five hundred year old school which the Hungarians in Marosvásárhely would like to restore to what it was before, a

Calvinist secondary school with Hungarian as its language of instruction. In that school Hungarian language instruction and Hungarian classes were gradually eliminated in the Ceausescu era.

In the end the doors of our headquarters were battered down on every side and the furniture of the offices smashed up, causing damage of several million Leis.

We fled to the attic and barricaded ourselves there to protect ourselves against being massacred.

It was then the slogan was given outside that the building should be set on fire. Shortly after the attackers appeared on the stairs to the attic, brandishing flaming newspapers, but we managed to make them retreat from the staircase by pelting them with broken tiles. Had we not resorted to this defensive tactic, they would certainly have set fire to the staircase leading to the attic. They repeated their attempt at arson several times, and every time we managed to keep them at bay by throwing tiles at them. This could have been the incident about which the Prime Minister, Petre Roman, said that we were not without aggression either. I do not wish to comment on Mr Roman's extremely original notions of aggression and self-defence.

Sometime later, however, Colonel Judea, the leading man of the city, arrived on the scene and told us that the danger of setting fire to the building was indeed real, and therefore he advised us to entrust ourselves into his care and let him lead us out of the building.

We had drawn up a list of those who escaped to the attic so that our names should be known in case we were to fall victim to arson. That was a real danger to be reckoned with, as the army itself was helping the fanatics with the petrol and crude oil required.

So we heeded the words of Mr Judea and left the attic and proceeded through our offices only to be welcomed on the way with blows and kicks from the defenders of the country's territorial integrity.

Leaving through the entrance of the building, a group of 10–15, including myself, clambered onto a waiting military lorry that had been ordered there; no sooner had we done so than we were attacked with axes, iron rods and knives, which one of the Vatra leaders later described as "traditonal working implements."

I received a staggering blow on my left cheek and forehead but did not lose consciousness and got on my feet to avoid being trampled to death.

With hindsight I think the organizers of the mass extermination had allowed about three minutes to execute us but it might have been longer. For when the military lorry, whose canvas had been ripped on purpose to allow the attackers to get at us more easily, began to move at last, the attackers were nowhere to be seen.

I have to add that I had seen a cordon of policemen and soldiers in front of the blood-thirsty mob but the moment we appeared this living wall broke up, and didn't bother to make one gesture to protect us, and needless to say Colonel Judea, who had guaranteed our safe conduct, wasn't to be seen anywhere either.

The first obvious symptoms of my injuries were established at the emergency ward of the Marosvásárhely Surgery Clinic. Three broken ribs, the loss of my left eye, cracked carpal bones, other bruises. I was taken from Marosvásárhely to Bucharest, from there to Budapest for surgery.

About the rest next time round.

Zsigmond Remenyik

A Hungarian on the Falklands, 1921

During that period of my life which shall serve as a basis for the following narrative, I was employed as boots and kitchen help, later as waiter and barman right there at the Deutscher Bund Hotel down in Buenos Aires in the Argentine. It all happened at the very start of the twenties, in the autumn and summer of 1921, to be precise (therefore from January to April of the said year), a few months after I arrived in South America from Europe, in rags and penniless. I described and published once before, close on twenty years ago, what the conditions were, what hardships and indignities I had to endure, so I shall not burden the reader with the details. I was, then, working at the Deutscher Bund Hotel where an interpreter and guide named Lüdecke had got me a job, away from day-labouring as a hod-carrier and mixing the mortar when, coming from the Falkland Islands, from Saint George's, whalers on leave in their huge winter fur coats, caps and shapeless fur-lined boots, like migratory birds, tired, longing for rest, flooded and filled this third-rate, untidy, dirty and disreputable hotel...

I ought to say here what this hotel was like. This tumble-down, ramshackle, patched-up old building stood in the vicinity of the Retiro-station and the harbour on one of the wide, airy, sunny alamedas built in a style much favoured by the architects of the last century but differing from the plain, unplastered contours of the neighbouring shops and dwellings with tawdry, ornate gables and vaulted, shady collonades fashioned in the style of guild halls. The name, HOTEL DEUTSCHER BUND, glittered on the façade of the building, in black, fancy Gothic lettering, struggling with the fog, wind and crumbling rain of decades, not entirely without success, for while the building itself crumbled, mouldered and fell apart, these man-size, triumphant letters were plainly visible from the distant seashore, from ships making for port. Thick-trunked, scaly palm-trees lined the wide boulevard in front of the hotel and all along the sea front to the left and right, in the direction of the Retiro-station as well as towards the broad pink expanse of Casa Rosada, the Presidential Palace.

This tumble-down, dilapidated building was full of vermin, mice and rats. What was its secret, its charm and attraction, why did immigrants, but especially poor Bavarian and

Zsigmond Remenyik (1900–1962) was a novelist and playwright who, in rebellion against his gentry background, set out in his youth to rough his way round the world. He spent a few months in the Falklands in 1921. His account, *Vándorlások könyve* (*The Book of Wanderings*), though written much earlier, could only be published in 1956. The excerpts printed here are taken from Chapters 1 and 2.

Baltic Russian peasants working on the pampas and in the neighbourhood of the Tucuman, flock there in their droves to find shelter for shorter or longer periods, that—even with full knowledge of the situation—would be hard to discover and define exactly. For even the staff, all of us there—and obviously things were the same before and after our times—were unreliable, slack, insolent, rude and hostile. Within living memory, we misled, slighted and tricked the guests whenever we could, besides going about our duties like men condemned, the reason for which was that the owner, Don Carlos Knöpfle, being miserly, close-fisted, aggressive and distrustful, never hired a suitable person to work in this hotel. Rumour had it that he picked his staff from the untrustworthy scum that had outlived their usefulness even on the waterside and as day-labourers—and that was truly the case. It was as if he selected us ham-handedly, in bad faith on purpose—there wasn't a single one amongst us who did what he was entrusted honestly, cheerfully and knowing what he was about. As a result, the hotel was like a rubbish-dump, not to mention that anything we laid our hands on, if it did not get lost, turned into dust, was destroyed and disintegrated in our hands. Taps broke off, glasses were broken, doors and windows came off their hinges, but even pots and pans, cauldrons and kettles, buckets and bowls became unfit for use in a matter of weeks in the kitchens; banisters gave way, stairs collapsed and came tumbling down, pipes burst in the walls, as a result of which a wall caved in on the upper floor in one of the rooms beneath the loft—in places it was only the roofbeams and pillars that kept the building from falling into total collapse.

[...]

Well, the arrival of these whalers was by itself something like a flood. Up they came from the harbour and, as soon as they had deposited their sacks, shabby trunks and baskets beneath the long, grubby counter, they began ordering hot toddies, beer, every kind of hard liquor, bols and gin and all sorts of spirits distilled from grain and sugar-cane. Those who served them milled around them, for we all knew their habits and expected to be bought a drink or two. Don Carlos stood behind the bar, leaning his stocky, shapeless arms on the table-top, his black straw hat pulled low down on his forehead, with a smug smile on his lips. These were the familiar, peaceful moments of the *Deutscher Bund Hotel*, the occasions and moments that illuminated the ramshackle old building, the only moments truly worth living for—and this was true for Don Carlos as well as for us, the servants of the hostelry—even Don Carlos himself drank, as did the kitchen staff, the waiters, the barman and the boots, Horst Bock, the bookkeeper drank, and Henrik, the porter-cum-interpreter-cum-corridor-bell-hop, the cooks drank, and the other guests did—for one had to admit that for as long as human memory stretched back, these whalers, miners and lumber jacks, who inundated the hotel in regular waves to rest and enjoy themselves, had never been tight-fisted or petty with money.

The whole evening, running well into the night, was spent by those of us working at the bar or in the neighbouring dining-rooms listening to the banter and story-telling of the whalers. For a while Don Carlos throned it among us, recalling us to our duties with stern and surly looks whenever he thought we had been idle for too long or had ventured too close to the enormous green baize-covered round table. But around midnight he picked himself up and, as was his custom every night before going to bed, he climbed up to the loft to make sure that the roof had not collapsed, that the dark, billowing sea had not left

its bed and that neither the moon nor any of the stars were missing but were there in the sky. As soon as he had gone, Hans Hönig and I who had been washing up the dirty dishes behind the bar these last few weeks, ventured closer to the table too. We ate and drank, and sang full-throated with the whalers—and on nights such as these Don Carlos would not have raised objections even if we happened to set fire to the hotel. The whalers were rolling in money and while it lasted they threw it about recklessly, as crazy, poor people generally do, who drift hungry and harassed, without a purpose in life. Don Carlos could therefore go to bed peacefully, sleeping without a qualm.

And so it happened that, in these underworld surroundings and elementary confusion, one evening, as Hans Hönig and I were about to go to bed, having cleared away the glasses, pitchers and other dishes, wiping the counter clean, one of the whalers, Leopold Werner by name, of an old Pomeranian family of fishermen, came knocking at our door. This Werner was a short, skinny little man, no longer young, middle-aged rather, who, unlike the other whalers, wore a battered, crumpled hat instead of a fur cap, thin cotton gloves instead of thick, fuzzy fur-lined mittens—most probably from habit and possibly for reasons of cleanliness—and a thick grey cloth coat instead of the long, ankle-length fur coats or short sheepskin jacket, a coat many sizes too large that flapped about him in which he seemed quite lost. A smile hovered around the corners of his mouth and his eyes always twinkled merrily. He shut the door of our shack carefully behind him and, as he sat down on the edge of the bed, he covered his knees with the folds of his long, anklelength coat. He held a small pipe between his teeth and the hat on his head had slipped down to his ears.

“The reason why I’ve come”, he said, “is to tempt you to leave this place. Come to think of it, the job you do in this cave is not for you. You’re lads, not dish-washing old hags. To say nothing of Don Carlos and this bloody hovel, this rat-infested hole and robber’s den—you don’t seriously mean to squander away your youth here? Come down to the island with us as fishermen. I’ve already talked over things with the others and they have no objections. You’ll see, down on the island you’ll be doing an honest job of work you’ll find suits you; you’ll even manage to put something by in a couple of years, unless you booze it or gamble it away in the canteen, for there’s no chance to spend it on women, four days sailing from dry land you won’t. Thank your lucky stars you’ll be getting out of here in one piece, without coming to grief like that scatter-brained poor sod Horst or that miserable Indian boy, José... Think it over. But if you do not come to your senses and go on drudging here you’ll live to see the roof cave in on you!... One of our sort can only perish in this bottomless, dirty big city.”

We talked far into the night and later, after Werner had left, Hans Hönig and I discussed things at length. Or, rather, it was me who weighed the pros and cons, for, to tell the truth, Hans Hönig was against the idea from the start—he was carrying on with a servant at the hotel, a short, thin Bavarian widow, an immigrant who was expecting his child, and therefore, honest and simple-minded that he was, he could scarcely contemplate such a distant venture—whereas nothing bound me to this place, nor to my miserable duties. What is more, every day that I spent in these decrepit, god-forsaken quarters under Don Carlos’ firm hand counted as time squandered and wasted, lost out of what in this wide, free, immeasurable world lay ahead at the age of twenty.

[...]

Getting up in the morning I therefore I decided to accept Leopold Werner's proposal to go to Saint George's with them and turn fisherman. Autumn was coming in, and with these last autumnal days in April, getting shorter in the Southern hemisphere, we did the rounds of a few of the bars where we were welcomed like so many pieces of gold. The fishermen were having a last fling, down the dark alleys of the harbour, creating confusion in the dimly lit parlours, standing the thick-skinned, garishly-made-up girls on their heads—so that, by the time we presented ourselves before Don Carlos for our last good-byes, we were all wilted and yellow like lemons. The day we set sail was a holiday, a day of festivity and a Sunday afternoon—an enormous jute warehouse was burning in the harbour and dense darkness began to cover the city of steeples, cathedrals and thick-trunked palm-trees. From the sea and a still starry sky, a wild wind whistled.

The sea was stormy too and for the first two days it seemed that the heavens had become deranged: green and grey winds churned the leaden waters of an ocean that was ever more desolate and forsaken. The fog settled, shrouding sky and water in hopeless grey. Night and day all you could hear was the booming of the waves that muffled the noise of the struggling engines as the wind drove the created foaming waves wildly and mercilessly forward. Slowly, after the heavy, leaden clouds the moon rose early and almost unexpectedly, enveloping the infinite, restless expanse of water in a silver haze. Then the snow began to fall in thick flakes. It seemed as if we had reached the fringe of the sinking underworld—we appeared to be surrounded by strange, hostile and vindictive elements. We slowly approached the island of Saint George on our ship.

We spent the entire journey down in the hold by the red-hot, smoky engines, trying to keep warm. We drank too, naturally mostly rum and pisco, and did so immoderately, especially the fishermen, who could hold their liquor. But as time passed and we neared the island, depression struck us like an epidemic and everyone became conspicuously morose and silent.

"Another year, but ten months at least, if all goes well", they kept on saying, and to console themselves and each other, they recalled and reminded each other of the glorious experiences of those past weeks of rest, but chiefly the Deutscher Bund Hotel, the Hotel Stadt Wien and all the other bars, gambling-houses, player pianos, and, of course, the girls who worked at the water-front. "Drudgery will be soon upon us", they said bitterly, their voices disillusioned. "Gibbons and bickering and the canteen and the whalers. And no more Buenos Aires, no more La Plata, nor more warm sea-bathing and idling under the palm-trees in front of the cathedral, not for a whole year."

"The drudgery will end, just like this spree, and we'll soon be going into town again to have us some fun," said Werner, lighting up his tiny pipe and pulling his shabby hat firmly over his eyes. Then, with a serene smile playing around the corners of his mouth, he turned to me and added:

"Listening to these boys one would think that Buenos Aires, La Plata, and especially the Deutscher Bund Hotel and the Stadt Wien was the hub of the universe with Don Carlos the good Lord himself, and yet...! As far as I'm concerned I must admit I wouldn't exchange the island for a hundred cities. Of course, I look forward as well all year and especially towards the end to our little kicking over the traces, which is the lot of our kind, and is no more than our due after a year of mouldering away, but ever since I left Pomerania twenty years ago I've always felt most at peace, most content on this island,

on these waters. And I used to be a gardener and even spent two years gardening near Mendoza, then I was out on the pampas too looking after Don Sebastian's oxen. I even worked in the mines up in Bolivia at Senor Patino's. But this has always been the best—whaling, and this island.”

“You’ll see, sonny,” Leopold Werner added, “things’ll go fine for you too. The main thing is to do an honest job of work, and if you see that Cardenas or one of the other overseers got out on the wrong side of the bed in the morning, pretend to be blind or dumb, as though they were talking to a brick wall, don’t even answer them! We’ll find you a place in the barracks, or in the canteen, or maybe in the store, cleaning fish, but you could well find yourself on a ship with us in a few months. Just remember to hold your peace and ignore the overseers and their grumbles. Above all watch Cardenas, for no matter how things may stand, how many managers, managing directors and chairmen there may be, on this island Gibbons and Cardenas are the bosses, they’re in charge, they’re the big dogs. Keep your mouth shut, do your job well, and put your pennies by. In this world if you don’t help yourself, sonny, you’ll perish like a dog. Our kind, if we don’t keep our eyes open, are gnawed away by women, liquor rots our guts, and we’re eaten by fish.”

And a few seconds later, lifting his eyes gravely to look me in the eyes and turning the collar of his coat up in the stifling clouds of steam, he added:

“But there is one thing you must never forget! Our kind—and you’re one of us now—has no land, no vineyard, no house and when you come to think of it, no place to call home either, at the most a chest where we keep our belongings and a bed to lie down at night. And this is a treasure, which most do not even understand, this is the greatest treasure on the earth! We are not trodden down by possessions, nor by any special, pitiful, ridiculous aim in life like pitching our tents somewhere, displaying our lucrative wares on the counter in front of it; we would not dream of sacrificing even a year of our lives, scratching around for the purpose of putting away enough in our stockings, purses hanging from our necks, or battered wooden boxes to buy ourselves a vineyard or a small house. A family does not bind us, nor crying children or wailing women—we are free in the strictest sense of the word! We go where and when we please! If we’re bored with the mines we can come up and be off for the pampas to look after Don Sebastian’s cattle, when we’ve had enough of that, we can build railways and roads in Brazil. From there to here and here to there, and if the mood takes us we can go up into the hills, on to the Patagonian table-lands with the hunters. We can go to Asia, Africa, Australia—is there a house-owner or a vine-grower who can say as much for himself? You needed no one’s permission to leave the mortar-mixing navvies or Don Carlos and that god-forsaken dump of a Deutscher Bund, just as I was able to leave Senor Patino and Don Sebastian with all their mines and cattle without so much as a by-your-leave or doffing my hat—the only thing we have to raise is our rumps and any of us can do that! This is what they call freedom, son, and you mustn’t exchange it for anything while there’s breath left in your body...”

It was late by the time he had finished and we soon went off to bed. The ship was passing through thick, wooly fog, blaring loudly as it made for harbour, for we were supposed to reach the island that night. Outside an icy wind whipped the foaming salt water and, signalling the closeness of land, scrawny gulls screeched and beat their wings around the blue, red, multicoloured lamps fastened to the mast...

[...]

The Falklands, where the ship berthed on the fifth day, consist of a few fairly large islands not more than a thirty-six hour journey away from the snow-capped, ice-bound, rocky tongue of the Southern continent, from the plateau of the Tierra del Fuego, eternally shrouded in mist, where Magellan first caught sight of the blazing fire at the head of his doomed fleet. Opposite, not within sight but only thirty-six hours away by a fast freighter or mail-boat, were the largest southern ports, Puerto Deseado and Santa Cruz, and behind them, at the foot of the vast range of the Andes, the bleak, barren valleys and the rocky table-lands of Patagonia. In these parts, around the Falkland Islands, the wind howled, roared, and raged eternally, covering the rocky shores and the salt water in a fog so dense and impenetrable that lamps had to be lit day and night all along the harbour between the shores and the barracks of the fishermen.

Well, in the Falklands it was on the island named after Saint George that the company had established a fishery; the central offices were in London but they had branch offices in Buenos Aires, Newfoundland, and Greenland, and their network of settlements, stores and processing plants covered every cold sea the world over.

The island itself was barren, cheerless and hopeless, completely bare of vegetation, except for stunted shrubs here and there and frozen, brittle, crackling blades of grass on the rocky highlands. Towering boulders rose up towards a sky lost in mist which only rarely cleared sufficiently to let the moon and the stars appear. Paths covered the island, rough paths cut deep into rock that led to wells and the pits used to store fish, and paths, naturally, to connect the places found suitable as moorings, established at various points on the island. The fishery itself lay in one of the western bays, extending over a large area at the foot of the cliffs lost to the eye in the fog, and facing the distant, invisible ports of Puerto Deseado and Santa Cruz. In these barren highlands, high above the bay and the restless sea were the stores, bodegas, offices and barracks, while down below, in the bay itself, securely chained and as close to the shore as possible, bobbed the tugs, ferries, pontoons, barges and fishing boats of various shapes and sizes, all invariably tough, heavy and squat.

There is perhaps no need for me to say that the central office rose up among the stores, bodegas and barracks like a temple or the witch-doctor's pile-dwelling towering above the makeshift, rubble-stone shacks of the scraggy, wretched Indians of distant Patagonia. The central office was a plain red-brick, two-storied house with the company's flag, showing harpoons, icebergs and a fisherman holding a fish in each hand, flying from its façade, continuously flapping in the wind. Gibbons and Cardenas, the overseers, lodged in this building, their offices separated from each other by a thin, grated wall, their windows overlooking the harbour lost in the fog-dampened, feeble, flickering glow of the lamps. These two, Gibbons and Cardenas, like the terrestrial commissioners of some invisible deity, kept an eye over the whole of the plant, handling the fishermen and the warehouse and bodega workers firmly, with a needless, cold lack of consideration. Both were tall men; Gibbons gaunt and haggard, Cardenas broader and bonier; his head was covered by a thatch of thick black hair, while Gibbons's hair was fair and sparse, his head almost bald. Their voices carried far and their gazes seemed able to penetrate even the densest fog. They competed with each other in currying favour with the company, hated and despised each other and were united only in jointly cheating, defrauding and stealing from the company.

Our lodgings—that is, the living quarters of the fishermen and those of the workers of varying rank and status who served in the bodegas, warehouses and canteens, were scattered about in several barracks, situated behind the stores in a long line. It was naturally the warehouses that stood closest to the central office building, sprouting from it, clinging to it, as it were, overshadowing the canteens, bodegas and barracks. You could not say that the barracks were not clean—despite the fact that they served as lodgings for people of all walks of life, recruited from all over the world, but especially, in the greatest number, from the highlands of the continent opposite, among the poor Indians of Patagonia, who were backward, half-wild and almost barbaric in their habits. The buildings were clean and you could even say that order reigned over the plant. Cardenas and Gibbons watched over it with the almost invisible magic force of their being like true incarnations of intractable law, petrified order and ruthless power.

These few months that I spent in the fog-bound area of the southern cold seas on Saint George's Island among the fishermen were, if not the most difficult, then surely one of the most difficult periods of my harsh and stormy youth, especially, and all the more, because everything around me seemed without pity, the weather in itself being of the sort that wore down body and soul. Undoubtedly all that I had to suffer in the form of hard work, misery, humiliation, fear and uncertainty during these wretched four or five months would have been easier to endure in a big city, or in the hills, or even in the tropics with the solace of warm winds and palm-trees to comfort me. I shivered in the cold, though at first I worked in the stores and later on general duty in the fishermen's quarters; surrounded by four walls, the ice, snow and eternal frost froze my limbs and chilled me to the bone. In the treacherous, icy, windy fog I shivered incessantly throughout my stay. My hands, ears and feet were frost-bitten so painfully that it seemed unbearable, since I had to be on my feet from sunrise to sunset pressing kegs, packing crates, or, later on, sweeping floors, washing dishes, running about senselessly, suffering pain that was almost unendurable.

Werner himself, almost with compassion and concern, said repeatedly every time of an evening when he saw me greasing my frost-bitten limbs covered with sores: "This work is not for you, Heinrich." For even in Buenos Aires, in the Deutscher Bund Hotel he had always used the name Don Carlos had stuck on me, thinking that my original, legitimate name was too unusual for the miserable guests of his wretched German, Bavarian, nay, South American Bavarian hotel. "This work is not for you, son," he said, "and if I had known that you would suffer so from the cold and eternal winter of this place I should never have enticed you away from Buenos Aires. We'll stick the year out somehow, and when the year's up I think I'll be moving on with you, for I'm getting tired of this island—especially of the company we're forced to keep, with Gibbons and Cardenas heading the list, for they're not simply thieves content with robbing the company they work for but thieves who cheat and rob even us, struggling, miserable fishermen, and are inhuman, ruthless, rabid dogs besides. When the year is up we'll go over to Santa Cruz or Puerto Deseado and if we don't fancy it there, or things don't work out, we'll move on to the pampas or over to Chile or even further."

And in truth I had to take note that soon after our arrival something seemed to have happened to Leopold Werner; less so to his nature, than to his habits and behaviour. The serene smile that made his eyes twinkle like stars and hovered invariably around his lips beneath his thick, heavy moustache seemed to have flown for good, dying out slowly,

gradually being replaced by a quiet contemplation and solitary brooding. It is true that he had every reason to behave thus, for only the blind among the fishermen on the island could be unaware that the two overseers, Gibbons and Cardenas, drove, harried and harassed the fisherman named Leopold Werner day after day ever more ruthlessly, making his life a burden and his work impossible. Naturally, there had to be a reason for this. These overseers, in their greed, in the knowledge and by virtue of their power, robbed not only the company but, being in charge of various services, bonuses and allowances, the fishermen as well, defrauding them of their rightful and customary dues in a most inhuman manner. They did all this in such a barefaced, undisguised manner that, though not jointly and collectively, but some of the fishermen, chiefly the said Leopold Werner, protested against the illegalities—not surreptitiously nor in stealth but openly, to their faces. Though this was not entirely true, at first he only joked about his grievances—which were not only his, but all of ours—cheerfully as customers banter with a barman, complaining about this or that, too much froth on their beer, or short measure, but even this jocular and cheerful calling to account enraged the overseers. Like dogs fed on raw meat they grew savage and fierce and, if not openly, they tried to break him and silence him, making him harmless, furtively and treacherously exploiting his own faults at that.

When they saw that the situation did not improve and they were unable to silence him, and Leopold Werner, upon his return from a fishing trip, dared to warn them, in front of witnesses, surrounded by a motley of fishermen and storemen down in the harbour, unsmilingly, in simple terms and without losing his temper, that our grievances would be brought to the notice of the management, though not as a written report but personally, by word of mouth, on the occasion of the approaching visit to the island of one of the managers—it was hardly suprising that they decided, by fair means or foul, to do their utmost to impede him, to stop him from carrying out his purpose; it was only to be expected that he would be made to pay for his intention—for it had been an intention, not a threat.

[...]

Naturally, there was a doctor there, a certain Doctor Moreno who, together with his tall, lanky assistant, tended the sick in his surgery in the basement of the central office as well as they could, treating only the simplest cases, inflammations, chilblains and fractures, for he was not much of a doctor—rumour had it that he was not a doctor at all, that he had been no more than an assistant of some sort in a hospital in his shady past, first in Bahia, later in Rosario where he had been involved in some underhand business and had offended against the law, in consequence of which he had found himself in the Penitenciaría. After that incident he had been unable to find employment in any decent hospital and it was only thanks to the company's leniency that he had ended up rotting on the island. One afternoon, then, this Doctor Moreno sent for me to appear before him in the surgery for a medical examination.

When I stepped into his office he was drinking hot toddy and warming his hands at the fire. He wore ankle-length, creased and wrinkled white overalls over his fur coat, using it to indicate his profession to the initiated and the uninitiated alike. He did not bother to examine me, simply announced:

"Weather permitting, a ship will be setting sail the day after tomorrow, a fishing boat. There'll be eighteen fishermen and storemen besides the firemen and stokers and the

sailors who work the ship. The overseers have chosen you to be one of those eighteen men but I have decided that you will not go as I consider you physically unfit for such work because of your frost-bitten hands and feet. To say nothing of your being completely inexperienced at and ill-suited for the hard work this sea-fearing job requires. I am only telling you this so you'll know what to do when Gibbons, or Cardenas, give you orders—don't be aggressive, let alone shortsighted—and, at all costs, just remember to keep your mouth shut and stay out of things as best you can where those two are concerned. You're nothing but a rookie, an untried, callow youth who knows nothing of life—as yet. But you will, and when you do, you'll remember to keep your mouth shut without anyone telling you. And you can tell Werner to take care too, and to keep his mouth shut if it's not too late, at least while he's on this island, working for this company, with Cardenas and Gibbons in charge."

I spent the last evening before the ship set sail with the fishermen. There was much singing, hard drinking and boisterousness, thunderous music from the player piano in the canteen, the clamour of which resounded all over the plant on an evening like this. We were up until dawn making merry, especially those detailed to sail that day, fishermen, storemen, stokers and firemen, Leopold Werner among them, of course, drinking one glass of hot toddy after the other with his shabby hat on his head and his pipe stuck between his teeth under his bushy moustache. Cardenas was making merry too, even Gibbons, though the latter had joined us only for the good company, and he was to stay behind to look after things on the island while the fishing trip lasted and it was Cardenas's turn to accompany the fishermen and the ship out to sea.

Everyone dispersed towards dawn and all set about their own business—the fishermen, storemen, firemen, stokers, and sailors braced themselves and began preparing for the journey. The ship stood ready in the harbour, a heavy, sturdy, firmly ferruled structure fitted up with nets, harpoons, sharp iron hooks, its hold lined with tin and stocked up with food and drink for a fortnight, for they planned to sail down to the Elephant Isles, circling the Tierra del Fuego, weather and the seas permitting, of course.

By the morning the fog had become dense again but the sea remained calm, unruffled, cold. Pandemonium reigned in the harbour where we had all gathered round to see the ship off. Leopold Werner embraced me for the last time, thumped my back and smiled, then, without saying a word, slung his patched kit-bag on his shoulders and soon disappeared among the others. Cardenas stood on the bridge, right behind the wheel, wearing a thick fur coat and a cap, watching the fishermen jostling each other for the better places. He bent over the railings from time to time, as though he were keeping an eye on someone or other, looking for this one or that. The clangour of the player piano sounded from the direction of the canteen. It was noon, announced by the appropriate blasts on the horn, when the ship left the safety of the harbour for the perils of the leaden-coloured sea in a blanket of fog.

During the two weeks following the departure of the fishermen it turned even colder and more treacherous; fog, icy snow and hail shrouded the water and the wind rose from the South, whipping the waves ever more wildly with unbridled fury. Familiar as they were with the conditions in those parts and toughened by the experience of many long years, the seafarers who had remained behind, old sea-dogs steeled by hard work and hardship, did nothing but watch the weather-glass, noting the strength and direction of the wind, the thickening fog, shaking their heads balefully and clapping their coarse-mittened hands together. "They're in the soup alright", they kept saying, "if the weather's as bad

as it is here, what's it going to be like down near the Orkneys". On the fifth day the wind seemed to abate a little but the lull proved short-lived and after three calm days the storm raged fiercer than before. There was hail, the fog became impenetrable, the wind howled and shrieked and lashed the island while the great waters rumbled, roared and thundered from afar, sounding like hundreds of ice-covered drums beaten in steady rhythm but hidden by the fog somewhere in the distance.

While the storm raged we rarely left the barracks, abandoning the shelter of their walls only for those of the stores during the day to seek the shelter of the canteen at night with a glass of hot toddy or brandy for company. There was no music—for one had to admit that the fishermen who remained on the island were not unaffected by the perils the ship was running and were duly or honourably concerned and solicitous for their comrades, as custom and decency obviously demanded. Their concern for the safety of the ship did not go unshared: even the miserable riff-raff assembled on the island, these Europeans, Brazilians, Chileans and Argentinians—even the ragged Aracan Indians from Patagonia, who held inferior jobs in the stores, bodegas, canteens and barracks, as I did, and who, when it came down to it could hardly be ranked with the fishermen who risked their lives—even they shared in the common anxiety. Gibbons, too, would appear, always on the move, awe inspiring and enormous, features set to mask his feelings, elbows propped on the counter in the canteen of an evening, staring out of the office window at the invisible sea and fog, hand clenched behind his back, or leaning against the heavy door of the central building in his long fur coat, frozen stiff in the cold, in the company of his most trusted men. Yes, even Gibbons was worried.

When he came into the barracks and saw me there, as it often happened, the corners of his mouth would twitch cruelly, hostilely, but otherwise he did not favour me with a word or a look, since the ties of friendship existing between myself and Leopold Werner could hardly have escaped his attention. It goes without saying that neither he nor Cardenas were unaware of this friendship—Doctor Moreno's warning was unmistakable and decisive proof of that—but it was not the only signal of their disfavour. I could sense that he had me watched and watched me, though he needed to take no pains greater than a hunter of defenceless game driven in front of his gun and unable to escape from the enclosed territory. But I could tell that this Gibbons robbed and cheated not only the company, not only the storemen and fishermen who were his subordinates, but double-crossed even Cardenas himself, expecting him, in his heart of hearts, to be irretrievably lost in the storms of the southern seas.

And so a week passed in fear, anxiety and expectancy, and the week following upon it was much the same, when at the end of that second week the sea grew calm and the wind abated. Only the thick, dense, impenetrable fog remained to shroud the icy waters in its white blanket, until on the eighteenth day, four days after the planned date of return, we gradually grew conscious of a siren wailing somewhere out at sea. The whole island was aroused, with Gibbons at our head, as though the sound of the horn were some kind of signal, a sign in the skies. The wailing ceased, then started up again from another direction, until it became clear to us all that the ship was lost in the fog and unable to find its way into harbour—perhaps unable to find the island itself, for the fog was so dense, so impenetrable that we kept bumping into each other even on the lighted paths that connected the stores to each other along the shore.

Gibbons decided to dispatch another ship that it may find and lead the other to safety by sounding all its sirens continuously and as loudly as possible. By this time it was late afternoon and soon night fell upon us. The hooting came now from this direction, now from that, low and faraway, signalling that both ships were now careening blindly around in the fog. It must have been midnight at least when the signal came from afar—from the other side of the island—that the ships had finally met, and soon after came the second signal that they had both lost their bearings in the fog and were now stationary or circling round each other, as distorted and as lost as before. We all stood down by the shore, stiff, still, completely helpless. Then Gibbons sounded the horns of all the ships in the harbour loud and long, so that the two out at sea should find their bearings by their sounds. It was thanks to this device that early next morning, when the fog had begun to clear in patches, the two ships at last sailed into harbour, drenched and weary, one behind the other.

Drenched and weary, I repeat, and not undamaged, for their sails were torn in many places, their timbers broken in others, a pitiful catch, and a sombre crew squeezed to the marrow, who could barely stand on their feet. They were hungry and worn out, all of them without exception, and lay like so many limp rags thrown in a corner in the hold and beneath tarpaulins on deck. Cardenas lay on a makeshift bunk behind the tiller, but when the ship had lumbered into port and was moored, he was the first to set foot on shore. His face was grave and tortured and only the faintest trace of a tired, ironic smile played around the corners of his thick-lipped mouth. He stopped on the quay facing us, leant his back against an empty iron drum, and stopped the wild clanging in their honour coming from the direction of the canteen with a single gesture of his uplifted hand.

"We're back, men", he said, in a voice that was hollow and hoarse despite the visible effort he was making to be heard by all of us, then he almost fell forward, stopped himself at the last minute and leaned back against the drum that now supported his full weight. "We're back and we're alive", he repeated, "all except Leopold Werner, whom we lost overboard in the last storm off Cape Horn. You shall hear all the details soon enough. And now you'd best be leaving us to lay ourselves down for we're all tired, tired to death."

I learned all about the accident that same evening, not from the most trustworthy sources, it is true, for the eye-witnesses were either sick or lying bruised, spent and weary on their beds, which was not suprising after all the trials and suffering they had had to undergo during their fortnight at sea. The first to tell the story was one of the firemen, not a true eye-witness therefore, for he had been busy with his boilers down in the hold when he had heard the commotion and had clambered up the narrow iron staircase to see what was causing all the noise. A terrible storm was raging, threatening to wreck the ship at any moment. In the fog and the spray all he could make out were the shapes of men cowering by the bulkheads, shouting desperately, frantically: "Werner's overboard, the seas have washed him off the deck! Help, men, help! Help!" But there was nothing anyone could do in that great wind against those roaring, crushing waves, and he himself had to return to his boilers forthwith, back to the hold where he was on duty, and in any case he had gone up on deck half-naked, with nothing but sandals on his bare feet and a pair of trousers tied around his waist with a bit of rag, bare from the waist up, the customary wear for stokers and firemen while on duty. He did not know and could not tell more. But there were others who could and did, in strictest confidence and hushed voices, cautiously and fearfully, but gradually the truth could be suspected. Werner the fisherman had become the victim of Cardenas the overseer. His death was not due to negligence or want of caution on his part

but to a conscious and deliberate decision. Some of the fishermen had been busy on deck when the accident had happened to Werner, and were able to say as eyewitnesses that not only had Cardenas given the completely senseless and unnecessary order for Werner to brace the railings in that raging storm but, as though driven by the impetus of a wave crashing down on the ship, had even pretended to stagger and lurched against Werner, throwing him against the railings with such force that he was knocked overboard and disappeared in the leaden, hissing waves. All this they told in whispers, with the furtive, wary, frightened expression of defenceless men on their faces, twisting their heads this way and that and falling silent as soon as they saw someone approach.

Meanwhile Cardenas, as soon as he had written his report for the company and the authorities, resumed his place by the long counter in the canteen, in his stuffy, over-heated office next-door to Gibbons, and resumed, too, his flagrant, prying rounds of the stores. The docks reverberated once more with the sound of their voices, their curses and threats rent the air like wild, crazy gulls above the foul and foaming waters. Whenever Leopold Werner's wretched end was mentioned in the stores, up in the office, but especially in the canteen, where he and Gibbons used to sit of an evening on their high stools propped against the counter, he always shrugged his shoulders and forced a grim smile, as one who had settled a nasty business once and for all. He even bared his teeth at his listener, as was his custom when he wished to flaunt his authority and power. "That business is over," he kept saying, "Werner was clumsy and had only himself to blame for his carelessness. In any case, what happened to him could have happened to any of us under similar circumstances. To say nothing of his age—he was much too old for this kind of work and, come to think of it, perhaps it was better for him to finish this way, he would have had to go at the end of the year anyhow, perhaps even earlier, for we've just about had enough from the management because of useless old fools like him. Neither Gibbons nor myself like to be lectured or told off, not while we're on this island we don't..."

It was not long after that Doctor Moreno sent for me one afternoon. When I went in he was sitting behind his white desk, amidst his pills, balls of cotton wool, forceps and bottles of ointment with a heavy, but empty glass in his hand. When he saw me he poured the glass full, and another for me, and went to stand in front of the window, where, leaning against the frosty, misted window-panes, he said:

"The advice I am about to give you is not exactly medical in nature, though God knows what is medical or isn't medical in this life. What I wanted to say was you'd best leave this lot and the island. People are saying all sorts of things, mostly about Werner's death, you can also expect trouble sooner or later. These overseers, Cardenas and Gibbons, aren't children, they know what they're doing and how to do it. Sooner or later you're sure to get into trouble with them. Pull yourself together, tell them in all honesty that you're sick, your hands and feet are frost-bitten, which I'll attest to, then get out of here while the going's good. A service freighter is leaving for Santa Cruz in Patagonia at the end of the week, you can be on it if you're quick. You know that neither you nor I can raise Werner from the dead..."

This was how it happened that barely two weeks after the destruction of Leopold Werner I boarded a ship and left Saint George's island. The ship sailed in fog as dense as that on arrival, and the sky did not clear until the evening of the next day, but by then we had left the island far behind. We slowly approached Santa Cruz, and Patagonia.

Translated by Eszter Molnár

László Bertók

Poems

Translated by George Szirtes

At the centre of the universe

Állunk a világ közepén

Whatever is event takes flight
though it pretends to stay behind,
we carry tables out to dine
the corridor is full of light

at the centre of the universe
as radiant as the sun we shine
our glasses raised but out of wine
this too is just a line of verse

reality and fact converse
within their common sphere of thought
but we ourselves prefer to shout
the real thing has the loudest voice

but no-one's where he's meant to be
only the words in the glossary

The word ploughs through the void

Furkálja a semmit a szó

As worms plough through their earthen dome
so the word ploughs through the void
what one moment is rock hard
the next is friable as loam

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because the real's so close to home
everyone drives through the lights
along the road the cars shine bright
the cheese consumes the prying worm

and since the infinite holds firm
the hole within may last the course
self-knowledge deepens to our term
Odysseus broods upon his horse

but he that might win plays us false
the loser sows and reaps the storm

The waste within the CNS

Az idegekben a salak

The will that binds, the vital juice
that is so quick to prompt the wit
the errors I may not commit
while once again all hell breaks loose

the moment grown into a word
when sensing my mortality
the acid in my cells, the free
galaxies enchained encurled

the slight bump and the shock delayed
the guilt in its brief blaze of light
divine salvation reason right
the loss of self the self mislaid

the waste within the CNS
the being myself nonetheless.

The ages stand upon the hill

Állnak az idők a hegyen

As when infinity consumed
wholly by fire turns terminal
the ages stand upon the hill
like frozen feathers neatly groomed

the sky is wide but still as stone
nor blue nor shadows shift their ground,
a hundred elements crowd round
and seek out their old haunts alone

only verbs the ice encrusts
break across our frozen tongues
the present buckles into lungs
distance to a womb of dust

and like one who transcends the place
is radiant beyond time or space.

I run from myself

Én magam elől szaladok

You live more bravely, sealed up tight
a secret's a thing I hide within
but when sun blossoms on my skin
I tend to spill the beans outright

behind the skin-lock metaphor
stand creatures of sincerity
I run from myself once the key
has turned and I've unlocked each door

this is the ceremonial gift
I post on to you unaddressed
which you'll absolve once I've confessed
since life must go on, or must try,

and this excuse too must make shift
so you may catch me at the lie.

Béla Pomogáts

Lifeline for a huge minority

Hungarian literature in Transylvania after the Second World War

Hungarian literature in Transylvania, and Hungarian intellectual and political life in general in Rumania, have been repeatedly forced to start afresh, rising from the ashes as a Transylvanian phoenix. That is what happened after the change of sovereignty in 1920, when the Peace Treaty of Trianon meant minority status for the Hungarians of Transylvania, and they were compelled, without any state support, indeed in face of the official Great Rumanian discrimination, to organise their institutions and their literary life. The same thing happened again in the late autumn of 1944, when Northern Transylvania and the Székely Country, which the 1940 Vienna Award had returned to Hungary, once again came under Rumanian rule. The Paris Peace Treaty of 1947 then re-established the borders drawn up in the Petit Trianon in 1920.

The war-time events and the repeated shift of borders destroyed most of the institutions that had been created by the hard work of the minority, such as the periodical *Erdélyi Helikon* or the publishing house of *Erdélyi Szépművészeti Céh*: several writers of the period between the two wars fell victim to the war or to fascism, others, such as Áron Tamási and Count Miklós Bánffy, moved to Hungary, as the poet Lajos Áprily had done even earlier, and the novelists József Nyírő and Count Albert Wass went into exile in the West.

The more than two million strong body of Hungarians in Transylvania endured the new transfer of power passing through severe trials both as individuals and as a community. In the winter of 1944 and 1945, they suffered

grievously at the hands of the reestablished Royal Rumanian administration and the armed nationalist terrorists known as Maniu Guards. The axe and hatchet massacres in Székely villages, the death camp near Földvár, (Marienburg-Feldioara) or the dragging away of part of the Hungarian civilian male population from Kolozsvár (Klausenberg-Cluj) have become tragic symbols of those times. The institutionalised reprisals were finally stopped by the Hungarian-Rumanian Mixed Administration the Soviet army introduced temporarily in Northern Transylvania, and Petru Groza's left-wing government which came to power in March 1945.

Social change promised equal rights to the minorities and opened up encouraging prospects for Hungarian culture in Rumania. Under the chairmanship of Gyárfás Kurkó, a gifted politician of working-class origin, the Hungarian People's Federation was established, which aimed at broad popular collaboration, managed the political representation of the Hungarian minority, and sent MPs to the National Assembly in Bucharest. The Federation of Hungarian Writers in Rumania was established with István Nagy as their president. The growing number of papers and magazines included the Hungarian papers in practically all the major towns in Transylvania, with *Népi Egység* in Brassó (Kronstadt-Brasov) and *Világosság* in Kolozsvár playing a significant role in culture. A central Hungarian paper was started in Bucharest, *Romániai Magyar Szó*, which was later renamed *Előre*. *Falvak Népe* was a national newspaper for peasants, *Utunk*, a literary weekly edited by Gábor Gaál, was started in 1946, and the periodical *Igaz Szó* in Marosvásárhely (Neumarkt-Targu Mures) in 1953. An extensive system of institutions served Hungarian public education: the Bolyai University in Kolozsvár,

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with a Medical and Pharmaceutical School in Marosvásárhely, and a Hungarian Teachers' Training College also in Marosvásárhely. New Hungarian elementary and secondary schools fulfilled an old wish of the Csángós (Hungarians in Moldavia, beyond the Carpathians), and they too could have their children educated in Hungarian. Hungarian theatres were re-established in Kolozsvár, Marosvásárhely and Sepsiszentgyörgy and later also in Temesvár (Timisoara), Szatmár (Satumare) and Nagyvárad (Groswardein-Oradea). The publishing of Hungarian books gave a new impetus to Hungarian literature in Rumania. The changing nature of this literature, alongside unchanging endeavours aimed at ethnic self-knowledge, was displayed in poems by Ferenc Szemlér, István Horváth and Jenő Kiss, and prose works by István Asztalos (*Szél fuvatlan nem indul*—No wind springs up unblown), Gyárfás Kurkó (*Nehéz kenyér*—Tough living), István Nagy (*Réz Mihályék kóstolója*—A tasting at Mihály Réz's house) and József Méliusz (*Sors és jelkép*—Fate and symbol). A young generation of writers appeared, including András Sütő, Gyula Szabó and János Székely, who later played important roles. Hungarian literature in Transylvania embarked on the new age with grave experiences behind it but still full of hope.

Soon, however, these hopes gave way to anxiety. In 1948 and 1949, a Stalinist dictatorship was established in Rumania as well, and this not only put an end to the shortlived democratic interlude but even jeopardised the very survival of Hungarians in Transylvania. As other countries in Central and Eastern Europe, Rumania too suffered from political violence based on the theory of the dictatorship of the proletariat, a voluntarism that prevailed in both economic and cultural life, and the personality cult, which meant the unlimited tyranny of the party leader, Gheorghiu-Dej and those around him. The Hungarian minority doubly felt the weight of all this, since they had to suffer the pressure of aggressive assimilation which characterised the national minorities policy. The Hungarian Writers' Federation was liquidated in Bucharest in 1949, and this was soon followed by the dissolution of the Hungarian People's Federation. Imprisonment on trumped

up charges for the leaders, Gyárfás Kurkó, Edgár Balogh and József Méliusz, and several others followed. The large number of the imprisoned linked with cultural, public and religious life included the writer György Böződi, the sociologist József Venczel, formerly Director of the Transylvanian Scientific Institute, István Lakatos, a leader of the Social Democrats, Pál Szász, the former president of the Transylvanian Hungarian Economic Society, and Áron Márton, the Roman Catholic Bishop of Gyulafehérvár (Karsburg-Alba Iulia)

Within a few years the number of Hungarian schools drastically diminished. The Csángó schools in Moldavia completely disappeared, the Hungarian University of Kolozsvár was amalgamated with the Rumanian University, under the name Babes-Bolyai University, the many Hungarian departments were reduced to two, and later to a single Hungarian Department of Literature and Language. It was in protest against that that Professor László Szabédi, the eminent poet and scholar committed suicide in 1959. All the other Hungarian institutions of higher learning closed down. In 1968, as part of the administrative reorganization, they put an end to the Hungarian (or Maros Hungarian) Autonomous Territory, which had been set up in the Székely Country in 1953. (In fact, during its existence of 15 years, the province was never granted real autonomy; it only served propaganda purposes, and also the division of Hungarians in Transylvania). Many writers, including Károly Kós, László Tompa, János Bartalis, Károly Molter, and János Kemény, were removed from the literary scene for many years, and even Gábor Gaál, champion of the Hungarian Marxist intelligentsia in Transylvania, became a victim of political persecution.

In the 1950s, Transylvanian Hungarian literature was unable to function. Works that were published were apologies for Stalinism and fell into line with the norms of Socialist Realism. That period produced little of literary value, except perhaps Gyula Szabó's rural novel, *Gondos atyafiság* (Looking after your kin), but the author was compelled to rework even this book to give it a political accent.

During the three decades after 1949, Rumanian cultural life was marked by fast and sharp changes. The measures passed in the early

1950s aimed at civil disability were followed in 1954 and '55, after Stalin's death, by a limited thaw. The prestigious journal *Korunk* was relaunched in 1957, edited by Ernő Gáll and Edgár Balogh, the same year brought *Napsugár*, a high-quality children's magazine. Writers, who had been previously suppressed, could return to the literary scene, and in 1961 the first volume of *Forrás* appeared, a series introducing works by newly emerging writers. At the same time, after 1956, a new wave of repression extended to the Hungarian intellectual scene, designed to inhibit any influence the revolution in Hungary might have in Rumania. That was the time the Hungarian university was closed down and many young intellectual leaders were imprisoned, including the poet and editor Géza Páskándi and the literary historian Gyula Dávid.

By the late 1960s, events in Czechoslovakia once again led to a policy of concessions. The Council of Ethnic Hungarian Workers was founded as a political representative body of the Hungarian minority, Hungarian intellectuals fought a tough ideological battle for the liquidation of dogmatism, and they were able to establish new literary and cultural institutions. In 1969, *Kriterion*, an ethnic publishing house was founded in Bucharest, with Géza Domokos as manager, which brought out scores of relevant literary and scholarly works, and much good work was also done by the Hungarian section of the Kolozsvár-seated *Dacia*, and other Rumanian publishers. In 1970, the weekly *A Hét* was started under the editorship of Sándor Huszár, and existing political and literary magazines also joined in to reshape their profiles and undertake the duty of an efficient representation of ethnic interests, with *Korunk* being perhaps the most important among them. New papers were also started, such as *Hargita* in Csíkszereda (Miercurea Ciucului), *Megyei Tükör* in Sepsiszentgyörgy, and *Brassói Lapok*. The trilingual university periodical, *Echinoc*, and *Fellegvár*, the supplement of the daily *Igazság*, were both founded in Kolozsvár to provide workshops for budding writers. There was growing interest in research in history, cultural history, literary studies, language and social anthropology. Zoltán Kallós was able to publish his collections of folk poetry, and Attila T.

Szabó launched a large-scale project, which brought him international recognition: *Erdélyi Magyar Szótörténeti Tár* (An Etymological Dictionary of Transylvanian Hungarian), which by now comprises four bulky volumes. Individual entries contain a wealth of examples to illustrate changing usage, as well as German and Rumanian equivalents.

The late 1960s and the early '70s saw a significant development of ethnic culture. It at last found its proper role: to carry on and cultivate the intellectual heritage of the Hungarians in Transylvania, presenting the truth of the life of the minority and representing their interests. The new Hungarian literature sparked off by the intellectual fermentation in Transylvania can only be compared to the Transylvanian literature of the 1920s. The list includes new verse by János Bartalis, Ferenc Szemlér, István Horváth, Jenő Kiss, and József Méliusz and, on the part of the younger generation, modern lyricism, feeding on the experiences and afflictions of minority existence, by Sándor Kányádi, Géza Páskándi, Domokos Szilágyi, Gizella Hervay, Aladár Lászlóffy, László Király, Árpád Farkas, Géza Szócs, and Zsófia Balla; the autobiographical writings of Sándor Kacsó, István Nagy, and Edgár Balogh, recalling the period between the two world wars. József Méliusz tackles the prison experiences of 1950s, Gáspár Tamási, András Sütő, Ferenc Szemlér, Gyula Szabó, János Pusztai, Tibor Bálint, István Szilágyi, Andor Bajor, Sándor Fodor, Tamás Deák, Zoltán Panek, László Csiki, Ádám Bodor and Attila Vári are the important authors of fiction and autobiographical non-fiction while András Sütő, Géza Páskándi, István Kocsis, Tamás Deák, János Székely and Csaba Lászlóffy are the playwrights of note.

Hungarian literature in Transylvania has deliberately undertaken communal duties, as it has to work as the only institution of an unaided ethnic and cultural community fighting for survival. It is the only means of self-recognition and self-expression of a mangled and strongly restricted ethnic community. It is, therefore, obviously works of high literary value, which at the same time express a sense of communal and moral responsibility, that can count on the greatest attention. The poems of Sándor Kányádi,

Domokos Szilágyi, Géza Szőcs and Aladár Lászlóffy, and András Sütő's fiction and plays primarily belong to this category.

Kányádi's intellectual inheritance is the Székely peasant tradition, but later he complemented it with the approach and idiom of modern poetry. He has responded with growing sensitivity to the challenge of existence, principally to the experience gained as a member of a minority, which has imbued his poetry with dramatic tension. In his *Fekete-piros* (Black-Red), the black of mourning and the red of life keep alternating, and while he recalls the folk traditions of a Hungarian village in Transylvania, he refers to the perpetuating force of these traditions. *Halottak napja Bécsben* (All Soul's Day in Vienna), laments the slow destruction of Hungarians scattered in the world. He gives a bitter account of the experiences of the Hungarian minority, the mournful requiem being a profession of faith for the dignity of the innocent victims.

Domokos Szilágyi, who took his own life when still young, was an angelic talent: his verse started out under the spell of the avant-garde, and expressed a desire for a fuller human life, but his poems slowly became permeated by scepticism, anguish and mourning. He looked on Bartók as his model and elaborated his poetry on the pattern of modern music, developing a new harmony out of disharmonic chords. *Bartók Amerikában* (Bartók in America) is about mental assurance attained by artistic struggles. *Ez a nyár* (This summer) sums up the tragic experience of a Central European. In his later poems he returned to the traditions of Hungarian poetry: expressing his melancholy, and later an excessive hopelessness, in a pure and full tone.

Aladár Lászlóffy's poetry developed in the catchment area of the avant-garde, with a confidence in technical civilization occupying a natural place. His interest in cosmic perspectives and the future of mankind does not only determine his subjects, his view also develops in the token of this interest. He turns to the past of Europe and Transylvania in his quest for real values: models and teachings that show the right way and argue for the realisation of full human freedom. His historical meditations lead him to vote for human values, and his bitter

irony indicates the danger these values are facing.

András Sütő's documentary writing, intertwined with personal relations and memories, *Anyám könnyű álmot ígért* (Mother has promised easy sleep) relates the lot of a Hungarian peasant community in Transylvania. (See a story by him in the present issue—The Ed.) The writer is the narrator in a story with a double time structure. The events follow partly from a visit home, and partly from the fifty-year long history of the Hungarian minority in his native village. The framework of a personal nature includes a great many facts, conversations, stories, village scenes, letters, petitions sent to the authorities, archival records, old newspaper articles, speeches made at meetings: mosaic pieces which help unfold the chronicle of the individual and communal afflictions of these Hungarians. The documentary report is rounded off by stories, fairly traditional genre scenes and humorous anecdotes, together with reports of a lyrical nature, proper short-stories made up of such anecdotes, and scenes and dialogues with a symbolic meaning. The stories of documentary authenticity usually have a contrapuntal structure, the depressing effect of the facts being tempered by gentle humour, the objectified text sometimes changing into prose verse; the stories are related according to the dramatic structure of a ballad. They relate the chronicle of the daily life of isolated Hungarians, telling about "what kind of cares dwell in the furrows of the foreheads of a community".

These cares provide the subject of Sütő's plays: *Egy lócsiszár virágvasárnapja* (Palm Sunday of a coper) after Heinrich Kleist's *Michael Kolhaas*, turns the story of a horse-dealer, who goes down fighting in defence of his rights, into a parable. He places two different personalities, standing for two possible attitudes, on the stage: Kolhaas tries to get his own back for offences he has suffered within the framework of the established order, while his friend, Nagelschmidt rejects the order that defends the interests of the powers that be, and opts for revolt. The parable sets out the possibilities and duties of man left defenceless in face of unjust power. *Csillag a máglyán* (Star on the Stake) also contrasts two kinds of personalities

and behaviour patterns, those of John Calvin, who ruled Geneva, and Michael Servet, whom Calvin condemned to the stake. The first embodies the fanaticism of the possessor of power, and the second the defenceless freedom of those outside the sphere of power. In the clash between power and idea, it is the idea which necessarily has to give way. In opposing the two protagonists in the mythological *Káin és Ábel* (Cain and Abel), Sütő stands up for the tragic dignity of life with head erect against kowtowing. The clash of freedom, of power and of human dignity is always a parable: Sütő's stage gives utterance to the conflicts and experiences of the Hungarians in Transylvania.

The hopes of the 1970s were soon denied by the everyday experience and growing political repression of the years of Ceausescu's terminal paranoia. A methodical reduction of the ethnic and cultural institutions of Hungarians already started in the early seventies. The injuries most difficult to redress were caused by the measures hitting public education in the native language, without which Hungarians were confronted with the prospect of being driven to the fringe of the social and culture scene, with a language deteriorating into an uncultivated pidgin suited at most to family use, and those with intellectual ambition or desiring to become skilled workers must, willy-nilly, become Romanised. By the 1980s moreover, nothing remained of the Hungarian institutions of higher education in Transylvania. The Kolozsvár university had one single department of Hungarian language and literature which had to provide for the training of teachers, journalists and scholars. Hungarian primary and secondary schools met a similar fate. In 1976, 172,000 six to fourteen-year-olds attended Hungarian elementary schools (a number that even then was lower than the actual number of Hungarian pupils), ten years later this number had dwindled to 60,000.

The situation was similar in the other institutions of Hungarian culture. The structure of the press which had come into being (or, rather, been fought for) after 1968, became radically transformed: the editors of *Korunk* and *A Hét* were replaced by people who unscrupulously danced attendance on Rumanian nationalism. Several other Hungarian periodicals were ter-

minated and there was an average cut of 30 to 40 per cent in the size and number of copies of Hungarian newspapers and magazines. Bucharest television and the radio stations in Kolozsvár and Marosvásárhely stopped broadcasting in Hungarian, and there was a drastic cut in Hungarian book publishing. The most valuable manuscripts fell victim to political censorship. They included works by András Sütő, Sándor Kányádi and many others, further volumes of Attila T. Szabó's *Corpus of Transylvanian Hungarian Vocabulary*, a Hungarian literature encyclopedia, and all works on Hungarian history, literary history and ethnography. The profile of the media was totally changed: from that time on, the Hungarian papers had to sing the praises of the Rumanian dictator and the lamentable age hallmarked by his name, and were forced to take part in the press campaigns against Hungarian political, cultural and scientific life. All this determined the options open to the literary scene as well. No active, successful intellectual life could be conceived under conditions that only gave green light to an Asiatic personality cult, reminiscent of the darkest days of Stalinism, and to a xenophobia and nationalist incitement on a par with the equally dark inheritance of ultra-right dictatorships.

By the mid-1980s, the prospects for Hungarian letters in Rumania were bleak indeed. The loose strands that had still existed between the cultural scene in Transylvania and Hungary were drastically cut, the use of Hungarian place-names was prohibited, and village bulldozing was planned. This was meant to cut off Hungarians and other minorities in Transylvania, and indeed, the Rumanians as well, from their roots. All this led to an exodus of Hungarians, literary persons, including the recent departure of nearly forty Hungarian writers, and literature critics from Rumania. Several writers committed suicide in Transylvania, and the greater part of the intellectual elite retreated into internal emigration. Decline and despair would certainly have led to further tragedies had the Rumanian revolution not broken out in December 1989, sweeping away the Ceausescu dictatorship in a few days and creating a radically new situation for the reconstruction of Hungarian culture in Rumania.

As I have already pointed out, necessity has forced Hungarians in Transylvania to make a new start on a number of occasions. The present recommencement, however, promises to be more difficult than any earlier one. The Hungarian minority has no adequate institutions left, its intelligentsia has become impoverished, intellectually as well, and, naturally, Great-Rumanian nationalism, aiming at assimilating the national minorities, has not abandoned its positions either. Nevertheless, one can already encounter signs of a revival. Hungarian schools are in the process of being reopened, the re-establishment of the Hungarian University in Kolozsvár is a subject of heated discussions, books that were banned are now in print, Hungarian broadcasting has started again in Kolozsvár, Marosvásárhely and Temesvár, and Hungarian television programmes are screened in Bucharest and

Kolozsvár. The editorship of *Korunk* was taken over by Lajos Kántor. *Utunk* has been replaced by *Helikon*, a new magazine edited by István Szilágyi, and the Marosvásárhely-based *Igaz Szó* by *Látó*, edited by Béla Markó. The central Hungarian daily again appears under the title of *Romániai Magyar Szó*. An organization safeguarding the interests of the Hungarian minority has been founded, called the Hungarian Democratic Federation of Rumania (RMDSZ), which, using its parliamentary status won at the recent general elections, continues the struggle to achieve full legal equality for Hungarians in Transylvania and provide Hungarian Rumanian coexistence with a new basis.

This struggle is going to be an uphill one and right now no one can tell how literature will respond.



Lividly blue

(short story)

When I came into the world at last on the first day of Christmas at noon everybody was taken aback. I shot into the midst of the family gathering like a tiny cannonball, blue as mortal fear itself; and soon dispelled any trace of reverence that may have been in the air first through my colour then through my size, which caused fresh alarm, and finally through my silence: not a single sound left my throat, which seemed to herald a gravestone—the end, and not the beginning, of my wanderings on this earth. My silence alarmed even my father, who had proved to be the most dauntless of those assembled to welcome me into the world: No, he's not so terribly blue, he's not too small at all! Small wonder he tried to extenuate my shortcomings, direct issue of his existence sizzling in my mother's arms. But despite the understanding smile intended to encourage me to cry, he soon found himself beside the blue-tinted wall, forehead pressed against the cool plaster.

"Can't weigh more than two kilos at the most," my grandfather muttered.

"What!" cried my uncle Pebbly, overriding the general confusion. "I'll eat every scrap that's over a kilo!"

Disappointment—which often tempts one to exaggerate—must have prompted that remark. The hooked scales used for weighing wool onto which I was put, swaddled and diapered, registered exactly one kilo and 620 grammes. According to my uncle, the weight of my nappies, to say nothing of my kicking, should have been taken into account.

"Those that kick up a fuss always outweigh the rest."

"Can't you see he's just fluttering, poor thing?" said my father, coming to my aid again, and hurried out to the well for water, almost at a run, like a fireman on call.

It is quite possible that water was not needed in the house at all; it was my muteness that he was fleeing, hoping that by the time he returned with the jug brimming with hope I would surely be bellowing.

The rest of the gathering accompanied him outside, each to his task; my grandfather to split acacia roots so that I might not be frozen in my silence, my aunt Rebecca to the schoolmistress for medical advice, my uncle Pebbly home to feed his pigs. My mother, though dazed, remained at the helm of all our trouble and called after them to fetch bricks to be heated and to shut the door, for there were a lot of people outside, and told Maria, the midwife, to cudgel her brains over what was to be done about me now. But my strange behaviour had even the midwife flummoxed. Her words of comfort were disturbingly half-mouthed:

"Don't take it to heart, Agnes, don't you grieve. There's nothing the matter, not yet there isn't," and gently patted my face, my back, rubbed my head.

My fearful blue colour she ascribed now to the sky, now to the icicles cutting into the handkerchief-size square of the window. Bright little child, reflecting the colour or the

sky, the colour of ice. Don't take it to heart, Agnes, there's nothing the matter, not yet; the sun'll blink twice, the icicles will melt, and the child will have a human colour.

Which was as good as saying nothing.

My father came back with the water, stared at the window, the ethereal city with its turrets of ice hanging down.

"We'll have it down then," he said, looking around for an axe.

"You leave our city alone!" my mother protested, attached to the game of make-believe played in the first weeks of their marriage. In the nights, while awaiting my arrival, she had liked to listen to the whistling of those reeds of ice in the wind.

But now the wind was still, the reeds were silent, the hour of evening-service approaching, time for my father to ring the bells. The midwife sought solace even in the lateness of the hour: the child is waiting, patient by nature, waiting for divine service. My father gave a discouraged gesture, glanced at the limping wall-clock, and rushed to the apothecary.

It was not the clapper of the bells that was wanting to sound your throat, son. Merry Christmas, I cried—loud to carry behind the glass partition, and added my name: Sándor Szilveszter's the name. What was it you were wanting? Medicine. Where's the prescription? There's no prescription. What is there, then? A complaint only, I said, the child was born on time, in the ninth month, born a whole hour ago, but he is blue and makes no sound. The man behind the grille shook his head: are we trying to set up the choir for the funeral already? But his colour, Mr Apothecary! Oh, his colour! They're all purple, or else red, at birth—just so long as they're not yellow, for that means jaundice every time. Even so—isn't there some kind of medicine you can give me? What kind of medicine were you thinking of, my good man, bless your heart? Something to make the child cry. Make the child do what? He must have thought me demented, for he slammed the door in my face. I stood there for a little while longer, then ran back home. I stopped to listen in front of the door; but heard no sound from within. Then your grandfather stepped out. I asked him: Any news? Nothing. No news except that your mother had proclaimed martial law in there, and every clause directed at your grandfather only: cigars, smoking, snoring, spitting were prohibited, tobacco-chewing was permitted as it made no smoke, but spitting should be effected out in the yard. The poor old man's pouches were full of cheap tobacco; he had stepped out for a spit when he found me listening outside the door. Inside, the midwife was warming bricks and salt on the oventop and your mother was rocking you, shaking you gently, saying: Bálint, Bálintka, who are you cross with that you don't want to cry? That was what we had agreed upon, that you should be called Bálint. I sat down beside your mother to assist her in the interrogation. Who are you cross with, Bálint? Bálint Szilveszter, I could think of nothing sensible to say, so I told you that your name day, your surname's day would be approaching soon, after Christmas we would go up to the church tower at midnight and sing: "In You we put our trust from the beginning of time". The midwife's forecast came true, the eaves began to drip. Look, Agnes, how brightly our city sparkles in the window! But the icicles dwindled to no avail: you whimpered a little from time to time, but the sound you made was more like a sigh, like the sound of a bird drowning. I hastened to the reverend. When I came upon him he was walking up and down in the dining-room, memorizing his sermon. We have over an hour to go until bell-ringing time, Szilveszter! What possessed you to come so early? Perhaps

he was angry that, instead of coming through the kitchen and finding the maidservant to announce me, I had taken the main stairs and had broken in upon him, taking him unawares with the sheaf of papers in his hands. But he was soon appeased, threw a coat over his shoulders and came to inspect you. He was a pastor who liked to keep account of his flock, always eager to learn where a child was expected, and when it arrived his pen flew happily over the fresh page of the register. He accompanied me to the house in high excitement as though expecting to be shown a gold nugget, the promise of the whole congregation. But joyfully expectant as he was upon entering the house, he took one glance at you and at once looked away, and began to inquire after your mother's health...

Our Reverend was reputed to be a sage man; awed by his presence in the house, my parents had promoted him to the rank of doctor in a trice. But the village minister of words reserved judgement, spoke neither ill nor well of me at first; the only possible conclusion to be made—namely, that I was not yet dead—he deemed uncalled for, out of consideration for the occasion. But after some reflection he said:

“The child should be christened immediately”.

My father was the only one who understood the bearing of his words; my mother nodded docilely and said:

“We shall call him Bálint. Bálintka is the name we chose for when the day of his christening comes:...

The Reverend's brow darkened, and tactfully turning his back to her, pronounced judgement upon me:

“If he dies unchristened, he cannot go to a christian grave.”

“Grave?” My mother stared at the Reverend's back as if at blood and ruin, then, for the umpteenth time—took stock of my ink-blot face.

She can have found no encouragement there, so she smiled, as she always did when something caused her pain. The reverend must have interpreted her smile as acquiescence in God's will, for he said:

“We must entrust it to Him now.”

And glanced up at the crossbeam as he said it. That was where my grandfather kept his spare tobacco, in a chink, there my diapers were hung up to dry on a string, above them gaped the mouth of the attic, harbouring some empty hives—and above those, everywhere, was God. The reverend's glance caught on the crossbeam and he gave a discouraged sad gesture: however boundless the grace of the heavens, a pouch of tobacco, wet nappies, a couple of bee-hives can come between God and human existence at any time and drive grace away. For on his way out he said:

“Pray for him. Page two hundred and sixty-two in the Hymnal.”

With mounting alarm my father turned the pages of the Hymnal to the prayer for the dying.

“Stop it!” cried my mother. “Put that book down! We are not going to pray! We are going to warm salt! Heat bricks! Maria dear! Bring a hot compress for the child!”

With the smile the tears came; and as the twin fountains of her strength began to gush, she was ready to spring out of bed and fall upon anyone who dared say the prayer for the dying over me.

“I don't want to see that book!”

My father thrust her back gently on the bed.

"That's right, Agnes. The Reverend must have got the page wrong."

"Go ring the bells!"

My father, dauntless to begin with, was now flustered and confused, hastened into action by the trouble and alarm that the urgency of the christening had caused him: he already was at the gate, but still trying to find his coat-sleeve, had lost one of his knitted gloves on the way but was off, without once looking back, to find godparents for me before the time for bell-ringing arrived.

Like a lamb that has strayed from the fold, I too turned in at the first open gate to seek salvation, Róza, would you stand godparents to my son? When? Right away! In an hour. An hour and a quarter at the most. I'll ask the reverend to wait. János cannot leave the house, the cobbler let him down and he says he couldn't stand the shame of wearing patched boots to a christening. Wear mine, they're brand new! A fine figure of a father you'll cut if I do—a barefoot St Joseph! So I ran to your uncle Pebbly; he's a master joiner and ordered his new boots in November. But they hadn't any baby-linen prepared: and with no christening gift to give you—to give a gift is a godparent's obligation—they'd be the talk of all the village. I said: the yellow cradle that I bought from the choir-master—I'll paint it green, and tell everybody it was your christening gift. For the love of God, brother, don't turn me down. Your uncle was almost crying he was so sorry for us, you too, I suppose. He told me later he thought I had lost my mind for a while at least. For he refused my offer of the cradle as a present, and what he offered in its stead struck me to the heart.

My uncle Pebbly led my father into his work-shed; there, set on two planks to dry, stood a little blue coffin. Just my colour. Made not for me, but for a child in a neighbouring village. My father took one look and reeled out of the room.

"Brother, what were you wanting with that coffin?"

"I have a couple of planks left..."

"Enough for a little chair, a play-pen!" my father broke in

"Play-pen? Little chair...?"

"A little chair, a play-pen, a play-pen!" my father repeated despairingly. "I don't understand you, brother. Can you not imagine anything but trouble?"

"I saw the trouble. And I saw the other... he looked just the same at birth, poor soul. Perhaps he was a little bluer. They had a diagnosis on him sent to the schoolmistress from Kolozsvár."

"You're wrong. My son's time will come."

Sitting on an imaginary little chair my father shook my rattle; gripping the bars of an imaginary play-pen, he tottered around my uncle, tottered with my steps, which were nowhere yet. Or if they were, they were sitting on the edge of Nothingness together with me. Goongooree, goongooree, he said, and laughed. Laughed convulsively into my uncle's stern face, leant his shoulder against him as though wanting to stop up my uncle's mouth with his body, because he saw that, any minute, my coffin would fall out of it. No doubt about it: that was precisely what my uncle had been about to offer me by way of a birthing present. Well-meaning, with the ruthlessness of candour.

"Whatever you may think, I say goongooree. That'll be his first word. Goongooree."

"With God's help!" said my flint-hearted uncle, softening.

"God will not help anyone. Except us. He will help us. For in this whole wide world it is only we who stand in need of His assistance."

"Amen" said my uncle.

So it came to pass that my coffin remained within the bounds of his thoughts.

I set off to ring the bells—with no godparents for you. I did not mind: I was happy to be delivered of the birthing present of the coffin. Negotiating had made me a little late: I made up for lost time on the smaller bell. But when I rang the third bell, the clapper struck the final chime false. I thought of your uncle's prediction and almost fell out of the tower. It means a death, they said at such times in every house. It means a death, I said, because that's what we always said, when the clapper struck false. I was trembling and had to rally all my strength to be able to stumble down the stairs. Those winding corkscrew stairs seemed like your uncle Pebbly's throat to me with the little blue coffin drying on planks inside it. The reverend arrived with the honourable Józsi and the choir-master; the congregation was waiting for them in the church; I began to pump the bellows. But all of a sudden I felt so weak that I didn't even notice I was pumping all wrong, the organ choked twice, our heart is filled with joy today slumped down on them like a sack of sawdust. The choirmaster did what he could to improve the situation, raising his voice to help them carry the tune, and coming back to myself, I evened out the breath of the Great Box somehow—together with my own. But we could not turn back the heads of a hundred and fifty men, women and children. It being a truly festive occasion, they stared at us with righteous indignation. What on earth do you think you're doing, Szilveszter? came the choir-master's message, carried by a youth from the other side of the box, for neither of us was visible to the other. I sent back the message that I wasn't sure but promised not to make any more mistakes. And as the reverend began to read out the Epistle to the Phillippians, rejoice in the Lord always, and again I say, rejoice, the choir-master came in person to ask me, sadly, what happened, Szilveszter? The reverend, too, threw up his voice to me in warning, let your moderation be known unto all men. The Lord is at hand. Sir, it is my son that is causing me worry, my foot slipped off the board. Do not let your troubles overcome you! The Lord is at hand. But that other child, you see, that other child died, died without crying. Do not judge untimely; your propensity for sorrow is the most dangerous of all... We put hot bricks under him, heated salt. Remember Paul, remember how he was downcast before the Lord opened the windows of heaven to him. Oh, sir, I am afraid that the crying stuck in his throat will choke him. Put up the numbers, Szilveszter: ninety-seven...

From down below, in his family pew, the honourable Józsi looked up and his eyes locked on the number ninety-seven and my father. Their eyes met and a look of recognition passed between them. There was a huntsman's hat on the honourable's head, a double-barreled shotgun in his right hand and a black coat with a white star between its eyes in his left. Then the surging music swallowed him up.

Only his hat remained, floating between the pulpit and the Lord's table like a green water-fowl. Hey, Szilveszter, old chum, said my father, breathing a sight of relief.

"Whose death did the big bell herald, I wonder?" asked the honourable Józsi as the people assembled around him after church, like so many question-marks to inquire after the weather, for he possessed a barometer.

"That is precisely the point, your Honour, that it should not come to pass."

"What shouldn't?"

"The death you were speaking about. Do you remember, your Honour, that I once saved you from drowning? You told me then to request anything I desired. At the time it seemed more important to get you dry as soon as possible, but now I do have a request to make: I would like to ask you to stand godfather to my son Bálint."

The fur-capped question-marks straightened up in disbelief and the honourable Józsi's face bore the expression it had assumed when he had found himself going under as he waded in after the coot he had shot. Again my father rushed to retrieve him, saying that it never for a moment entered his mind, not even in his wildest dreams, that this would permit him to take liberties and act overfamiliar with his honour—banish the disgraceful thought—on the contrary, if the honourable gentleman accepted the charge, he would be all the more willing to take his hat off to him, even if he were out of shooting-range, so to speak. The honourable collected himself, and said:

"So be it, Szilveszter."

I rushed home, son, as though the bells were ringing in my head. I did not have the courage to enter the house at once; I stopped to listen at the porch window. Your mother was sitting up in bed, solemnly combing her hair, and you were in the midwife's arms. She was walking up and down in the room, then held you up to the window—as though she were expecting something from the icicles—so it seemed. Then she stepped back from the window and held you up into the steam rising from the water heating on the stove, then put you down on the table, rubbed you, pommelled you, fanned the air above you with the whisk we use to sweep the crumbs up with. Give me the child, Maria! Your mother tucked you under her chin, then laid you in her lap, straightening your swaddling clothes, the little white knitted bonnet on your head. You can leave us now, Maria. Go home and celebrate. The woman went by me without noticing me. Your mother's gaze hovered over your face and it looked to me like tears were seeping from her eyes.

"Bálint, Bálintka, who are you cross with, that you don't want to cry? Have you not the strength, or is it that you don't know how? Open your eyes and look at me, listen to me, don't listen to yourself who says nothing. Watch me cry for you, if you looked at me, Bálint you'd soon have a good mind to cry. Look how the tears gather in my eyes and trickle down my face to rain down upon you, so you stand in no need of bathing, look, if I shake my head they spill like falling dew, and you just lie there, silent, silent, like God in heaven, don't you see you are lying in my lap, Bálint, low, so low, or is it that you are afraid I am ugly when I cry? Don't you think that, Bálint—if someone saw me now, they would say what your father always says—Dear God what a strange creature you are, Agnes—that is my name, Agnes—what a strange creature you are, your face is always sad, it only brightens up when you cry. Go ahead and look at me, Bálint, there's nothing to be afraid of, go ahead! Go ahead, look! Let me hear you! Did I shake you too hard? Did I hold you too tight? Don't be cross, I am sorry, but it is pain I am wishing on you now, for it is because you feel no pain that your tears are choked up inside you. But perhaps I am wrong, perhaps you feel too much pain, and it is pain that cripples your throat, that makes you so fearfully blue... Are you aiming to become a man or God's curse upon me? Is that why I brought you into the world, that I should have to cry instead of you, that I should never see you in your pure form? For through my tears you appear to me like a shattered jug, your closed eyes in the window, half your face up in the corner of the ceiling,

and when I uncover you, your hands and legs are cast up to the sky, to the tree-tops... Scraps and snippets of you floating before my eyes... Dear God, when am I going to be able to gather you up with a calm easy glance? Bálint, Bálintka, who are you cross with, that you don't want to cry?"

Your mother's eyes, son, were like candle-flames by that time. She must have run out of words, for she began to sing in a voice that faltered with crying: The sweet and fine words, of my mother, to whom

I listened, whom I never,
whom I never, no never,
sweet and fine words,
sweet and fine words,

sweet and fine words... What are you doing, Agnes, what are you trying to do? Why are you tormenting yourself? She says: I am teaching the child, I am trying to teach the child to cry. I would teach him to cry... but there's no one to teach.

Sándor, what can we do? Do? Godparents we have, so calm yourself. And there's an explanation. Your sister Rebecca has fetched the dead child's diagnosis. The long-distance diagnosis from Kolozsvár that the schoolmistress' brother sent in reply to the written query. Read it.

"Dear Sister, in answer to the query concerning the child who did not cry I can only say that the symptom was in all probability due to the state commonly known as livid or blue asphyxia. The algid or white asphyxia could also have come into question but judging by the symptoms listed—the purple-blue colour of the foetal cylinder..."

"What does he mean, a foetus!" said my mother, abruptly putting an end to science. "How dare he call my son a foetus! Oh, Bálint!"

And she caught me up and pressed me to her.

Pressed me so hard she almost flattened me—and, with the suddenness of a miracle—my eyes flew open while my mother's solemnly closed.

"Look!"

It was as though her own sight had dripped into me. Raising her face to the heavens she began to improvise a thanksgiving prayer to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost—and with that turned her eyes back to me, glorifying me as her appointed fourth member of the Holy Trinity. Holding me tightly with one hand she fluttered joyfully, laughing, with the other, Agnes, you'll fly out of the window in a minute! Like an old shepherd of the nativity, my grandfather rushed in and knelt down to kindle the fire.

This happened at five o'clock in the afternoon, and their joy did not last long, for we waited in vain for you to cry. Your father ran to the apothecary again, Is it still in the matter of the child's crying that you are haunting the streets, good man?—and back again, dragging his feet in the snow like a wounded animal. If only he had not read the letter, in which Paradise and Hell had been brought together! That other child's death had stuck fast in his flesh, like a bullet. When he turned to me he donned his dutiful consoling mask, but he could not hide from me that he had laid down his arms and begun to give up hope. Several times I had to shout at him: Where is your mind wandering? I almost hated him then for forsaking me, for leaving me to hope alone, for despairing, conducting secret transactions with the blue death. It was beginning to grow dark, and, though Christmas Saturday was past, the carolsingers had returned with their pretzels strung up on

string to ask whether they might sing to us. Oh, no, come back later, come back when my son has cried! Even so a little Gypsy girl with a sack much too large for her slung over her shoulder slipped into the house; by the time we noticed her the little witch was there singing beside you—Jesus' boots are patched and seeping, his sheepskin waistcoat's torn and weeping—do you hear what she's singing? Our whole life is weeping, even that ragged sheepskin waistcoat, only my son is silent, Bálint, Bálintka, who are you cross with, that you don't want to cry? Grief gripped my throat with all its six fingers.

My mother became feverish, compresses had to be brought for her forehead, the bag of salt, the bricks by her side warmed from the heat of her body, sweat dripped off, her whole body trembled and shook her pearly teeth chattered; icy rain trickled down her throat.

I thought my son, this is the end, it's over. Death has surrounded us, like at the Italian front—it has picked off that child, who in falling drags the mother down with it. Agnes, do you see me? Her eyes look burned-out, sightless. I wanted to run for the midwife for help but her choked voice dragged me back: don't leave us alone, Sándor! Bending low over you, she listened awhile then motioned for me to join her: Listen... Your mother's pupils began to dance, my breath took a stumble, the breath caught in my throat; I watched you: your face was still but I could hear your crying. Do you hear it too, Agnes? What is this child doing? He's crying, but it is as if it was not he who cries... Something is crying inside him... Someone... We looked up together, and turned into pillars of salt. Your mother shrieked like a falcon and made my blood run cold: she clasped her hands around her head and cried, Praise be to God, praise, praise...! But it was a delusion only; it was not your crying we heard: it was the wind that brought, from God knows where, the sound of another child's distant cries, but I said nothing, your mother's delirious words held me back. She said that you had met up at last, you and your lost cry: the little gipsy girl with the big sack who had come with the carol singers had slipped out from beside you to stray the streets and sing: she should have stayed by your side, that was her allotted duty, and she had failed to perform it, Christmas or the Child you ought not have presumed to be born on the same day with had lured her away from you. What a good thing she came back, what a good thing she turned up again! I did not contradict her, but nodded assent to everything she said, and it was a good thing I did; in a little while she seemed to grow calmer, forgot the little gipsy girl, began to cry again: these are my last tears, Bálint, I leave them to you, you will have to manage with them as best you can, for I am like an empty chalice, ready for the shroud, I have given you my flesh and my blood, like the Lord's Supper and there is nothing left of me, no bread, no wine...

My uncle Pebbly and my aunt Rebecca did not ask whether they might sing. They came onto the porch, sang Silent Night, Holy Night, recited some rhymes one after the other, and among their New Year wishes as to the fruits that the earth should bear for us thought to include my voice, which, they said, should be strong enough to cut the milk-loaf with. It was a lovely wish, one that my uncle Pebbly, a little tipsy from the wine he had drunk, spoiled as soon as he stepped into the house and took a look at me:

"Is the little bugger still on strike then? I can see his eyes are open, but he seems to have shrunk rather than grown in his obstinacy. It looks as though he's aiming to be not a man but a hedgehog, the prickly little devil! Who knows what he was up to in his mother's womb—the way he huddles there surely seems penitence itself—it's not tears you should be shedding for him, but shaving that monkey-face instead, and checking his feet to make

sure its not hooves he's growing under there, and as for christening him, perhaps it's Durumo you should be thinking of..."

"Brother! Brother, you don't know what you're saying!"

"Of course I know what I'm saying! I can see it too! Here he is, gorging himself on my sister's life-blood before our very eyes—he may not have a voice but he may well have a commission, and who knows but he may have perpetrated it already, sending his father and mother to their graves—where's the mirror, go look at yourselves!—and when his job is done he'll curl up his tail and be gone up the chimney..."

"Shut your mouth! Shut your mouth, you Philistine!" my mother rose from her bed like the last judgement.

My aunt Rebecca began to cross herself rapidly, erecting a little chapel around her.

"I cannot be silent!" continued my uncle Pebbly, giving voice to his destructive opinions. "I will not leave here until you are done with grieving. Is he not pleased to be born a Hungarian? See him turn up his nose, silent like the abyss at our feet! You'll soon make another, one that'll cry, confound it, even a fish like the loach knows how to whimper though God knows its harder to cry underwater... But even the loach knows its duty, there at the bottom of the water, Well then, we..."

At this my mother, violating the midwife's warnings, jumped out of bed and flew at my uncle's face with nails at the ready.

"You were my brother! But I've buried you away!"

She would have scratched his eyes out, muttering oaths, had not my father caught her up in his arms and deposited her with capable and determined hands suddenly and forcefully back on her bed, Agnes calm yourself, brother, could you see to it that you hold your tongue if you can, almost squashing me, the root of all the trouble, in the process. Luckily my uncle Pebbly had caught me up clumsily, holding me high and swinging by the legs, at the sight of which my mother screamed out: My God, the child! You've knocked him against the wall!

This was too much even for me.

Like a carp drowning on dry land I began to gasp, round-mouthed, then, by way of supplication, at first to croak—as it was later said, emitting clouds of blue vapour the while—then to howl, bitterly and loud, overriding the din of curses and soothing murmurs around me: Wha! Whaa! Whaaa!

My father, who had already lost the Great War, made a military evaluation of the silence that ensued. The fuse had been set alight, and the flame had begun to creep toward the charges on the suspension bridges. Words and passions took cover, entrenched. After seconds that seemed an eternity, the voices of the relatives outside shook the windows. My father rushed to the sideboard with his head bowed, took out some glasses, broke one, filled three, and with the exception of my mother, who was drying herself with the soft fold of satisfaction like a soaked dove, they all clinked glasses and drank to the health of the Cry.

"May he be yours for ever!" my uncle Pebbly said. "And when the time comes, may his voice be like a donkey's jaw, the terror of the Philistines—in Samson's hands."

My mother forgave him—perhaps forgave me as well—then fainted. She did manage to say, as she sank back: blessed be the Evil One who teaches our children to cry.

Translated by Eszter Molnár

György Gyarmati

The elections of 1947

At the end of 1945 István Bibó published a major political article, "The crisis of Hungarian democracy". Contemporaries, who were hoping for a better world after the war, reading this article were still justified in believing that an infantile disease of the new political system under construction was involved. However, the "infant" hardly survived to kindergarten age. Eighteen months later the Social Democrat Vilmos Böhm remembered the electoral campaign of 1947 already as "the agony of Hungarian democracy."

Of the rich store of electoral abuses of 43 years ago, the "blue slip" swindles alone have been remembered. This swindle was made possible by an extract from the electoral roll being made available to those who did not vote at their permanent place of residence. These extracts were the blue slips with which those to whom they were issued were able to cast their vote where they happened to be. In the Communist Party leadership, Mihály Farkas, later Minister of Defence, was responsible for the electoral preparations, and with proprietary solicitude he had printed a substantial quantity of these forms, especially for the Hungarian Communist Party (MKP). The "fraternal party" of the Social Democrats (SzDP) also got some of these, but the leaders of the SzDP locked up the suspicious gift in a sealed safe. On August 31, 1947, the day of the elections, the Communists embarked their supporters on trains and lorries, mounted them on bicycles, and they dropped their blue slip votes into the ballot boxes at every polling station on their way.

The various party headquarters got many messages referring to the abuses around mid-day. The fairness of the elections had to be guaranteed—with the authoritative responsibility of the government—by the Communist Minister for the Interior, László Rajk and the Social Democrat Minister for Justice, István Riesz. Since Riesz was completely unaware of the blue slip ploy carried out by the supreme leadership of the two parties, he at once mobilised the officials of the state offices that could be reached. He instructed them to go to the scene and begin an investigation. This step caused Rajk to act. He ordered the police to remove the district attorneys from the electoral premises, and if they refused to leave, they were to be arrested. This led to István Riesz's resignation, and then action by colleagues in solidarity with him, which entered into history under the heading of the "strike by ministers."

The order of magnitude of the hundreds of thousands of blue slips used speaks for itself. Yet these account for but a smaller part of the abuses. The Communists did not simply want to win in 1947, but also to avenge their failure of two years before. Mátyás Rákosi had forecast already in the autumn of 1945 that "the overwhelming victory of the workers' parties projected its shadow". At the elections to the National Assembly the Independent Smallholders Party then won, with an absolute majority of 57 per cent. In addition, the MKP was even headed by the Social Democrats, by a minute margin.

To make up for this failure, the MKP started methodically to eliminate the Smallholders Party. In 1946 they only cut off small groups from the Independent Smallholders Party. Then, in the second half of that year, they construed the "anti-republic plot", which aimed at the complete destruction of the majority party in the parliament. At the beginning of 1947 they succeeded in persuading the Soviet military au-

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thorities to arrest the Secretary General of the Smallholders, Béla Kovács, in spite of the immunity from arrest, which in most countries of Europe, including Hungary, is part of parliamentary privilege. Ferenc Nagy, the Prime Minister, who was also a Smallholder, then did not return from a trip abroad, in order to avoid a similar fate. The MKP wanted to harvest the fruit of this large scale action when it urged the calling of new parliamentary elections in the summer of 1947.

This time the technical details were planned with precision. The first step was the new Electoral Act, by virtue of which approximately six hundred thousand citizens were classified as unworthy of the vote, four times as many as on the occasion of the 1945 elections. But it appears that the MKP did not see an adequate guarantee for winning the elections even in this. Its leaders considered the most practical way to be if they prevented further hundreds of thousands from voting, by using administrative methods.

Let the documents speak for themselves. The minutes were taken at the conference of the Communist election commissioners, where Mihály Farkas's two immediate subordinates prepared the executive apparatus for the tricks to be used.

Quotations from the minutes: "The comrades should not exceedingly respect the law. 700 to 800,000 persons must be excluded from the ballot. This is over and above the figure which the Act removed from the electoral roll. How does this look county by county? In every electoral district (there are a total of 16) that many thousand reactionaries must be excluded as there are candidates in the county. For instance, in the Csongrád-Csanád electoral district there are 36 candidates, and there we have to get rid of 36,000 reactionaries. Do not remove fewer than I have mentioned, but the figure can be somewhat higher..."

"... The rumour has to be spread that after the elections the Social Democratic Party will merge with the Hungarian Communist Party. People must be made conscious that the villages where the MKP gets a significant majority will get extraordinary economic assistance from the new government. The SzDP list must be criticised, and its candidates made to lose face... It must be made known that the Social Democrats have decided to get rid of the minor Arrow Cross people who are in our party."

"It is our job to narrow down the camp of reactionary votes. This can be done by clever organization. For instance, if there are 60 voters in a house and 14 of them are reactionaries, one should forget to deliver the registration papers to them. Let them go to the electoral committee and ask for their papers. It is the duty of the commissioner to establish who must not vote. Then it is possible to forget to deliver the registration paper to the registering commission. Let the person go and try to find it."

"The Communists on the registration commission can demand the presentation of various documents before granting the right to vote... For instance: the registration commission calls on a person to prove that he was not the member of this or that. It may ask for any kind of paper. It takes time to get the documents asked for and causes a lot of trouble."

"There will be some further help from the Ministry of the Interior. The registration forms will ask an extremely large number of questions, including complicated questions. The questions will certainly include a cause for exclusion."

The careful preparation achieved results: even if not to the degree hoped. The Communists won the elections by getting 22 per cent of the vote in 1947. Quoting József Révai, the Minister for Culture and chief ideologist: "Parliamentary chatter gave way to total democracy."

Vote early, vote often

In 'forty-five it was us who won the elections in our town, the Hungarian Communist Party. We came first with forty-five per cent, and came second in the county, after Túrkeve. And we did it all under our own steam, without help from nobody — but not in 'forty-seven. We missed the bus in forty-seven, those Smallholder reactionaries worsted us.

It wasn't for want of trying that we lost, mind you. The campaign was carefully prepared in every respect, as it had to be — it was just that those right-wingers had gone and perked up again. We left no stones unturned, and they sent us help from Szolnok — besides organization at county headquarters was really first-rate — it was just that it didn't quite work out as planned, that's all.

What happened was that I got two lorries from Szolnok jam-packed with comrades who were doing the rounds of all the districts, casting their blue-slip votes at all the polling-booths. I'd taken care of things at our end, made sure they'd be properly received at the polling station but between times the Social Democrat lot had clean infiltrated the whole of the city and put guards up at every polling-station and as soon as they saw an unfamiliar face they jumped. They caught our lot off their guard and wanted to put our men under arrest.

Of course I was there in a jiffy. The Soviet military commandant could always be counted on to get one out of a fix, all you had to do was lift the phone off the hook.

"Hallo, drastoutye."

"Drastoutye, what's the problem, tovarish?"

I told him what my problem was, half in Russian, half in Hungarian, and by the time I was done the lorry was there waiting for me — they never butted in, never meddled, just drove me around — most times it was enough to do the trick, just that they were there.

The Social Democrat guards had no guns, they just kept slapping their hip-pockets and clap-trapped about how our lot should be arrested for intent to defraud and handed over to the Public Prosecutor's office. They were an insolent lot, cussing and swearing and using words you'd never believe.

"Stop your blather", I told them "and git about your business."

No, they said, they weren't going nowhere, they were going to arrest these so-and-sos.

"Far as I know I'm the one that does the arresting around here", I told them.

But it wasn't easy going, I can tell you, we had what you'd call a heated discussion, extremely heated. In the end I had no choice but to make a show of arresting the comrades from Szolnok, symbolically, don't you know, and have them and the two lorries taken to the Town Hall — and put under arrest."

But I did manage to pull a nice trick on them, finally. I took the arrested comrades in through the main entrance and the guards stayed outside, at the gate, but had the lorries

From Zsolt Csalog's oral history interviews, Egy téglát én is letettem (I did my bit, too). Magvető, 1989.

parked at the back, and when half an hour or so had passed and the guards' attention was beginning to flag I said to the drivers: "Comrades, get those engines started up, at the double!"

And to the rest I said: "Get yourselves up there, Comrades, keep your heads down and get a move on, they're waiting for you at Karcag!"

And when those right-wing Social Democrats came up to me and said:

"Where'd you put those men?"

I told them "Listen," I said, "I don't know where they are, you were there at the gate, didn't you see where they went?"

But by that time our lot were casting blue-slip votes at Karcag and God knows where else, they did the round of all the districts, voting in each place, using the same trick.

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Mária Csanádi

Farewell Symphony 1989-90

Angyalföld is the working class part of the 13th district of Budapest with 140,000 inhabitants. Much of it is more like an industrial estate for there are a large number of factories. János Kádár was the local member of parliament. In 1989 there were still 14,000 party members in the area's factories and other institutions. Subordinate to the Budapest party committee, a district party committee functioned, and this controlled local decisions. Its administrative apparatus supervised the institutions of the area, their activities, controlled the key positions and party members; it passed on political guidelines, instructed and coordinated communication among the local branches, lobbied in higher party and government offices in the interest of the area; in other words, it acted as the master of the district.

After the October 1989 Congress of the HSWP, the local membership of the successor party dropped to one-tenth. The institutional instruments of power had ceased to exist, the ties of dependence and of interests were broken. Examining this disruption, I witnessed the process of decay and also how the Party reorganised, relying on its remaining members. I have recorded some prosaic episodes of this process.

December 5: After the congress, the local Party apparatus, reduced to 14, considers itself under notice. Everybody is in search of a job. The Party building, which looks like a bunker from the outside, is desolate inside. Hardly any people in the corridors. The room of the First Secretary is empty. Of the staff, the secretary-typists have already gone to work elsewhere. Second Secretary answers the phone both in the lobby and in his own room. In the absence of a secretary he has to do this himself, running out of the room to call the person required: "Jóska, it's for you!" He makes coffee and serves it on a tray. We chat. Occasionally it is a threatening call, passively stored in his mind. Threats have been frequent for weeks, by phone, in writing, anonymously, from the right and from the left.

December 16: Waiting for M. I met the former secretary in the morning. He has become the managing director of a partly foreign-owned company. He is serving out his term of notice here, he still has no office of his own. He sometimes comes in to attend to his business phone calls. The percolator is still in place. The floor is desolate, somewhere the phone goes on ringing for a long time.

M. was the secretary of the Communist Youth Federation (KISZ) in the 13th district, a graduate in law, who was transferred to the party apparatus after the liquidation of the

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KISZ. She is entrusted with the liquidation of the district party premises. Our conversation is frequently interrupted by telephone calls: some want to obtain telephone lines, embedding their soundings in sympathetic clucking: "You don't say, my dear! And what is going to happen to you now, darling?" Other callers are looking for timber, chairs, other furniture. Several callers ask about moving into the building.

A contract cleaner appears, who has "restructured" his activities: he now burns Party documents in the Budapest district offices. He has come here with a recommendation. M. considers the price too high, whereupon the contractor flexibly reduces his offer and waits in the corridors for hours in order to clinch the deal. M. mentions that for some time it has been necessary to lock the rooms, because anybody can come in through the open entrance, and there have been thefts. Recently a heavy cylindrical ash-tray was stolen from the corridor, elsewhere flowers, palms, radiator-evaporators, curtains, vases, carpets, wallets have disappeared.

January 2: The Constitutional Court will move into the building. Those who hold a valid lease must be given notice, the furniture has to be removed at short notice, the building must be handed over empty. The Constitutional Court does not wish to take over anything. The liquidation rush begins: some furniture and valuables are removed to the remaining party buildings. A limited liability company formed by the former head of the Economy Policy Section and two former employees of the Party-and Mass Organization Section looks after transport.

M. produces an inventory, and arranges a sale of assets in a rush. The removal of documents which have been left out of earlier storing is sped up. The abandoned safes and cupboards are emptied, their contents are placed into sacks. Hardly any documents are left for the new HSP secretary. Sacks are piled up in the empty corridors, papers and bags in the rooms. More and more sacks are lined up in the basement. There are about sixty to eighty sacks. I look into some: file cards and minutes of admissions, disciplinary proceedings, registers of members, duplicates of Executive Committee meeting minutes, papers of the national ambulance service, copies of daily reports from the police, sociological surveys about the aged of the district and about the young, nomenklatura lists, etc. The documents received from Party branches are also heaped up there. Two women select material for destruction in the freezing cold. Only the most used rooms continue to be heated. (Later everything is sent without shredding to the Budapest Party Committee, where—allegedly—the entire assembly hall is chock-full of papers from the 22 districts.)

M. looks after everything from jobs through telephoning to selling the furniture and equipment. Everything is for sale at bottom prices. Institutions can buy. Everybody shows up all the way from the Solidarity Trade Union to local schools and they buy everything: out of order refrigerators, decrepit vacuum cleaners, curtains, carpets, furniture. On that floor, furniture and some files are left only in M.'s room. She was out for a few minutes and I waited for her: a cleaning team (paid by those who move in) come in. They say hello, put the files aside, take down the curtains, wash the windows and move on. By the time M. returns, the room is a shambles.

Two colleagues of M. pack up the ground floor offices. The buffet stopped operating days ago. They take hours cooking Maggi soup on their own electric range. They wear anoraks, because there is no longer any heating. One of them took Lenin's *Collected*

Works to the MÉH (Raw Materials Recycling Trust), where she was asked why such valuable works were being scrapped. She asked back, how much they were willing to pay. Ft 1.80 a kilo,—the price of a bread roll—they said... “Well, you see, this is how much it is worth now.”

An old man hangs around at the porter’s lodge of Party Headquarters and insists that he wants to present a petition to the Constitutional Court. He has difficulty in understanding that they will only move in the next week. The old man gives in: if I was able to wait twenty years, I will be able to wait these couple of days, he says, and totters away.

January 11: We conduct the conversation among heaps of paper, vacuum cleaner pipes and discarded typewriters, in the abandoned room of the duty officer. M. has already sold her own furniture. The upper floor, where M.’s office was, has already been vacated. When, by mistake, I looked for M. there, one of the revolving doors of the circular corridor was locked. I entered through the other. A team exchanged the locks on the doors of the offices at great speed and asked me to leave the corridor. An empty wardrobe with a glass door, in what used to be the room of the duty officer. A yellowed shin-bone on the upper shelf. During the interview my eye frequently goes back on it. Later the bone disappeared from the cupboard.

January 17: I arrive during a tremendous balls-up. Three or four lorries at the back entrance of the building. Men rush in and out, shout at each other, and seem excited. Several people load the lorries, the sacks are no longer in the basement. The entire building is overrun by workers. Everybody carries something: chairs, tables, lamps, plants. Some try to put three armchairs on their head at one time and finally wobble out with two. Broken furniture lies along the corridors. These were still left there by the first attack. On the ground floor furniture heaps fast disappear. On one of the floors I find M.: she issues orders to the inquirers and applicants besieging her. She holds a tray in her hands, with the keys of the offices of the building on it. I join her. She tells me that she has agreed with the district maintenance office that if they clean out the cellar where there is discarded furniture and trash, their workers may buy a few things at a low price. She did not reckon with all the staff turning up to hunt for furniture. The situation was out of control. She asked a few people at least to try to register at the three exits what goes out. In the meantime she opens the rooms together with the heads of local schools who have come to record the furniture that may be taken by them. They are very happy. At least, they will have a desk, they can throw out the ragged synthetic leather couch in the staff room and replace it by armchairs. They will get carpets, coat hangers, a colour television set, chairs, small tables, announcement boards, blackboards.

A group of children come running with a gasping teacher. They carry down the things to the vestibule, where they put up a guard. By the time they get organised, half the things have already gone. They also find maps, and happily put away empty plastic folders to use them at school. In one of the rooms there are a few Marx, Engels, and Lenin volumes and some other books. They pack those too. Lecture notes of the Marxism-Leninism evening university lie around in an open cupboard. M. again shuts the room, until the children finally empty them, and puts a notice on the door: Everything Sold.

The light is on in some rooms, a lecture is still going on. A course continues in all the confusion. In the meantime, people come from other institutions, and men and women too

show up having heard of the loot available. They mention names, with no success. For some time they linger, and then they go. The door of one of the large halls, which had been locked, has been pried open. There is a withering green plant on the floor of the empty hall, and a face of Lenin stares at the nothing from the wall. Lenin in bronze, in marble, white, green, small and large. The busts have been gathered here, some were taken home. Paintings on the corridor walls, the works of local artists and others. I hear that some people are thinking of taking these away too. Elsewhere on the wall there are valuable cabinets, and modern frames of exhibitions. These must be taken away too, the Constitutional Court does not require them.

Room No. 328 is the temporary headquarters of the HSWP, the hard-liners who refused to change their name. We enter this room too. There are two elderly persons there among heaped up papers and newspapers. A Lenin bust on top of the safe. M. tells them that within minutes the person taking over the premises will arrive and take away the furniture, so they must remove the documents. The HSWP people do not protest, they already know that this will happen; they have even ordered the lorry, but it has not yet arrived. In the meantime they have to vacate the room. A woman comes up to M., the representative of some institution leasing one of the premises. She is desperate. Their contract has been terminated, they have not received new premises, they do not know where to go, they will be forced to wait until the police put them out: until then she will stay. As M. moves along the corridor, she is besieged by several questioners, people rush in and out. Soon the damaged furniture disappears too, there are only rags on the floor, pieces of maps, small cabinets, pipes.

January 18: We sit on the floor, in a room already abandoned by the district KISZ, in the last warm room, on a carpet left behind, in the company of some heaped up furniture. There are no chairs left. Only the porter's lodge still functions, I wrap all my warm things around myself, I can feel the cold from the outside. We talk.

February 2: The new premises of HSP are in the old Angyalföld headquarters occupied by the Attila József Theatre. They consist of a few rooms on one of the floors, and a conference room on the groundfloor. A sewing machine belonging to one of the staff. At the other end of the table some curtain material, M. is humming a tune and sewing. She wants to sew twenty curtains by the evening, when there will be a conference. She takes me around the rooms, two contain the Secretary's velvet upholstered furniture, two long tables. They have two functioning telephones. One can only be used for outgoing calls; they do not know its number. She takes me down to the conference room, where two cleaners are at work. One has come from the former headquarters, the other is the head of the local history museum. She cleans the windows. (That evening somebody threw a stone and broke one of the window-panes.)

Bob Dent

Interesting times

May you live in interesting times' is said to be an ancient Chinese saying. Events in Hungary in the recent past would surely have satisfied any Eastern sage.

The Hungarian process of change has been somewhat overshadowed by the more dramatic events in the GDR, Checho-Slovakia and Rumania. Nevertheless, the long-drawn out, peaceful process here is likely to result in a more stable situation in the future.

Because of the lack of high-tension drama and massive street protests, which have characterised the neighbouring countries, it is not easy to say where the process began in Hungary which culminated in the first multi-party elections in more than forty years.

A convenient starting point might be early 1989 when a historical committee of the then ruling Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party suddenly announced that the 1956 uprising was no longer to be regarded as a 'counter-revolution' but rather as a "people's uprising". The floodgates were thus open for a total reassessment of the entire post-56 period. After all, with this small change of wording the Party itself was calling into question the very legitimacy of the Kádár regime, or at least of its foundation.

The inevitable result took only six months to be realised. On June 16th last year Imre Nagy, the prime minister of the 1956 uprising, who had been executed after a secret trial two years later, was ceremonially reburied along with several associates who had suffered a similar fate. The event involved a massive rally with wreath laying and speeches in Budapest's Heroes' Square, followed by further ceremonies in the municipal cemetery where Nagy had lain in an unmarked grave for thirty-one years.

This was perhaps Hungary's most dramatic moment. The rehabilitation and reburial of Nagy signified a public political and psychological cleansing, a settlement of a historical debt and a wiping clean of the slate so a fresh start could be undertaken. Ironically Nagy had been a reform communist, of the type which many speakers singing his praises on June 16th would like to see swept into the dustbin of history. Such are the twists and turns of politics, in Hungary, as elsewhere.

The ruling party continued on its path of reform and liberalisation. A humanitarian decision in the late summer had a tremendous impact in the rest of Eastern Europe. On September 10th Hungary announced it was opening its western borders to allow the exit of thousands of East Germans encamped in Hungary and who wanted to flee to the West.

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This decision and the resulting publicised euphoric crossing of the border led to further pressure inside the GDR for political change, the opening of the Berlin Wall and the later subsequent events. Hot on the heels of the GDR came the November revolution in Czechoslovakia, then rumblings of change in Bulgaria, then the overthrow of Ceausescu in Romania, and so on. All this, it could be argued, was because of Hungary.

At home the ruling party was not going to see such tremendous effects as a result of its efforts, but at the time this was by no means clear. In the autumn, as had been the case throughout the summer, the Party was still standing relatively high in the opinion polls. At 35 per cent, although not commanding an overall majority of popular support, it was well above any of the opposition parties who were still in the stage of forming or re-forming themselves, sometimes after a gap of forty years.

The Party's special congress in October was intended to be a watershed. It was, but not quite as planned. A new party emerged, the Hungarian Socialist Party. Presenting itself as the new, reformed face of the Hungarian left, it had all the well-known, and sometimes well-liked, politicians on its side, including Imre Pozsgay, Miklós Németh and Gyula Horn.

But image, words and indeed deeds in the end turned out to be not enough. After an initial post-congress surge, the Socialist Party's standing in the opinion polls gradually declined to about 10 per cent, where it remained up to the elections.

The Socialist Party has certainly been unfortunate. Throughout 1989 reforms were coming thick and fast. Society was opening up and restrictions were being lifted almost week by week. Although not a popular concept in today's Hungary, it is nevertheless a fact that to a large extent the new multi-party and freer system has come about because the old ruling party was willing both to implement reforms and to engage in a dialogue about change which, as it turned out, meant they were digging their own grave. Such a smooth abdication of power, albeit unintended, is a historical rarity. The Socialists were wrong, however, to believe that their role would be appreciated.

The referendum held on November 25th last year partly put paid to that. That was the date when the parties had agreed there would be an election for Hungary's new president. Four dissenting opposition parties, however, collected thousands of signatures and forced a referendum instead. Under the slogan "let the people decide" there were four questions the opposition mini-coalition wanted determined. The most contentious concerned whether to elect the new president before or after the elections for parliament. The oppositionists wanted a later election. It wasn't emphasised that in this case it wouldn't be the people who would decide, but parliament itself which would elect the president.

A wafer-thin majority of less than 1 per cent decided that the president would be elected after the parliamentary elections. This put paid to the, at that time, very good chances of Imre Pozsgay becoming president, and the Socialists entering the election contest with the advantage of their party already holding the presidential post. No doubt this tactical consideration was always at the forefront of the referendum campaign.

More significant was the extremely low turnout. In Hungary's first ever referendum, and after weeks of publicity and argument, 40 per cent of the electorate didn't bother to vote at all. This lack of participation was to characterise the parliamentary election itself later, and ought to be a concern of the new government.

As the Socialists declined, so the others rose. The Hungarian Democratic Forum, the Alliance of Free Democrats, the Smallholders, the Federation of Young Democrats and the Christian Democrats—these were the parties which emerged in the forefront, the first three all well ahead of the still ruling party in the pre-election opinion polls.

From early in 1990 the campaign was underway. Political posters appeared everywhere and almost every night there were serious, sometimes too serious, discussions on television.

A visitor from Mars watching these broadcasts might have concluded that there were no women in Hungary. Almost every political party representative in virtually every discussion was male. When it came to selecting candidates for the individual constituencies the parties proposed women for only 10 per cent of the seats, on average. Only the small Green Party had something specific to say about the necessity of changing women's role in Hungary.

The point here is that while the new (and the old) parties in Hungary are falling over themselves in their proclaimed identification with Western democratic practices, this kind of under-representation of half the population would today be totally unacceptable in any Western party laying claim to be a party of the future.

Understandably the new parties want to get away from the old practices whereby women were promoted on a token basis, for purely political or ideological reasons. But here—and there are other examples—perhaps it's a case of throwing the baby out with the bath water. The old ways of promoting women's participation may have been distorted, but the ideas of equality of the sexes and combatting sexism are still relevant.

Our visitor from Mars also might have had difficulty in distinguishing one party from another. Politically, everybody, it seemed, was anti-communist in an ideological sense, i.e. in the sense of lumping together in an ahistorical way Hungary's entire forty year past and rejecting the lot. Economically everybody was pro-market, in one degree or other. 'The road to Europe' became a political buzz-phrase of all and sundry. What was meant, of course, was Western Europe, but nobody seemed to be asking exactly which Western Europe, that of mafia killings in Italy, of anti-Turkish racism in West Germany, of illiberal secrecy laws in Britain, or of rural unemployment in Portugal. The radiant future was no longer 'communist' but 'European'. Ideological phrasemongering takes a long time to discard, even when the words are new.

The election itself went peacefully (a great plus) and smoothly, despite a laughable computer hiccup involving delayed counting after the first round on March 25th. But given the generated excitement, publicity and newness of the event, the turnout was surprisingly low, 35 per cent of the electoral didn't bother to vote. In the second round two weeks later, necessitated because in most of the 176 individual seats no candidate got more than 50 per cent in the first round, the turnout was disastrously low—45 per cent.

'The triumph of democracy,' proclaimed the headlines after the elections. The low level of participation, however, should surely bring some caution into the euphoria. Add to this the fact that nearly half the seats in the new parliament were distributed not proportionately to votes cast but on a first-past-the-post system, it means that the winning party (as it happens the Democratic Forum, but the argument would equally apply had the balance tipped in favour of their closest rival, the Free Democrats) has gained a parliamentary majority far in excess of its relative support at the polls.

Hungary's new coalition government, which is dominated by the Forum, ought to be careful about assuming that it has a natural base of support in society, at least not from a close examination of the actual voting pattern, and taking into account the abstentions. At best it could assume the temporary goodwill of the nation, as people place their hopes in what has been labelled the 'change of system'.

Life for most, however, goes on unchanged. Rising prices and housing difficulties continue. The market brings fears of greater inflation and possibly unemployment. The new government, in the time-honoured tradition of Western politicians, will be able to blame the previous administration for current difficulties—for a while at least. Then will come the reckoning with society. One can only hope for the best, for the government and, more importantly, for society.



Mihály Fülöp

The failure of the Hungarian–Rumanian negotiations on Transylvania in the spring of 1946

On April 23, 1946, the Hungarian government debated the Hungarian peace aims and decided to send Pál Sebestyén¹ as special envoy to Bucharest to negotiate with Petru Groza, Prime Minister of Rumania, and his deputy, the Foreign Minister Gheorghe Tatarescu. The intention was to improve relations between the two countries and to settle outstanding issues concerning frontiers and the status of minorities. The Foreign Ministry was instructed to prepare an aide memoire. It was hoped Hungary and Rumania would find a solution instead of having to rely on the verdict of the Great Powers, as they had done after the Great War.

The Hungarian–Rumanian frontier issue had been left open by Article 19 of the armistice signed in Moscow on September 12, 1944: "Transylvania (or the greater part thereof) should be returned to Rumania, subject to confirmation at the peace settlement."²

A council of Foreign Ministers for settling territorial issues and preparing peace treaties

was established in Potsdam. The Foreign Ministers of the three Great Powers (the Soviet Union, the United States of America and the United Kingdom) were empowered to make decisions concerning the Rumanian–Hungarian frontier.

At a conference in Moscow (December 15–27, 1945) the three foreign ministers agreed that the three Great Powers would advise the King of Rumania to include a member of the National Peasant Party and a member of the Liberal Party in the government. After this was done, the Rumanian government was partially recognised by the American and the British governments in February, 1946. The Hungarian advantages, namely the 1945 autumn elections and the recognition of the Hungarian government, had vanished. The pendulum had again swung in favour of Rumania.

At the conference of the Deputies of the Foreign Ministers in London (January 18, 1946 April 20) the Soviet delegation, in drafts for a Rumanian peace treaty presented on March 11 and in one for a Hungarian peace treaty presented on March 27, suggested that the Vienna Award be declared null and void, and that the whole of Transylvania should be returned to Rumania. Thus the Soviet position was clear. The Foreign Office held that "Feeling among Hungarians, Rumanians, and Russians, seems

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to be developing towards a solution of the Transylvanian question on a basis of autonomy, rather than frontier rectification. All plans for minor frontier adjustments seem to cut across the railway line running North and South just inside Rumanian territory, unbroken operation of which is essential to the economic life of the area. More extensive alterations would be unjustifiable on ethnic grounds. It would seem that the action of the Soviet Union in handing back de jure administration of Transylvania to the Rumanian government while leaving de facto control largely in the hands of the local Hungarian communists presents probably the best immediate solution to Transylvania's political problem. In any case, it is unlikely that we shall be able to persuade the Soviet Union to alter the settlement they have already made." So on February 28, 1946 the British delegation informed the Americans: "We would not oppose their raising the question of the frontier, if they see fit, but we are not convinced that any alteration of existing frontiers between Rumania and Hungary is in fact desirable." The British delegation would approve of the reestablishment of the Trianon frontiers if all the frontiers, including the frontier with the Soviet Union, are exactly established in the peace treaty.³ On April 17, 1946 Bevin telegraphed to his representative in Bucharest that he should tell the King of Rumania for his own information "that it is not their intention to suggest or support any modification of the Trianon frontier, although they would, of course, be ready to recognise any rectification of it that might be mutually agreed between Rumania and Hungary."⁴ The latter formula was included in the text of the British message under the influence of the Americans, who had changed their position by the middle of March, 1946. The Deputy Secretary of State, James Clement Dunn, in his March 19, 1946 telegramme to London claimed, in full knowledge of the Soviet position, that the case for a rectification of the boundary is not sufficiently clear to warrant making a major issue of it. Dunn reached the conclusion that it may not be desirable politically to attempt an alteration of these boundaries by means of the present treaties, although he was against imposing "provisions which preclude later adjustment by other means." Secretary of State Byrnes accepted

James Dunn's reasoning therefore on April 10, 1946, at the conference of deputy foreign ministers. The American delegation presented an amendment to Article 19 of the Soviet draft-peace treaty referring to Rumania: "the decisions of the Vienna Award of August 30, 1940 are declared null and void without prejudice however to direct negotiations between the governments of Rumania and Hungary, looking towards an adjustment of the frontier which would substantially reduce the number of persons living under alien rule."⁵

At their April 16, 1946 session in London the deputy foreign ministers of the three Great Powers decided to include the article on the restoration of the Rumanian-Hungarian frontier of January 1, 1938 into the draft peace treaty. A Soviet amendment of the text was rejected and so was an American amendment that "the Allied and Associated Powers are ready to recognise any such rectification of the Rumanian-Hungarian frontier in which the sides interested might reach a subsequent mutual understanding and that might considerably decrease the number of persons living under alien rule".⁶ As the Soviet proposal, with a different wording, repeated the contents of the commonly accepted article, the Paris session of the Council of Foreign Ministers (April 25, 1946-May 16) could only decide on the American amendment which envisaged the possibility of a bilateral agreement.

Petru Groza wanted to visit Hungary in the spring or autumn of 1945. However, at that time the Hungarian government regarded the peace negotiations of the Great Powers as the forum where the Transylvanian question would be settled and didn't look on the territorial settlement as final,⁷ thus Groza's visit was inopportune. The messages Groza sent to Budapest in the beginning of 1946 did not change the Hungarian position. On January 15, 1946 Petru Groza, through Dr Dezső Hirsch, a Hungarian diplomat, requested Prime Minister Zoltán Tildy "not to allow himself to be influenced by reactionaries. He was asked not to permit such forces to raise the Transylvanian question again, since this could lead to disaster. He—Groza—was engaged in a life-and-death struggle, in

which Marshal Stalin fully supported him." He wanted to make serious efforts to establish a customs union... and in this way a powerful economic block" which would extend from the Baltic Sea to the Black Sea, that would replace states that were not viable economically."⁸ At the end of January the Prime Minister of Rumania complained to an old Hungarian acquaintance of his that in Hungary the revisionist tendency prevailed again, and added that although his policy concerning Rumanian-Hungarian friendship received no echo in Hungary, he let the responsible quarters in Budapest know that he would go on fighting for his ideals even on his own. ...Revisionism would only lead to a revival of the Little Entente.⁹ In March, 1946 Groza summarized his ideas on the frontier issue when briefing Rumanian envoys abroad: "When talking about the Hungarian issue they must never refer to historical rights, since these are always disputable and it can never be determined whether it is the Hungarian position or Daco-Rumanian continuity that is right. He has only one right to Transylvania, and this is that he endowed the Hungarians in Transylvania with equal rights and that he will defend these rights also in the future in a manner that will by itself put an end to the importance of the frontier."¹⁰

By the end of 1945 or early 1946 the Rumanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs—against the intentions of the Prime Minister—had compiled a documentation on the Rumanian-Hungarian frontier issue at least as large as had been prepared for the 1919 Peace Conference. Following Groza's protest, Vasile Stoica, the Secretary General of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, replied that they must be prepared for every eventuality in case the Rumanian government could not establish a common position with Hungary at the peace negotiations.

In the middle of January, Andrei Vishinsky, the Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs, assured Tatarescu that the Soviet Union would support the restoration of the January 1, 1938 Rumanian-Hungarian frontier. At the beginning of February, 1946, Tatarescu tried to convince the French political representative in Bucharest that the western Great Powers could maintain their political prestige in Rumania only by a restoration of the Trianon frontier, and at the end of the month King Michael similarly

tried to persuade the American and British envoys.¹²

Tatarescu presented five memoranda on the Rumanian-Hungarian dispute to the representative of the Soviet government: on Rumania's efforts in the war against Germany and Hungary, on the Transylvanian issue, on the Rumanian-Hungarian frontier, on Rumania's reparation claims on Hungary, and on provisions that were to be inserted in the Hungarian peace treaty. The Rumanian government requested that the Trianon frontiers be confirmed by the peace treaty since, after having signed the armistice agreement, Rumania had fought on the Allied side. Article 19 of the Hungarian armistice agreement signed in Moscow on January 20, 1945, apart from annulling the two Vienna awards, imposed the withdrawal of Hungarian troops and of the administration behind the December 31, 1937 frontiers; the Rumanian administration was reestablished in Transylvania; the 1920 peace treaty of Trianon was concluded after "a thorough examination" in which the governments of the United States and Great Britain had taken part; the soundness of this solution has been fully confirmed by the remarkable development of Transylvania in all domains and by the comprehensive and tolerant policy of the Rumanian people towards national minorities. After the restitution of Northern Transylvania, this policy has been re-affirmed with even greater emphasis."¹³

The English translation of the Rumanian note was sent to London on board the SS *Transylvania*, but was not handed to the British and American Deputy Foreign Ministers. Indeed Tatarescu wanted to avoid raising the territorial issue. He had only received information from Moscow on the London discussions of the Council of Foreign Ministers and wanted to act in keeping with the Soviet promises he had received from the Chairman of the Allied Control Commission. He made the distribution of the Rumanian note dependent on the course of the London conference of the Deputy Foreign Ministers. In spite of the urging of the Rumanian representative in London, Tatarescu was unwilling to start a diplomatic conflict with Hungary. He held that "despite the repeated failures of Groza's pro-Hungarian policy, Moscow supported it with unprecedented intensity."¹⁴

*The visit of the Hungarian government
delegation in Moscow
and Pál Sebestyén's mission in
Bucharest*

On March 6, 1946 the note of the Peace Treaty Division concerning territorial questions was discussed at an inter-party conference in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Budapest.¹⁵ János Gyöngyösi, the Foreign Minister argued that "as regards Rumania, no call has come from the Great Powers to start direct talks." Referring to the probable reaction of the great powers to a Hungarian territorial note he said that "he was asked to expound his position so he must do so. The Soviet Union, which is the decisive factor in this region and neighbour to almost all interested states, will most probably remain indifferent to a territorial claim against Rumania. At least, two months earlier when he had raised the issue with the Soviet Union's representative in Budapest, he had not been rejected with indignation. Since then this issue has not been raised, so the Soviet position may have changed in this respect due to the deterioration of Soviet-Hungarian relations." Gyöngyösi referred to the fact that "the Soviet Union as well has requested us to make our position clear" and "it would be very strange if in spite of this, the Hungarian government did not expound its position... All our neighbours have already disclosed their position, making it clear that they want to maintain the Trianon frontiers. The situation of our envoys abroad is awkward since, without an official Hungarian position, they do not know what to represent. We must expound a definite and clear position."¹⁶ But Gyöngyösi did not get his way. On March 23 work on the territorial note was temporarily suspended because of disagreement between the coalition parties. Groza's concerns relating to supposed Hungarian territorial claims had no grounds: the Hungarian government's preparation activity was unrelated to the Great Powers' ideas on a frontier adjustment—which had just been abandoned. The Soviet government, by calling on the Hungarian government to present its position, adhered to the January 14, 1946 three-power agreement.¹⁷

The Hungarian peace-aims in relation to Rumania were formulated only on April 8, 1946, the night before the government delegation's departure for Moscow (April 9–18, 1946). At the meeting held in President Zoltán Tildy's office it was decided to present two proposals about the territorial settlement, one referring to the whole of the 22,000 square kilometers to the west of Transylvania proper, known as the Partium, the other to a narrow frontier region of 11,800 square kilometers, with a majority of Hungarian population.¹⁸ On April 9, Foreign Minister János Gyöngyösi submitted the proposal to Molotov, and on April 11, Ferenc Nagy presented them to Stalin. Both Gyöngyösi and Nagy joined maps to their proposals. Stalin asked twice whether any population exchange was part of the plan. Gyöngyösi's answer was negative, however, he considered it possible to include such an exchange. Then Stalin joked and said "that if the Soviets accept the plan, the King of Rumania will abdicate," and Ferenc Nagy, the Hungarian Prime Minister replied that "Rumania would then at last become a Republic, like Hungary". Stalin then asked Molotov about the terms of the Rumanian Armistice Agreement. Molotov told him that "the Allies will support the Rumanians' claims to at least the greater part of Transylvania." Stalin thought for a while and then said that he would think the matter over and that they would meet again. Ferenc Nagy's report on April 19, given to the American representative in Budapest, makes it clear that the Soviet leaders emphasised that the decision was up to the three Great Power signatories of the armistice agreement. Basing themselves on Article 19 of the Rumanian armistice agreement, they found it possible to raise the Hungarian claims, but they did not commit themselves to supporting them. On the contrary, Soviet Deputy Foreign Minister Dekanazov and later Foreign Minister Molotov assured the Rumanian representatives in Moscow that the Soviet Union would defend, the Trianon frontier against any change.¹⁹ On April 15, 1946 under the influence of information from Moscow, the Rumanian government instructed its representative in London to present a note to the Conference of the Deputy Foreign Ministers requesting a confirmation of the Trianon fron-

tier, and an acceptance of Rumanian reparation claims.²⁰

The Soviet government chose to respect the principle of the Three Power decision—taking into consideration the American amendment presented in London in April 10, 1946—so on the same day, April 15, Foreign Minister Molotov suggested to the Hungarian government delegation that pending Rumanian–Hungarian issues be settled by direct negotiations. The Soviet Foreign Minister emphasised in connection with Rumania that “it would not be advisable to submit the question (of the Hungarian–Rumanian frontier—M.F.) to the Peace Conference, without having it first discussed with Rumania.”

Gyöngyösi was not enthusiastic about the bilateral negotiations and said: Hungary has already had its elections but public opinion represented by the majority party is just as difficult to handle as in Rumania. If direct negotiations do not lead to a positive result, the Government will be accused of having made an error and that it would have been better to submit the question to the Peace Conference.”²¹ But Molotov said that it was natural that the proposition to start the negotiations should come from the country which has more interest in the matter. Gyöngyösi then asked whether the Soviet Union would approve of such an initiative. Molotov gave an affirmative answer.

Pál Sebestyén's mission to Bucharest took place after the April 23 meeting of the Hungarian government. On April 27, the Hungarian Deputy Foreign Minister informed Foreign Minister Tatarescu about the position of his government, and in the afternoon of the same day he gave the same information to Prime Minister Groza, hinting that a friendly great power knows about it and supports it. Sebestyén said: “Hungary found itself in the unfavourable situation of being, of all the Danubian countries the one which gathers the smallest percentage of the nation within its own frontiers. A significant part of the Hungarian people live in foreign countries amongst foreign peoples.” The most important problem for the Hungarian government was the situation of Hungarians in Rumania. Under these circumstances the Hungarian government would raise the issue of the

Hungarians in Rumania at the peace conference and would present proposals to deal with it. Prior to his, the Hungarian government wanted to engage in friendly and confidential talks on the issue with the Rumanian government. “The Hungarian Prime Minister and Foreign Minister sent me here to make a formal proposal for the negotiations, in which the two Prime Ministers and the two Foreign Ministers would take part. The Hungarian statesmen would be ready to travel to Rumania. From the point of view of future relations between Rumania and Hungary, the Hungarian government would consider it of great importance that this meeting should take place, if we could settle our problems ourselves, between us, in a friendly manner... We have good reason to presume that a settlement of this kind, the form of which would give free scope to various solutions, would be welcome by the government of our big neighbour, the Soviet Union.” In his answer Tatarescu claimed that “there was no responsible Rumanian statesman, nor a single Rumanian, who would be ready to look on the western border of Rumania as negotiable, not even the subject of confidential talks. Transylvania—as the cradle of the Rumanians—was most sacred and precious, and therefore Rumania cannot ask for or expect anything at the peace conference other than the final confirmation of the borders of Transylvania.” At the Hungarian envoy's protest, he admitted to Sebestyén that the Trianon frontiers allotted territories to Rumania which could not be called the cradle of the Rumanian nation by any stretch of the imagination but—according to Tatarescu—Rumania, bearing in mind its role in the war of liberation could not contemplate negotiations concerning any territorial issue.

Prime Minister Groza gave the Rumanian government's official answer to Pál Sebestyén in the afternoon of the same day.

He felt compelled to say that perhaps there might have been a time when the two countries could have dealt with pending questions—including the border—in direct talks. He had attempted to meet the Hungarian Prime Minister, but the Hungarian answer at that time had been that the time was not opportune for such a meeting. Now it was he who was not in a position to negotiate on territorial issues and that for

two reasons: one formal and one substantial. For formal reasons he could not negotiate with Hungary on territorial issues because the matter was before the Great Powers already, and he did not consider it proper that two small states should try to anticipate the decision of the Great Powers. Concerning the merits of the issue Groza did not find it possible to negotiate on the frontiers. In his view breaking up the unity of Transylvania would be a fatal mistake. Groza said that he could not imagine a fair territorial arrangement. To include the Székely Country in Hungary plus a corridor would mean breaking up Transylvania, which was a nonsense. On the other hand, handing some 20,000 square kilometers to Hungary would transfer too many Rumanians to Hungary. Pál Sebestyén commented that given the insubstantiality of the borders—declared by Groza—Groza should as little object to that as to the presence of 1, 500, 000 Hungarians under Rumanian rule. Groza finally repeated how much he regretted not to be able to accept the Hungarian proposal concerning a meeting, and he still hoped to make the acquaintance of the Hungarian Prime Minister and the Foreign Minister soon.²²

The Rumanian rejection of the Hungarian initiative had three consequences. At the end of April the Hungarian government presented its proposal concerning a territorial settlement to the Allied Great Powers. This had no effect on the drafting of the peace-treaty and the same was true of the Rumanian memorandum, presented in London on April 15, 1946. In the morning of May 7, 1946, at the 11th session of the Council of Foreign Ministers in Paris, where the Rumanian issue was discussed, Secretary of State Byrnes withdrew his proposed amendment, which has already been mentioned, it having become obsolete owing to the failure of the Sebestyén mission. As Molotov also found it unnecessary to insist on the Soviet supplementary proposal, the three Great Powers resolved to establish the January 1, 1938 frontier between the two countries. On April 29, 1946 Prime Minister Petru Groza summed up his views on the Hungarian-Rumanian frontier issue and his policy towards Hungary to Sándor Nékám, the Hungarian representative in Bucharest, as follows: "He fully understands... that the Hungarian government should take an

interest in the life of the Hungarians outside Hungary and especially in Transylvania. He himself would do the same if a great number of Rumanians happened to live outside the frontiers of Rumania. He also understands that for this reason the Hungarian government expressed claims against Rumania before the Great Powers. He would like to make it clear that this does not prompt him to change his policy. He could assure me that it was not for electoral reasons, even less so to obtain territorial advantages at the Peace Conference or on the frontier issue that he initiated his pro-Hungarian policy. To him friendship with the Hungarians was basic, being convinced that this policy was of vital importance for both nations and that this was the only right way. The frontier issue was in the hands of the Great Powers, they would decide. Whatever the decision will be, he will follow the same line, he will create a customs union, he will make sure that the frontiers are insubstantial, he would create determined friendship between the two nations."²³

NOTES

¹ Dr Pál Sebestyén (1893–1973) was head of the Department of International Law at the Foreign Ministry between 1937 and 1941. He held another senior post between 1941 and 1944. During the time of the Provisional National Government he took part in the reorganisation of the foreign service. On August 1, 1945 he became the executive head or General Secretary of the Foreign Ministry.

² See St. Lache-Gh. Tutui: *Rumania si Conferinta de Pace de la Paris din 1946* (Rumania at the Paris Peace Conference of 1946) Cluj-Napoca, 1978 p. 318. Here and below the term Transylvania designates the whole of the Hungarian territories annexed by Rumania following the 1920 Peace Treaty of Trianon.

³ Public Record Office Foreign Office (PROFO) 371.S7153, February 28, 1946. Summary of the territorial settlement of the peace treaty with Rumania.

⁴ PROFO 371.5914.

⁵ Foreign Relations of the United States 1946, vol. VI pp. 587–588 (FRUS) The text of American Amendment Council of Foreign Minister (Deputies) (Balkans) (CFM) (D) (B) (46) 13.

⁶ (FM) (D) (B) 46 12th session. April 16, 1946.

⁷ New Hungarian Central Archive, Foreign Ministry Peace Treaty Division (NHCA-FM-PTD) October 11, 1945, second N° 40705/Bé=1945.

⁸ NHCA-FM-PTD Dezső Hirsch's report of January 24, 1946 N° 249/Bé/1946.

⁹ NHCA-FM-PTD Keresztes's report of February 4, 1946 from Bucharest N° 21/pol/1946 on Roumanian peace preparation activity.

¹⁰ NHCA-FM-PTD Sándor Nékám's report of March 18, 1946 from Bucharest N° 48/pol/1946.

¹¹ Ministère des Affaires Étrangères. Archives et Documentation (MAE.AD) Série Europe 1944-1949 Roumanie vol. 24. Jean-Paul-Boncour's telegram N° 420 on December 20, 1945.

¹² MAE AD Série Z. Europe 1944-1949 Roumanie ro/24. Jean Paul-Boncour's telegramme of January 16, from Bucharest about the Tatarescu-Vishnisky Conversation.

Jean Paul-Boncour's N° 148-149 telegramme of February 8, 1946 from Bucharest about the Tatarescu-Vishnisky Conversation.

Jean Paul-Boncour's N° 148-149 telegramme of February 8, 1946 from Bucharest about his conversation with Tatarescu.

FRUS 1946 vol. VI. pp. 578-579

Burton Berry's N° 246 telegramme from Bucharest of February 28, 1946.

PROFO 371 54145 le Rougetel's N° 280 telegramme from Bucharest on February 26, 1946 about his conversation with King Michael.

¹³ MAE. AD. Série Z. Europe 1944-1949 Roumanie vol. 28.

¹⁴ MAE. AD. Série Z. Europe 1944-1949 Roumanie vol. 28. Jean Paul-Boncour's N° 42 telegramme from Bucharest on March 27, 1946.

¹⁵ NHCA-FM-PTD

Note N° 40 res Be. of February 20, 1946 on the Hungarian-Rumanian Questions.

¹⁶ NHCA-FM-PTD

Note N° 51/res. Bé.

¹⁷ Stephen D. Kertész: *Between Russia and the West. Hungary and the illusions of peacemaking 1945-1947* (University of Notre Dame Press, 1984/ p. 96 Transylvania) The Kent State University Press, 1983, p. 208. A Schoenfeld's N° 350 telegramme from Budapest of February 18, 1946 on his conversation with Count Gyula Desewffy and Schoenfeld's 486 telegramme of March 9, 1946.

¹⁸ NHCA-FM-PTD István Kertész's Note of April 10, 1946 N° 70/B res. Bé=1946.

¹⁹ Stephen D. Kertész: *The last European Peace Conference: Paris 1946* (University Press of America 1985) p. 112-120 MAE. AD Série Z. Europe 1944-1949 Roumanie vol. 24. Jean Paul-Boncour's N° 339 telegramme from Bucharest of April 19, 1946.

²⁰ The Trianon frontier is the frontier established in the Hungarian Peace Treaty of 1920 which was signed in the Petit Trianon Palace near Paris

MAE.AD. Série t. Europe 1944-1949 Roumanie vol. 28. and vol. 24. See Gen. Catroux's N° 921 telegramme of April 17, 1946 from Moscow.

²¹ NHCA-FM-PTD.

Ferenc Kemény's note of April 15, 1946 N° 1119 (Bé/1946)

²² NHCA-FM-PTD.

Pál Sebestyén's report of April 30, 1946 N° 1216/ Bé, and 1217/Bé

Mihály Fülöp: *The fate of Transylvania. História*, 1988/2

²³ NHCA-FM-PTD

Sándor Nékám's report of May 3, 1946 N° 177/ pol/1946 from Bucharest

APPENDIX I.

Report by Pál Sebestyén on talks with Gheorghe Tatarescu, Foreign Minister of Rumania, on April 27, 1946

Foreign Minister Tatarescu asked that I call on him on Saturday, 11 a.m., and Prime Minister Groza asked that I do so on the same day at 6.30 p.m., obviously to ensure that Tatarescu should be able to inform the Prime Minister about the purpose of my visit and the contents of my message.

Tatarescu received me with the broad gestures and loquacity characteristic of Rumanian politicians and diplomatists, and with all the external signs of cordiality. After an introduc-

tory conversation about my journey, my impressions of Bucharest and the city's suffering during the war, I asked Tatarescu to permit me to inform him about the purpose of my visit. The order of ideas in my discourse in which I tried to carry out the Prime Minister's instructions to give a hint that the government of a friendly Great Power was aware of our step and supported it was as follows:

The Hungarian government, after the Moscow negotiations, and taking into consideration the

proximity of the Peace Conference, thought the time ripe to define its positions and the claims it would make at the Peace Conference. Hungarian policy has no other aim — I said — than to live in peace and friendship with the Great Powers, primarily with the neighbouring Soviet Union, and putting aside the adversities of the past, to create and maintain good-neighbourly coexistence and close cooperation with neighbouring countries, allowing the country to devote all its energies to economic, moral and political reconstruction in a peaceful atmosphere. Within the scope of these general guiding principles the Hungarian government—as the trustee of the interests of all Hungarians—has only one concern, namely the future of Hungarians outside the borders of the country and thus excluded from Hungarian political life. Hungary found itself in the unfavourable position of being, of all the Danubian countries the one which gathers the smallest percentage of the nation within its own frontiers. A significant proportion of the Hungarian people live in foreign countries, amongst foreign people. The largest proportion of these are in Rumania. It is therefore understandable that of all the neighbouring countries the most important problem for the Hungarian government is the situation of Hungarians in Rumania. Tatarescu will understand that, given these facts, the Hungarian government would raise the issue of the Hungarians in Rumania at the Peace Conference and would present proposals to deal with it.

The expression of the Rumanians responsible of the desire for reconciliation and for sincere cooperation with Hungary, and the expression of friendly feelings towards the Hungarian people and its government—which the Hungarian government highly appreciates and reciprocates—makes it the duty of the Hungarian government to meet friendship with friendship and sincerity with sincerity, and for this reason the Hungarian government—before raising the issue of the Hungarians in Rumania at the Peace Conference—would like to discuss matters with the Rumanian government in friendly and confidential negotiations, which negotiations would cover all pending questions between Hungary and Rumania, including territorial rearrangements without which the Hun-

garian government cannot imagine a solution of the problems of Hungarians in Rumania. The Hungarian Prime Minister and Foreign Minister had sent me here to make a formal proposal for the negotiations, in which the two Prime Ministers and the two Foreign Ministers would take part. The Hungarian statesmen would be ready to travel to Rumania. From the point of view of future relations between Rumania and Hungary, the Hungarian government would consider it of great importance that this meeting should take place, so that we could settle our problems ourselves, between us, in a friendly manner, allowing us to appear so to speak hand in hand at the Peace Conference. We have good reason to presume that a settlement of this kind—the form of which would give free scope to various solutions—would be welcome by the government of our big neighbour the Soviet Union, indeed the neighbour of both.

Tatarescu constantly interrupted me and tried to sidetrack me with rhetorical effusions accompanied by broad and theatrical gestures meant to emphasise his friendly feelings and sincerity. When I reached the end of what I had to say he said:

He had no intention to anticipate Prime Minister Groza's position, however, being aware of the Rumanian government's ideas and the Rumanian people's feelings he, as far as he is concerned, could promptly answer the Hungarian government's proposal and could declare that there was no responsible Rumanian statesman nor a single Rumanian who would be ready to look on the western border of Rumania as negotiable or even the subject of confidential talks. Transylvania—as the cradle of the Rumanians—was most sacred and precious and therefore Rumania cannot ask for or expect anything at the Peace Conference other than the final confirmation of the borders of Transylvania.

At this point I interrupted Tatarescu and said that I had no desire to provoke a debate, all I wished to do was to make two remarks:

1. I respect the noble feeling which Rumanians entertain about Transylvania but I must draw his attention to the fact that the frontiers of historic Transylvania cannot be identified with the present western borders of Rumania, since the Trianon borders allotted territories to

Rumania which cannot in any sense be called the cradle of the Rumanians.

2. As regards the situation of the problem before the Peace Conference, the Hungarian government must consider Rumania's western frontier an open question, bearing in mind the known arrangements of the armistice agreement with Rumania. Given these international legal and diplomatic antecedents, the Hungarian government cannot accept the Rumanian position that the Trianon frontiers should be considered as 'noli me tangere'.

To my first remark Tatarescu could only answer that he accepted my argument, nevertheless, he hastened to add that the western regions had become inseparable from Rumania to such a degree that they were unable to distinguish emotionally between the two any more, and what was true for Transylvania was true also for the other regions I mentioned.

His answer to my second question was more interesting. In essence he admitted that the Great Powers had not at the time of the armistice agreement decided on the whole of Transylvania, however, the reason was merely the fact that they desired to make the allocation of the whole of Transylvania to Rumania dependent on how the Rumanian army and government fulfilled their obligations under the armistice agreement. Well, they had more than 100 per cent fulfilled their duty, they had taken part in the war of liberation with twenty divisions instead of the twelve stipulated, at the cost of more than 100,000 lives, etc., etc., therefore the con-

dition on which the reestablishment of their former frontier depended being fulfilled, all that remained to be done was the confirmation of those frontiers by the Peace Conference.

Tatarescu ended his remarks saying that much as he appreciated the proposal of the Hungarian government, he was not able to say anything other than that he could not see the possibility for any negotiations that even touched on the territorial issue. If one day the frontiers of Rumania were definitely confirmed, there would be no impediment to collaboration. That would be the time to discuss our problems and to settle them. He would certainly immediately and fully report on our very important talks to Prime Minister Groza and I would be given a definite answer by the Prime Minister.

I then expressed my regrets that apparently, the Hungarian government's proposal would not be given a favourable reception by Rumania. The Hungarian government felt that by making an attempt to settle Hungarian—Rumanian issues through direct negotiations it was carrying out a duty to the Rumanian government and the Rumanian people which derived from the friendship the Hungarian government felt for the Rumanian government and the Rumanian people. Whatever the position, I asked him to look on this step by the Hungarian government as an expression of friendly loyalty. Tatarescu pointed out that this was only natural, and we said goodbye to each other with the utmost cordiality. Our talk had lasted more than three quarters of an hour.

APPENDIX II.

Report by Pál Sebestyén on talks with Prime Minister Groza of Rumania on April 27, 1946

Prime Minister Groza received me in his office at six o'clock on Saturday afternoon. Following mutual greetings and polite formulae he told me that Foreign Minister Tatarescu had informed him about the purpose of my journey and the proposals I was to hand over, as

well as giving him a detailed account of the talks he had with me. He was well aware of the importance of the step taken by the government of Hungary. He described our meeting as of historical importance in relations between the Hungarian and the Rumanian nations.

After Groza's introductory words, I asked to be allowed to present the message of the government of Hungary to him as the head of the government of Rumania, and I did so, essentially telling my piece to Groza in much the same manner as I had done to Tatarescu.

Groza did not interrupt me, he attentively listened and took notes, and then, he as well, presented his answer as a connected, longish, discourse.

He went into great lengths about his own political past and his present political intentions. Quoting his own writings and speeches, he discussed his efforts to produce a reconciliation between the Hungarian and Rumanian nations, the means he used to this purpose, the difficulties which he had overcome and which he would overcome in the future as well, and he detailed results he had achieved to which he—so to speak—looked back with pride.

He felt forced to reply to the Hungarian proposals concerning direct negotiations that perhaps there had been a time when pending questions—even that of the border—could have been solved in direct negotiations. Indeed he had made attempts to meet the Prime Minister and the Foreign Minister of Hungary but the Hungarian reply had been that the time had not come for such a meeting. At present, however, it was he who was not in the position to discuss territorial questions with the Hungarian government, and that for two reasons, one formal, and the other substantial.

The formal reason why he could not discuss territorial questions with Hungary was that the problem was already in front of the Great Powers, and he did not consider it right that we, two small states, should try and anticipate the decision of the Great Powers.

This thesis, in this formulation, appeared as something new, even as a surprise, after my conversation with Tatarescu, the more so since Groza repeatedly returned to the point in a number of variations e.g. "it is not up to us small countries to interfere in the political games of the Great Powers", "He who sups with the devil must use a long spoon" (literally: it does no good to eat cherries out of the same dish with great lords). This repeated emphasis had to make me think that this position must have taken shape between my seeing Tatarescu and

Groza. I have nothing to go on regarding the question whether the factors involved were purely Rumanian, or whether Groza had meanwhile consulted others.

Groza stubbornly hung on to this position, although at first I merely remarked that the government of Hungary has good reason to suppose that the Powers—contrary to what he maintained—would only be too happy to be relieved of the burden, indeed the odium, of having to decide on the Hungarian—Rumanian frontier issue, continuing I went further saying that a Great Power equally friendly to both our countries had expressly advised that an attempt be made at a direct arrangement. Groza chose to ignore these observations, making no comment and maintaining his position. Since I did not consider it part of my job to talk Groza into accepting the Hungarian offer, I chose to behave in a receptive manner only.

The substantial reason why Groza considered negotiations about the frontiers to be impossible was that he thought of the destruction of the unity of Transylvania as impossible and as a fatal mistake. He argued at great length that he was born in Transylvania, that he was a Transylvanian in the first place, and that being a citizen of Rumania took second place only. Transylvania was a unity which could not be broken up, that was proven by the unfortunate Vienna Award, and by the immeasurable suffering that derived from it. When, in the Belvedere Palace, Ribbentrop and Ciano cut into the living flesh of Transylvania, neither the Budapest nor the Bucharest government cried out in pain, because neither was a true mother to Transylvania. Only Transylvanians had a feel for, and understood, Transylvania. That is why he undertook to solve this problem with entirely different means. What had to be done first was to bring the Hungarians and Rumanians closer to each other, to get them to understand and like each other, so that they would not merely know and respect each other, but love each other as brothers, living together as such. He felt that he had done pioneering work in this field and that something had already been achieved. Overcoming aversion and jealousy he had invited Hungarian artists like Oszkár Dénes and Rózsi Báronyi (!) to appear in Bucharest, he had arranged a film festival, and on March 15th there

had been a Hungarian Celebration in Bucharest where they had sung the Kossuth Song and the Hungarian Anthem, and the walls of the Atheneum had not collapsed! The Hungarian Opera had performed to frenetic applause in Bucharest, and the Bucharest Opera did so, at the same time, in Budapest. But that is only laying the emotional foundations of the action. The essence was the planned customs union, and free travel, turning frontiers into air. If the Székely could travel to Hungary without travel documents, and the Hungarians from Hungary to Transylvania as well, tempers would calm. When this plan was first made public there was great bewilderment in Rumania but they are getting used to it. Marshal Stalin had also approved of his ideas. (At this stage, to say something pleasant to him, I interrupted that Hungarian experts as well had occupied themselves with such things and that they judged the possibilities to be favourable, which made Groza very glad). Come what may, he wanted to implement his plan, indeed he wanted to extend it to other states, in particular Yugoslavia and Bulgaria. But not to Czechoslovakia, since advanced industrialisation there meant a certain threat to weaker Rumanian industry.

Further efforts concerned administration. He did not think that territorial autonomy was necessary since Rumanian national minorities legislation made it possible for all Hungarian wishes to be fulfilled. Hungarian counties would have Hungarian prefects, Hungarian towns Hungarian mayors, and Hungarian villages Hungarian headmen and notaries. There would be Hungarian gendarmes in the Székely Country, let them keep order among their own kind. He was well aware of course that his measures did not meet with understanding everywhere, indeed there were places where they were sabotaged, but he was fighting for success with all his might. The other day, for instance, journey-

ing in the environs of Kolozsvár, he met a peasant woman from Magyarlóna he knew from way back. She told him that in her village, where there was a Hungarian majority, the notary was Rumanian and so was the headman, that there was not a single Hungarian on the village council. As soon as he had got back to Bucharest he had taken measures, via the prefect, ensuring that the parish council be made up of Hungarians. That's my way in national minority politics, he said, gesticulating!

In any case, Groza said, he could not imagine a sound territorial solution when it comes to Transylvania. Linking the Székely Contry to Hungary through a corridor would lead to the carving up of Transylvania, which was an absurdity. To join twenty or more thousand square kilometres near the frontier to Hungary would mean that too many Rumanians would be included in Hungary. (I quietly observed that, if the frontiers were to be made insubstantial, as he had indicated, he should object as little to that, as to the presence of a million and a half Hungarians under Rumanian rule, given similar conditions.)

Finally Prime Minister Groza repeated how much he regretted that, because of the formal and substantial reasons he had expounded, he could not accept the Hungarian proposal concerning a meeting, but he had not given up the hope of making the acquaintance as soon as possible, of the Prime Minister and the Foreign Minister, whom he highly esteemed. He asked me to pass on to them all that he had said, assuring them of his friendly feelings which the Rumanian people as a whole shared. He wished me to convey his warmest regards.

Groza then handed me an inscribed copy of his "In prison darkness," in memory of our present conversation, as he said. A number of polite sentences on my part concluded the conversation.

Tamás Kabdebó

“The Hungarian Way” for Ireland

Arthur Griffith's historical parallel between Hungary and Ireland

Many have drawn parallels between the fate of Hungary and the history of Ireland but the lines of these parallels are not really well known. For instance few will recall Bertalan Szemere's visit to Ireland in 1837 and that of Ferenc Pulszky the year before. Yet they both published vivid accounts of their stay.¹

The best known example of drawing a parallel came from the pen of Arthur Griffith,² one time editor of the weekly *United Irishman*, later the first president of the Irish parliament, one of the founders of the modern Irish State. Griffith, first in 1904 then in 1918, published a book that became an instant best seller in Ireland: *The resurrection of Hungary, a parallel for Ireland*. Although not in print, the book is widely taught in Irish university and was, on its 50th and 60th anniversary, mentioned by (first) Attila Fay of Genoa University and reviewed by myself for the BBC. The first edition actually appeared at the same time when Stephen Daedalus and Leopold Bloom met in the novel of James Joyce.³ The Dublin Ulysses was a Jew of Hungarian origin.

It sounds ironic, yet it is true: the example of Hungarian history gave the idea to Griffith to advocate and organise a movement called Sinn Féin.⁴ But, let me add, the original Sinn Féin, starting up in the first decade of this century was non-violent. Sinn Féin means 'ourselves', and the organisation's model was Kossuth's⁵

Védegylet or protective association. "Buy Irish products!" "Establish the Irish Theatre!" "The National Museum!" "The Gaelic language movement." — these were the original slogans, the overall aims being to call to life an Irish Parliament, *independent* of Westminster.

Griffith's book was an apotheosis of the Hungarian struggle, Hungary's historical fight to regain her independence and it showed Deak's⁶ example as a *modus vivendi* to reach that goal.

With twenty parallel examples of Austrian-Hungarian and English-Irish political relationships Griffith demonstrated that each dominating country always ruled on the principle of *divide et impera*. This was most obvious in Austria formenting trouble among Hungary's nationalities and England exploiting the differences of opinion between Catholics and Protestants. Griffith's book convincingly argued that as the Hungarians were successful in adhering to the laws of 1848, and thus retaining their Sovereign Parliament, the Irish, who had a similar parliament in 1783, will be successful if they will not give up, nay increase their constitutional demands. 1848 was significant for Ireland. Under the leadership of William Smith O'Brien,⁷ the Young Irelanders (like the *Giovanni d'Italia*) attempted to revive Ireland's constitutional freedom by gathering in arms. The bid failed and the Young Irelanders⁸ (like the Hungarian exiles after 1849) scattered around the globe. John Mitchel⁹ was jailed, Thomas O'Reilly¹⁰ went to America where he met Kossuth, William Smith O'Brien was exiled to Australia. He was allowed to return to Europe in the late 1850s when he settled for a while in Brussels. Later, by promising political non-involvement to the

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English Crown (echoes of Count László Tel-eki,¹¹ who was made to do the same by Francis Joseph) he was allowed to return to Ireland. On his last European voyage in 1861 O'Brien visited Vienna where the Reichsrat was in session with the Hungarian delegation absent. O'Brien then rushed to Hungary where he witnessed¹² the passive resistance country-wide and the closing session of the famous meeting headed by Deák. Writing about the 22nd August 1861, when the Hungarians reasserted their constitutional privileges, O'Brien wrote in his diary: "This was the greatest day in my life." Since he could not engage in overt political agitation any more, he copied the *Appeal* by Vörösmarty¹³ in his diary and stated—in his journal, to his journal—that the "Hungarian way" was the way forward, politically, in Ireland.

In 1867 the British authorities executed three Fenians. The members of the Fenian Brotherhood had sworn to liberate Ireland by any means. After the executions a lot of questions were asked in the press, mainly in the *Freeman's Journal* about the efficacy of violent struggle.

A poet named John O'Donnell¹⁴ decided to publish a poetic answer, entitled *cui bono*. His answer (given below in excerpts) is an affirmative yes, and he sees in the Austro-Hungarian Compromise of 1867—which he alludes to as an example—the peaceful corollary of our earlier armed struggle.

*You asked me twice, in anxious mood,
What good can Ireland win, achieve,
By boasting of the right of blood—
What sullen day can she retrieve?
I answer: For the common good,
Let her be hopeful, and believe.*

*If destined to be conquered—slain—
By native foe or foreign fate,
Of Ireland solely would remain
A memory void of space or date—
A dim tradition of the main—
A leper by the city gate.*

*Again you turn to me and say:
"But why such gallant sacrifice?
The peaceful land before them lay
They needed no avenging cries;*

*They might have clearly said their say,
And spared the tears of women's eyes."*

*And answer thus I freely give:
Suppose them happy, self-content—
Suppose them cursed and fugitive—
Their natures took their natural bent;
They knew the nation could not live
By fraud and foul oppression rent.*

*They saw this Ireland trampled down;
They hoped no mercy from the foe;
In wasted field and ruined town,
Altar and hovel tumbled low;
And by the Harp that wears no Crown,
They swore to lay the Saxon low.*

*They failed I grant you—Klapka failed—
But not the cause for which he bled:
Disaster, blood, and tears entailed,
Till beaten Hungary ran red,
And Europe howled and Europe railed
Above the victors and the dead.*

*But still the mighty Magyar race,
Persisting, won the doubtful day;
The empire charmed to sudden grace,
Achieved its mission—forced its way;
The nation's sons got breathing space,
Its heart resumed its pulse and sway.*

*Are we unworthy less renown?
Are we unworthy less reward?
We who, despite our masters frown,
Cling to tradition of the sword,
And prize the axe that strikes us down,
More previous than the spiteful word*

*I say—let history answer this—
For us we freely risk the chance,
And, meanwhile, be it joy or bliss.
Our constant motto is: Advance.
To ladies, whispered voice and kiss;
For Freemen, rifle, sword and lance.*

*You see our corpses strew the field;
You see our standard in the dust;
You see our legions backward reeled
Before the foes' imperious thrust.
We'll dare all that before we yield—
The cause is good, and God is just.*

At the time of the first edition of Griffith's book there were several important cultural/political movements in Ireland, like the Celtic Literary Society, the National Council, the Cumann na nGaedhael, each in its own way, continuing the 19th Century Celtic revival and working towards Irish independence and unity. In 1782 Westminster—fearing a large Irish volunteer force—acknowledged Ireland as a separate Kingdom. However, by the Act of Union (1801) this separateness went into abeyance and what parliamentary representation remained for the Irish had to be, perforce, through Westminster. In the wake of the "Resurrection," Griffith and his friends proclaimed that the "Hungarian way" will be the political salvation of Ireland. Through articles and political speeches Griffith argued that just as Hungary was unable to overcome Austria by arms—partly because Austria's web of alliances—Ireland will not be strong enough to take on Britain, militarily speaking. Griffith was a republican but preached royalist prudence. He knew that Ulster was strongly in favour of a link with the English Monarchy, even to the extent that it would threaten a rift in a unification movement. He advocated, therefore, the Deák way, a personal union between England and Ireland in the person of the King, but otherwise separate administrations.

In 1916, unknown to Griffith, many of his friends and political allies conspired to proclaim "the Irish Republic" through the famous and bloody Easter rising. Many were killed in the street fighting, others executed. Among the many jailed were Griffith and de Valera¹⁵. In 1918 they were released—a guerilla war and an internecine struggle raged between 1916 and 1922—and Griffith reaffirmed his views for a peaceful solution. This was not to be. The Treaty in 1921—incidentally signed by Griffith—declared Ireland a Free State, minus Ulster, which remained with Britain.

NOTES

¹ Szemere, B. *Külhoni utazás*. Pest, 1840 3 vols; Pulszky, F. *Aus dem Tagebuch...* Wien, 1837. József Eötvös has also written about Ireland, without visiting it.

² Arthur Griffith (1872—1922)

³ On the 16th June 1904, which has since been christened Bloomsday. In actual fact Joyce met his future wife Nora Barnacle on that day.

⁴ Sinn Fein. Founded in 1905. In 1968 it split, resulting in the Provisional Sinn Fein and the Official Sinn Fein.

⁵ Lajos Kossuth (1802—1894), the leader of Hungarian nationalists prior to 1848, governor of Hungary in 1849, leader of the exiles afterwards.

⁶ Ferenc Deák (1803—1876), the architect of the Compromise of 1867.

⁷ William Smith O'Brien (1803—1864), the younger brother of Lord Inchiquin, patriotic leader of the Young Irelanders.

⁸ Young Irelanders, originally led by Thomas Davis. They first grouped around the periodical *The Nation* in 1842. As a movement it did not outlive the arrests in 1848.

⁹ John Mitchel (1815—1875). After Daniel O'Connell he became the leading member of the Irish Confederation, was tried, jailed, escaped, farmed in America, and finally returned to Ireland.

¹⁰ Thomas O'Reilly, Young Irelander. His visit to Kossuth is described in Mitchel's *Jail Journal* (Dublin 1914, p. 205).

¹¹ László Teleki (1810—1861) Hungarian envoy in Paris cf. Horváth, Z. Teleki László, Budapest, 1964. vol. 1. ch. 6.

¹² Ms. *Travel journals*, Germany, Austria, Hungary, Poland, Italy, 1861. Two exercise books kept by Anthony O'Brien, Dublin.

¹³ *Szózat*, by Mihály Vörösmarty. O'Brien copied the Hungarian, and its German, French, and English translations as well.

¹⁴ John Francis O'Connell (1837—1874) Poet and journalist, an editor of *The Nation*.

¹⁵ Eamon De Valera (1882—1975) Irish nationalist, first prime minister of free Ireland, later President.



KING MATTHIAS CORVINUS (1443–1490)

Erik Fügedi

A king for his season

Something unusual occurred in the middle of the 15th century. Following the sudden death of King Ladislas V of Hungary and Bohemia on November 25th, 1457, the lords spiritual and temporal in both of his kingdoms chose native magnates, Matthias Hunyadi and George Podebrady, to be the kings of their countries.

The election in Buda was held on January 24, 1458, and tradition has it that the ceremony took place on the frozen Danube. There were three contenders, all Hungarian aristocrats. One was the Count Palatine László Garai, lord of fifteen castles and their appurtenant estates, the second was the Voivode of Transylvania, Miklós Újlaki, with sixteen castles, and the third Matthias Hunyadi whose possessions were more modest. All three headed parties largely made up of retainers. Garai was the most powerful, and kin to the late king. Matthias was the least influential, backed only by the nobility of the eastern part of the country. Újlaki alone could raise three thousand lances more than the king. Thus all three stemmed from prominent noble families, yet none was substantially superior.

A compromise was worked out in Szeged by Garai and Mihály Szilágyi, Matthias' maternal uncle. Garai was promised immunity for having been party to the execution of Matthias' elder brother, László, a year earlier, and was also allowed to keep his office. In return he agreed to vote for Matthias. He was also promised that Matthias would marry his daughter and would "respect as a father" his future father-in-law. The electoral diet set into law the demands of the nobility and elected Szilágyi as Regent for Matthias, who was still a minor.

The king designate was born on February 23, 1443 in Kolozsvár (Klausenburg–Cluj). He was brought up in the spirit of Humanism and knew Latin, Czech and German. His father, John Hunyadi, the hero of the 1456 relief of Belgrade, used his young son as an interpreter. Marzio Galeotto, of Matthias' court, noted that Matthias "dictates all letters that he sends, or if he has others write them, he at least reads them." At eleven the boy was knighted by his father in Belgrade. By the time of his election Matthias was already widowed, having lost his wife, Erzsébet Cillei, after only three months of "marriage." After 1455 he lived at the royal court, seemingly free, but in reality a hostage until his arrest in 1457. Following his brother's execution, when the country became unmanageable, King Ladislas had moved his court to Vienna and later to Prague, taking Matthias with him.

Erik Fügedi's numerous publications on medieval Hungarian history include two books in English, *Castle and Society in Medieval Hungary (1000-1437)*. Budapest, 1986; *Kings, Bishops, Nobles and Burghers in Medieval Hungary*. London, Variorum Reprints, 1986.

After Ladislas' death, Matthias quickly proved that he was capable of acting independently. He negotiated a treaty with George Pódebrady and engaged himself to marry his daughter, Katharina. Even when it became clear that his supporters had other intentions, including a different wife, he stood to his decision. The barons soon had to recognize that Matthias could not be controlled. He cleverly excluded his uncle from government and had his brother buried with pomp and circumstance in the cathedral at Gyulafehérvár (Alba Iulia). When Garai and Újlaki did not appear at court for several weeks, he relieved them of their offices and appointed his father's old supporters in their place. This move was an open challenge to the magnates. The barons, together with Szilágyi, offered the Hungarian throne to Emperor Frederick III of Habsburg. Frederick accepted, took the title of King of Hungary but sent neither soldiers nor money. Matthias responded by depriving Szilágyi of his power, then taking a solemn oath of allegiance from a number of loyal barons, thereby isolating the conspirators. Finally, after Garai's sudden death, he crushed the insurgency by his troops.

Matthias was successful in other areas as well. In 1464 he concluded an agreement with Jan Jiskra z Brandysa, the leader of the Bohemian Brethren in northern Hungary, and thus reestablished the unity of the country and his repeated campaigns against the Ottomans secured him enthusiastic support. By and large the campaigns were futile, though he was able to capture the fortress of Jajce in 1464. The next campaign followed thirteen years later, when he captured the fortress of Sabac. This was Matthias' last war against the Ottomans, although he continued to express his intention to fight the Sultan. He did not do so, in spite of the fact that at the time of his succession the pope had entrusted him with the impossible task of "destroying the Muslim faith."

Both Matthias' contemporaries and later generations were puzzled by his Ottoman policy. Some have accused him of betraying Hungary's interests, others believed that he first wanted to conquer western lands with their wealth and then march against the Ottomans. Most likely the explanation lies in the bare fact that Ottoman military superiority was absolute, there could never be a decisive battle, and cooperation by Christian rulers was an illusion. Matthias even tried to ally himself with the Persians, in the rear of the Ottoman Empire, but they were too far away and their social system too different. A coordinated campaign was out of the question.

Such were the conditions under which the country's defence had to be assured. At a time when siege artillery still used stones, the advantage appeared to be with the defenders. Strong lines of defence could exhaust the enemy and force it to retreat before the onset of winter. Matthias planned to establish such a line of defence from Jajce, through Srebernik, Zvornik, Belgrade, Smederevo, to Golubac. However, he was not able to carry out his plan, and bands of Ottoman irregulars kept breaking into the country, pillaging and seizing inhabitants. At no time, however, did a regular army cross this line of defence. We now also know that at that time the Sultan's attention was focused on territorial gains in Asia.

The first period of Matthias' rule ended with his coronation in 1464. To be considered the legitimate king of Hungary, he had to be crowned with the Holy Crown, but that was in the hands of Emperor Frederick III. To attain it Matthias had to pay a high price,

not only in money, but also by agreeing that if he died without a legitimate heir, the Hungarian throne would revert to Frederick. Frederick being twenty-eight years his senior, the treaty appeared to favour Matthias. Nevertheless, Matthias continued all his life to either woo Frederick or to fight him.

Clashes with the Turks revealed how weak the Hungarian defences were, and it became evident that a standing army was needed. To raise the necessary money, Matthias introduces fiscal reforms in 1467. Old taxes were replaced by new ones and their collection enforced. By 1470 the treasury's income probably reached 800,000 gold florins and even surpassed that amount in the 1480s. Compared to his predecessors, this was quite a respectable income, close to that of the Dukes of Burgundy. Nevertheless it hardly sufficed to cover military expenses and the luxuries of the court, including his wedding in 1476 with the Neapolitan Princess Beatrice. For this reason, in the 1480s Matthias regularly collected an extraordinary tax, five times the amount of regular direct taxes. It proved a heavy burden on a country which was able to export only precious metals and livestock. Surplus income could come only from taxation and economic growth.

Matthias' taxation was extremely unpopular and even led to minor uprisings. Nevertheless, paradoxically, Matthias lives on in Hungarian and South-Slav folk memory as the embodiment of social justice. A 16th century saying is still current: "Matthias is dead and so is justice."

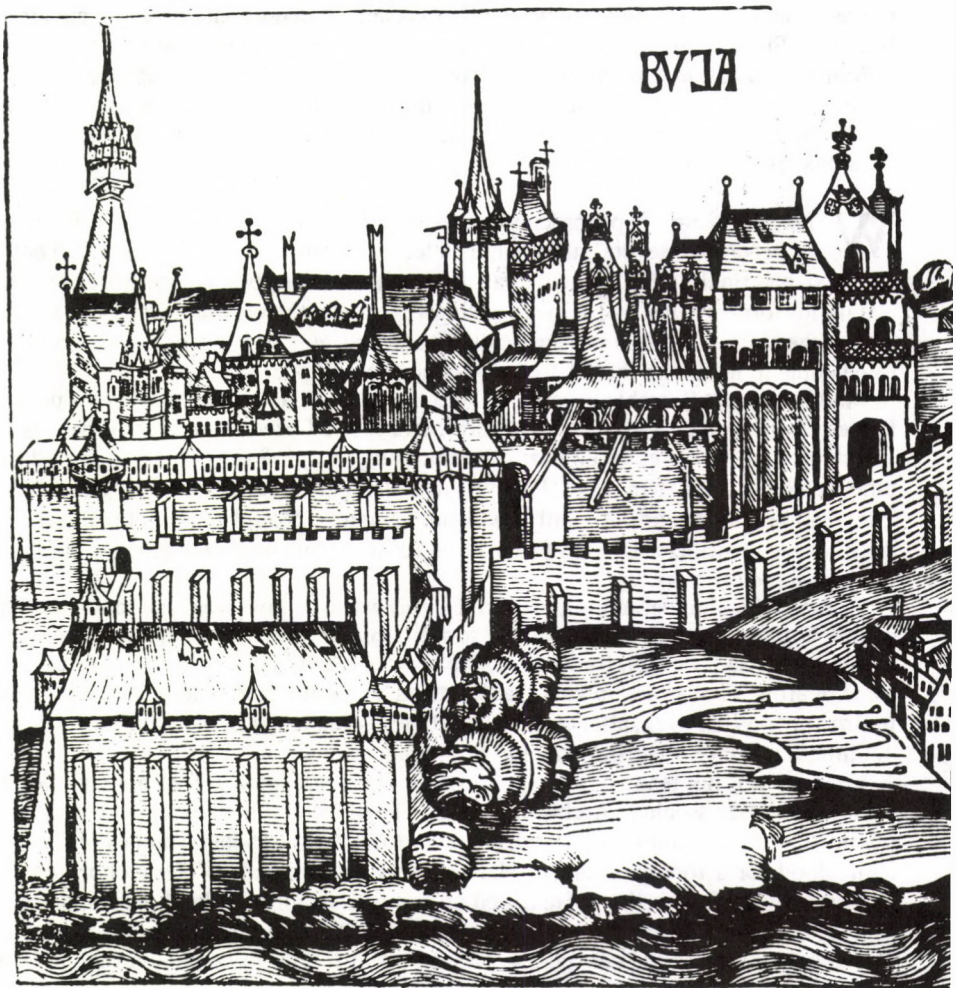
When 1466 the Pope proclaimed George Podebrady a heretic and stripped him of his crown, several rulers were called on to carry out the Pope's will. They all declined, and finally Matthias, who had offered his services before, undertook to march against his former father-in-law—surprisingly, given that he was just as much an outsider among the kings of Europe as Podebrady. But he had, at least initially, the support of his royal council, including that of Vitéz, Archbishop of Esztergom.

Matthias was at first able to capture Moravia and Silesia. Both sides avoided decisive battles, since mercenaries were expensive, and instead tried to capture fortresses and towns, thereby taking as much territory as possibly. In 1468 the two armies faced each other at Trebic for sixteen days. That was a tactic the Hungarians were unprepared for. They had no modern artillery only awkward catapults. Matthias did not recognize the significance of artillery. Even towards the end of his reign he exclaimed that "a catapult is worth three cannons."

That Matthias' undertaking failed in the end was not, however, due to any military action. Diplomatic negotiations finally recognised the status quo. Matthias' opponents joined forces against him; furthermore, the Hussites could not simply be suppressed by force of arms. Thus it was in vain that Matthias had himself crowned King of Bohemia in Brno in 1469. In 1471, after George Podebrady's death, the Bohemian Estates elected not him, but Prince Vladislav Jagiello of Poland.

Matthias was not ready to give in, however, and came into conflict with his fatherly friend and close associate, Archbishop John. The old churchman expressed the general opinion in the royal council that the Estates were not willing to spend money on and shed their blood for a foreign country. Matthias was not persuaded. The archbishop then plotted to overthrow the king. He called on Prince Casimir of Poland, a great grandson of King Sigismund on his mother's side, to claim the Hungarian throne. Again Matthias was able to suppress the conspiracy. He had no difficulty in convincing the nobility,

through promises regarding taxes and so forth, to protest against an heir in the female line. The archbishop was left without supporters, and Matthias soon defeated the inferior army of the Polish prince, who was forced to retreat. Nevertheless, 1471 proved a fateful year for Matthias, both as ruler and man. He had failed to acquire the Crown of Bohemia; a number of educated men around him left him, and minions took their place; he came to be increasingly alone. In 1476 even his new favourite, Johannes Beckensloer, the new Archbishop of Esztergom, switched to Frederick's side. Matthias no longer had real associates, only secretaries who had neither the skill nor the legal training to oppose their ruler's every whim. Matthias became increasingly despotic. Most of the decrees of the 1480s were issued "by personal order of the Lord King."



Prince Casimir's aspirations to the Hungarian throne in 1471 put an end to any friendship between Hungary and Poland. In 1474 the king of Poland—the prince's father—Casimir IV, decided to avenge his son by conquering Silesia. Matthias, besieged in Wroclaw, applied scorched earth tactics and thus dispersed the enemy's huge army. The ensuing peace treaty, which was confirmed following new clashes four years later, summed up the gains and losses of the Bohemian wars. Matthias was allowed to keep Moravia and Silesia, as well as the Bohemian crown. At the same time he agreed that, after his death, Vladislav would be permitted to redeem these territories for 400,000 gold florins. Ten years of war, which had cost countless lives, huge sums of money, and a great deal of energy, were a failure.

View of Buda

Schedel Chronicle, 1493



King Matthias Corvinus

Matthias' personal isolation was only deepened by his wife. Beatrice was educated and charming, but she drew Matthias into Italian politics, which were none of his business. His Italian court chronicler wrote that the Hungarians "disprove of his spending, day after day accuse the king's wife of wasting taxes on trivialities, impugn him for not being thrifty as the earlier kings, for deviating from the ancient traditions, for casting aside the old customs..."

It was Beatrice who brought Renaissance art to the Hungarian court, and Matthias was ready to use it for his own purposes. He proved a genius at ceremony and showed it in his wedding arrangements through his choice of horses, the colour of costumes of his pages, drivers, and stable boys and their places in the parade. Matthias had begun the reconstruction of the palaces of Buda and Visegrád and became a generous patron of the arts. He was the first to establish the "new style" in a land beyond the Alps. Yet all the while he must have had his reservations, since he chose the Gothic style for his burial chapel, built towards the end of his reign.

It was not a desire to be fashionable that inspired Matthias to found his famous library, the "Bibliotheca Corviniana". Ever since childhood he had felt the need to read, and there are records of his having read at night even when campaigning. As early as 1464 or 1465, his library was already well-known, and following his fiscal reforms in 1467, he acquired books from Italy on a large scale. After crushing the conspiracy of 1471, Matthias incorporated the libraries of Archbishop John of Esztergom and the bishop and poet Janus Pannonius into his own. As a result, the Corvinian Library, with its two to two and a half thousand volumes, became the second largest in Europe, after that in the Vatican.

The large library and the court's generosity attracted humanists, primarily from Italy. From there came Antonio Bonfini, Matthias's court chronicler, who wrote a most detailed biography of the king. Marzio Galeotto, also from Italy, wrote a flattering book on the king's wit. Although there were also Hungarians in this entourage, there were only a few of them.

Matthias considerably raised cultural standards in Hungary. His boundless energy allowed him to attend to many matters simultaneously. He assisted in the reform of the Dominican order, revised the order's studium generale in Buda, and reviewed the diocesan prayer books. He recognised the importance of printing, and even published pamphlets to popularise his cause against Frederick III. During Matthias's reign Andreas Hess established the first printing press in the country. However, Matthias' greatest achievement was that he was able to induce the nobility to abandon its merely oral culture. Characteristically, the lay about the siege of Sabac was recorded in writing.

In 1477 the Emperor Frederick III surprised Matthias by recognising Vladislav as King of Bohemia and Elector of the Holy Roman Empire. Matthias declared war on Frederick and went on to capture most of Lower Austria. Frederick was saved only by the intervention of the papal nuncio, who was able to negotiate a peace. Frederick had to renounce his claim to the Hungarian throne and pay 100,000 florins compensation.

Peace was made urgent by an unexpected event in the Ottoman Empire. When Mohammed II died, Prince Jem rose against his brother, Sultan Bayezid II and, after his defeat, took refuge with the knights of the Order of St John. Matthias saw the advantage of invading the Ottoman Empire in alliance with a Moslem prince, and requested that Jem be sent to his court. When his request was refused, he decided that the Christian world's

fight against the Turks was in vain, and in 1483 he concluded a peace with the Sultan. This allowed him to turn his attention to Frederick III, and he was able to take a number of Austrian towns. The campaign ended in 1487 with the capture of Wiener Neustadt. It had, however, climaxed two years earlier, when Matthias led his 20,000 men to seize Vienna, where he took the title of Duke of Austria.

Matthias's staunchest opponents were the aristocracy, which had gained exceptional power in the early fifteenth century. The king employed stick and carrot: he endeavoured to keep the old aristocracy out of government office, but he kept them as judges and as officers of the court, where they could raise the court's splendour by displaying their own. He appointed new people to government posts, either relatives or his father's retainers. The latter included Imre Szapolyai, his father's former steward. The great families, who had long been influential in politics, considered Matthias a tyrant. But he did not fare much better with the newly raised. They were quick to accept their role, but were offended for receiving mere titles without the power of their predecessors. To win them over, Matthias created the legal status of "baron" without an office, something that had not existed until then. Earlier titles had merely gone with office. Some of his followers were rewarded with exceptional powers. Among the newly privileged, Szapolyai's governing of three banates (Croatia, Slovenia and Dalmatia) made him something of a potentate, and István Báthory, a member of an ancient family, was for a long time both Judge Royal and Voivode of Transylvania. In the last resort what can be said about Matthias's transformation of the power of the aristocracy is that he was able to curb it but not eliminate it, and at most only added new families to join the older ones.

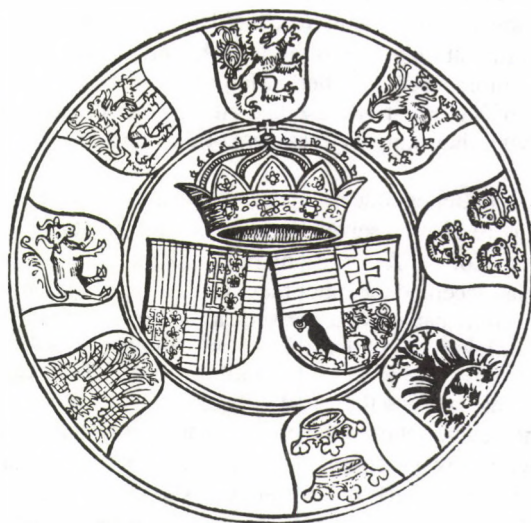
Since the Council of Constance had recognized the king of Hungary's right to patronage, Matthias was free to appoint his candidates to episcopates. Up to this time it was the general custom that only men of high birth were appointed bishops, generally aristocrats, or nobles, more rarely burghers. Matthias was the first king to appoint sons of serfs to such high office. Most of these had attended an Italian university and were highly educated, serving their king as treasurers or diplomats.

Had it not been for anxieties concerning an heir, Matthias could have looked forward to a peaceful future after he seized Vienna. He took great care over the education of his natural son, John Corvin. An engaging but weak man, the prince came into focus in 1482, when Matthias accepted the bitter fact that Beatrice would not bear him a child. Now he presented all confiscated estates or such as had reverted to the crown to his son and even seized land unlawfully in Silesia. Matthias's mother, Elisabeth Szilágyi, willed the entire Hunyadi estate to the prince. On Matthias' death, John Corvin owned thirty castles, forty-nine towns, and one thousand villages.

Queen Beatrice, however, opposed the prince. In ten years in the country she had still not grown familiar with its ways. Hungarians were extremely reluctant to allow women to hold the reins of power, yet the queen believed she would succeed her husband as sovereign ruler. With his usual energy Matthias fought to secure the succession for his son. In 1485 he procured new authority for the Palatine, but the man he named to the office, Imre Szapolyai, died soon afterwards and could not support the designated heir. Matthias was in need of a party and of followers, but none had supported him for a long time. The old aristocracy considered him their enemy, the barons and prelates, whom he

had "raised from the mud", to repeat his own words, were only lusting for power. Matthias tried to buttress their feigned loyalty by making them and castellans and towns swear allegiance to John Corvin. After lengthy negotiations, which Beatrice tried to stall for as long as possible, Matthias was able to secure for his son Bianca Sforza's hand in marriage. The deal was intended to obliterate the prince's illegitimate birth and to obtain the support of a foreign dynasty.

Burdened by grave anxieties and overexertion Matthias fell ill in Vienna, on Palm Sunday 1490. After two days of agony, he died on April 6th. In Italy it was whispered that he was poisoned. Hungarian historians once believed the diagnosis of a nineteenth century professor of medicine that Matthias had died of a stroke due to arteriosclerosis. More recently a physician in Austria re-examined the medical record and argued that the possibility of poisoning could not be excluded. Whatever the cause of death, and no matter how Matthias's often contradictory policies are evaluated, his demise was a much more serious loss than that of most other rulers. The events following his death justified his position, even as regards the fight against the Ottoman Empire.



The coats-of-arms of countries ruled by King Matthias (Augsburg edition of the Thuróczy chronicle, 1488)



András Kubinyi

Statemanship and governance

The victorious campaigns of Matthias (1458–1490), the last great medieval king of Hungary, his conquests and his patronage of the arts and sciences, are all closely linked with his manner of government. His administrative reforms ensured him the strength to pursue a foreign policy of a major power.

When, after the death of King Ladislas V (1457), Matthias, the 15 year old son of John Hunyadi, the former Regent, known as the scourge of Turks, was elected king by the diet in Buda, it brought one of the country's largest landowners to King Stephen's throne. All the same, the new King only possessed ten per cent of the country's castles. The big secular landowners, the barons, on the other hand, owned 44.7 per cent of the castles, while the proportion of castles owned by the Church amounted to 10.3 per cent, slightly more than that held by the king. The rest were shared by foreigners and members of the nobility. This meant that if the big landlords chose to join forces, they could abort the royal will.

In the Middle Ages there were legal bases both for the expansion and restriction of royal power. The monarch was considered the embodiment of sovereignty, and this was not only sanctioned by the church (the king reigning "by the grace of God"), but also supported by Roman law. Even though this allowed the inference of an absolute royal power, that could be restricted by another principle: "That which concerns all must be sanctioned by all", lawyers maintained. This justified the existence of the diet.

Scholars will find a singular similarity in this respect between the Hungarian and the English systems. In the centre of Europe, medieval diets used the three (sometimes four) chamber system, with the clergy, the nobility and the commons conducting separate debates, while at the fringe, thus in England and in Hungary too, bicameral diets were held. The lords spiritual and temporal met in one chamber (the "House of Lords"), and the delegates of the counties and towns in the other. In the Middle Ages, the former naturally had greater influence, as magnates often had nobles to suit their purposes elected as delegates to the diet, and anyway, a considerable proportion of the nobility (in England the knights) were in the service of the barons. In England this system prevailed within the framework of what was known as "bastard feudalism", and in Hungary as the system of liegemen. In this way the lesser nobility boosted the military and economic power of barons.

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King Matthias Corvinus

In Hungary the antecedents of the diet go back to the 13th century, but up to the mid-15th century, apart from a few short periods, the king asked for the subjects' assent to his measures only in the Privy Council, which consisted of prelates and the barons, that is the most powerful lords spiritual and secular. The English parliament also grew out of the *magnum concilium*, the Great Council. In the 15th century, the age of Matthias, this institution included the Hungarian episcopacy and all the barons, altogether nearly sixty men. This high number in itself made permanent session impossible. When the monarch requested their opinion, he summoned them by personal writs. But the chaotic situation that developed by the mid-15th century, the Turkish and Hussite threats and the king's financial difficulties, made it necessary to ask for the opinion of all the landowners, and so apart from the prelates and barons—the full council that is—the nobility and the royal boroughs also had to be summoned to the diets. The latter were usually represented by elected delegates.

The royal will was recorded in writing in the chancery. This accounted for the influence the chancellor enjoyed as the keeper of the royal seal. Interestingly, as in England, in Hungary too the question of control over the royal seal, and thus over the chancery, was a source of permanent conflict between the king and the aristocrats, and later between the king and the estates. When the latter succeeded in controlling this or that seal and the attached office, the king turned to the use of other seals and offices—privy seal, secret seal. Much the same thing happened in Hungary. As early as the 14th century, a new secret seal became, in addition to the Great Seal, the instrument of the royal prerogative, and a secret chancery was set up alongside the larger chancery.

By the first half of the 14th century, a treasury was set up to handle royal revenues. From around the year 1400, the Treasurer was among the barons *ex officio*, and many revenues were handled by institutions that did not depend on him. A separate institution administered the only regular tax, called the *lucrum camerae*. This was paid by serf households. The tax was levied after the number of gates. Five "gates" paid one gold florin to the king. By the middle of the century, the Turkish attacks made it necessary to assess extra taxes. These had to be sanctioned by the diet, but they were still generally reckoned an exception. (In such cases the tax usually amounted to one gold florin per gate.)

Despite this, by the time Matthias came to the throne, royal power had declined and this was not only due to the diminished number of royal castles. A large part of the revenues had been alienated by former monarchs, and the administration of those still existing left much to be desired. Therefore the king had to rely on the support of the estates, both the lords (spiritual and temporal) and the commons, to vote the emergency tax.

Matthias, as the new king, had to confront many unsolved problems. Despite the victory his father, the Regent John Hunyadi had gained in 1456 over the Turks at Belgrade, Hungary continued as a likely object of Ottoman aggression, the more so as meanwhile the Turks had occupied the buffer states between the two countries: Serbia in 1459, and Bosnia in 1463. Bohemian Hussites controlled the northern part of the country, and along the western border many towns and castles were in the hands of the Emperor Frederick III. The widow of King Albert of the Habsburg dynasty (1438–1439), had pawned the Hungarian Holy Crown to the Emperor, which put difficulties in the way of the coronation of Matthias. Last but not least, the magnates who increased their power in the internal struggles in the middle of the century, also tried to extend their influence and to restrict royal power.

Such problems presumably contributed to the fact that, after ascending the throne, Matthias enjoyed relatively broad support. The bishops, the Pope,—who supported the son of Hunyadi, the scourge of the Turks—those magnates whose estates were endangered by the Turks or the Hussites, some of the nobility (who were not dependent on the magnates), and the towns were on his side. Matthias was therefore in a position to levy an emergency tax which later became regular. During his reign of 33 years, there was only a single year when this tax was not collected, and more than once it was levied twice a year. This tax, which amounted to a gold florin for every copyhold, made it possible to set up and maintain a royal mercenary army. Although some of the magnates defied the king, and in 1459 elected the Emperor Frederick III as a rival king, Matthias succeeded in defeating them in battle and came to terms with the rebels.

Finally Matthias regained the Holy Crown from the Emperor. He had to pay for it and to recognise that, should he die without legal issue, the throne was to be inherited by the Habsburgs. Matthias was crowned in 1464, and from that time onwards, nobody could question the legitimacy of his reign. This allowed him to implement his domestic reforms.

Some of these reforms involved concessions, the most important of which undoubtedly concerned the reorganisation of the chancery. Since between 1458 and 1464 Matthias was not yet crowned, he could not use the Great Seal, and so only the Privy Chancery could function, using the Privy Seal. There was a Chancellor, an aristocrat, the Primate Cardinal Dénes Szécsi, but he had little say in the drafting of documents. After his coronation, Matthias could use the Great Seal and a Great Chancery could be constituted. A compromise established a uniform institution, headed by a Great and a Privy Chancellor as complete equals. This also meant that the Royal Council was able to control the Privy Chancery as well, which formerly had been an independent body. From then on the Privy Seal also became the Seal of the "country". In the idiom of the day, it represented the estates as well and not only the person of the king. The two new Great and Privy chancellors were the two most powerful bishops, Archbishop István Várdai of Kalocsa, and Bishop János Vitéz of Várad, the king's former tutor. Since Primate Szécsi soon died, the cardinal's hat went to Archbishop Várdai, and Vitéz became the Archbishop of Esztergom, that is the primate of Hungary.

This system planted the germ of conflict between the king and the heads of the chancery. Matthias quarreled with most of his chancellors, who had a hard time to maintain a balance between the energetic king and the estates. But Matthias was always able to enforce his will against resisting chancellors. It is true that he had two of his Great Chancellors (Archbishops Vitéz and Péter Várdai) imprisoned, and it also happened that, while he left the titles of Great and Privy Chancellors untouched, he used smaller seals (and a new office). By the end of his reign, the office of the Royal Secretary, Tamás Bakóc, became the means of enforcement of the royal prerogative. The status of the royal secretaries (who were not always aristocrats) was constantly growing.

Even though in the case of the chancery the king at his coronation had to make concessions towards the estates, he was given a free hand regarding finances. From the mid-1460s onwards he introduced fiscal reforms. First an official was placed at the head of finances, who was no longer called First Treasurer, only Treasurer, and did not belong among the lords *ex officio*, but had a radically expanded sphere of authority. By the late 1460s, the Treasurer was in charge of all royal revenues, including emergency taxes. This

meant the establishment of a financial organisation embracing the whole country and depending on the Treasurer. This prevented the revenues being frittered away, and made it possible to draw up a budget of sorts. In the case of certain revenues which had been alienated by previous monarchs, income could be increased by putting an end to the old revenue and reestablishing it under some other name ("gain of the chamber" tax, customs duties). This did away with earlier exemptions. All that made it possible for the King not to resort to regularly debasing the coinage, establishing a stable currency instead, which, of course, boosted trade. The treasury reforms were carried out by János Ernuszt (1467–1476), who rose from being a baptised Jew, a Buda merchant to be the head of the country's financial administration.

The fiscal reforms (and the emergency tax) increased the country's revenues. When taxes were levied twice a year, the King could reckon with an annual revenue of 750,000 gold florins. This was less than the income of the most powerful countries, but it still made it possible to pursue an independent foreign policy, to wage wars and to cover other expenses. In comparison, in the year 1475, Sultan Mohammed II, Matthias' adversary, had 180,000 ducats at his disposal, more than twice the amount available to Matthias. This in itself explains why the King of Hungary did not wage offensive wars against the Turks.

The relationship between Matthias and his Royal Council was interesting. Since the large size of the full Council made its functioning cumbersome, a narrower council was soon established, consisting of prelates, lords and officials, and possibly a few officials of lower status who were constantly at court. Matthias did not change the council system, which meant that the barons' right of intervention remained untouched. Since the large secular estates controlled nearly half of the country, the King was unable to break their power institutionally. It would have been hard for him to do anything against the lords acting together. But he could overcome the possible resistance of the Royal Council in several ways.

In the beginning he could count on the support of the prelates. After the Hussite danger was overcome, and towards the end of his reign, when his relationship with the Pope be-



Battle scene (Augsburg edition of the Thuróczy chronicle, 1488)



Ottoman horsemen. Woodcut (Bernhard von Breidenbach: Peregrinatio in Terram Sanctam. Speyer, 1502)

came strained, there was no reason why the prelates should support the King but, since relying on advowson, the King was in a position to fill the episcopal seats, he often nominated low-born prelates, who depended on him; so he did not have to reckon with any major resistance on that side.

The King also could coopt magnates to the narrower council who, possibly for personal reasons, were willing to support his policy. By this he divided the barons. In the years before his coronation he included many more in the direct work of government, while by the end of his reign the number of barons in the narrower council was restricted, as the King no longer needed the support of so many. A major advantage for the King sprang from the fact that he alone could expand the number of barons. By appointments to national offices and donations of big estates, he created a new aristocracy. True, the old aristocracy maintained its majority among the barons, but the proportion of those supporting the King grew.

Finally, in case the Royal Council raised difficulties, Matthias always had the possibility to turn to the nobility in the diet. The King wished to defend the counties and the county nobility, strengthening them against the barons and extending their autonomy. A good example of this was his legislation "for all times" of 1486. Such things, of course, did not always work smoothly, as part of the nobility stood in the service of the barons,

which also meant financial advantage to them. At the same time, they were not always pleased by the growth of royal power (a levy burdening serfs was more damaging to members of the lesser nobility with few serfs than to the aristocracy). Thus the diets served more than one purpose. Besides voting taxes, they more than once restricted the power of the lords, while on other occasions they also served to conciliate the nobility when dissatisfied with the King's actions, as they could legislate to restrict royal power, legislation which, after receiving the Royal Assent, was soon forgotten. Since Matthias could play off the barons against the nobility, it sometimes also happened that, due to the resistance of the diet, taxes were granted by the Royal Council.

In his wars, Matthias occupied Moravia, Silesia and Lausitz, and he assumed the title of King of Bohemia. The Peace of Olmütz, between the Hungarians and the Bohemians in 1479, strengthened him. In the war against Frederick III, he captured Vienna in 1485, occupied Lower Austria, taking the title of Duke of Austria. In all these provinces he observed the rights of the local estates, and maintained their own institutions, but—even if not always—he appointed Hungarian subjects as viceroys of these provinces. Central management, however, was in the hands of Hungarian government bodies, with a separate Bohemian and a separate Austrian chancery. The local financial authorities, e.g., the Austrian Hubmeister, also depended on the Hungarian treasury, but Matthias was careful not to over-burden these provinces financially. (Taxes were lower there than in Hungary). At the same time, Royal Councils were only exceptionally attended by men who were not Hungarians.

The Central European states ruled by Matthias were in a manner of speaking the prototype of the later Austro-Hungarian Empire, ruled by the Habsburgs. He enjoyed high status abroad. According to Philippe de Commynes, a contemporary French diplomatist, King Louis XI of France, Edward IV of England, the Turkish Sultan Mohamed II, and Matthias were the greatest monarchs of the day. And this despite the fact that Matthias did not continue his father's campaigns against the Turks.

Matthias cannot be blamed for this, as the Turks were much stronger. He nevertheless did everything within his possibilities. He completed the construction of the defence system along the southern frontier, which had been started by King Sigismund (1387–1437). He captured important border fortresses from the Turks (Jajca, Srebernik, Szabács), and incorporated them into the Hungarian system of border fortresses. This consisted of two parallel lines: the first extended to the Adriatic from Szörény (Severin), Belgrade and Jajca, while the internal line, to the north, from Temesvár to Bihács in Croatia, also included a great number of castles. The responsibility for the defence was assigned to the Croat–Slavonian Banus in the West, and the Banus of Temes, the Captain-General of the Lower Parts, in the East. (Transylvania formed a separate unit in the defence). Turks could be halted between the two lines of border fortresses, and in case of major danger, the two leaders could mobilise the counties in the hinterland. The system of border fortresses was completed by the late 1470s (with Pál Kinizsi, the famous champion of the Turkish wars, as the first Captain-General of the Lower Parts). This line could ensure the defence of the country up to the surrender of Belgrade in 1521. This of course also meant that permanent garrisons had to be stationed (and paid) in these fortresses.

It was Matthias's personal tragedy that both his marriages remained childless, and he left no legitimate heir. From the early 1480s on he used every means to try and promote

the succession of his illegitimate son, John Corvin. He required the lords, the royal castellans and the boroughs to take oaths of loyalty, and also tried to put his son in charge of provincial administration. He placed some four to five members of the nobility at the head of nearly half of the counties, who governed these counties as John Corvin's castellans (by that time the Prince was the largest land-owner of the country). This created blocks of the size of whole provinces which, in keeping with the king's intention, could control the other counties.

When Matthias died on April 6 1490, there were four claimants to the throne: John Corvin, Maximilian, the son of the Emperor Frederick III (relying on the treaty signed when the Holy Crown was returned), King Vladislas of Bohemia, and the Crown Prince John Albert of Poland. First Vladislas mobilised his forces and was elected by the Buda diet. The majority of the bishops and nearly half of the barons (including the new aristocracy raised by Matthias) took his side. John Corvin was backed by a third of the lords, most of them the most illustrious old aristocrats and the county lord lieutenants of noble origin. In the battle of Csontmező, Matthias's old warlords defeated the army of his son. The nobility tended to support the Polish prince. One can argue about the perfidy of Matthias's minions, but it is also true that it would have been difficult for the country to resist three foreign pretenders. (Driving out the forces of Maximilian and John Albert also took a year and a half).

One of the greatest monarchs of medieval Hungary brought Italian humanism and Renaissance art over the Alps. The finances that made this possible came from his government reform. His patronage of the arts and sciences formed part of the royal presence, and therefore served important propaganda aims. The name of the king of Hungary became known throughout Europe, the more so as he also maintained diplomatic relations with practically all the countries in the continent, and even with Egypt and several Asian countries.

In Matthias's reign Hungary, perhaps for the last time, was an important factor on the political map of Europe. The possibility to continue along these lines was aborted by the lost Battle of Mohács in 1526, which was soon followed by the country being torn into three parts, with the middle section, including Buda the capital, becoming part of the Ottoman empire for 145 years.



Árpád Mikó

Divinus Hercules and Attila Secundus

King Matthias as patron of art

Tusca manus, Tuscum marmor, rex Ungarus auctor, Aureus hoc Ister surgere fonte velit. Tuscan is the hand, Tuscan is the marble, the Hungarian king is the author; may the golden Ister want to splash from this fountain. These elegant lines are from the hand of Angelo Poliziano, who inscribed them on the white marble fountain King Matthias ordered from the Florentine workshop of Andrea del Verrochio in 1488. Verrochio died soon after and we do not know whether the fountain was ever completed and, if so, whether it ever arrived in Buda. As scattered records by travellers and envoys, and the fragments that have been excavated, bear out there were several fountains, ornamented with mythological figures, reflecting a passion for antiquity, among the fragments some (with lion's heads and the raven of the Hunyadi family on them) made of white marble. During the reign of Matthias, the all'antica fontana appeared with as much self-evidence in Buda as in the princely courts of Italy. In the splendid royal summer palace at Visegrád, water played from a marble fountain decorated with statues, the Fons Musarum. The Fountain of the Muses had been a source for art and science ever since Pegasus created the Hippocrene spring on Mount Helicon by stamping his hoof. King Matthias's emblems (the qualities they symbolised have now become blurred) included the fountain-head. Poliziano's epigram helps to interpret both this emblem and one of the most important aspects of King Matthias's patronage of art. The recognition in the poem is double-headed: it links Tuscany, the birth-place of the Renaissance with Hungary, and it assigns a concern for antiquity to both.

The Muses return to the banks of the Danube, named Ister again, and Pannonia, after a barbarous interlude, becomes Roman again. This picture had already been envisaged by an earlier generation of Hungarian humanists. The life of Janus Pannonius and a considerable part of his poetry well exemplify this. His contemporaries also found it appropriate to have his gravestone inscribed: *Hic situs est Ianus, patrium qui primus ad Histrum Duxit laurigeras, ex Helicone, Deas.* (Here is the seat of Ianus, who first led the laureate goddesses from the Helicon to the Ister.)

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The poem dates from 1464, and the poet, disappointed in his king and having turned against him, died in 1472. In less than three decades the laureate goddesses reviving the ancient arts, found a true home in Hungary.

Through King Matthias's patronage of the arts, Hungary became the first country north of the Alps to which the Italian Renaissance spread. All'antica objects (books and paintings) were arriving from Italy to the court of Buda from the early 1460s onwards; they were followed later by growing numbers of Italian craftsmen. Several outstanding illuminators, cabinet-makers doing intarsio work, bronze casting workshops and a large number of Italian stone-cutters were active in Buda. Construction work was directed by the Florentine Chimenti Camicia, and sculptural commissions were assigned to the reputable second generation in quattrocento sculpture, as for instance, by the late 1480s, to Giovanni Dalmata, who had worked with Mino da Fiesole, and also at the Papal Court. At the same time, the king also employed outstanding artists in Italy, mainly illustrators (Attavante, Boccardino Vecchio, Cherico), and commissioned work from Filippino Lippi, Andrea del Verrocchio and Andrea Mantegna. Members of the royal court followed the king's example as best they could. Ten years after the death of Matthias, the revived arts of antiquity were in evidence in many parts of the country. The Renaissance pomp of Buda Castle soon served as an example to other countries in the region. The courtly culture in Cracow or Prague would be hard to explain without the quattrocento ambience of Buda castle. The most profound influence must have come from architecture. Matthias had the old Royal Castle rebuilt and extended, with a particularly effective court of honour flanked by a one-storey, Renaissance loggia. Most of the wings surrounding the court of honour dated from the first third of the 15th century, mainly from the reign of King Sigismund. Matthias had these wings further expanded and ornamented, some of the work in Late Gothic, and some in the new Renaissance style.

King Matthias Corvinus

Bronze sculptures from Buda—including Hercules—in the Hippodrome in Constantinople. From a woodcut by Pieter Coeck, 1533



The reconstruction of the wing facing the Danube must have been the most consequential since this housed the state room, the royal chapel and, close by, the library. The large arcade lent unity to the wings dating from different ages and built in different styles. In the hands of careless descendants and, later, of the Turks, the palace and its furnishings began to deteriorate; the volumes of the celebrated library, the Bibliotheca Corviniana, were scattered and most of the works of art were destroyed. The splendid buildings have come down to us as a barren stone desert; it is only excavation that has revealed much fine Gothic and all' antica stone carvings.

The Gothic palace in Buda, with major Renaissance sections, displayed a heroic idealism all of its own which looked back to Antiquity. This was best expressed by Antonio Bonfini, court chronicler to King Matthias, who described in several of his works the royal constructions in Buda, Visegrád and Vienna. In 1487, he concluded his praise of the Buda palace: "If I wanted to enumerate all that ornaments the Buda palace, it would perhaps seem to be flattering Your Majesty and be recalling antiquity rather than writing the truth, which cannot be gainsaid anyway".

Bonfini's descriptions (which could hardly be used as topographical guides) provide an outline sketch of buildings that owe much to Antiquity. This is also suggested by the use of scholarly terms, mostly of Greek origin, such as *heliocaminus*, *apodyterium*, *sphaeristerium*, *systus*, etc. But in his descriptions the buildings resemble each other so closely that he obviously must have envisaged in each case a theoretical ideal, which he



King Matthias, woodcut (Brünn edition of the Thuróczy Chronicle, 1488)

then illustrated with elements that resembled the actual. As his main source for this illustrative work, this learned humanist drew on two letters by Pliny the Younger, in which are described his own villas in Tusculum and Laurentum. Bonfini did not always understand the exact meaning of some of the terms in the letters; all he aimed at was to make a building (such as the Buda palace) more or less recognisable, and thus his “description” authentic, and to present the building as something worthy of Antiquity, (a state so ardently desired) and even able to vie with it *expressis verbis*. This is present in every sentence of Bonfini’s; what he describes resembles the antique, and even becomes antique: using Pliny’s words—*systus violis odoratus*—transplants the flower-garden of Visegrád into ancient Italy. One no longer knows where these flowers are blooming, in Visegrád or at Laurentum. So influential was this incantation that it has concealed to the present day the Gothic art patronised by Matthias.

The most detailed description of King Matthias’s physical and intellectual character also comes from Bonfini. Age-old tradition, and, conditioned by it, the history of art, considered his portrait authentic, even if accepting that it was strongly stylised and idealised. Bonfini’s description, however, was set down several years after the king’s death: the main source was a preface the humanist wrote while still in Italy and later added to his *Hermogenes* translation, which he dedicated to Matthias, before having ever seen the king. The research of István Borzsák has shown that its characterisation, held to be



The Emperor Attila, woodcut (Augsburg edition of the Thuróczy Chronicle, 1488)

accurate, consisted of an assembly of *topoi* and that almost all the seemingly realistic elements, from the colour of his hair and skin, through his leonine look to the wondrous scent emanating from the king's body, this divine *euodia* or pleasant scent, derives from the Alexander the Great tradition, which goes back to Plutarch. The imitation of Alexander applied to the Hungarian monarch was not Bonfini's invention, he there followed ancient patterns. Similar *topoi* were used in the descriptions of rulers soon after Alexander the Great. Bonfini's portrait of Matthias is not the great king in his living likeness: that has been lost forever.

As regards Matthias' aspirations to the imperial throne, historians are fairly sceptical. Most do not even accept that he aspired to this highest rank. For a long time he did not even legitimately hold his own throne; perhaps the strongest impulse behind his policy was to have the legitimacy of his rule, and later that of his bastard son, recognized. All the same, the king's iconography undoubtedly includes imperial suggestions, perhaps most openly on the title page of the Philostratos Codex in his library: here, flanked by medal portraits of the emperors Hadrian and Nero, the portrait of Matthias appears in the middle. In a certain group of the Corvinus manuscripts (those that have the king's coat-of-arms painted onto them after 1485, the year he captured Vienna), the letters M A around the arms, can be read as—the Augustinus codex now in Besançon bears this out—Matthias Augustus. All of Matthias's profile portraits in the antique style, that is the majority of his contemporary likenesses, were inspired by the same type of ancient emperor portrait. Andrea Mantegna was the first, in 1460, to use this type in his portrait of the Hungarian king. This was obviously at the initiative of Janus Pannonius, with whom he maintained personal contacts. It was around that time that the humanists around János Vitéz, Matthias's tutor and later his chancellor, developed an *all'antica* aspect of the king's image. The person of Matthias is sometimes linked with that of Alexander, the invincible, the new Heracles, also in the poems of Janus, one of the likely inventors of this new image. In the same way as the king's tastes in the arts had an *all' antica* aspect, so too his personality as such had a strong actualised, *all' antica* complexion. But this also had its counterpoint.

Stella cadit, tellus tremit, en ego malleus orbis! (The star falls, the earth trembles, here I am, the hammer of the world!)

This famous hexameter—the words of Attila's billowing soul—have come down to us in the first passage of the *Thuróczy Chronicle*, the history of the Huns. The Chronicle was written within the royal chancellery. It opens with the history of the Huns and ends with the accession of Matthias, when the glorious reign of Attila returns and King Matthias appears, expressly as an Attila secundus. The parallel which glorified the person of the national and elected king by this putative identity of the Huns with the Hungarians, was given different interpretations by contemporaries. Attila had been the ruler who, listening to the pope's entreaties, spared Rome, and from that moment onwards, his people was a bulwark of Christianity against the attacks of unbelievers, be they Bohemian heretics or Turks. Attila's chief enemy had been the Roman emperor, just as Matthias's was the Holy Roman Emperor Frederick III. Historians of late antiquity and the Fathers of the Church thought that the Huns descended from the devil. According to Orosius they were the offspring of lecherous devils and witches driven out into the desert. In Christian art the devil appeared in the form of the antique satyr. By the late 15th century, in Italy, Attila's face was a faun's mask framed by shaggy hair and beard, with horns on his forehead. Lajos

Vayer discovered that in countries which were warring with Matthias, this new Attila appeared as a faun with a devil's face, as the pictorial equivalent of Attila, a pamphlet Callimachus Experiens wrote against the King of Hungary. A bearded Matthias portrayal is known from as early as 1488, in Johannes Lichtenberger's *Prognosticatio*, which prophesied that after the death of the King of Hungary his realm would be sundered and fall into the hands of his enemies. At Buda, the court of the "star of the Huns", the image of Attila underwent a different change; in the woodcut in the Thuróczy Chronicle he is seated on a canopied throne, like all Kings of Hungary, crown on head and with a drawn sword, the emblem of the Holy Roman Emperors, the symbol of the power to pass judgement (also the Sword of God, of which Priscus writes) in his right hand, a lance in his left, and the Turul, the mythical bird of the ancient Magyars, on his banner. The line of Kings of Hungary begins with the picture of Attila and ends with that of Matthias; in the same way the glory of the Huns also returns and provides a framework to the history of the Magyars. János Vitéz had Kings of Hungary and Scythian princes painted in his Esztergom palace; a monumental statue of Matthias in the court of honour of the Buda palace held a lance. While the enemies of Matthias substituted the satyr mask of the fiendish and rapinous Attila for the king's features, the figure of Attila was adjusted to the traditional (one might almost say, canonical) royal iconography in Buda. Matthias did not want to be recognised as the Attila known to Europe.

In the middle of the open space of the first, outer, courtyard of the Buda palace, stood a life-size, or larger than life, bronze statue of Hercules conquering the monsters. A fairly accurate description of the statue has survived in the records of travellers and envoys during the period when kings of the Jagellonian dynasty ruled. It was standing on a pillar, presumably naked, or at least without armour protecting his whole body. (Monumental nude statues were not unknown at the time in Italy). The figure of Hercules was a favoured motif at the Hungarian royal court. The red marble fountain in the middle of the royal castle in Visegrád was surmounted by a sculpture of the boy Hercules fighting the hydra of Lerna. In Buda, the bronze gate of the new wing of the palace, unfinished when Matthias died, was ornamented by the Labours of Hercules. The legend of Hercules—which enjoyed wide popularity in Italy, especially in Florence, in works linked with the humanists at the court of Lorenzo il Magnifico—has a dual meaning: on the one hand he is a hero embodying royal virtues, and on the other, he is the hero who conquers and curbs the monsters that threaten mankind and culture. The idea of Matthias as a new, invincible Hercules is a fairly old one. Janus Pannonius had embellished Matthias with such literary topoi and wanted to arm him against the Turks with the club of Hercules. Furthermore, the "monster" itself could also be assigned: when Bonfini styled Austria a hydra, he provided one of the possible contemporary interpretations of the Visegrád fountain. The bronze sculpture in Buda, however, did not represent the conqueror of Austria. Or rather not only him, not principally him. The key to the mythological parallel is found in an open letter Marsilio Ficino wrote in 1480, the year of the battle of Otranto: the humanist, terrified of the Turks, urges the King of Hungary to take on and defeat the monster—as a Hercules. The inscription of the Buda statue—*Divinus Hercules, monstrorum domitor* (Divine Hercules, conqueror of the monsters) uses the words of Ficino: the monster Hercules had to conquer was the Turkish threat and the eastern barbarism seeking to destroy Christendom, with Hercules being Matthias

himself, the bravest champion of Christendom. The gilded bronze statue stood on a pillar—taken from Victoria—as a monumental symbol of victory; Matthias in fact defeated the Turks, and, even if for a short time, he checked the beast which the whole of Europe was terrified of. Suleiman could scarcely have found more appropriate booty for himself than this statue in Buda which, in 1526, was at his mercy. Bound with strong iron chains, they erected the statue in the Hippodrome, among the trophies of the Byzantine emperors. The statue was the symbol of the whole of the life of Matthias: a symbol whose real meaning and significance was by 1526 in Hungary perhaps only fully grasped by the Turks.

Scholarly appreciation of the Renaissance art of Matthias's time has always wavered between two extremes. One approach has stressed its European dimension, its courtly character, and its non-recurring features; the other has identified it as one of the most important roots of Hungarian folk-art. According to one, the Renaissance of Matthias's day was an imported art, and as such totally foreign. The history of the Renaissance in Hungary is far from being a triumphal march of unbroken progress. According to the other view, the new style, initiated and patronised by the king, recognised as an ancient archetype by the Hungarian people, travelled from splendid Buda to the villages and carried out a mission. Both sides have their arguments, the question however is that of the humanists. Pannonia had no need to be recivilised at all. Hungary had joined Western Christianity, and with it Western culture, several centuries earlier; by the 14th and the 15th centuries, during the reign of the Neapolitan Angevins and of the King and Emperor Sigismund of Luxemburg, the country had strong established links with Italy. It was precisely Italian trecento art, exercising a powerful effect in Hungary, and the early humanists, who paved the way for Matthias's Renaissance. Were Matthias and his people dog-headed barbarians or civilised Europeans?

It is obvious that the alternative as formulated by the humanists was false from the start.

The two notions concerning King Matthias, condensed into the images of a new Attila and a new Hercules, these two parabolas which from a national and a European point of view seemed to move along contrary courses, are in fact one and the same. It is therefore futile to submit the style of the various relics, for instance of the Hercules statue, to a minute analysis to establish whether it was Gothic or Renaissance; in vain does one try to date the two monumental Matthias sculptures so rigorously. These efforts are in vain because the two images, the civilised and the barbarian, are two facets of one and the same personality. Which image is that of Matthias the attacker and which that of the defender; which the creator and which the destroyer—Matthias the Renaissance monarch, the humanist, the bulwark of Christianity, and Matthias the representative of the national tradition? The answer can be manipulated at will, as it is the question itself which is false. To enlarge the circle: the duality of the Matthias image can even reinterpret the stylistic shift into the Renaissance itself: the Gothic palace should be viewed as an all'antica building; the splendid Renaissance fountain and the plain medieval well as the embodiment of one and the same emblem; the sculpture of the child Hercules conquering the hydra of Lerna as the work of a Hungarian master, and the clumsily carved festoon as a genuine work by Giovanni Ricci. All that is European should be considered as our very own, and we ourselves as Europeans.

Zoltán Kocsis

Letter from London

I know many people envy us travelling artists for one reason or another. Earlier, before the introduction of fully valid passports, fellow Hungarians eyed us curiously because of our relative liberty to pass the border. Nowadays, their reserve is due to the "success, money, and glamour" they like to associate us with. How unfounded this actually is a novice to the field could probably describe best, mentioning all the trials, tribulations, and even humiliations he had to face, no matter how talented he might be. But even a performer at the height of his career sometimes finds himself taking on something that makes him flinch—at least initially.

My journey to Switzerland and England lasted precisely eleven days. Of course I had signed the contract way before anyone even dreamt of the changes that were to overtake political life. The document called for no fewer than seven appearances on my part. Five of these belonged—according to their system of classification, which has since been discontinued—to the National Philharmonic Agency's category A (performance of concerto with orchestra, instrumental solo recital), the other two to the C category (classical music piano accompaniment, orchestral piano part). As it was, category C promised to be far more difficult and much more exciting. They involved the works of György Kurtág. My teacher was to be honoured by his British devotees with an entire festival devoted to his works. A series of five concerts was to be held between October 30th and November 5th with one premiere, three British and twelve further Kurtág compositions on the programme. All of the latter had been played in Great Britain before and most of them many times. Undoubtedly Kurtág is the most-performed Hungarian composer in the United Kingdom. The concert series was part of a much greater event with the title *Magyarok: Britain Salutes Hungary*, which sounds somewhat odd to us. It revealed the noble intention of its famed patrons and anonymous organizers to present our country in the best possible light. The programme included many cultural and social functions, with Ernő Rubik and the Polgár girls in attendance, Hungarian gastronomy would be represented, etc. The Budapest Festival Orchestra was to play at the opening in the Barbican Hall, the main venue. I was more excited than usual, looking forward to it all, as also to the two earlier concerts in Switzerland beforehand. For one thing I was curious whether a citizen of the Hungarian Republic would be received differently.

Things did not start smoothly. My friend Raymond was going to be out of town, and even though he lives some distance from the Centre it would have been a great help

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to be able to use his pianos. On a tour we are rarely provided with an opportunity to practice, this being a question organizers somehow seem to dodge. It has even happened that I had to pay for the use of an instrument (in Holland), and another time, though a tuned piano had been placed in my hotel room (in Japan), the objections of other guests aborted all attempts to practice. It looked as if I would be forced to rely on reserves I had brought with me. That made me double my efforts to practice before leaving. Rehearsal followed rehearsal, and with the Festival Orchestra we actually gave two performances of the London programme (in Veszprém and at the Budapest Operetta), since it differed from what we were to play in Switzerland. All things considered, these concerts were a success, and the orchestra was full of energy and excitement about the approaching trip.

But we were still at home. The day before we left I was standing at the bus stop when the following happened:

I was waiting for a No. 7 bus when I noticed an elderly but remarkably well-groomed lady staring at me. I had just had my hair cut, was wearing a cap and raincoat and felt safe in my anonymity. When I stepped closer to the curb to see if the bus was coming, the lady mumbled as if to herself: "Zoltán Kocsis".

I looked at her, perhaps I even nodded slightly, signaling I had registered what she had said.

"You look like Zoltán Kocsis", she said, obviously addressing me directly.

I nodded again.

"Do you know who that is?"

I spoke for the first time, though I did not say what I wanted to, "Yes, of course".

"Well, you look like him", she established, and a moment later added, "But he's much taller".

'Ahem.'

"Yes, much taller", she asserted, "and he's no longer young".

My astonishment reached its peak. I would have loved to find out more about myself but the bus arrived, the lady was swept away by the crowd. I did not see her again. Actually, she was right. I am much older than I am. I can feel those thirty-seven and a half years I have been on this earth in my very bones.

October 22nd

After getting up I did what I always do: breakfast and packing the things I forgot to pack yesterday. I got to the airport early. No wonder, it was Sunday. An hour and a half of doing nothing, even though the plane left on time. As so many times before, they overorganised, I am sure. With nothing better to do, I bought a few newspapers, one of them the trial issue of *Beszélő*, which sold out within hours. Reading through it did not extinguish my nostalgia for its *samizdat* forebears, though it was well produced. The typography was strange but interesting.

The flight to Zurich was pleasant, and we were welcomed by real May weather. The natives claimed that they had not had such weather at the end of October for decades. What was less pleasant was that lunch was out of the question. We had to go almost directly to the Tonhalle for a rehearsal of *Bluebeard*. Everything was all right, the singers, Tamara Takács and László Polgár, were very accomodating, the orchestra a little tired. Finally,

dinner in the evening, afterwards endless talk with the conductor, Iván Fischer, about Bartók's opera.

October 23rd

I haven't slept this much in weeks. I was hoping to have the morning off, but right after breakfast came a video producer from Stuttgart who had travelled here just to talk to me. I had to give him at least an hour, and as I needed to buy shoes, I could hardly wait for this meeting to end.

Shoe shopping was a success, not so my afternoon nap. Of course no one knows whether that helps or not. Perhaps it is better if you are physically tired but able to concentrate, if you can be there, than if you're well-rested but not in full control. I have had it happen that, following a superb siesta, I played awfully that night. So for lack of anything better to do, I watched television until rehearsal time. At my hotel I could choose from eighteen channels, of which RAI, the Italian channel, seemed relatively enticing with its popular science feature on the life of salmon. I did have time—if only in the bathtub—to contemplate the past few days' events back home. My thoughts revolved around Iván Pető's well weighed words and Zoltán Király's ravings. (I still don't know who those extremists among the Free Democrats might be.) And that fascist leaflet. And the detonator charges that had disappeared. I wondered how many in this evening's audience would know what this day means to us Hungarians.*

Dressed in a hurry, the inevitable cutting of fingernails—and rush down to the bus.

That night I had to be three people at once. Besides Liszt's Piano Concerto in E flat I had to play both the celesta and organ parts in *Bluebeard*. For those who might not realise what this means I must disclose that among insiders it is the equivalent to the person concerned being written off. A serious soloist, no matter how much he secretly wants to, can never undertake to play a strictly orchestral part without damaging his standing. Unfortunately, that also indicates that orchestral musicians are not really respected: they are generally described as "disappointed". The whole thing is stupid, only commercialisation gave one's image a significance of this kind. It's getting to the point where the chosen will have to stand to attention by their image night and day. It has nothing to do with anything demeaning or questionable, an artist can be a leper, a drug addict, have AIDS, no matter. But he must never undertake work "unworthy" of him.

The acoustic rehearsal was disheartening. Without an audience the Tonhalle echoed like a swimming pool. A quick glance at the piano and they pushed it out, the concert was about to start. As always, Iván Fischer put on his tails at the very last moment. During the *Dances from Marosszék* I attempted to practice in the dressing room but realized that that was no substitute for one, now already two, days. Before stepping on the platform, touch

* October 23rd: The anniversary of the outbreak of the revolution of 1956. Iván Pető, a historian, is a leader of the Free Democrats (SZDSZ), Zoltán Király was an independent member of the opposition in Parliament at the time. The fascist leaflet proved to be a provocation by the extreme left. Nothing ever came of the matter of the stolen detonator charges. (Ed.)

wood, as usual. The Tonhalle was filled to overflowing, all in a real concert mood. The piano went flat after a minute, but that wasn't the only thing troubling me. Somehow you could not get a real forte out of it. By the time I registered this fact I had already used too much energy for nothing. Towards the end I went completely stiff. The audience sensed something, the applause was not explosive. During the intermission members of the orchestra, friends and acquaintances—some of whom I had not seen for twenty-five years—seemed to congratulate me in earnest and I couldn't make out whether they had noticed. *Bluebeard* was touchingly beautiful, it turned out the rehearsal had not been in the least in vain. It was a little disturbing that the audience actively participated in the performance by noisily turning the pages of their score. But we got over it. Iván Fischer conducted without a score, meanwhile prompting the singers. I successfully slid back and forth between the celesta and the organ. Thundering applause when it was all over. Back at the hotel, I was again overcome by that uneasy feeling about missing my practice and had difficulty going to sleep.

October 24th

I loathe packing early in the morning. Whenever I can I get ready the night before. Unhappily, I didn't have a chance to last night, we went to bed much too late. We had a comfortable bus ride to Lausanne and time for lunch and even a rest after we arrived. The hall was dry, the piano better, the celesta and the organ worse than yesterday. The performance was much more polished this time: there is just no substitute for on-platform experience. Something unexpected did happen, however. during the second half the advance payment, four hundred and fifty Swiss francs, which Laci Polgár had received from the impresario in the afternoon, disappeared from his wallet in the dressing room as if they had never been there at all. All members of the orchestra were above suspicion, since all of us were playing *Bluebeard*, a huge ensemble. Only a local could have done it. Laci took it like a gentleman and did not make a scene. He only mentioned what happened—even to the members of the orchestra—the next day. I let my thoughts wander about similar incidents in the near and distant past, when it so happened that we, Hungarians, had muddled ourselves. Whenever it could, the Western press chewed us over like a glutton! Now we, lacking evidence, could only have our suspicions that dishonest people exist even among the honourable citizens of West Central Europe.

October 25th

Reveille at six thirty, an extra quick breakfast, then a bus to Geneva, from there by plane to London. I heard on the plane that Tamara's money was also stolen last night. Unfortunately we arrived at Gatwick, which is much farther from the centre than the more familiar Heathrow. The latter, however, was not willing to take the MALÉV charter flight. It seemed like our company did not blink an eyelid because of another two hours' bus ride and we arrived fresh at the hotel. The difference between even a second-rate Swiss hotel and the Royal Scot cannot be described. That the room was tiny and the freshly cleaned rug gave off an unbelievable smell I could probably get used to somehow. But the absence of a blending tap is something a European, or as they say here, a Continental, cannot accept. Rest was out of the question, we're off to rehearse. At first our mood was a bit

affected by a double bass that had gone missing, it was the third entry on our list of lost items. What is of the essence is that the Barbican Hall is beautiful, and what is even more important, it sounds great. The environment was truly inspiring.

The concert was held in the presence of the Duke and Duchess of Kent, many Hungarophile aristocrats, and Imre Pozsgay, the festival's Hungarian patron. The national anthems were played with the orchestra standing. (Imagine: the cellists standing!) Again I did not listen to *Maroszéki*, but was finally able to practice a little. When I went on the platform I could not see the celebrities, but at the moment I was not really interested whether they were there or not. The piano was excellent, true the left pedal went down a little further than necessary and gave the sound a nasal quality. It did not bother me much, however, because the whole time I felt that the people understood what I was doing. (Toward the end of the concerto it occurred to me that this was the third time I had played this piece in London. First with the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, exactly sixteen years ago, with the excellent French conductor, Jean Martinon, who has since died. After I was *one minute* late for the dress rehearsal he never spoke to me again, neither during the concert nor afterwards. Fortunately, that didn't prevent me from recognizing this musician's undeniable qualities. He had conducted with success in Hungary, also. I will never forget his interpretation at this same concert of Paul Dukas's *Symphony in C Major*.)

The success was tremendous, then suddenly, the applause cut off, the Duke and Duchess got up and left, which meant that everyone had to at least pretend to have something important to do outside. In the intermission the usual visits and congratulations. I listened to the second half's only piece, Bartók's *Concerto*, from the far left of the auditorium. I thought the performance a little facile, or should I say, well-oiled. There was nothing laborious about it, not even where there should have been: everything was over-perfect. Perhaps I was the only one struck by this. On the other hand, perhaps the excitement had disappeared, like some superfluous element, since it is a fact that when you're tired you focus only on what is most essential. The *Elegy* was beautiful. I wondered if the orchestra would have been able to play it as beautifully without the *Bluebeard* performances. (Bartók himself admitted that in this movement he included remembrances from the opera). At the end the applause was explosive, which the ensemble repayed with an impassioned performance of Brahms' *Hungarian Dance No. 6*. Following the concert, we briefly met some high-ranking guests, everyone was kind, simple, no one acted superior. I did not attend the banquet, I had a headache, and, well, I was dead tired.

October 26th

It was pouring with rain, real London weather. I congratulated myself for having brought a cap, I had to leave early in the morning, I was switching hotels. At noon I returned to say good-bye to the Festival Orchestra, then rushed to Maida Vale Studios, the headquarters of the BBC Symphony Orchestra. Péter Eötvös conducted beautifully, lively as always. The orchestra, however, was boring and played badly, as if they had just returned from a months long tour of the Far East. And yet they perform Bartók's *Second Piano Concerto* a good few times every season. The concert we were rehearsing for was not officially a part of the Hungarian festival, in practice it was. We did not have time for the

first movement, we left that for the dress rehearsal. Instead I had a talk to Eötvös and Béla Dékány, their outstanding leader, who has been living in London for over thirty years. After one minute we were talking about politics. It was very exciting how we, Hungarian residents of three different countries, viewed events in Hungary in three different ways. I was in a bit of a bad mood when I went back to the hotel. It was depressing that even in London, formerly a musician's paradise, there was something wrong with the orchestras. Not even a fantastic Chinese dinner was able to make me forget my misgivings.

October 27th

The weather probably would stay like this, it was cold, and I started to feel that my raincoat was too light. In the morning I went to the Guildhall with the Kurtágs, who had been here since the beginning of the festival. We were going to rehearse ...*Quasi una Fantasia*..., Kurtág's "little piano concerto". The combination of instruments required by the piece is quite unusual, five mouth-organs, for example. Playing requires much effort and concentration or, more precisely, faith. The dedication is to Péter Eötvös (and myself), so it would have been logical that he should conduct. Instead I noticed Sian Edwards (a woman) at the conductor's desk. We started late. It seemed that famous English punctuality was a thing of the past. Nor was discipline what you'd call perfect, the London Sinfonietta players had difficulty in getting together. What a great team they once were! Since time was short we had to lower our standards quite a bit. In the lunch break a little man I had never seen before, some manager, I guess, introduced me to another stranger as Mr Kovács. Kurtág was about to correct him but I signaled with my eyes not to. These days I can take such things with a smile—earlier I would have had a fit—let the reason be malice, stupidity, or simply ignorance. The afternoon rehearsal was useless, we had to break up an hour and a half before we had planned to because two percussionists left. Pity, the hall being full of students (the Guildhall is actually a music school), with the newly printed scores in their hands. As a consolation Kurtág improvised a talk for them, though I saw that he, too, was nervous. I went upstairs for some practice, I could do with it. It was cold in the room but the well-worn though quality instrument evoked pleasant memories of my practising far into the night years ago at the Music Academy. I stayed for two hours. Back at the hotel I had a short exchange on the phone with Iván Fischer, who is a London resident, about the notices of the concert two days ago. The majority of papers published rave reviews, only the *Daily Telegraph* called my playing "arid". (Oddly enough in 1973 this same paper, writing about the same piece, could not print too many words of praise. Could it be that I had deteriorated that much?) In the evening I turned on the box; Pozsgay, for the seventh time since I arrived. Here they still think it unbelievable that a republic has been proclaimed in Hungary.

October 28th

In the morning dress rehearsal with the BBC Symphony Orchestra in the Royal Festival Hall. This must be the only major concert hall in the West where every notice is in Russian as well. It seems strange to see Cyrillic letters in this part of the world, but Soviet artists are frequent guests here, and anyway, English courtesy will not overlook a thing. Or does it? On the door of my dressing room I came by another variation of my name: KOVSIS.

Rehearsal this time was really just a trying out, time did not permit any real work. The orchestra behaved disgracefully. A clarinetist lectured Péter Eötvös in such a tone that made me wonder why he did not walk out. I did not say anything, not even when someone made a glaring error. I only waited to get things over and done with. In the afternoon I had a rest, watched TV (Pozsgay again!), made some phone calls. I took the tube to the concert, the only sure way of getting there in time. I took the music with me only as a formality, knowing I wouldn't take a look at it at all. At routine performances it only causes confusion. Just before the concert began I was informed that the house was only one third full; no wonder, the BBC Symphony Orchestra is reputed of poor quality. The piano concerto began. Seconds later I knew that what I considered important was not for the orchestra, not even on the platform. I could hardly hear them, their accompaniment was so evasive. All the while I hated myself and the world, constantly feeling as if I were passing counterfeit coins. Péter fought like a hero. How I wished the Festival Orchestra were here! In the intermission many people came in, but no matter what they said I sensed that this performance did more damage to Bartók, his music and me, than a hundred words could heal. This was definitely my farewell concert with this orchestra. Good bye, BBC!

October 29th

It was Sunday, nevertheless I was wakened early in the morning by the sound of a pneumatic drill. They had just changed back to G.M.T., we gained an hour, and rain had given way to wind. I was almost blown away when I stepped out to buy a paper. I know I ought to write something about London, but this world is somehow foreign to me and I can't overcome my aversion to it. I was not in any way able to come to terms with the stones, the depressing walls which to me radiated an air not of history but of staleness. Don't get me wrong! As a man who is necessarily and organically connected to the past, I am not speaking against beautifully aged buildings, bridges, or walls, like those, for example, which are so characteristic of the English countryside. What bothered me was the dilapidated, long ready for demolition junk that had to be cleared away. Regardless of empire or tradition, London is an ugly city, ugly beyond hope. It does not even help that you can find absolutely everything here. Perhaps the inside of Buckingham Palace is also uncomfortable and depressing. And though I spoke the language well I was not able to truly follow the contortions of their thinking, I remain naive and dumb confronted with understatement and contemptuousness. Pedantry in insignificant matters makes me smile, and I am saddened and astounded by newly apparent arrogance. Morality is fast deteriorating, in spite of the draconian measures taken by the Thatcher cabinet. London's onetime flourishing and deservedly attractive musical life, possessed by the devil of business, merely vegetates.

Precisely at noon my stomach signaled that it was still functioning by the old clock. Soon it was time to go to the Barbican Hall, since I had a recital this afternoon. Naturally, the piano was different to the one I had played with the Festival Orchestra—and why not? I practiced for an hour but the keys moved with such difficulty that I felt that my fingers were of lead. My pleas were given the cold shoulder rather than instructive comments by the tuner. Throughout the recital he stared at a TV set. The first part went relatively well. I would have liked to play the six Liszt pieces without interruption but the audience had an irresistible urge to applaud. Even after the *La lugubre gondola* the roar of approval

arose without delay. The Csárdás macabre was so exhausting on this instrument, I would not wish an enemy to feel as I did then. Schubert's great Sonata in B Major did badly this night. The audience was bored, to quote Bulgakov. Nonetheless, after each movement they applauded diligently before the last note was played, (just as a reminder: this was London, the music capital of the world!) After the piece was finished, however, the ovation cut off relatively quickly. I could hardly stand on my feet and felt like going to bed right then and there. An old student of mine was barely able to persuade me to have dinner with him.

October 30

In the morning went by cab to the Almeida Theatre, which was small, filthy, and stank. The Kurtágs were thrilled anyway, because the location was perfect for the performance of *Quasi...* The ensemble behaved and, what's worse, played, shamefully, not only in this work but in the others too. During the BBC concert I was longing for the Festival Orchestra, now I would have liked to have Péter Eötvös to rap this gang on the knuckles. As soon as they stopped playing for a moment they chattered, some of them read a paper. At one o'clock the whole lot jumped up as if worked by a spring, rehearsal time was up. They were not willing to play another note, yet didn't want to leave either. I could hardly get them out the door, because of course we wanted to keep on working. In the afternoon I went into town to buy scores, but the two best stores no longer existed and the third had moved. I was forced to leave the whole thing for tomorrow, my last day in London.

In the evening I walked to the concert. Interesting, it seemed shorter than by taxi in the morning. The theatre was crowded. I listened to *Truszova* from the first row, somehow they got through it, but in the intermission no one was happy. The second half offered some compensation. The Pieces for Piano went well, in spite of the fact that I had not practiced, and *Three Old Inscriptions* was very effective. In *Fragments from Attila József* Adrienne Csengery put on a great acting performance too. (Listening from the back I was not able to determine whether anyone who did not understand Hungarian was able to follow with the help of the makeshift translation). Considering how involved *Quasi...* is, it sounded quite good, though there were many mistakes. No matter, we repeated it. The lines on Kurtág's forehead had disappeared and he was able to enjoy his success. Not quite like last year in Berlin and Vienna, but the people still felt they had encountered something extraordinary. Not bad for a start.

October 31st

Today's concert was held at St Giles Cripplegate. It was perhaps even more important than yesterday's, today's programme included the only world premiere of the London Kurtág Festival. Entitled *Requiem for a Friend*, it contained songs to poems by Rimma Dallos. My partner was again Adrienne Csengery.

The church, which was surrounded by the Barbican complex, was just celebrating its nine hundredth anniversary. As soon as we entered it we felt that we were surrounded by the walls of history. Shakespeare had been there, Oliver Cromwell had sworn to be true to Elizabeth Bauchier there in 1620. Milton was buried there (during the concert the rear left leg of my piano stool was to be right on top of what had been his tomb). Thomas Morley had been an organist of this church once, and he, too, was laid to eternal rest here.

In our excitement at getting ready for the concert, we were aware of these things even though there was no lack of present celebrities, either. György Ligeti came, for example, who could not come yesterday, because of the first performance of his opera. (A Ligeti Festival was held in London at the same time.) Then there was a huge crowd of critics and journalists. They besieged Kurtág who, however, makes a point of never giving interviews. The first number was *Eight Pieces for Piano*. The piano was worse, but the piece went better, than yesterday. Of the choral works I could unfortunately catch only scraps from the outside, but during the Pilinszky songs we opened the dressing room door. A phenomenal Swiss basso, Claudio Danuser, sang them in near perfect Hungarian. The Requiem did not go as we had expected, so we repeated the whole piece right away. The second time we were able to capture something. The audience was ecstatic. Then again the *Fragments from Attila József*, and that was the closing number. I felt the Kurtágs were really happy now. For my part, I collapsed like a child's balloon. I could hear the congratulations rather than understand them. Too bad I had to go home just when the lion's share was still ahead.

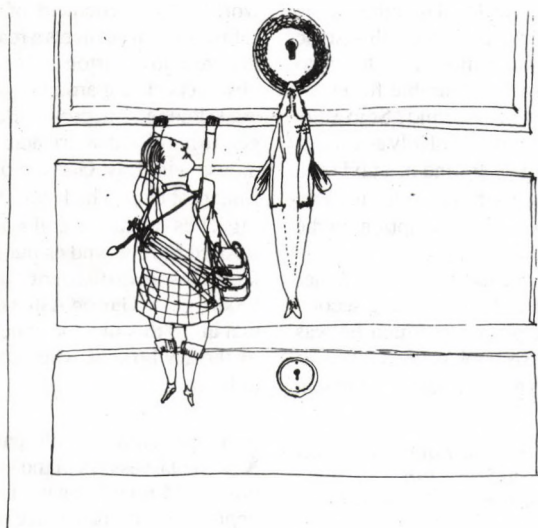
As I stepped out of the church, words spoken in Hungarian struck my ear. "Well, he's not exactly a Bartók..."

That's one thing we were able to learn from the English quick as a flash.

November 1st

A quick breakfast at dawn, taxi, airport. I bought some papers, all pedantic eye-wash, hardly anything of praise.

The flight went smoothly, the plane landed at Ferihegy at the appointed time. I could see from the bus that I was expected. My dinner jacket is off to the cleaners, my passport off for a new set of visas, and I am off in a week to the Badenweiler Kurtág Festival.



András Sajó

In the republic of true minds

Timothy Garton Ash: *The Uses of Adversity. Essays on the fate of Central Europe*. Random House, 1989. 335 pp.

Oxford colleges are considered comfortable, even if the notion of heating is replaced by fireplaces, woollen underwear, flannels and tweed jackets worn at the elbows. What was it then that could have forced Timothy Garton Ash out of this much envied environment to Eastern Europe? Perhaps it was the steaming radiators which pour out suffocating heat (and have no way of being turned off) until at dawn you awake shivering because the heating system has gone out of order.

It is essentially the imagination that makes these fizzing or ice-cold appliances exciting. Perhaps the dusty radiator hides a bug. Who is smiling at us, is perhaps watching us. Here people may also be oppressed, even when they seem to be attended to. In their words: "we take care of people". What however does the traveller experience of this? The local member of the X hotel chain offers services that are almost the usual ones. The helpful ladies are alleged to work for the state? Isn't it desirable for every employee of the state to be so kind? Souvenirs are cheap, public transport is laudably advanced although the traveller gets around in a taxi for a few cents. Clothes are shabby, the air is more polluted. It is really only the inscription on the map that warns: *hic sunt Leones*.

And yet. Over a decade Garton Ash has regularly paid for these slightly boring second rate safaris—in those places to which he was still being admitted. (His book on the GDR was found good enough to get him barred from that

workers' state). His collection of essays, *The Uses of Adversity* entitles him to an honorary citizenship of East Europe. His standard work on Solidarity made him many Polish friends. As early as October 1986 Garton Ash wrote: "Perhaps we would now say that Orwell was a Central European. If this is what we mean by Central Europe, I would apply for citizenship." (p. 213)

Yes, Garton Ash found the region interesting. Or he fussed around until it became interesting. Garton Ash moved in opposition circles until he managed to attract the attention of the authorities. Here be lions! In possession of a British passport it may be felt that the lions are panting in a cage. Or the traveller is in the cage; in any case the lion does not get at him, at the most he is forwarded, cage and all, into the free world. The excitement of the East European safari is when he meets a real informer. Thus, to his great joy Garton Ash can get the better of observers sitting around—victims of an inadequate budget—in prosaic Ladas, until finally he gets to his dissident friends; he plays cat and mouse with East German policemen; at illegal Budapest events he listens to, and pronounces, sagacities on the Central European character of Eastern Europe, and on public holidays irritates faceless socialist security officials with official tasks. It is to Garton Ash's credit that he knows that all of this may be experienced differently by those who stay, who cannot, or do not wish, to leave.

Oppression—an old game (we hope). The six last essays of the volume describe how this world mixed together of various doses of oppression and resistance, disappears.

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1989—"minor disorder in the street," as Prince Metternich might have said, or any metropolitan police chief a hundred years later. Did history perhaps declare Gaston Ash's book to be of merely antiquarian interest the moment it appeared? What do the non-heroic ethics and other intellectual products of failure, of powerlessness and the absence of hope matter now? Who cares how the intellectuals (always the intellectuals!) suffered at their meetings in the eighties in Paris or Budapest.

Where are the snows of yesteryear? One morning you wake up and find that you are free, a Central-East European citizen, and no longer a beetle. A Kafkaesque experience. All the signs indicate that our citizen—who is not even a citizen, only a state employee in a state that is falling apart—is behaving as can be expected after his years of existence as a beetle.

We can only hope that what the author still formulated in the present tense at the time of publication has indeed become a chronicle of times past. Garton Ash speaks rather of the semi-past, which determines another semi-past, which is considered to be present as these lines are being put to paper. After all, the "heroes" in his book are the "licensed" crowds who welcome the Pope, and the banned writers, who sometimes greet each other and sometimes do not, and they appear to be the masters of today. What is (or can be) realised now, has partly grown out of the intellectual climate which this book registers, discovers, invests. The Hungarian word for discovery (*felfedezés*) can mean invention too. The great travellers not only discovered distant fabulous empires but also created worlds in their accounts and, by so doing, had an influence on the fate of the discovered continents. Garton Ash's book adds to the idea of Central Europe, since Michnik, Konrád and Havel meet more convincingly in the book than they would have in the Café New York. It is perhaps a regrettable, but certainly a characteristic feature of Central Europeanism, that it is really in New York, in Paris and in Garton Ash's essays that those who represent its spirit are really at home with each other.

In the picture drawn by the book, it was the resistance of the intelligentsia or even of honest reason and faith that characterised—or

shaped?—Central Europe. A myth which has—or can—become reality? However, Garton Ash is a political realist as well as a compassionate traveller. He knows that the German question is the real question for Central Europe. During the eighties West Germany approached the German question pragmatically, if only because of the proximity of the Soviet Union. At the time Garton Ash wrote that "West Germany's special interests in relations with Moscow prevailed. So far these special, national interests have been accommodated in the Western alliance and the West European Community without too much strain. There is no reason to believe they cannot be accommodated in the foreseeable future. But as President von Weizsäcker observes, we do well not to shut our eyes to them. Bonn will forcefully assert what it regards as the German national interest" (p. 103).

After that, the citizen of East Germany fleeing individually and by mass demonstration went beyond Realpolitik and Deutschlandpolitik and provided new opportunities for the expression of the German national interest.

Germany is, of course, always something different, even if it is crucial to Central Europe. The social role of the intelligentsia is different. This is not a substitute bourgeoisie, or even a cultured bourgeoisie (*Bildungsbürger*) produced for the lack of the bourgeoisie. Its reactions are different when faced with Evil. And it regularly faces it. And the greatest, with a few exceptions—as Thomas Mann demonstrated—chose *Innerlichkeit*, the intimacy protected by authority. "Mann's argument has paid the price of its influence, by debasement into cliché" (p. 12).

To a certain extent, Brecht also fits into this *Innerlichkeit*, although *mitmachen*, for which Garton Ash justifiably blames him, dominates in Brecht. The Central European intelligentsia are the opposite of Brecht, or even more of Hermann Kant. If he was lucky, the East German writer could leave, which sometimes meant that he was put out like a kitten by the scruff of his neck. Still the medium of the language remained, even if the importance of what he wrote could be lost. But for whom outside his country could a Czech write, asks Garton Ash.

In other words, Garton Ash's Czech intelligentsia, (or the Hungarian and Polish) does not go into exile. As far as literary history is con-

cerned, this proposition is just as untrue as that of *Innerlichkeit*; the true bourgeois resistant Sándor Márai died in California, where Milosz lives; while Mrozek and Kundera achieved their places in world literature by keeping the distance of the exile (and thanks to their genius). But seen from the aspect of Central Europe as the intellectual frontline against the Communist system, it is those who stayed, those who were not allowed to go, and those who returned who are the interesting ones, indeed the more important ones: the Michniks, the Havel. And, of course, by their presence they are the political factors of today. Whether this is a lasting presence or has been and will be a mere episode, is tested in this essay—and by the citizens as they go to vote.

As Garton Ash puts it, *Mittleuropa* is “an assertion about the present” (p. 188). The problem is, as usual, with the future. The myth was needed against an oppressive reality woven out of appearances; now it has to be asked if it is merely a question of new myths—and not only of a Central European type—that are taking over.

“*Mittleuropa*, if it merely reminds an American or British newspaper reader that East Berlin, Prague and Budapest are not quite in the same position as Vladivostok, then it serves a good purpose” (p. 180). However, *Mittleuropa* existed as an effective myth apart from this, made up of aspirations, dreams, desire and honesty. And honesty comes first. It appears, and not only among the authors cited by Garton Ash, that the basic position of intellectual resistance after the failure of 1968 was not so much direct political action but the policy of telling the truth. The system is mendacious, the imperative of not lying is the fullest denial of the system. Husak, the president of oblivion, made a programme out of wanting people to forget the past—and thereby the reality—in return for the private pleasure of weekend houses. And who wanted to remember 1956 in Hungary as long as things were going relatively well? Denying the phantom world, the Central European mind simply forgets the world created by the Husaks. The problem for the future will be that millions of subjects willy–nilly cooperated in the phan-

tom world of the Husaks; they will now have to vote and will have to bear the real collapse of the phantom reality. Instead of manna or *Sacher Torte* it is stones and *Dreck* that they find around their necks here.

Garton Ash is fascinated by this moral world view; he is fascinated its moral grandeur, not by its force as an analytical tool. In this respect he recognised that there is “a lot of mythopoetic tendency in it—the inclination to attribute to the Central European past what you hope will characterize the Central European future, the confusion of what should be with what was” (p. 184).

To forget the existing, “the state was ignored” (Vonnegut). The intellectuals, especially the Poles “lived elsewhere” for the sake of what was true, desired, and perhaps possible. Not abroad, but in the future. And if abroad, then in the national past too. In an “unofficial” past, which existed mostly as the dream of intellectual resistance, and as such was far from being *sine ira et studio*. Today this past has suddenly become dangerous, in particular because of its idealised nature. Can catching up with the rest of Europe be ensured by bringing back a past which is not exactly without blemish and somewhat anachronistic to boot? Gustav Husak was right: in a country without a memory anything is possible. In a country living in such a mythical past it can, however, happen that only one thing will be possible.

The Central European intellectual elite is a narrow circle. These opposition figures which build a closed society out of references to each other, are not representative; yet they symbolise—in their differences—their own country. After—some of—the “events” we might be inclined to believe that the difference between the Czech, Hungarian, Polish and East German changes and peoples correspond to the difference between Havel, Konrád, Michnik and—let us say—Hermann Kant. Now it seems, it is their being shunted aside that will be common. And since writers are concerned, the difference is also one of style. It is in this way that Hungary—in the wake of Konrád’s linguistic bravado—becomes the country of art nouveau. The way of living here relies on half–telling the truth, life is made bearable by the playing of blindman’s buff. This half–lived Hungarian life

is a great tradition and I doubt whether today the time for telling all has arrived. In Poland people thought in the contrasts of black and white—and acted thus too. According to Garton Ash, the Hungarians lived in a maze, where they hid, took cover. So they found it difficult to decide—about each other, but sometimes even about themselves—whether they were actors or extras, backers, *gleichschalters* or *gleichschalters*, resisters or not. If we asked a former agent today—and it makes no difference which agency he was acting for—he would be inclined to point out that he in fact was resisting the system, which is certainly true if you consider the smooth collapse of the Hungarian maze of communism.

The linguistic stimulation of half-telling the truth continues to haunt, since the Central European intellectual elite is a narrow circle. The progressive hero of today persecuted yesterday, also as a progressive, his allies of today. Of this persecution others again demonstrate that, in reality, it had been a kind of pampering. The vagueness of concepts gives rise to mistrust.

Garton Ash's heroes are intellectuals. His genre pictures have limited validity, even if as symbols these actors point beyond their microworld. It is Garton Ash's good luck—and perhaps ours too—that those about whom his essays are written, have in the meantime become national leaders. Garton Ash probably has contacts today in the new East European establishment of a kind which the Foreign Office can only dream of.

Of course, Garton Ash is not the chronicler of an inbred group. The populace—just as in that typical East European opera, *Boris Godunov*—is the principal actor. If the Pope blesses Poland, the importance of the people is given by their forming the populace. And if a "simple man" such as the farmer Augustin Navratil in Lutopecny opposes the authorities with peasant stubbornness and religious faith, Garton Ash feels a moved and almost troubled respect. The problems increase somewhat when Garton Ash meets frankly and openly antisemitic Polish peasants. True, he met these in the film, *Shoah*. Nevertheless, where the intellectual fight against oppression has to wait for the "fifth column of social consciousness" (p. 199),

it is troubling if such "irregulars" have to be relied on.

True if we disregard the moral purity of future presidents and ministers, which no doubt played an important or even a decisive role, the forces of change which can be sensed in the past also give rise to doubts and anxieties. Anxiety is not yet present in the volume, since the last essay, calling the transformation a mixture of revolution and reform, was still written in the dizziness of the "fantastic spring" of 1989. But the facts which cause anxiety today are discernible in the volume.

Everyday resistance was restricted in Hungary and in Czechoslovakia—and I am not only thinking of the "Polish markets" here—to private life. "Black marketing is the antipolitics of the common man" (p. 205). Reform/revolution ("refolution") is only partly the work of internal forces, it is in part the "gift" due to the shortening of the frontline by Gorbachev's empire. Garton Ash, the honorary citizen of *Mittleuropa*, who knows Eastern Europe, watches the processes of emancipation as "ottomanisation," as a consequence of unsuccessful modernization. If there is emancipation, then it is "emancipation in decay" (p. 253). If what has happened here was an attempt at modernization, then what follows now will be the drawing of the conclusions of the failure of modernization. In other words, the withdrawal of a—however superficial—secularization. It was exactly the non-secularized forces that were able to resist most effectively the Eastern modernization which lead to a dead-end: the national idea, religion. It thus cannot be wondered at if the socialist ideal seems to disappear from the thoughts of the opposition. On the other hand, in Havel's programme, for the East European dissidents, civil society did not primarily mean private property and private production but living in truth. Leaving the level of declarations, private property—or to be more exact, the well being involved in it—gave rise to envy and mistrust. It is no wonder that—with or without reason—collaboration and the sell-out of the homeland are mentioned in connection with businessmen.

As regards Hungary, Garton Ash formulated the difficulty of democratization, assuming the

survival of the conditions of socialism. Two years later when thousands of democratic lilies give pleasure, Garton Ash's words are even more thought-provoking:

"The sad fact is that socialism has created in all the East European state an array of domestic barriers against the transformation to liberal democracy-cum-mixed-economy. These barriers lie not only in the system of politbureaucratic dictatorship (to use Rudolf Bahro's apt term) and not merely in the character and interests of the nomenklatura ruling class, but also in the interest, attitudes, and fears of many of the ruled" (p. 298).

And so far Garton Ash's prediction that "in conditions of external sovereignty, these obstacles would simply be swept aside" (p. 289) does not seem to be confirmed. Of course, the advantage of the traveller is not only that he can move on. It is also that his judgement is not dictated by the millions of frustrations of the moment. And yet... Wolf Biermann witnessed the phenomenon when hundreds of thousands of East German citizen who incontestably cooperated—and not always simply on the level of toleration—with Stasi-socialism, frantically abused in the streets of Leipzig a crowd of approximately three thousand who spoke up for socialism. They threatened leftist oppositionists who had been permanent clients of the most peculiar institution of Stasi-socialism, the interrogation room.

In contrast to the cheap explanation of the world by the ancient regime, we have to proclaim—and believe a little—that the spirit can overcome matter. Or was it nevertheless not antipolitics that won out? To continue in Konrád's allegedly art nouveau manner: "To be a Central European is a *Weltanschauung*, not citizenship. "But according to other local ideologies that cannot be described as art nouveau, it is national citizenship that brings salvation.

Philip Roth imagined Vidal and Malamud in the place of the Czech intelligentsia which advanced to the position of tram drivers and street cleaners in 1968. Nevertheless, Havel is the President of the Republic. Uplifting and anti-Kafkaesque. But where does it end? In Philip Roth's recent interpretation, K. not only conquered the Castle, he even replaced Klamm's boss by having Havel as President.

In reality we have decent clergymen and actors in the place of lawyers in the legislature. And officials continue in the economy. Of course, other officials. Even if they were the same physically. Patriotic, people-loving specialists. Honestly. Upon *their* word. How will it be, if the antipoliticians will again have to opt for antipolitics? What will happen if those who bore witness to the truth will not be able to satisfy public expectations? If they provide too many rights to the minorities? *Horribile dictu*, to the Gypsies? If they take *Mittleuropa* seriously? If they do not prohibit pornography, begging in the street, abortions and atheism? If they do not cut the law day after day to national public interests? If they do not celebrate renationalised law as the rule of law? What if they will not be sufficiently Central European? Fortunately, some of today's leaders are also expert street cleaners and tram drivers. The undercivilised civil society will be able to save on the costs of retraining.

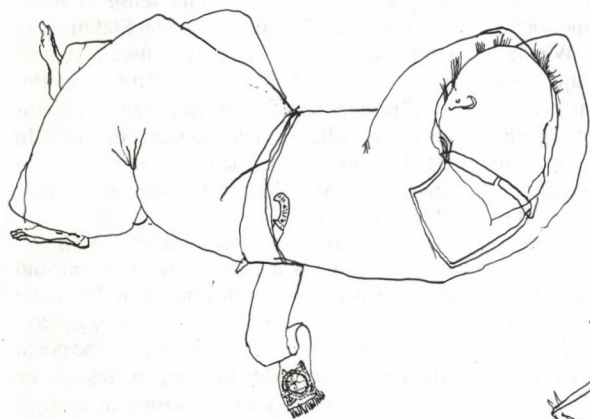
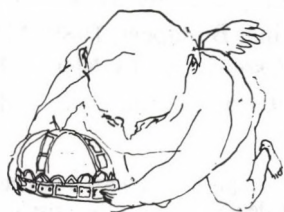
But what will happen if the victors will nevertheless not be able to remain Central Europeans? If the politician carries the day over the antipolitician? After all, in a "normal country" it is not the will for the impossible that is the only honest realism. On the contrary, victorious—and in its purity, attractive—naivety becomes criminal irresponsibility. In a normal country, I say. But let us not forget that, according to the traditions of *Mittleuropa*, "in this country one acted differently from the way one thought or one thought differently from the way one acted. Uninformed observers have mistaken this for charm." (*The Man without Qualities*. Vol. I.) For what would a *Mittleuropa* essay be worth without beautiful quotations from Musil? To voice, finally, some serious reservations concerning Garton Ash's book. There is already a considerable chance that while they speak the language of *Mittleuropa* they will be forced to form a *Zwischeneuropa* through their actions. ("Zwischeneuropa is a dependent intermediate zone of weak states, national prejudice, inequality, poverty, and *Schlamassel*.")

E pilogue (or as Timothy Garton Ash put it in his somewhat euphoric *New York Re-*

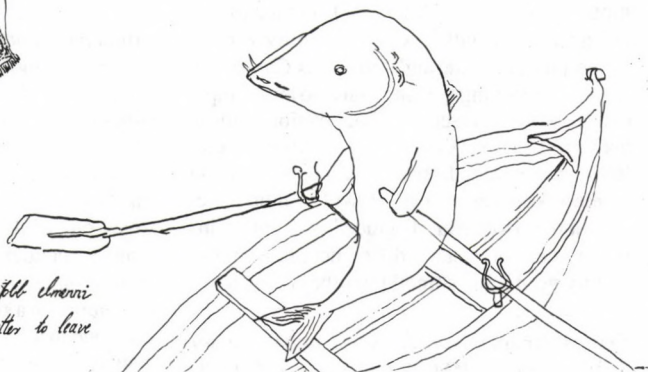
view of Books article of February 15, 1990: "Epitaph").

"To be sure, there will be many further conflicts, injustices and miseries in these lands. But they will be different conflicts, injustices, and miseries—new and old, post-communist but also pre-communist. In the worst case, there might be new dictators; but they would be different dictators."

Intellectuals will be productive again, if they survive as intellectuals. Much fun is promised for the future traveller. Please come to visit our modest human zoo. A warning, however: there intellectuals, antipolitician writers turned into politicians, are remarkably similar to born politicians: they are increasingly dull. Perhaps this region has had its fill of chilling performances.



*John Cherni
Better to leave*



Eric Mottram

Before the revolution: poetry by István Vas and Sándor Csoóri

Through the Smoke. Selected poems by István Vas. Sel. by Miklós Vajda. Intr. by George Szirtes. Corvina, Budapest, 1989, 128 pp.; *Barbarian Prayer.* Selected poems by Sándor Csoóri. Sel. by Mátyás Domokos. Foreword by Len Roberts. Corvina, Budapest, 1989, 91 pp.

Both Vas and Csoóri expose to us, English-speaking readers in the West, the depths of necessity to survive under cultural alienation, the resources that need to be drawn upon if creativity is to resist reductions to propaganda or the perpetuation of tyrannical dogma. Whether under Stalinism, fascism, religious inquisition or capitalism, the artist has to learn how to create rather than imitate, if he is to be the transmitter of the new. To state opposition, even and perhaps specially in exile, or to suffer as others must, is not enough, hard though it is to say this. Intellect for Vas is itself the spirit of release, independence and humanity distinct from nature and animal—although he can image it as light or a spark, as well as the generation of thought (“Ode to the Intellect”). Venice to him is a triumph of will power, “masculine order”, “triumph of conquering”. Nicholas Cusanus is intellect surviving tyranny, but also an example of necessary “intersection of oppositions”, those contraries that produce art “where worlds collide”, experienced, for instance, in ancient Rome’s vestiges—a way of withstanding “repression, prison, war, disgrace”. Vas entertains the moment of ecstatic difference, faith in humanity producing something other than chaos.

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He has translated Yeats, and this is like the Irish poet's insistence on “monuments of unageing intellect”—which for him were Byzantine. Both poets are classicists, in this sense at least. “Romanus sum”, writes Vas under Stalinism, in a city he dubs “a haughty, false, /Revived Byzantium”—a deathly power. “Roman Ars Poetica” restates resources in the Forum and Mediterranean culture, “my ancient country”. In “Mediterranean” he claims “the sea of the Greeks, the Latins, and my forbears, and in me”, “this chaos is order”.

But his classicism is also fatalist. “The Invisible Element” is a rhetoric of question and tentative answer by further question. The issue is the “germ” that penetrates, and can be generative in either “fatal” or positive ways. The poem offers the vulnerability of living in closure, the chance of finding yourself wrong in spite of yourself. Intellect is a process not of total security, therefore. In “Wedding Song” the universe cannot be contemplated because it expands, causes useless vertigo. The emphasis must be on “a man who makes the future, /One who loves, one who can thwart /That infinite expansion by condensing /Space and atom in his beating heart”—a further extension of necessary hubris in a sick time. Natural processes will continue in any case; but this wedding is the instance of love, the human capability, “the power that creates its own system”.

Culture or anarchy; love amid "ignorant armies": a British reader might recall Matthew Arnold's "Dover Beach", and not without misgivings—and, indeed, "The Scholar Gypsy". Vas asks in "The Grand Finale", during the last days of World War II, Budapest between Germans and Russians and western victorious democracy, "What will each do to save his life?" This is one of his best poems, because it dramatizes conditions—and Vas does tend to describe and state rather than dramatize and imply. The action emerges as an intersection of appalling decisions for survival—"between the lines". But the survivors include a young German soldier, "symbol of stubborn resistance". Vas penetrates the issues: the human-caused complexities of war at the practical level of local action, us in conflict rather than high policy in cabinets and boardrooms. But Europe is the producing factor; the over-all conditions are presented as inevitable. Are they cynical or realistic or stoic in formulation? Probably all three. What is not cynical is faith in beauty and the creative masters. Again, a British reader might well recall Yeats, after the Irish "troubles" climaxing in 1916, rescuing what he can for beauty and the arts. "Ode to Yesterday's Women" is a fine articulation acknowledging the social, political and erotic powers of women as a complex definition of beauty. But these statements act in parallel with "The Translator's Vote of Thanks", evaluating translation as a control for the translator's responses, feelings and beliefs; and also as part of his salvation by "world literature, our human heritage" in a time of national cultural destruction, when that translated heritage can alone be handed on to youth that survives the parentally enforced sacrifices.

Vas is a poet of faiths, therefore, and of invaded territory, creativity under duress from cultural colonization and possession, with the risk of a disinherited future for the young. He opens up to his translated writers—French, English and German—who provided him with sustenance when his own work was suppressed by "blind cant and bigotry": "If I retained your honour" that's your due, /The faith I honoured was both yours and mine... You gave me sea breezes, smell of liberty". One context is part two of "Rhapsody: Keeping Faith," which

honours a fellow poet who existed during the terror of the labour camps.

Another edge of sustenance and survival is reached in "Approaching Fifty", a poem of premature, despairing age—ironical, apparently, although the present translation does not convey it, except, perhaps, by a sort of jokey anguish: "Nothing reacts, /There's nothing in my depths, my guts, /But shrinking, shrinking..." But "An Evening at 'The Four Greys'-a 'pub' in Buda, the introduction reports, although it is doubtful whether pubs exist in Hungary—stumbles back into resistance: "Yet we are still alive, our innermost being /Radiant amid the horrors. /We've even solved a few /Of the insoluble secrets. /Having lived not as we wished. /Only as was possible". But Vas needs, as main reliance, those masters he must have recognized appreciatively in Yeats:

*The masters, our ancestors, were not trifling
when they*

Created noble, lovely monuments:

*They meant them for your last line of defence
In our wars against the forces of decay.*

How to attain such power, is a major theme in his work, therefore. "Parliament" looks back to Cromwell and recognizes how the title institution's political basis was obtained: "Each new heroic act /Demands that blood be spent /And without faith your great good sense /Is nothing, friends, is impotent". In "Dialogue Between Strangers", the poet of faith confronts the poet of fate in an opening up of the man whose self has been hard won, and is now unwilling to relinquish its attainment, to "walk away from the roads". He acknowledges a tendency to brooding solitude. He needs "our sense of place, our domicile" ("Moving") and resists any "higher stage of forgetting" ("Necessity"). "It Doesn't Matter" presents this condition in one of Vas's most intriguing poems, one of several about intense personal solidarities arising from pressures of separation, imprisonment, persecution, the fate of thousands of Europeans in this cruel century. And it is a certain sense of inevitability that is futile to try to alter that makes "Allende" dangerously broad, insufficiently detailed and politically lacking in particularity. A reader

might well find himself asking: but who and what forces brought Allende down?

"That Too is an *Ars Poetica* (From the Conversations of Einstein and Heisenberg)"—that is, a brief entry into relativity and indeterminacy—once again takes on the issues of form—found and created—eternally our fundamental enquiry. One voice says:

*...these forms always
Find us unprepared when suddenly
They disclose themselves. What's more, I be-
lieve
That laws are born from forms.*

The other voice's move is:

*...you can't really overlook that all
Possibilities to come
As well as hope are indispensable Elements
Of human existence.*

"Idling" proposes conditions for these ideas in poetic action: the necessity for an alert watchfulness for "lines and designs", and the production of "meaningful form". The conclusion is characteristic, in both image and stance:

*I'm just walking the well-guarded border.
Beyond, a hazy forbidden sector.
One day I shall perhaps chance
Upon an unpatrolled crossing-place.*

But this initial appreciation of István Vas's work must be radically flawed. It could not include much sense of the chronology of the poems, since, apart from a few referentialities in a generally less than useful "Introduction", the poems are not dated, nor is their principle of the sequence disclosed. Nor is there any section of notes for each poem. Corvina really must pay more attention to the editing and presentation of its poets.

Vas was born in 1910, Csoóri in 1930. But for the latter, Corvina offer only a paragraph of biographical detail, and a loose appraisal on the back cover—plus a brief inside introduction which does little justice to this remarkably fine poet. His skills survive even some of the present translations!

The location is now post World War II Hungary, but the overall scene of investigation is again a search for answers to continuing turmoils of culture versus anarchy masquerading as authoritarian order. As with Vas, the poems are generated from self-survival, implying national cultural survival. Csoóri says his work is "about how to maintain the existence of the human personality in the world amid the great campaigns of depersonalization". So that it can penetrate far beyond Hungary into other of our European isolations, solitudes, lonely witnessings. The "Foreword" speaks of his "elegiac poems", but there are very few of these. The back cover says "so-called Folk Surrealism", but gives no details, and barrenly refers to Csoóri's being "often in political disgrace, with books suspended and writings banned"—which certainly dates this edition rather precisely, as well as being smug. More to the point, his techniques of imagery have an imaginative excitement that demonstrates a particular creativity at work against cultural destruction. Where Vas's ego is commonly present, and often artistically interfering in its manners, Csoóri concentrates on language structures that burn through translation. His love poem is not a record of love—most people's experience of love is inexorably similar—but an experience in itself particular:

*I am content that once, like heaven's fire, I
stole your face
and gave it to other women to make them fair;
content that in my matted body, in my dreams
like a buried statue or legend burnt in tile,
you are always there.*

Where Vas insists on his own integrity, Csoóri presents his poetic skills first, and the effect is generally exhilarating:

*On my hand hare's blood,
frog-spawn,
silk of a night-gown and dying
in a green coach of leaves, summer and my
skull go driving.*

A poem becomes a dramatic site of creative action that explodes corruption—a strong resis-

tance which encourages and engages intellect and the senses. The assault on enclosures and dullness is itself political:

*just like the pilot, a prisoner to the lack of
limits,
who files higher only to fall
in fatal love with the earth,
just like one who always speaks of stones,
although he does not believe in anything
but the dirt man digs his life from,
on his face love betrays itself, like a tattooed
number
faded, and still disappearing.*

Csoóri's frequent convention is that forest, wild life, love, the weather are where a man may work for liberty by imagination; city, machinery, the business of state control, cause premature destruction and are potentially deathly. His version of the legend of the boys changed into stags, used by both Bartók and Ferenc Juhász, is radical: who can possibly return home in circumstances of national depression? ("Cantata Profana—In Memory of Béla Bartók"): "If the door opens it's like a jack-knife. [...] We would only rush upon you, like a blast, /we would throb beside you /like an old generator". If technology is to be viable, it must be in some way naturalised, liberated. Otherwise ("Something Started"):

*Now I know: hell was erected piece by piece
like a house, an unscalable towerblock:
glass walls, glass railings, glass stairs
glare at me and I see a transparent bed, too,
in which I shall lie on my back at night.*

But Csoóri's poetry is activated by impregnatory meetings, by force and counter-force. To call this simply violence would be useless; it is a matter of countering violations. Creativity is itself an Heraclitean war with destruction-invasion of homeland and self, erosion of love, Vietnam villages burnt on television. There can be nothing parochial about violation and no requirement to convert it into poetry, unless a poet's language goes beyond the mere taking advantage of a subject matter by wretchedly

commonplace second-rate artists. As Csoóri writes during the making of his film on the Hungarian armies in World War II: "What could you have found to say/to those who were dying?" The foreword compares Csoóri to the Whitman of "I was the man, I suffer'd, I was there"; but he is not that kind of recording witness. He creates another occasion, an art that transcends contingency with strong linguistic techniques, post-surrealist imagic structures the nineteenth century did not have. Csoóri rarely uses the traps of representation. In "Whispers, for Two Voices", "I was there" is followed by "between two faded chairs", "the exposed /nerves /dangling over the threshold".

Csoóri transforms as he transmits so that you feel the force of language emerging from the emotional, political site, whether you have experienced the historical actuality of it, or not. Snow is a constant occasion in his poems, and snow will never be the same experience after them, because of his range of associated feelings and memories, extensions, now, of our own experience:

*half-world, half-smile can be a declaration
of war;
but there is always a tomorrow,
snow-dew, wind,
resurrection which as yet I do not know.*

Above all, he invents a language for distress and lack, deprivation fought by human resistance:

*Chestnuts strike the bench.
From the house next door
silver-haired war sobs in a woman's voice.
Suddenly, what is lacking in our lives
begins to throb like some imaginary pain.
Love throbs like a sawed-off right leg.*

*I'd even submit to interrogation
in front of spotlights
and police fists.*

Again and again he penetrates, hurts, with his skills, brings the sensibility to attentiveness:

*...when the sun stands and faces you, strip off
your clothes. Parade your maimed body
before the first green leaf,
every forest was home to us, each patch of
grassland,
dark sister of amazons, the wind still remem-
bers us,
it plays round your shoulder, it raises your
hair.*

Csoóri has one of the major poetic gifts: he can resist stating his material, and embodies it—in the full sense incorporates it, in language and in situational forms:

*I long to wall myself in in a windowless
white room, with no other companion beside
my hopes with their conspiracies. All time
would be mine again at last.[...]*

*[...]I could be out of date again:
my body and soul, nerve and bone stretching
out
into infinity. The memory of iron wheels
should not repeat its victory over me, nor of
infernal clockwork!*

Let a few ruinous fragments of "To Keep Watch with Me" exemplify the skills of this major European poet:

*Just now in my dream
soldiers ran, naked to their waists,
and combed through the unkempt park
with pitchforks ready to thrust.*

*Were they looking for me, the old exile?
I can't remember.
Bloodstains darkened a rock.
I saw an overturned barn lantern.
The flame was mixed with mud
and this made everything so finite,
so shameless.*

*I'd love to sleep out of revenge
to forget my very European nightmare-[...]*

Brief criticism of the editing of these important selections has been offered. But it must be further said that the translation techniques do often seem to be faulty. It is hard to believe that the trite, gimmicky rhymes and leaden metrics of most of the Vas versions really represent the poet. The sound of the English is repeatedly without much force. Is Vas's poetry really littered with poeticisms and archaisms? The introduction says that his language is "more open and limpid" than in "Walcott, in Murray, in Dunn"—but Walcott and Dunn are hardly significant contemporary poets—and who is this Murray? Then we are informed that Vas is "classical", "almost Horatian", and that this "readily offers itself in English". What can this possibly mean? Then: "The intellect is a necessary part of the godhead for Vas. 'Ode to the Intellect' states this credo more forthrightly". But this poem says no such thing; it concerns the moment a man's "instincts learn to think". Vas has translated Yeats and other English writers. Could he be persuaded to translate his own poems? Perhaps he has.

Corvina should think carefully of what the introductions to these editions should contain—certainly a wide range of readers reading the poems for the first time need information: dates of publication, the circumstances of publication, extended biographical details. We do not need drivel like: "The author of these verses is a true human being and a true poet", or "Vas the man and the poet are indivisible" (is the last word here in fact English?), or "Vas ought to be easily pigeon-holed as a metropolitan", and his "marriage was not fated to last for long". His "concrete images of the town and its population" are said to be "the living backdrop" of a poem; we are told his "anecdotes assume our patience to listen". And so on and on, for eleven pages and more. Corvina should think seriously of giving us extended quotations by the poets on their work and their culture, and interviews with them. This is an important series and needs the most careful presentation.

Balázs Lengyel

Sonnets and sonneteering: two volumes

Győző Ferencz: *Omlásveszély* (Danger of Landslide). Szépirodalmi, 1989, 72 pp.;
Béla Markó: *Mindenki autóbusza* (Bus for All). Magvető, 1989, 112 pp.

In the last year and a half or so, Hungarian poetry as a whole has continued along a road of progress, mostly with a sober naturalness, avoiding stridency, yet still with flying colours. This is true even though much is in a state of formation, and there are quite contrasting modes of expression with their questionable values; it would be a pity to consider the state of poetry to be critical simply because of all the semi-dilettante poems that fill magazines and newspapers, and the equally semi-dilettante reviews with their pedantic eulogies. It would be a pity to judge the latest output fastidiously as nothing other than mediocre. The judgement of such a period needs time—books and the successful endeavours they imply take years to become absorbed and achieve their proper rank. True, now we are not living in a restless age of spectacular entrées upon the literary scene; it is rather a period which, relieved of the pressure of literary politics, is paying less attention to the lyre and which will judge its real values only later, in retrospect. There is nothing irregular about this. Thank goodness, the day of appointments for writers is on the wane. The artificial fame of poets, overestimated out of political considerations, has become deflated, and the appointed ones have disappeared from the scene. Unfortunately, they sometimes disappear with valuable works which deserve to survive, be-

cause the living, in their efforts to get on, are cruel to the dead. Attention is concentrated on the present and memory produces lapses. The *poeta minor*, having brought forth values that cannot be gainsaid, is unjustly forgotten. I could make up a long list of names that are no longer even mentioned, and would be glad to be able to save some of the poets, who, during their lives, were shelved (as, for example, Zoltán Jékely, who in fact was anything but a *poeta minor*) and transfer them into the storehouse of lasting values.

In the last months of the past year, I have read two important volumes, which are related both in their treatment of form and the subjects they tackle. One, *Bus for All* is the first volume by the Transylvanian Béla Markó to appear in Hungary, and it includes a hundred sonnets; the other, *Danger of Landslide*, is the second volume by Győző Ferencz. Ferencz is a virtuoso poet, adhering to form, who can write modern poetry, employing innovative means even while using Greek metric strophic structure. Both volumes devote themselves to unravelling the inextricable secret of existence: to dissecting what we really are while we proceed in time, in a given environment and a human ambience; to dissecting whether we are identical with our own self, which is constantly present, in an intermediary state, as it were, between our past and future, and to dissecting what in fact this identity consists of. In the course of this progress, which works with "the amnesia of oblivion" (Markó), and in which the arriving new always

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blurs and covers the past, where can one find the unsuppressible character, and indeed, the essence of one's own existence? Are we identical in our recurring gestures, which are reflected, multiplied, in the hall of mirrors of the present (see Weöres's mirror-palace), or do we exist in our love, through the person who is also endlessly changing?

But to approach the thought of Győző Ferencz's even more closely: existence, which *is*, is a state that can be experienced, assigns tasks and excites emotions, and is still dubious and contradictory—and it is dubious not because as a process it is limited in time, but because in itself it is a process taking place in time and exposed to perpetual change. As Bergson argues in his *Introduction to Metaphysics*, reality as a whole signifies the process of origin, and existence means to be. There are not *things* that have originated, only things that are originating, and there are no *states* that endure, only states that change. The place of one who lives in the process of existence (of being) cannot be demarcated and defined in space-time, and indeed, it is not only his moving position which is undefinable, but he himself as well—undefinable for himself and also for the other, a stranger also being within a process and living through a process, even though to establish contact with that other forms one of the most certain facts of being and of identity.

This by and large is how Ferencz's sense of existence can be translated into prose.

Of course, you could say that passing time, and what our existence signifies in this passing time, have been subjects which have inspired poets in all ages and in the most varied manners. But such a generalization would be misleading, since it leads away from the uniqueness of this poetry, whose quality is manifestly high. Because for Ferencz poetry itself serves as a means of examination. Or, if you prefer, a self-examining electron-microscope. Fighting with faith and doubt, he wishes to establish truths, and not to "sound" the consequences of the experiences of existence. He uses the poem to observe and analyse and carry out intellectual and emotional tests. This is his starting point which, as compared with the usual, is almost anti-lyrical. It means that he refuses all the lyrical conventions, all the "cheating" with words and emo-

tions, all the possibilities for "puffed-up", stereotype lyricizing, and almost exclusively retains the strictness of a disciplined form, elaboration and the poetic quality of the poem. Today, at a time when rationality is being broken up, a singular, loosely set metrical logic is gaining ground, with associative effusion and disarranged lyrical structure in fashion, he aims at precision. But meanwhile he, too, applies innovations, word-twistings, contractions, bold syntactic turns, half words and wary interpolations of half sentences.

From the point of view of the standard concept of poetry, Ferencz undertakes less—just to be sure of the result. Modesty and withdrawal make up an attractive, anti-inflationary policy at a time of the inflation in words. I think, therefore I write poems (because whether I am, and how I am, are far from being evident)—this could be the motto of his poetry.

I know that in characterising a poet by discussing his own topic area—which poetically is almost immaterial—instead of speaking about the quality of his accomplishments, his originality, his motifs and graphic quality, I comply with something which today is fashionable in reviews but which is in fact an absurdity. Have I perhaps fallen into the trap of the empty ideological criticism that derives from György Lukács and has prevailed for the past forty years? I hope this is not the case. Because Ferencz's poetry realizes poetic values not according to the customary poetic formulae. Quality finds expression not only in the melody of the lines—though whenever Ferencz so wishes, this too turns out perfectly—nor in pictorialness or perception, but precisely in unfolding the conceptual arches by breaking them up and interspersing them with parenthetical interpolations and question marks. Or indeed, in the clashing of thesis and antithesis. These features are a new poetic quality. Naturally, one has to become accustomed to this way of arriving at values. Once one is so accustomed and able to discern the idiom of this purposeful endeavour, our internal world, the charting of which forms one of the basic tasks of literature, is arrived at.

Today, when even outstanding poets often owe their success and popularity to their political poems—for example György Petri or Géza Szőcs—it is not superfluous to stress that Fer-

encz's in-depth confrontation, which at some points touches on the given facts of the outside world almost imperceptibly—though it touches nonetheless—yields literary results which are not inferior to those of the above. Indeed, in its restrained manner, it sometimes reveals more profound truths of a general validity.

In *Bus for All*, Béla Markó's aims are similar to Győző Ferencz's though he does not perhaps arrive at the same depth and originality. In submitting to the limitations of the sonnet, at places his self-analysis is affected by the devices he has to employ. He writes in the preface ("A Brief, Outdated Appeal"): "I do not like the sonnet. I like liberty. I do not like my memories. I like liberty. No, no, no! I do not want to be like a house, like a native land, like a sonnet. Let them be like I am!" This is like a scream. A scream from Transylvania, from contemporary Rumania, coming from a Hungarian poet living in oppression. Just consider the constraints there are behind the private meditation of the sonnets, the shouldering of their closed form. Although the same constraints have had an influence on the passage of Győző Ferencz's meditations and have determined their scope, they did not fully remove all possibility of him being able to surmount them. Although, as for the gifted Szabolcs Várady, an intimacy using modest, objective understatements is a constitutional quality with Ferencz, he is still able to indicate the compelling circumstances. Referring to the resultant of his attitude, in some of his outstanding poems he speaks of "tumble-down principles" pinned up with "defencelessness", virtually giving a socio-political reason for his closedness.

Understandably, Béla Markó cannot afford to do so. I feel somewhat guilty of a lack of proper critical care to be writing on his first volume to have appeared in Hungary, as I do not know those which were published in Rumania and I do not usually form an opinion without being familiar with a poet's earlier work. So all I can say is that in vain does he show little liking for the sonnet, whether he has opted for this form voluntary or under duress, he has locked himself in its stocks, in its prison, and it is in this form he relates the story of his internal life, the struggling and cumulated moments of his love.

True, "prison lyrics" are successful like this as well, still noteworthy and gripping.

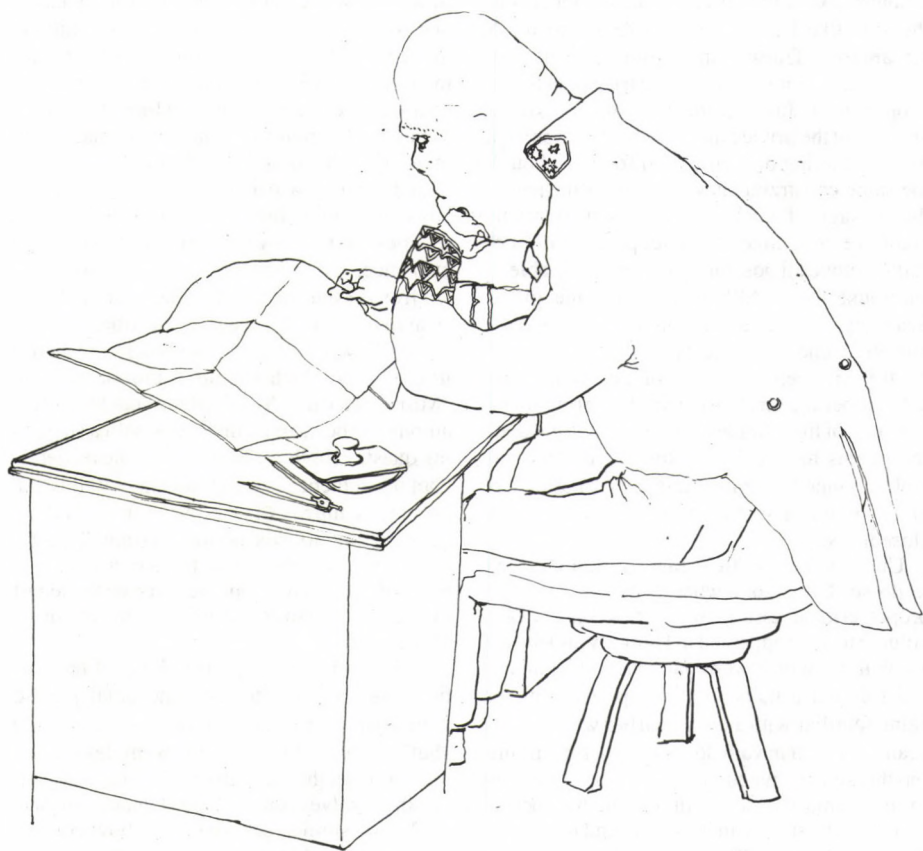
Unfortunately, however several "but"s here follow. Petrarch, the creator of the form, himself employed whole series of repetitions and mannerisms, not to speak of his followers, the whole Petrarchan school. The repetition of themes and turns by itself is, of course, not a negative feature, since one stanza reinforces the other. Even if using other forms, Ferencz also sometimes develops his meditations through repetition, preparing the way for a new conceptual arch with the finished material of his observations. This is one way in which repetition can lend authenticity and depth. But Ferencz can vary his formal treatment. The sonnet, however, with its formal monotony, is a dangerous genre. In writing sonnets, two risks are usually taken: one is garrulity, an unnecessary slackening of the concise image already found, just to fill out the form, and the other is an excessive reliance on a surprise ending in the last line. It would be unfair not to point out, however, that in the majority of the sonnets, Markó has succeeded in avoiding these twin dangers; more than once he has scored direct hits in taking on the amazing realities in the voyage through time of our existence. As for instance in "I, too, have written from beside the poultry shed", or in "Eppur si muove", which, denying the title, ends by saying: "I wanted to live, and see, I have died of it: the earth which I tread is motionless". Or "Mirror of a Blind Man", which stands out even among the best, and which ends with a staggering question both for the poet and the reader: "...but my sentence is exact in vain... will words become a mirror of a blind man?" And the counterpoint to this doubt, "Triumph of the Language", reaches even higher: it is able to bring about a concision, the force of the length of a scream that makes you forget the monotony of the form.

Still, while lowering the colours of recognition (and pointing to the conceptual parallel with Győző Ferencz), let me now turn to the "but"s. One could find many examples for how Markó, under the compulsion of the form, washes out and resolves some splendid images, masterstrokes of similes or statements, how convention overruns his verse, so that the fourteen lines can be padded out. This is particularly

evident in the 15 sonnets "Poets' Wreath", at the end of the volume, in which, under the pretext of producing a "master sonnet", he devotes a sonnet each to almost all the famous Hungarian poets from Janus Pannonius to Attila József and Miklós Radnóti. To write about the authors of great works, to recreate poetic experiences which live in every Hungarian reader, is the most hopeless task, something which even the greatest can rarely manage. It should be said for Béla Markó that the "Master Sonnet", a summary of the fourteen portraits, grew beyond the empty frames of what leads up to it, in fact it grows

beyond the volume itself: it says something more, something bolder and more heartfelt than what has been possible for the poet in a state of oppression at all. Indeed, he uses here a more original tone, employing more powerful similes than he does in the compelling closedness of the sonnets.

The sincerity which burst to the surface will, with the passing—or at least lessening—of compulsion, perhaps mature into a lasting and outstanding poetic achievement, of the kind that the best and most successful poems here anticipate.



László Ferenczi

Making it new

Jelzés a világra (Signal to the World).

Selected Documents of the Hungarian Avant-Garde. Selected and edited by

Miklós Béládi and Béla Pomogáts. Text edited by Béla Pomogáts.

Magvető, Budapest, 1988. 629 pp.

Signal to the World, as the subtitle states, publishes a selection of the documents of the Hungarian avant-garde. The first text bears the date 1910, the last that of 1932. The informative forewords and postscript (by Miklós Béládi and Béla Pomogáts respectively) also quote brief excerpts from texts earlier and later than those dates. The majority of the material in the book was compiled from long forgotten or inaccessible periodicals and journals, although a few well-known essays and pamphlets are also included. The latter have been regularly republished and commented on or annotated. Within this group are the writings of leading lights of the period (and not only those of the avant-garde), thus pieces from the poet Mihály Babits. *Signal to the World* gathers together for the first time the major literary documents of the avant-garde, irrespective of the movements they sprang from. The volume carries theoretical writings, discussions, and criticisms rather than fiction. Anthologies and readers of this kind have been appearing elsewhere, mainly in the West, since the late fifties. In Hungary compact annotated anthologies presenting international Futurism or Expressionism had appeared much earlier than this work, which now makes the documents of the Hungarian avant-garde accessible to scholars.

The co-editors have taken the title from an article by Lajos Kassák, the poet, novelist,

journalist, painter and theoretician. It introduced the international issue of the monthly TETT (Deed) in 1916. The first periodical of the Hungarian avant-garde, TETT was launched in 1915 by the then 28 years old Kassák. The international number was a declaration of faith in internationalism, for the contributors—in the middle of the Great War—included individuals from the countries of the entente powers—a provocative gesture. The periodical, under fire anyway, was promptly banned, not so much because of the English, French, Russian and Italian authors, but because of Kassák's provocative editorial. During the war, publishers and magazines (including even the conservative ones) regularly published works, classic and contemporary, by authors from the "enemy" countries, even if not anywhere to the same extent as before. TETT being banned, Kassák launched in the same year his magazine MA (Today), with practically the same contributors. Censorship, then, was not all that strict in the Hungary of the Great War. This is what Kassák wrote in that 1916 editorial that provoked the ban:

"We are a handful of Budapest lads who do not believe in miracles, nor in the cosmic universality of the war. We know what we want, and with our eyes open we now shout East, West, North and South, where people live whose Red greetings we have heard (...). We believe that apart from us there are others whose troubled fate clamours for expression, and in the meagre twenty-four pages of our magazine we embrace our comrades in misfortune who are,

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like us, human beings, innocent and educated. It is in this faith that we send out this international issue of TETT to all our friends."

The anthology here reviewed arranges these contemporary documents in nine chapters. Let me quote a few of the chapter headings: "The Hungarian Avant-Garde Introduces Itself", "The Reception of the Hungarian Avant-Garde", "The Avant-Garde and Proletarian Literature", "From Dada to Surrealism", "The Decline of the Avant-Garde". *Signal to the World* documents the literary life, the movements, views and aspirations, the actual and presumed lines of force in the arts over some quarter of a century.

The anthology begins by presenting the Hungarian answers to the challenges of Futurism. In his introduction, Miklós Béládi quotes in brief the first Hungarian response written by its author on the occasion of the failure of a Futurist play in Paris. "For all that one mustn't laugh them out of court. One must wait till tomorrow and the day after tomorrow. (...) The theatrical storm that shook Paris with loud booing and hisses on a frosty January night has already been recorded with the precise dates in those meteorological institutions where eyes are kept on the ups and downs of literary life. Later, perhaps, the electric agitations of the sense of change will be transmitted to our nerve endings too. The barometers at any rate are unsettled. They indicate storm." The author of the passage is Dezső Kosztolányi, then aged twenty-four, a poet, novelist, essayist and translator. His first book of poems was published in 1907, and from then on he was a leading figure of the new Hungarian letters. In 1914 he published a volume of translations called *Modern költők* (Modern Poets), in which he presented poetry after Baudelaire and Walt Whitman, mostly the poets of the fin de siècle, but for good measure he also included some Italian Futurists and German Expressionists. Kosztolányi, like so many of his contemporaries, had an openness of mind and a sense of absolute confidence.

The revival in Hungarian literature in the early 20th century began with Endre Ady. His *Új versek* (New Poems) appeared in 1906, when he was 26. This proved a watershed.

Almost overnight he became an adored or hated leading figure of an up-and-coming generation. It was Ady who forced the way open for

the youngish or younger poets. Kosztolányi, as mentioned, published his first volume in 1907. 1908 saw the appearance of the anthology *Holnap* (Tomorrow), a collection offering a chance of first publication to a number of young poets, including Mihály Babits. (Kassák, a fitter and turner, began to write under the influence of that publication.) Finally, also in 1908, *Nyugat* (West) was launched, a seminal organ of Hungarian modernism that continued publication till 1941. Its major contributors included Ady, Babits, and Kosztolányi. In the first two years of its existence György Lukács was a regular contributor. The editor was Ignotus, a generation their senior, a minor poet, perceptive essayist, and President of the Hungarian Psychological Association, a man of unconditional liberal views and of great openness of mind. He published Lukács's crass attack on his impressionism and liberalism without a word of complaint. György Lukács's essay *Az utak elváltak* (The Parting of the Ways) is, under the pretext of anti-Impressionism, the first powerful attack against liberalism in Hungary.

Marinetti's Futurist manifesto appeared in French in February 1909 in *Le Figaro*. (Marinetti wrote in both Italian and French). Futurism caused an immediate scandal. For the first time in the history of the arts, an international movement forced contemporaries to react instantly. Marinetti (whose considerable wealth Kosztolányi mentions repeatedly) was a first rate organizer. The Futurists were the first to discover the value of publicity and the mass media. The same pictures were seen almost simultaneously in Paris, London, Brussels and Budapest. Before the emergence of the Futurists, a particular artist or a particular movement in the arts needed approximately a generation for the message to get through to the world. For Marinetti, Nietzsche, Ibsen and the French Symbolists were timely and relevant in the same way as they were to Ady or Babits. Because of masterful publicity and aggressive propaganda, those of roughly the same age as Marinetti were compelled to make an instant response to the publication of the Futurist manifesto. Much has been written about the impact of Italian Futurism. The Russian Futurists are referred to in the first place, then the

Portuguese Pessoa and the Hungarian Kassák, who were profoundly affected by Marinetti. The significance of Futurism is greater than that, I think. It compelled a number of writers, still young but with major works accomplished or in progress, to define themselves. It is important that Mayakovsky, Pessoa or Kassák were followers of Marinetti for varying periods of time. What is more important is that Ady, Babits, Ezra Pound, T. S. Eliot and Huidobro rejected Futurism from the start. It is no surprise that there should be common elements in their rejection: the Hungarians and the Chilean poet were shocked by Marinetti's militarism, while Babits and T. S. Eliot denied the omnipotence of *vers libre*. Babits, Huidobro and T. S. Eliot were, at the very least, sceptical about Whitman.

The first generation of Hungarian modernism consists of Ady, Babits, Kosztolányi (and, one may add, Lukács). The second consists of Kassák. There is scarcely any age gap between them: Ady and Babits were four, and Kosztolányi two years older than Kassák. They were educated men, each born into middle-class families. Kassák, who grew up in the Social Democratic movement and was self-taught, began to read and write under their influence. His first volume of stories appeared in 1912, his first play in 1914, his first volume of poems in 1915. The liberal press of liberal Hungary, including the modernist *Nyugat*, received him with sympathy. He was the authentic, genuine proletarian writer they had expected. He had made it, even if unspectacularly. His first three books excited no debates. This was in contrast to Ady, who had been causing a stir with almost each successive work he published. In 1915, not long after the appearance of his first volume of poems, *Eposz Wagner maszkjában* (Epic in Wagner's Mask), composed in *vers libre*, Kassák launched TETT, the first Hungarian avant-garde magazine. Henceforward Kassák was to come forward as the leader of the youngest writers and, with an excellent tactical sense, directed the main fire at *Nyugat* (which, incidentally, he himself had contributed to and had been well received by). The *Epic*, because of TETT's force as a movement, had suddenly received (together with an appreciative critique by Kosztolányi, saying that it was Expressionist rather than Futurist verse) a new meaning:

complete denial of the poetic represented by *Nyugat*. And a denial of all the past.

It is worth noting the chronology. The Hungarian avant-garde struck out in 1915, in the second year of the war. Wyndham Lewis, their contemporary, had this to say in 1937:

"The day was lost for art at Sarajevo. World politics stepped in, and a war was started which had not yet ended: a "war to end war". But it merely ended art. It did not end war."

A cruel, exaggerated, unjust judgement but one not to be overlooked. (Lewis mourns here for the creative confidence of the pre-war years.)

Ady, of the minor gentry, created a historical past around himself. Kassák spoke from 1915 onwards as if poetry and history had begun with him. (This difference had been noted as early as 1917 by one of Kassák's collaborators.) Kassák was the representative of a new social class, the proletariat. With the victory of the working class, Marx said, the prehistory of mankind comes to a close. Kassák took over from Marinetti the radical denial of the past, the praise of energy, a few slogans (a synthetic literature is to be created), and promulgated the new, collective man. He welcomed the October revolution, not because it was the last chance for the Central Powers to achieve victory but because it offered the opportunity to create a new world order. The events seemed to prove Kassák right. The movement, which had been the butt of laughter and mockery in 1915-16, was gaining more and more adherents. Kassák's position was not weakened by the fact that he was overtaken by the fate of the avant-garde movements: the first spectacular break and excommunication took place as early as 1917. In 1919 Ady died and, in his obituary, Kassák took leave of Ady as poet of a past that had ended for good. The future belonged to Kassák and to activism. In 1919 the Hungarian Soviet Republic was proclaimed. Kassák identified with it, although he considered its leader, Béla Kun, not enough of a Leninist. Soon they were to clash head-on because Kassák rejected the principle of Party directives in literary matters, and in an open letter to Kun he demanded absolute freedom for art. Not long afterwards this Soviet Republic was overthrown, and Kassák was among the first to be arrested by the victorious counter-revolutionaries. After his release he went into

exile in Vienna. From then on Kassák (and his ever-changing group of supporters) carried out a running debate with the Communists: his views kept changing just as frequently as those of the Communists. But his position remained unchanged. The Communists called him a bourgeois decadent, a counter-revolutionary, while in return Kassák held the Communists incompetent in matters of art. At the same time the triumphant counter-revolution looked upon Kassák as a dangerous Communist.

The Hungarian avant-garde had four quiet years between 1915 and 1919. Then, paradoxically, just in the years when this par excellence international movement was shut off from the world. Kassák and his companions, in exile in Vienna, made tremendous efforts to get their bearings in Europe and to re-enter the mainstream of the international avant-garde. Kassák restarted MA in Vienna: it could only reach Hungary as contraband. The public, that had been reading MA during the war was now scattered all over the world. In 1926 Kassák returned to Hungary. Together with a few young writers also in exile, he launched the magazine *Dokumentum*. The best known of those writers were the poet Gyula Illyés, who had come back from Paris, from the company of Surrealists, and the novelist Tibor Déry. The magazine, which still appears excellent in hindsight (it published, among others, Paul Eluard and Walter Benjamin), folded within six months. The avant-garde had ceased to have a readership in Hungary. The new generation, poets and scholars, buried the Hungarian and international avant-garde with pleasure. Kassák had remained alone, for even if there were a few new supporters coming forward, they too were to leave him soon. The last texts contain the materials of a 1932 conference under the title *New Bearings in World Literature*. The new generation was burying the avant-garde.

The history of the avant-garde proved to be tragic. It begins after the disaster in Sarajevo, is forced to exile after 1919, and is exposed to attacks from both the extreme left and extreme right. In the meantime, it goes through the life of the avant-garde movements, best-known from the history of Futurism and Surrealism: continual breaks, excommunications and restarts. Almost every two years Kassák makes efforts

to keep the movement going and to rejuvenate it with new people, but the avant-garde is no longer one "ism" but many, now Expressionism, now Futurism, now Dadaism, now Constructivism, now Surrealism.

The Hungarian avant-garde had one big handicap to reckon with and that was *Nyugat*. I have mentioned that the representatives of Hungarian liberal modernism were barely older than Kassák. Although Ady died in 1919 at the age of 42, the others continued at the height of their creative powers to respond to the challenge of the avant-garde through major works. Babits and Kosztolányi, for example, were producing in this period their best things. (Incidentally, this goes for Kassák too.) The avant-garde levelled its attacks not at a derivative literature or at outdated classical writers, as elsewhere, but at the cream of its own generation, those only a few years its senior.

A novelty of French surrealism was the discovery of Marxism and Freudianism. Even if not to the same degree, Marxism and Freudianism were part of the new resources used by almost every other "ism". On the other hand, the Hungarian avant-garde inherited them from the first liberal generation of *Nyugat*, who were neither Marxists nor Freudians but were acquainted with both. However, after 1919 Marxism (and to a lesser extent Freudianism) counted as destructive.

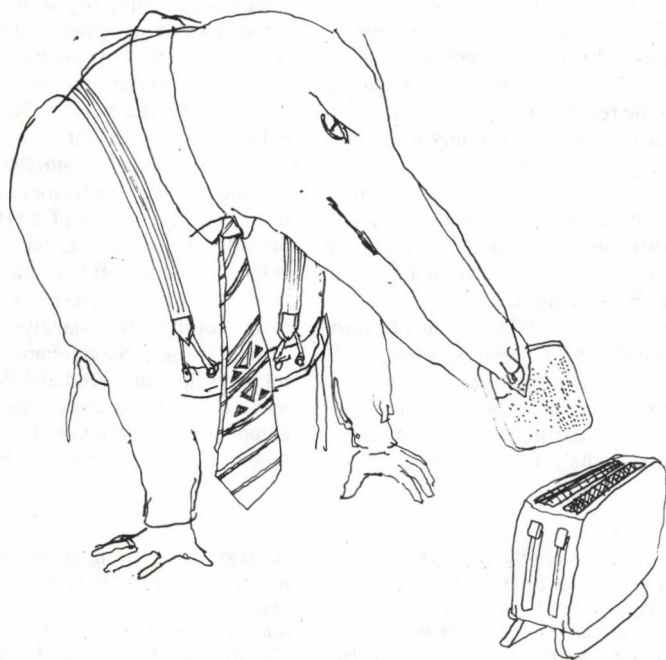
As early as 1909 Futurism was openly and aggressively anti-liberal and anti-parliamentarian. So was the Russian avant-garde, so was French Surrealism—along with the Hungarian avant-garde with Kassák in the lead. It is one of the paradoxes of history that, where liberalism has never taken root, or it has miscarried, the victorious or new totalitarian regimes swept away the avant-garde or forced it into making substantial concessions. Where liberalism was strong enough, as in France, there Surrealism was allowed to flourish freely. But of the "specialists in revolt" (as the Surrealists styled themselves) Aragon became a Stalinist, Breton a Trotskyite, and Drieu la Rochelle a Hitlerite (Kassák never became any of these).

Signal to the World contains the documents of an obliterated movement. The boundary is 1919, or, rather, 1914. Until 1914 (or amidst more difficult circumstances even until 1919)

the Hungarian intellectual horizon was unboundedly open, accommodating and confident. It evinced a catholic interest, and selected in the possession of a wide knowledge. It tolerated and even encouraged opposite views. On the other hand, beginning from 1919, judgments became increasingly prejudiced and determined by lack of information. In the spring of 1919, after the proclamation of the Soviet Republic, but before Béla Kun's damaging statement, it seemed that Kassák the Communist was the hero of the day. The poetry evenings organized by MA were triumphant affairs, and Ernő Osvát, the editor of *Nyugat*, called what he heard at one of these, absolute rubbish. Kassák, he said, didn't know what he was talking about. Not long after, Kun's critique was no less sharp. Yet there is a fundamental difference between the two critiques. Osvát,

the liberal editor of *Nyugat*, loved literature passionately. He thought highly of Kassák (helping him both as editor and as a man before and after 1919), he disagreed with him but held his fingers crossed for him. Kun, at the height of his power, on the other hand, was a counter-supporter, to put it mildly.

From 1919 onwards, the field is full of smaller and greater counter-supporters. Everyone regards his opinion as the only justifiable opinion and rejects the views of others, mostly without even listening to them. Those forced into exile become rigidified in their views, and those remaining in Hungary gradually cut themselves off from Europe. It is characteristic that a poet writing free verse is regarded as a communist. And political allegiance becomes far more important to every party, movement, church, and group than allegiance to art.



György Vikár

The Budapest School of Psychoanalysis

Pál Harmat: *Freud, Ferenczi és a magyarországi pszichoanalízis*
(Freud, Ferenczi and psychoanalysis in Hungary).

Európai Magyar Protestáns Szabadegyetem, Berne, 1986. 381 pp.

When in 1969 Pál Harmat set out to examine the history of Hungarian psychoanalysis, his aim was more than just to fill a gap. He was embarking on an intellectual adventure which was to last nearly two decades. The result is his volume, *Freud, Ferenczi and Psychoanalysis in Hungary*, published in 1986 in Berne. No similar work on such a scale had appeared on the subject prior to it. (The author of this review published a brief summary of the history of the Budapest School of psychoanalysis in 1976. Ferenc Erős and Patrizia Giampieri's writings on the reception of psychoanalysis in Hungary have become known only in the past three or four years.) In the history of psychology Hungarians have played a special role. There are many great names, and a whole school with its own profile and international influence, a fact which deserves to be treated in a separate publication. What made Hungary one of the cradles of psychology? Why was this country the first outside the German-speaking area where psychoanalysis took root? Was it the proximity of Vienna, or is there a deeper, cultural-historical, connection? It must be kept in mind that psychoanalysis is more than a disci-

pline. It is also a movement, and as such a socio-psychological and historical fact. It was one of the inspirations for a given period of cultural history, at the same time one of that period's trademarks. In Hungary psychoanalysis has become particularly entwined with the country's history and the often tragic events of twentieth-century Europe. Harmat displays a keen interest in psychoanalysis not only as a discipline, but as a movement. To him psychoanalysis is more than a theory. Moreover, he is interested in looking into the lives of those who became involved with it. This is why I have called this book an "intellectual adventure."

The book is divided into fifteen chapters embracing the complete history of psychoanalysis up to 1983. The history of the Hungarian school provides the underlying theme with the other subjects shooting off from there. The introduction gives a short overview of Freud's oeuvre and the birth of psychoanalysis. Following that comes the life of Sándor Ferenczi, his work, his relationship with Freud and the Hungarian intellectuals, writers and artists of his time. The author discusses how a circle of analysts formed around Ferenczi and how it became a part of

Pál Harmat was born in Budapest in 1947. He graduated in medicine in 1973 and went on to specialise in diseases of the lungs. In 1979 he emigrated to Austria. Since 1980 he has worked as a clinical psychiatrist near Linz. He has written numerous publications on the subjects of medicine and psychiatry.

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Hungarian intellectual life, how it affected literature, how it related to the political forces of the time, and so on. The concept of psychoanalysis was not readily accepted, implicitly it was even rejected. Dramatic events followed; psychoanalysis was organised into a movement, intellectual conflicts surfaced, there began a drive against the heretics Jung, Adler, and Stekel. Then came the Great War and a revolution, followed by the short-lived rule of the Hungarian Republic of Councils. It recognised psychoanalysis, and as a result the movement was persecuted after its fall. Nevertheless, the twenties evolved as the golden age of psychoanalysis in Hungary. That was the time when Ferenczi developed his great theory on biopsychology and conducted clinical experiments which subsequently led to his conflict with Freud. This was also the time when the work of Michael Bálint, Alice Bálint, and Imre Hermann was defined. Other schools of depth psychology were also taking root in Hungary, including individual psychology, the Stekelians, and Lipót Szondi's fate analysis, the latter evolving into a school of its own in Budapest.

The period between the two world wars was when the Budapest School of psychoanalysis flourished. It was the first to point out the nature of the initial mother-child relationship that leads to the Oedipus complex. Perhaps it was Ferenczi's own personality that made him sensible towards recognising this. His longing for love as a child stayed with him throughout his life. In his 1924 work on biopsychology known in translation as *Thalassa* he postulated that the human desire to return to the womb is the underlying motif behind our whole sexual development. Ferenczi set up a parallel between Haeckel's basic law on biogenetics and sexual phylogeny, which he thought to be motivated by the search for the lost primeval sea. The reality of the distant past is reflected in the unconscious: the search for the security of the primeval sea in the body of the mother, of woman. Pál Harmat rightfully calls Ferenczi's work a scientific myth, but it also contains relevant psychological experience. Based on such experience Michael Bálint came to the conclusion that the psychological development of human personality does not begin with pri-

mary narcissism, but rather a primary object relationship, the experience of the unity between mother and child. Individual development evolves from this relationship, both in its narcissistic and its libidinal drives. During analysis it can be reached at the deepest point of regression.

Imre Hermann noted the clinging instinct of apes, and his observations on reflexes, conduct, cultural phenomena and pathology led him to conclude that such instincts exist latently in newborn humans as well. They provide the biological foundation for the mother-child relationship even prior to the appearance of libido, and later in conjunction with it.

With the mother as its focal point the Budapest School branched out to include a number of different conceptions. Ferenczi applied his theory to his therapy: the mother role became increasingly dominant in his attitude as analyst and he took a greater interest in severely traumatised patients (or to use the currently preferred term "borderline personalities"). Ferenczi's 1913 work on the sense of reality and its stages of development, and Imre Hermann's writings on the psychology of thinking from the 1920s can be regarded as the precursors of ego psychology. Michael Bálint was experimenting in therapy using psychoanalytic findings in general medical practice and continued this work after he left Hungary for England in 1939 where he wrote his *The Doctor, his Patient, and the Illness*. Also in these years, Géza Róheim began his ethno-psychoanalytic studies, and István Hollós wrote his book on the psychoanalytic concept of mental disorders under the title *Búcsúm a sárga háztól* (My Farewell to the Yellow House).

This fruitful period in psychoanalysis was interrupted by the spread of fascism, followed by the Second World War. In the war years the Hungarian Psychoanalytic Society was still able to convene, but only in the presence of a member of the political police. After the German army occupied Hungary in the Spring of 1944, further meetings of the Society were prohibited, its members persecuted, and several of them were killed. Those who survived and remained in Hungary founded a new analytic association in 1945. They resumed the

training of analysts, and were otherwise active. For a time they were permitted to organise lectures on psychoanalysis at the university. In 1948, however, Marxist ideologists declared psychoanalysis the ideological enemy of Marxism, and the association was forced to dissolve. After that psychiatrists kept a low profile in Hungary, though a handful of doctors in private practice carried out psychoanalytic therapy. It was never officially prohibited, still both doctor and patient refrained from speaking about it in public.

Only in the late 60s did psychoanalysis as a profession resurface in Hungary. Initially it had to confront strong ideological pressure, which gradually weakened with the liberalisation of the Communist regime. In 1980 a working group on psychoanalysis was established under the auspices of the Hungarian Psychiatric Society, Hungarian psychoanalysts could again set up a training programme and keep in touch with colleagues abroad. Only very recently, though, were they able to overcome the fear that their views would be branded as antagonistic to official ideology.

The recurring traumas caused many psychoanalysts before and after the Second World War to leave Hungary. To psychoanalysis in the West this influx was highly stimulating. Among them were several personalities without whom modern psychoanalysis would not have become what it is. Though not all belonged to the Budapest School, the spirit of the Hungarian analytic circle influenced them either because they were born in this country or lived here for a prolonged period. They include the afore mentioned Michael Bálint and Géza Róheim, Franz Alexander, who was born in Hungary, and who developed a theory on psychosomatic disorders, and Sándor Radó, who established a centre for analytic training in New York. René Spitz went to school in Hungary, and later became famous for his observations on infants in their first year of life, and subsequently on hospitalism or anaclitic depression. David Rapaport left Hungary to live in the United States, where he made a name for himself in the field of ego psychology in the theory of psychoanalysis. Also born in Hungary were Margaret Mahler, who defined symbiotic psychosis; Béla Grunberger, who investigated nar-

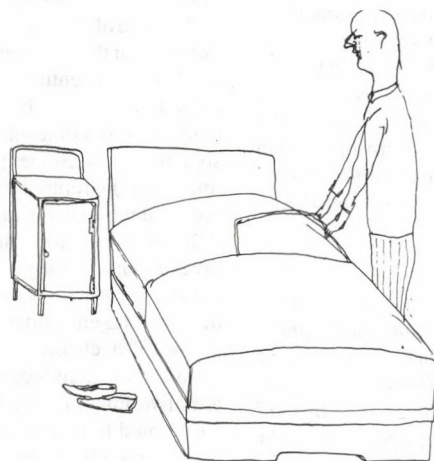
cicism and now lives in Paris; and Lajos Székely, who examined creativity from an analytic point of view and lives in Sweden. Even Melanie Klein, who later founded her own school, came to Ferenczi for analysis. A complete list would be far longer. Hungarian psychoanalysis has been extremely prolific in many parts of the world.

Such a background explains the passionate tone of Pál Harmat's book. He is deeply concerned about psychoanalysis, at the same time criticising its speculative outgrowths. He argues that had it not been for the conservative and anti-Semitic inter-war Horthy regime, fascism which dispelled its adherents, and Communism which eradicated the entire field, "the Budapest school of psychoanalysis would have been to the world, what the Kodály method is. Training in it might well be worth coming to Budapest for, even from the other end of the world." The author is by no means unemotional (*sine ira et studio*) in characterising scientists, writers, artists, philosophers, and politicians. (But then, neither did Tacitus adhere to the rules he set for being a good historian.) Harmat shows respect for those who made major advances in psychoanalysis. He also notes those who did not give up their convictions. The opponents of psychoanalysis he criticises more or less sharply, yet not blindly. He expresses respect for great thinkers like György Lukács, for outstanding writers like László Németh, or for poets like Gyula Illyés, even if they were ambivalent about, or outright hostile to, psychoanalysis. But Harmat's criticism is downright sardonic when it comes to the ideologists who readily served the Communist dictatorship in attacking psychoanalysis. As I said, Harmat wants more than just to describe the development of a discipline, he is interested in the movement, in the social-psychological aspect and its effect on the intellectual climate of Hungary at the time. He wants to unravel the characters of people sucked into the vortex of history when they had to prove whether they could stand by their beliefs. Harmat wants to cover his subject completely. He touches on psychoanalysis in literature, in philosophy, in politics; he deals with "Freudomarxism" and its social role, i. e. how it related to various social groups, Jews, etc. On 313

pages he confronts an inexhaustible task. The wish for such comprehensiveness, coupled with the author's wit and easy-going style, are both the book's strength and weakness. Its strength because, in the words of Béla Grunberger in the introductory essay, it is "interesting like a novel—a good novel." And its weakness, because its quality is quite inconsistent. Expert treatment of intellectual history and scientific views are followed by captivating accounts of the movement's history and anecdotes—or gossip. The problem is that the anecdotal side of the book at times eclipses the scientific-historical side. For example, the reader learns more about the antagonism between Melanie Klein and Anna Freud than about Melanie Klein's influence on psychoanalysis in England. This is one point where the author's insight is wanting because he considers that influence inconsequential. (In fact, the Kleinian school is one of the main branches of modern psychoanalysis in England, but also elsewhere.) We learn that Géza Róheim spoke with his wife in the language of an Australian aboriginal tribe whenever he did not want others in their company to understand what he said. On the other hand, we do not learn anything about collective trauma, which was the focus of Róheim's research. (Róheim uncovered through his work in ethnology that there are traumatic events which individuals of a primitive society experience in

childhood, and such a society's culture, with its particular customs and rites, helps them to come to terms with that collective trauma.) Harmat uses all the information available to him to make his book as vivid as possible, without consideration of the reliability of his facts; he himself alludes to the uncertainty of some of his sources. Luckily, this applies only to anecdotes about people or events, his scientific views the author expounds for the most part accurately and professionally. But there are a few shortcomings in this respect as well, which is unfortunate, considering that Harmat is a talented writer who can present intricate theories in a way that the lay public can understand and enjoy. It would have added to the book's quality if Harmat had put that talent to use more often, even if it is not strictly the task of a historian of science to define the discipline as such.

Far outweighing the book's weaknesses and inconsistencies are the author's broadmindedness, the vivid style with which he portrays a bygone world whose achievements reach into the present, and marshals a mass of information which is generally reliable. Moreover, an extensive bibliography testifies of the author's desire to thoroughly research his material, even if his narrative skills at some points are given priority over the need to be factual. Béla Grunberger's fine introductory essay adds to the book's quality.



The coalition which never was

Elemér Hankiss: *Kelet-európai alternatívák*. (East European Alternatives).
Közgazdasági és Jogi Könyvkiadó, Budapest 1989. 407 pp.

I cannot establish precisely when Hankiss started to collect the material for his book. In 1987, in 1988 perhaps, in the last resort it does not matter. He put the final touches to it around January 1989, that much is apparent from the text. It is certain that when he started, he could not have dreamt that by the time his book appeared events would have overtaken a considerable part of his scenario. That the East European system was in a crisis, and in all countries simultaneously, had been clear for some time to all, except the most blinkered among the Communist leaders, but that it would cease to exist in numerous countries by the end of 1989, and that the probability of its being restored would be nil by then, and that its regeneration would no longer have any real chance in the Soviet Union either, although there the likelihood of a pluralistic democracy of the western type relying on a self-regulation market economy is much lower than in the Eastern and Central European countries, is something that no-one reckoned with a year ago.

For some time we had been musing about East European prospects (usually terrible), and the reason for this was precisely the fact of the crisis. Many scenarios diametrically opposed in outcome had to be outlined since it did not seem likely that the process of disruption would begin within a foreseeable time.

Mihály Vajda, a disciple of György Lukács and a member of the circle of philosophers known as the Budapest School was dismissed in 1973 from the Institute of Philosophy. He afterwards taught at various universities abroad where he published many specialised works and political essays, which now also appear in Hungary.

Hankiss's ideas were conceived in this strange period of transition. The system was in an unequivocal and extremely grave crisis, but whether it would regenerate itself through some miracle, and if yes, in what form, or whether it would be disrupted, and in what direction it would then set off, whether the societies of each country would set out on an identical or at least a similar path, or whether the different traditions would place different signposts: on such questions the imagination could have free rein. Nothing is less predictable than events, especially when it is becoming obvious that a society organised from above is non-viable.

Numerous questions have since been decided. Nevertheless, Hankiss's book has lost almost nothing of its timeliness. Not only because the future course has not everywhere been set, although there is practically no chance anywhere for the restoration of the Communist system. Even a socialist system is unlikely.

The title of the book is *East-European Alternatives*, but the innumerable alternative scenarios listed are entirely uninteresting. Hankiss cites almost every book in which mention is made of the possible future of the East-European societies of the Soviet type. He classifies these images of the future rather casually, not paying much attention to the logic of the classification; if he ever mentions the likelihood which he gives to any country of realizing a given scenario, it is only as a game, one which is obviously not taken seriously and is discussed only in the fifth chapter. At the time of writing, Hankiss was convinced that in Hungary the alternative imagined by him would be realized. He wanted to convince us that this alternative was not merely the only one likely but the only one that leads to salvation.

The book is not really about Eastern Europe but about Hungary. The first four chapters, which discuss the coming about of the Communist system, its transformation after 1956, and its crisis in the eighties, are all about post-war Hungary. This descriptive section is followed by the alternatives or scenarios, which the author has arranged in a playful mood, some pertaining to the system and others expressly to a single country only. This is highly disturbing and I do not understand the purpose. Whatever the title, the author could have omitted from his book the East-European alternatives. The discussion is simply not serious. The scenarios listed interest Hankiss only inasmuch as, after setting them down, he draws the conclusion that they do not sufficiently take into account one of the most important factors in East European societies: the ruling elite. Hankiss does not discuss the East-European alternatives, but those who exercised power in Hungary in the forty years of the Communist system. Sometimes one has the impression that he wrote from the point of view of this elite.

Which would not be wrong in itself. Why should it not be possible to write a story just as convincingly from the point of view of the ruling elite as from that of the oppressed society? Especially, if somebody—as Hankiss—is convinced that without an upwardly mobile, new ruling class genuine and thorough social change can not be imagined.

I myself also believe that a genuine rebirth is only possible if a social group develops which is able to take charge and which society accepts as qualified for leadership. Modern democracy does not mean everybody exercising political power together, but that nobody is necessarily excluded by birth from the possibility of the exercise of power. But I cannot accept that a Soviet-type society can be characterised by the dichotomy of a ruling elite and an oppressed society. At the end of the Introduction, Hankiss argues against the Manichean view of East-European societies, according to which everything is seen and interpreted as the struggle between Good and Evil. However his book goes beyond this view only inasmuch as in Hankiss's eyes power is not necessarily the embodiment of Evil and society that of Good. But the (not always evil) power and the (not always good)

society are rigidly opposed to each other in his approach to socialism as well. Together with the non- or anti-communist politicians and analysts contrasting good society and evil power (or Communist politicians and analysts contrasting evil society and good power), Hankiss is not willing either to face the theoretical possibility that totalitarian Society looks (looked) different, that in it power involves the whole of society, as almost everybody exercises power. On top, as at the apex of a pyramid, there are of course some who rule and do not have to obey anybody; yet this may not be so simple either: those at the very top also have bound hands, and at the bottom there are some who do not issue commands to anybody but only obey. But the essence is nevertheless that precisely because there is no division of power and precisely because all power is of a political nature, there being no such thing as economic power, intellectual power and so on, anybody who has power, has political power, and in the last resort can call on the power-enforcement machinery to assert it; with the exception of the most abject, those who have been driven out of society, everybody is part of this power. I do not claim that in the 1970s in Hungary János Kádár also had only as much power as József Kovács, a conductor on the Budapest-Szeged train. I only wish to assert that the nature of the power of József Kovács was somewhat similar to the power of János Kádár. Inasmuch as being in conflict with the power involved in being a conductor (involved in every society), meant just as much being in conflict with the political power apparatus as being in conflict with János Kádár's power. The lowest position of power in Society was *ab ovo* part of the power network. A stubborn conflict with a porter can have more unpleasant consequences in a totalitarian society than a conflict with a Rockefeller in a democratic society. I am, of course, well aware that this was really true in the period of Stalinism, that it was only then that it could happen that somebody ended his life in the Gulag because he had an argument with the doorman of the factory where he worked. But the mellowing of the severity of the system, did not change much of the structure, the fact that in socialism POWER suffuses the whole of society, and every kind of power is part of THE POWER.

Accordingly, it is rather problematic to speak without any further ado of an elite in a society of the Soviet type—for at least two reasons. Hankiss all the time contrasts society and the elite: the elite does not belong to society—where does it belong then?—and society has no elite, which is of course true as far as socialism is concerned. The reason is simply that the Communist elite never disposed of the fundamental characteristics of a social elite in the original sense of the term, i.e. that the other part of society looks at its members as people who are above the rest due to some positive qualities, outstanding abilities, certain merits, or services rendered to society: they are more discernible, more capable, etc. than the others. Not even at the high noon of Kádárism did Hungarians accept the group around Kádár as an elite in this sense, at the best only Kádár himself enjoyed some personal authority. The other difficulty is that it is hardly possible to define the criteria of belonging to a power elite. If Hankiss, in a book intended to be scholarly, uses such commonplace concepts as communist elite, or the contemporary Hungarian ruling elite, then he should at least have made an attempt to define what or who he is talking about. True, in reference to the final days of Kádárism, he defines the Communist elite as the upper party and state bureaucracy plus the leading managers of the large enterprises; he thus undoubtedly circumscribes those who at the time of the dissolution of the system held/hold most power. Meanwhile, strangely, he speaks as if from the moment of grabbing power a social elite had existed, “the Communists”, which was extended, changed, but always remained identical with itself. However, when he opposes to this contemporary Hungarian ruling elite “society” as such, one’s belief is immediately shaken in the intuitive truth of circumscribing the elite. József Kovács is, of course, not raised to the elite by his power. But whether the employees of a district Party Committee in Budapest belonged to the elite or not, I would really be unable to tell.

Of course, not even disciplines which are more exact than sociology can do without concepts that are established merely intuitively. But this is not what I am talking about. I do not claim that a more exact definition of the concept of the Communist elite is needed. I claim that

there is no “Communist elite”; it is one of the fundamental characteristics of a Communist society that it does not have any elite, as the embodiment of Good or of Evil. By driving everybody else out of power with the help of the occupiers, and by doing in addition everything possible to destroy physically the elite of a society excluded from the exercise of power, the Communists have not become a new elite. They did not stand out among the members of society by anything other than the exclusive exercise of power, which they did not acquire through their own strength. The attempts which they made again and in the course of their forty years rule to have themselves accepted as a social elite, attempts which consisted mainly in imitating the external features of the old ruling elites, ended in shameful failure. The view which Hankiss formulates in his book and which used to be considered self-evident by all of us over a long period of time, proved to be untrue, precisely because those who occupied the highest power positions in this society did not form an elite. “Those in power understandably stick to the fullness of power, and will presumably be inclined to discuss the actual division of power only if they see no other way. They dispose of a power preponderance which seems to be unshakable, a huge apparatus and power enforcement machine, huge assets (party assets), an undisturbed power monopoly over four decades; in opposition to them the alternative movements are still deplorably weak, defenceless, poor, fragmented. Why did they voluntarily renounce this supremacy? Why did they enter into serious and not merely tactical negotiations on the division of power, the actual, effective democratic control of their power, the radical translation of the political system?” If in contrast to all expectations, Communist power collapses today in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe like a house of cards, in some places,—for instance in Hungary—without mass pressure from below, and in other places owing to mass pressure from below, without putting up stubborn resistance, then to me this is proof that the power pyramid collapsed, because the self-evidence of its existence ceased, and this signalled the end of the power elite or, rather, of the group which was alleged to form the elite of the system. It no longer sits in the key positions

of political power, and consequently it no longer differs in anything from other members of society; thus it is also unable to ally itself with a new, rising social group, the entrepreneurs, and to establish a new power coalition.

The message of Hankiss's book is that—at least in Hungary—the Communist power elite can sort of maintain itself in a kind of democratic or at least more democratic system, which, if society in opposing the rule of the new elite will be able to construct its own lines of defence, that is institutions protecting its own interests and asserting its political will, will become a welfare society led by some kind of aristocracy. If not, society will be compelled to accept "that it will be the defenseless and exploited subject of the new system" in a kind of 19th century capitalism (see the chapter "Hybrid society"). The book seems to suggest to the Communist elite that it should not resist democratic change, not only because the resistance can only lead to the intensification of the crisis, to chaos and to rebellion, but because it will itself profit from change, since it can convert its political power into economic power in the new society.

Nobody can deny that some of the politically powerful, some of the overlords of the Communist dictatorship, were and are able to convert their political power into economic power, either because they stole enough to invest in enterprises, or because in the period of translation in which we live they lawfully acquire as private property what they controlled until now through their corporate membership. One Communist leader or another may even succeed in some way in remaining a politician. Still, I do not understand what that "great coalition" is meant to be. If the former high ranking Party bureaucrat, the former politician occupying high state office in the old Party State (though it is not clear why the Party and the State bureaucracy should form two groups, when members of the nomenclatura held office sometimes in the Party and sometimes in the State), if the socialist manager becomes a capitalist in the future, and as such the possessor of not insignificant power, then he is a capitalist and not a Party bureaucrat, etc. If the upper Party and State bureaucracy, if all the socialist top managers maintain themselves in the new system, then it is not the

Communist political elite that enters into an alliance with the entrepreneurs, but a new bourgeoisie is created out of what were Communist leaders. And this is a tremendous difference.

If this new coalition, as claimed by Hankiss, came about as the ruling class of the new society, then this new society would be a society in which the Communist Party and State bureaucracy, and the socialist technocracy—in addition to the entrepreneurs politically allied to them—would continue to play a decisive role, in other words no new society would come about. This prediction by Hankiss would mean that we faced the extension of the last decade of Kádárist communism. If, on the other hand, what is happening is only that some of the members of the earlier Communist leadership succeed in maintaining themselves in the new society, and are able to belong to the elite in that too, (now already in fact some kind of elite), then we shall have a new bourgeoisie, some members of which are recruited from the old Communist leading stratum. Some transfer from the black Mercedes to the red one. Indeed, who cares, if a functioning society comes about? I do not believe that the bourgeoisie was ever recruited from the Knights of the Round Table. But does it make sense to speak of a great coalition of the Communist elite and the entrepreneurs?

I do not believe that social theory necessarily must engage in predictions. But in the last resort why should not a social scientist do so if he feels like it? Any such predictions however, must be backed by an interpretation of society which can be taken seriously. The interpretation of Communism given in *East-European Alternatives* cannot be taken seriously. At one point Hankiss writes "the ruling elite was not able, did not have sufficient wisdom and courage, or external and internal factors prevented it from actually liberating society. It was only able or willing to [liberalise] it." The Communist elite, which in the absence of wisdom or courage, or perhaps because it was hindered, does not "liberate" society! How on earth could these poor fellows have been able to do so, when they were an "elite" only in ruling over an unfree society. If, before writing the conclusion the author had looked through its beginning, he himself could have understood this. Who knows why he did not do so?

Munkácsy's *Ecce Homo* and Joyce's "Araby"

In September 1899, James Joyce, then a first-year undergraduate at University College, Dublin, wrote a paper on the painting *Ecce Homo* by the Hungarian artist Mihály Munkácsy, which was being exhibited in the Royal Hibernian Academy at the time (Ellmann, 65). This painting, Munkácsy's last work, was finished in Paris in 1896 as the final piece in a series of pictures about Christ. The collection was presented to the public in several European cities, and earned Munkácsy considerable, although short-lived, recognition. Joyce's evaluation of *Ecce Homo* is the first document which intimates his imminent departure from nineteenth-century classic realism—a tradition typified in art by Munkácsy, who was a student of the "Düsseldorf School." The short-story cycle *Dubliners*, the first complete, mature work of Joyce's was conceived in an avant-garde spirit which heralded literary modernism.

It is perhaps no accident that Joyce's pronouncements on the nature of art should be provoked by a painting. The essay "Ecce Homo" (Ellmann and Mason, 36–37) demonstrates that Joyce's aesthetic thinking was concerned with the "essence" of all arts. The interrelationship between the different forms of art was widely discussed at the end of the nineteenth century. The link between painting and literature was of considerable interest: modern fiction was developing towards the spatial form.

In certain passages of Flaubert, units of meaning are perceived in a flash, rather than as a consequence of a chain of cause and effect.

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This kind of perception, perhaps first suggested in Lessing's concept of the *fruchtbarste Augenblick* in *Laokoon*, is spatial—it reduces the importance of the temporal sequence—and the artistic effect approximates to that of a painting or a sculpture (Frank, 231). Likewise, the Joycean epiphany functions as a spatial device in the text; it is a "sudden spiritual manifestation"—as the term is defined in *Stephen Hero*—which results from seeing different things simultaneously, as when viewing a painting. Such a flash of insight does not depend on an elaborate plot; rather, its nature is similar to that of the Nietzschean moment of recognition in early Greek tragedy. Nietzsche's formulation in *The Birth of Tragedy* contrasts the intrinsically tragic "Dionysian" essence of life revealed in pre-Socratic tragedy with the scientific rationalism which informs the bourgeois theatre. The affinities between Joyce's concept of the epiphany and the Nietzschean revelation of Dionysian truth, shrouded by the veil of Apollonian appearances, are readily apparent.

Joyce was fascinated by Munkácsy's *Ecce Homo*; ill at ease in accepting religious doctrine without question, he was very much aware of the painting's human rather than divine attributes. In spite of his generally favourable reaction, Joyce sensed the painting's openly didactic nature; the painter wanted to ensure that his audience—bred on the values of glorified nineteenth-century positivism—would understand the dramatic nature of the moment, recounted in St John's Gospel (John, 19:4–6). In Munkácsy's painting, the gestures, the facial expressions, the light and shade effects all guide the viewer to the desired response to the painting. Joyce comments:

It is this treatment of the theme that has led me to appraise it as a drama. It is grand, noble, tragic but it makes the founder of Christianity no more than a great social and religious reformer, a personality, of mingled majesty and power, a protagonist of a world-drama. No objections will be lodged against it on that score by the public, whose general attitude when they advert to the subject at all, is that of the painter, only less grand and less interested. Munkácsy's conception is as much greater than theirs, as an average artist is greater than an average greengrocer, but it is of the same kind. It is to pervert Wagner, the attitude of the town. (Ellmann and Mason, 37).

It is noteworthy that Joyce should mention Wagner, whose attempt to create a synthetic form of art was at the focus of attention at the time. In his essay, Joyce, too, seems to be discussing art "synthetically." Wagner was also celebrated as the artist who instead of portraying every-day life in realistic terms, sought to express the mystic element behind human experience. In Nietzsche's terms in *The Birth of Tragedy*, Wagner's music showed the way back from nineteenth-century bourgeois art to mythopoeia, which was present in pre-Socratic tragedy. It is Munkácsy's conception of the scene which does not satisfy Joyce. Drama it is, but a bourgeois, "domestic" drama concerned only with superficial manifestations of human behaviour and blind to the myth which underlies the episode. *Ecce Homo* would not reflect the taste of the "average greengrocer" if the depiction of the events of the "world drama" were replaced by details less suggestive of sweeping emotions and more revealing of the different moods of the figures peopling the canvas.

Joyce's critical essay is noteworthy for its implied dissatisfaction with the type of art which endows whatever it treats with the attributes of the mediocre burgher for whose limited sensitivity and less limited wallet it caters. Christ in *Ecce Homo* has the appearance of a kindly, even liberal-minded "social and religious reformer," whose fate is easily intelligible for the comfortable and self-righteous potential buyer.

The difference between the artistic commitments of Munkácsy and Joyce is apparent even in some of the biographical details. Undoubtedly a very talented painter, Mihály Munkácsy had abandoned claims to artistic integrity, and allowed his Parisian art dealer, Sedelmeyer, to dictate to him in matters pertaining to painting. In order to maintain his fashionable way of life and his studio, which was visited by the greatest celebrities of his time, he produced works which the wealthiest collectors wanted for their drawing rooms and places of business. Joyce's difficulties in publishing his works are well-known. Some of the early stories of *Dubliners* appeared in 1904, the year they were written, in *The Irish Homestead*—whose readership Joyce despised—but not at the price of his lowering his artistic standards for financial or other gain. A complete edition of *Dubliners* was not published until 1914.

What, then, is the distinguishing aesthetic quality of Joyce's early work? From "*Ecce Homo*" it is clear that he finds the Wagnerian conception of art more appropriate than that embodied in Munkácsy's painting. *Ecce Homo*, in spite of the superficiality of its portrayal of the scene, captures a moment of recognition on the canvas. In writing it is the device of the epiphany which enables Joyce to give a flash of insight. He, however, chooses to do so impressionistically, through the observation of those small details which would be passed over as insignificant by any artist striving to convey the "truth" through obviously visible gestures and blatant demonstrations of feelings.

A story from *Dubliners* will illustrate Joyce's technique. Most of the short stories of the cycle were written in 1904 and 1905. They mark a new stage in the history of the genre. The traditional short story of the Boccaccian type has a precisely designed plot, where artistic meaning is bound up with the unfolding of the "story." It tells of a unique event, a moment of dramatic conflict, which is often resolved in an unexpected fashion. The Joycean short story, however, does not tell of "special" moments and its plot is obscure. Insignificant elements, "the outskirts of attention"—as Ortega y Gasset puts it—perform the central role (Praz, 199). Instead of adventures, it is smells, sounds, various objects, pieces of small talk and other ran-

dom gathered flotsam and jetsam which are endowed with meaning.

The trivia of life in the stories of *Dubliners* are structurally linked to the epiphany. The story is never finished when, out of the apparent triviality, the epiphany arises. Ellmann writes that "...to conclude by reinstating the dreary disorder of life which has been temporarily heightened in the direction of tragedy is the technique of *Dubliners*" (Ellmann, 80)

In Munkácsy's painting the entire canvas is filled with figures conveying the painter's point of view (the crowd is hostile, Christ's complexion shows saintly "elevation", etc.) In *Dubliners* the author's point of view is hidden. The objects and their environment, which comprise the "atmosphere," along with the characters, speak for themselves – the epiphany is a manifestation of this world rather than the author's.

As a representative example, let us consider "Araby", the third piece in *Dubliners*, which, like the other stories in the collection, is built around an epiphany. Narrated by the protagonist, a schoolboy in his teens, the story offers a sensuous depiction of lower-middle-class life in an impoverished part of Dublin. The plot is minimal: the boy wants to impress a girl across the street whom he secretly loves by bringing her a gift from a bazaar called "Araby." Because of the indifference everybody shows him, he fails to buy the present when he finally reaches the bazaar. The narrative has plural meanings; at first reading it seems "innocent," but all the phenomena of the story, haphazardly chosen as they may seem, allude to the revelation of triviality and mental paralysis which occurs in the epiphany. The description of a back room, where a priest had died, the odours, the ballads sung in the streets "about the troubles of our native land" all conceal an insight into the quintessence of a way of life. This is forcefully revealed in a flash in the epiphany, which, like the "drama," is "conditioned, but not controlled, by its scene" (Ellmann and Mason, 32).

Just as important as the details are the "light and shade" effects which also help to create the impressionistic tone of the tableau. They are wrought chiefly through the metaphors of blindness. Like the impenetrable darkness which descends upon the rooms, the house, the streets

and the city, mental paralysis prevents people from seeing. "North Richmond Street, being blind, was a quiet street except at the hour when the Christian Brothers' School set the boys free. An uninhabited house of two stories stood at the blind end,"—so runs the beginning of the story. The adjectives "blind" and "dark" are used repeatedly. Occasionally, to emphasize the inability to see, an agent is placed between the eye and the object: "...her image came between me and the page I strove to read" (*Dubliners*, 32), or "Some distant lamp or lighted window gleamed below me. I was thankful that I could see so little" (*Dubliners*, 31). The narrator, "grazing up into the darkness", sees himself "as a creature driven and derided by vanity" (*Dubliners*, 35). He regards his attempt to break out as futile; he does not see an escape through the darkness.

The use of light and shade in the story is reminiscent of the manner in which this device is used in paintings. To the narrator, love seems to be the alternative to "darkness"; the object of his love, the girl who lived across the street, is "defined by the light" (*Dubliners*, 30). He describes her thus: "The light from the lamp opposite our door caught the white curve of her neck, lit up the hand upon the railing. It fell over one side of her dress and caught the white border of a petticoat, just visible as she stood at ease" (*Dubliners*, 32).

The adolescent narrator does not share the irony present in the consciousness of the text. His remarks have just as plural a meaning as those of the other characters. The chief function of the narrative is to sketch the mood rather than to develop the plot. When the boy talks about the priest's bequests, his words sound ironic only in the context of the story, thanks to the light shed on it by the epiphany: "He had been a very charitable priest; in his will he had left all his money to institutions and the furniture of his house to his sister" (*Dubliners*, 29). The detail of the boy's sentimental love for the neighbour's daughter also essentially contributes a detail to the picture in "Araby" rather than creates its plot. This is also true of the activities and remarks of the other characters: the teacher's comments about the boy's idleness and the reactions of the aunt and uncle concerning the boy's request to be allowed to visit the bazaar.

The boy, having overcome everybody's opposition, arrives at the fair too late, when almost all the customers have left and the shops are closing up. The epiphanic moment arises out of a conversation he overhears between a shop-girl and two "gentlemen":

- O, I never said such a thing!
- O, but you did!
- O, but I didn't!
- Didn't she say that?
- Yes, I heard her.
- O, there's a fib! (*Dubliners*, 35)

The "sudden spiritual manifestation" of triviality and mental shallowness is interwoven with all the elements of the story (*Epiphanies*, XII). The revelation illuminates the obscure particulars of the reduced plot, which the reader is left to complement with his own suppositions. We can guess that the boy's parents are not alive—that is why he lives with his aunt and uncle. The general poverty is not mentioned either, but the careful inventory of details leads the reader to infer it. The narrator never admits that he is aware of his pitiful condition, yet the compassion he cherishes can be seen as his attempt to escape.

Thus, the withdrawal from an explicitly expressed point of view, the plurality of meaning, the metaphorical language, the opaque multitude of objects and gestures and the seemingly irrelevant utterances all lend a highly impressionistic quality to the Joycean short story. Most importantly, the epiphany in a flash throws light on all the trivial information scattered throughout the story; we see the elements of the narrative make sense simultaneously. This "spatial" quality of the epiphany significantly reduces the importance of the temporal evolution of the plot and enhances the significance of the minute bits and pieces of the narrative. Thus, Joyce's departure in his writing from the "attitude of the town," which, in his opinion, pervades Munkácsy's painting *Ecce Homo*, is a radical one.

Not surprisingly, perhaps, Munkácsy's views of the impressionist and post-impressionist movement were characterised by complete hostility. He financed a foundation in Paris for

young Hungarian painters, and refused to admit any of those who later became the great names in twentieth-century art (Perneczky, 39). These artists, János Tornyai, József Rippl-Rónai, István Csók, Sándor Bihari were all influenced by trends of the end of the nineteenth century and Munkácsy, feeling threatened, did not approve. Although the post-impressionist Van Gogh had been dead for several years by the time of *Ecce Homo*, Munkácsy still refused to give up his faith in knowledge gained from a careful, accurate "reflection" of how things appear.

Of all the major arts, painting best expressed fin-de-siècle doubts about the perspective of the artist and the subject of art. Painters, composers and writers alike no longer wished to create a mimetic illusion of "reality": new forms were required. The seventeen-year-old Joyce was impressed by the grandeur of Munkácsy's painting, but he felt uncomfortable with its artistic conception. His essay, apart from being a statement about his views on Roman Catholicism in 1899 (Ellmann, 65–66), is a lively critique and, more importantly, a highly sensitive, if not yet fully explicit pronouncement on a new form of fictional artistry, namely the "impressionist" short story.

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Who were the Magyars?

Colin Renfrew: *Archeology and Language: the Puzzle of Indo-European Origins*.
Jonathan Cape, London, 1988. 346 pp.

Many important questions regarding the history of the Hungarian language still remain unsolved. Three facts however have been established as indisputable: first, the Hungarian language belongs to the Finno-Ugric (Uralian) family of languages; secondly, the first state which embraced the whole of the Carpathian basin was founded, based on a Hungarian-speaking populace, by the confederation of tribes which in the late ninth century (895) entered the Carpathian basin from the East (the leadership of the tribal federation was gradually seized by the princely family of the House of Árpád, which until 1302 provided Hungary with her kings); thirdly, the ethnic group, or ethnic groups, speaking Hungarian, arriving from distances of some 2,000 to 3,000 kilometres, settled in the Carpathian basin within the relatively short space of a few centuries. The first fact calls for no proof. As for the second, during the course of the only attempt in Antiquity to occupy this territory permanently, the Roman Empire was only able to extend its sway to two parts, Pannonia and Dacia, of the basin. In neither case was Rome able to maintain its rule for a long period. During the formation of the feudal state organizations in Europe, the Frankish empire could only acquire Transdanubia (the former Pannonia), and that only for a matter of a few decades. Where the third fact is concerned, the tribes speaking Hungarian (or a precursor of the language), separated from their nearest linguistic relatives, the other tribes of the Ugric language family, in the first centuries

of the first millenium BC. Following this, the steppe region west of the Volga was conquered by peoples of the Turkic linguistic family; thus their close contact over several millennia with peoples speaking Iranian languages also came to an end (except for some random contacts, as with the Alani, a people related to the Ossetes). Moving westwards, the Magyars gradually occupied the Carpathian basin, a region surrounded by completely alien (German, Rumanian and several Slavonic) languages.

These facts had already caught the attention of the eminent historian Moses I. Finley. He was seeking both the reasons and the archeological evidence for the various movements of peoples: "There is, for example, no incontestable archaeological trace of the Dorians, either *en route* or after their arrival in Greece proper. Nor, as a much later example, have the Huns been clearly identified in central European archeology, [...] but we know beyond doubt that the Huns made a devastating sweep into Europe. Our difficulties are further compounded by the unpredictable behaviour of language following a conquest. The Normans failed to impose Norman French in England, despite the thoroughness of their conquest and control, whereas Magyar (Hungarian), a member of the Ural-Altaic family, has survived to this day as a linguistic island surrounded by wholly unrelated Indo-European languages (German, Rumanian and several Slavic languages)." (*Ancient Culture and Society. Early Greece and the Bronze and Archaic Ages*. London, Chatto and Windus, 1970, pp. 16-17). Besides the Normans, there are other examples too of peoples who, though numerically inferior, conquered territories and founded states, meanwhile losing their language and becoming as-

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simulated themselves. In the second half of the ninth century, the Vikings (Varegs or Rus), with a strong military and political organization, founded the first eastern Slavic states around Novgorod and Kiev; they themselves became fully absorbed linguistically. The foundation of the Bulgarian state must be ascribed to conquerors from the East and speaking a Turkic language, who around AD 680, led by Asparuch Khan, conquered from Byzantium an area that even then was inhabited by a population speaking a Slavic language; soon they, too, became assimilated linguistically. These examples would seem to suggest that the Magyar conquest, led by the Árpáds, could be unique in history of a numerically inferior conquering ethnic group subduing a very large territory occupied by an alien (and obviously much more numerous) ethnic community within an extraordinarily short time (a few years), then founding a state within scarcely a century and meanwhile linguistically assimilating all the original inhabitants. This conclusion would hold true if one were to presume that each of the tribes under Árpád, or at least the overwhelming majority of them, spoke Hungarian. On this premise, the Árpád conquest would have no historical parallel, either in Antiquity or in the early centuries of feudalism.

Colin Renfrew, now Master of Jesus College and Disney Professor of Archeology at Cambridge, examines similar questions, in a world historical context. He seeks models to understand the process whereby after the Indo-European languages separated (which he considers as still uniform in Asia Minor around 7000–6000 BC), the various dialects or branches spread over huge distances (from Iceland to South-East India, along the whole central belt of Eurasia) in the course of a few millenia, which are historically a short time. Naturally, the areas these peoples conquered had not been uninhabited; they settled among peoples who had originally spoken dialects of languages other than Indo-European. The question therefore arises, how “does a specific language come to be spoken in a particular area? [...] This is the process whereby the language spoken in a particular region is displaced by another, brought in by people from a different, possibly adjacent, region where it is in use.” (p. 121) He postula-

tes three possible models for linguistic replacements, “when the new language comes about as the result of the movement into the territory.” One he describes as the “*wave of advance model*,” based on demography and subsistence. It implies the introduction of a new subsistence technology which allows for a significant increase in population density.” (p. 131) This model Professor Renfrew links with the spread of agriculture which, starting out from the Near East around 9000 to 8000 BC, gradually struck root in most of Eurasia. This extension is slow and covers minor distances within a given period.

Another possible explanation for language shift is the system collapse model. Examples for this can be found in some early societies that were not very stable organizations either economically or politically (as for example the Lowland Maya civilization after AD 980). The third is the Elite Dominance model, which “assumes the arrival from outside the territory of a relatively small group of highly-organized people, speaking a different language, who because of their military efficiency are able to dominate the existing population, and bring it into effective subjection. The two languages will then exist side-by-side for some time, with many of the population, probably both the indigenous and the immigrant, becoming bilingual. In some circumstances the territory will continue to speak its original language, and the newcomers will be assimilated and their foreign language forgotten. In others it is the language of the newcomers which prevails, while that of the original population, although they were the more numerous, dies out. That is the case of language replacement. This model lays stress upon the social organization of the immigrant group. They may not be large in number, but in order to bring the pre-existing population into subjection effectively, [...] they must already have a ranked or a stratified social organization. Sometimes they will be the agents of a state society. [...] In other instances the incoming élite will not be organized on quite so complex a level. They may, rather, show the features of [...] a ‘chiefdom’ society. Here there is still some measure of centralised organization, but there is not the administrative bureaucracy often associated with a state. The society is now

divided into a series of separate social classes, but is organized rather by a system of ranking, based on kinship, where those most closely related to the chief occupy the positions of highest status. [...] It is only when a small incoming group is organized in such a way that it can expect to dominate a much larger resident population. Of course it helps if the incomers also have some advantage in military technology. For instance, if the incomers know the techniques of horse riding and the locals do not, the former are at a tremendous advantage." (pp. 123–3). It can hardly be denied that Renfrew here describes with almost perfect accuracy all the elements which typified Hungarian history in the Carpathian basin in the tenth century, over the 106 years that passed between the conquest and the coronation of Stephen, the first Hungarian king (895–1000): here we have movement from a ranked chiefdom society to a state society, incorporating their sophisticated techniques of horsemanship and the use of a specific stirrup and can surmise that the indigenous inhabitants of the territory in the Carpathian basin were much larger in number than the incoming tribes of Árpád's. The latter has only become clear after several decades of silence and, indeed, concealment by historians and archeologists, now that it has turned out that there are a huge number of Avar settlements and cemeteries from the eighth and ninth centuries, testifying to the presence of the original inhabitants in practically the whole of the central, western and southern regions of the Carpathian basin. There are no reliable sources on the linguistic status of this original population from the late Avar period: the majority of historians have considered their language to be of a Turkic character merely to fall in with the model currently generally accepted for the Árpád conquest (according to which it was Árpád and the peoples of the seven tribes he led who brought with them the Finno-Ugric Hungarian language.)

Renfrew, of course, can only be familiar with this prevailing version of the Hungarian conquest and the establishment of the Hungarian state, namely that "the Hungarian language was introduced into central Europe around the ninth century AD". So this is what he uses to adduce that similar cases of elite dominance linked with

the spread of the language might have occurred much earlier too elsewhere in Europe: "Why not similar events earlier?" (p. 163). Still, "Hungarian is a language which has displaced its predecessor (at the end of the ninth century), and for that reason it is in many ways less *relevant* (my italics) to a discussion of the early languages of Europe." (p. 70)

Thus according to Renfrew's theory, the perfectly functioning model of the Hungarian conquest is a unique one, practically without any parallel in history. (The Norman, Bulgar, Varg and other élites, the Indo-Europeans, e.g. the Mittanni, who appeared in the Near East in the first half of the second millennium BC, display a radically different outcome, namely the assimilation of the dominant elite). Thus one ought to tend towards considering the Árpád conquest as an extraordinary sequence of events, unique in history. Provided that it is unconditionally accepted that it was this elite dominance of the late ninth century which presented and disseminated the Hungarian language in the Carpathian basin, within a single century, an almost incomparably short time.

Actually, there is a possibility of applying the dominance model without any difficulty (similarly to the Norman, Bulgarian and the Kiev Rus examples mentioned) both to the first extensive spread of the Hungarian language in the Carpathian basin and the process of the founding of the Hungarian state, a period lasting from the late ninth century to the turn of the millennium. For this, first of all, one must separate the process of the foundation of the Hungarian state from the arrival of the Hungarian language into the Carpathian basin. Much data for a convincing proof that the leading and determining layer (the élite dominance) of the tribal conquest led by Árpád, spoke a Turkic ethnic language and accordingly, had Turkic names, exists. The majority of the conquering tribes (five out of seven) had Turkic names. It is also known that the overwhelming majority (more than 90 per cent) of the personal names used by the ruling layers in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, as they have come down in the earliest Hungarian written sources, are of Turkic origin. As I have mentioned, there are a great number of late Avar settlements and cemeteries dating from the eighth and ninth

centuries spread over a large part of the historical Hungarian ethnic territory. Compared to this, it is more than surprising that the historical place names in this area do not include any place names that survived from the Avar period, which lasted for at least 200 years (from the late seventh century to the ninth). With a few exceptions, linked to tribal or personal names, titles or Slavic centres (Tárkony, Várkony, Berény, Székely, Csongrád), the overwhelming majority of the place names in the Hungarian historical linguistic area were of Hungarian (of Finno-Ugric etymology) or of Slavic character as early as the eleventh century. This lapse must spring from the fact that scholarly research has been seeking place names which must have survived in large numbers and remained known after 895, not in the relevant linguistic layer (since they start out from the supposition—which in fact has never been verified—that all the place names dating from the Avar period can only be of a Turkic character.) Obviously, the earliest Slavic place names, dating from the eleventh and twelfth centuries, must be related to the Slavic inhabitants of before 895. It is also evident that the same holds for the earliest layer of the earliest Hungarian place names (of Finno-Ugric etymology). So these toponyms can only come from groups of the late Avar inhabitants who spoke Old Hungarian.

In summary: such an interpretation of Renfrew's élite dominance model makes it equivocal that the majority of the people, and all of the leading layer, in the tribal confederation led by Árpád belonged to Turkic ethnic groups, or at least spoke some Turkic language. The individual tribes might have included people speaking Hungarian, and the two tribes with Hungarian names might have consisted of Hungarian-speaking people. But the foundation of the Hungarian state was clearly an historical act by

this tribal confederation, the majority of which had Turkic names, belonging to a Turkic linguistic group. However, according to the essence of the model, large numbers speaking Old Hungarian must have lived before the conquest (which began in 895), in areas of the Carpathian basin, the historical Hungarian linguistic territory. These people can only be the relevant section of the late Avar population. And the "missing" toponymy of the Avar period is none other than the place names deriving from this population of the late Avar period, speaking Old Hungarian, which therefore cannot be distinguished from Hungarian proper. This supposition accepted, the conquest of the dominant élite led by Árpád in 895, can easily fit in with the general form of Renfrew's élite dominance and there is no need to look for anything extraordinary in it. Of course, further evidence is called for to show how the ethnic group of the Avar period speaking Old Hungarian had reached the Carpathian basin; this, however is a different question, one that is beyond the scope of this article. It is a thought-provoking consideration that, by the tenth century, all the Indo-European languages in Europe used names for the Hungarians (Hungari, Ungar, Hungaryen, Hongrois, etc., based on Onogur, the name of a fifth-sixth century people) which were only rarely applied to Árpád's tribal federation and their direct predecessors in the relevant Byzantine sources. In these sources Árpád's federation are mostly called *Türks*—Toupkoy.

So Renfrew's model makes it possible for Hungarians to abandon the traditional conquest model as well as Gyula László's theory of a "dual conquest" and replace them by speaking of an ethnic-cum-linguistic conquest that took place 200 years before 895, and another conquest around 895, one which led to the foundation of the Hungarian state.

Tamás Koltai

Past revived

György Schwajda: *Ballada a 301-es parcella bolondjáról* (Ballad of the Fool of Lot 301); Csoda (Miracle); Péter Müller: *Szemenszedett igazság* (Barefaced Truth); Gábor Görgey: *Komámasszony, hol a stukker?* (Hunt the Gun); Sándor Weöres: *A kétféjű fenevad* (The Double-headed Beast)

The historical phase which has just come to an end in Hungary, whose consequences are so difficult to shake off for their being still in people's minds, is well grasped in György Schwajda's new play, *Ballad of the Fool of Lot 301*, which received its premiere in Szolnok, in the theatre managed by the playwright.

Lot 301 is part of the New Cemetery in Budapest. For the past hundred years, it has been akin to the burial places for those whom society has ostracised even after their death—suicides, victims of epidemics and of political murder, innocent and guilty alike, adherents of opposing convictions, liquidating and burying one another in unmarked, common graves, those executed by revolutions and counter-revolutions, war criminals and martyrs to ideas. The lot is even said to contain the bodies of animals from the Zoo and the Circus. It was here they interred the Communist Imre Nagy, the legitimately-appointed Prime Minister, who was executed in 1958 by his comrades in retribution for 1956. Thus this small plot of land, in which the past is piled up in several strata, has become the symbol of the horrible absurdity of the Hungarian heritage.

On June 16 1989, the anniversary of their execution, Imre Nagy and his fellow martyrs were reburied with national honours: buried in the same place where they had till then been resting unmarked in lot 301. György Schwajda's

play is set directly before the Great Disinterment, which may also be called the Great Compensation or the Great Redemption. The central character is Lajos, "the fool of lot 301".

Originally he was called Sándor, when, as a young, hopeful officer of the Ministry of the Interior, with a fresh diploma in Latin and Greek in his pocket, he was trained over nine hard months to secretly observe suspicious characters. He was trained by a friend of his, indeed, trained to pose as a lunatic, to make it easier for him to pass unnoticed. They practiced a few typical turns of speech, as for instance, "may all the Communists rot away". If this was done well, Sándor asked his friend to rap on his knuckles, and when it went well, he took up his place near lot 301. His wife thought he was abroad, on a secret mission. Sándor slowly became accustomed to his new environment and embarked on a new way of life. His wife was told that he had died. Thirty years passed by in this way; then came the sea-change in the status of lot 301. Sándor's friend came to fetch him. He no longer had anything to observe. There are no dirty tricks any more. We will become Europeans. Everything can be forgotten. All the past thirty years. But Sándor does not forget. Sándor does not understand. Sándor does not want to go anywhere, he does not want to have the fact that he is alive confirmed. Sándor cannot be communicated with. He continues to reply to everything in the way he had been conditioned, with raps. Sándor remains "converted". He has turned into Lajos. For good.

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The play, interwoven with absurd elements and making use of surrealistic ideas, faces up to the embarrassing fact that a single symbolic gesture does not suffice to redress crime. The past cannot be wiped out for good overnight, as the *Internationale* has it, for inner wounds can fester for long, sometimes for ever. Lajos, the fool of lot 301, remains what the system has misformed him into. If he is mad, so was the system that made him mad. The only remaining question is what should be thought of those normal people who made Lajos out of the Sándors, and who now reject their old selves without turning a hair, and pass themselves off as the originators of the changes.

Schwajda gives his protagonist a metaphoric wisdom. What he says makes no sense, but there is an order in it. His meditation on the unremovable dirt which is deposited on great men, who thus appear greater and greater, until somebody invents the soap which dissolves unremovable dirt and exposes the dwarfish size of the supposedly great, shows a genuine moral philosophy. The same holds true for his rumination on the mortality of the dung-beetle and of man. Lajos is usually fully aware of the Antigones in things. I do not mean antagonism, and there is no need to find fault with this Freudian distortion, partly because Lajos has had a classical education, and partly because, where else would an association with Antigone, standing for the burial of the unburied, sit more natural than in lot 301?

Director János Taub must have found to his liking this very *pièce à thèse* with its bitter humour and its use of sarcastic gestures in place of psychological processes. His production is a very good one. There is a finely-tuned choreography for ideas and gestures, ranging from the "disinterment", with its slow, solemn funeral music, to the last great dialogue, closing all the details of the political "puzzle". György Kézdy gave his best in the role of Lajos-Sándor, who "is but mad north-north-west", but not because he plays the idiot, but because his idiocy, his tortuous arguments, his word-twisting sophistry and philosophical lunacy are more human than the conformity of those around him, those who obey norms that are mad. The climax comes when he quotes Seneca, in a passage which can be taken as the motto of the play, in a soft and sober way: "The best part of life slips

away if we act badly, a great part of it slips away if we do nothing, and the whole of it slips away if we always do something else."

Miracle, a play Schwajda wrote fifteen years ago, has been revived by the József Attila Theatre in Budapest. Like other plays by Schwajda, it was of high topicality; society, however, pretended to be blind so as not to be compelled to notice it. This attitude is just the reverse of the protagonist's, Vencel Nagy; he is really blind but pretends to see, because society only provides—the little it does provide—for the sighted and pretends to be blind so that it should not have to notice the blind. This logic provides the bitter absurdity in the play. Blindness also serves as a graphic metaphor for a system that announced long ago the imminent arrival of the days of victory, to quote the *Internationale*, with the days growing into years, and years into decades, without any sign of victory in the offing.

Since then we have begun to see clearly, projecting reality onto the screen of our conscience; however slow we have been on the uptake, at long last we have caught up with the play on a social scale. We understand the wife, Mrs Veronika Nagy, who merrily swings over the stage, and speaks of her happy life, their marvellous flat of "one room and a half," with a huge pantry you could almost call a bathroom, her retarded small son, sucking a rubber teat ever so charmingly, her small daughter, unable to speak, whom she intends to be a TV announcer, and the blissful future that awaits her at the side of her husband, who at the age of thirty should get a pension and has at last given up his plan to commit suicide. But we also understand that life does not lay everything at one's feet, and one cannot expect a happiness that is not struggled for. Vencel would be eligible for an invalid pension if he had worked for ten years; since he has not, he is declared to be sighted. Henceforth everybody is forced to behave according to a topsy-turvy logic and behave as if they could walk with ease on the ceiling.

The wife of the blind protagonist makes heartrending efforts to imitate her husband (who is sitting on the leg of an overturned kitchen stool) and lays the table, as a good wife should,

so that her husband can find the food. A member of the printing team literally works himself to death while resetting what the blind type-setter has made a mess of. Of course, it is the protagonist himself, cured by an administrative miracle on the part of the social insurance service, who sets the good example. Sándor Gáspár works a special miracle in the role, playing the character not with a groping clumsiness but with physical virtuosity. In particular, there is a series of physical bravura in which he kicks over, knocks about and shoves down, objects around himself, and displays behind the physical damage the mental atrocity that has been inflicted upon his personality.

This production, directed by Dezső Garas, is one of the best in recent years. It is reticent, exact and has a firm grasp of the essentials. He interprets all the layers of the text, its right and wrong sides with strength in both its concept and use of historicisms. The derisive pathos of the *Internationale* at the end of the performance, while the protagonist's wife indulges in happy day-dreams while floating in the baby swing: a faithful expression of the grotesqueness of our day.

There have been several other recent examples of old plays being put into a new light. Péter Müller's crime comedy, *Barefaced Truth*, was first performed in 1966, in the Madách Chamber Theatre, and was a failure. The play had more luck abroad, and now, returning to where it was first performed, has finally scored a success in Budapest. Audiences are said not to have dared to understand it in 1966; I think it was rather the actors who were unable to interpret it.

Undoubtedly there are many things one can read into the plot. Judge Hector Revalier, a fanatic seeker after the truth, is investigating a murder case, and he gradually unpicks the threads of a sham trial, leading up to the highest circles. The metaphor is clear but the play expresses generalities that the authorities usually do not feel compelled to take personally. (Even *Oedipus Rex* can be presented as a political indictment.) What turns Péter Müller's small-town Oedipus into a figure of tragicomedy is that, while he comes to disclose the guilt

of the power he represents and, indirectly, his own guilt, a large number of innocent people fall victim to his desire for purgation. The earlier production was unable to cope with this devious duality, the extremes of this Catch 22 situation.

Present-day politics in Hungary, and a young director in the person of István Kolos, have come to the rescue of the play. The basic dramatic situation itself bears a resemblance to contemporary reality. recent years have brought new "judges" to the forefront of public life; they have tried to clean the Aegean stables and promised to find the real cause of a long-running "criminal case". They have arrived in turn, and failed in turn; several of them were able to recognise that the strands lost in the past lead, if not personally to them, then to the "cause" they represent. Even though this has not driven them crazy, as it did Revalier in the play (Schwajda's play, *The Fool of Lot 301*, does not seem to be the only one in which lunacy indicates a deadlock), and they only had to relinquish their place to other, new experimenters, the audience can easily recall some politicians from the recent past who arrived on the scene as saviours before taking an ignominious leave.

The play, written with a practised rather than an original hand, but displaying stage-craft and providing some good roles, has now been staged in a mature style. The production is dominated by its unity as a whole: a sound spectacle, dynamic acting, good rhythm and well balanced stage work. From the first scene, in which the silhouette of the new judge appears in an illuminated background to a half-lit interior, to the very last moment, when the military representative of the new powers—that-be comes marching in in full splendour, awakening histrionic or, rather, historic memories, the director's controlling hand can be felt in every little detail. Péter Cseke's elegant, well measured physical interpretation of the lead embodies the official self-assurance of the judge. In his performance, Revalier's physical and mental distortions do not always go hand in hand with his human failure, he preserves his faith in his calling to dispense justice even on the brink of insanity. He is a decent man who carries out a purge, no matter who dies because of it.

The current political scene is also reflected in Gábor Görgey's *Hunt the Gun* and Sándor Weöres's *The Double-headed Beast*, two more plays revived by the Madách, the first in its main auditorium and the second in the Petőfi Csarnok, which is not a theatre proper, but a leisure centre much used by the young for its roller-discos, flipper machines and pop concerts. Both plays go back some thirty years and have seen several revivals.

Hunt the Gun is an absurd play. Five people keep each other in check at the point of a gun, depending on which one of them has laid hands on the revolver—a disreputable hooligan, an aristocrat, a petty-bourgeois, an intellectual, and a peasant. Each one is thinking along different lines, using different arguments and trying to extricate himself through different means. But once an individual has hold of the gun, that is to say, power, they change immediately: principles are abandoned and naked terror is exercised over the others. The audience does not need to have the controlling metaphor explained. At the end of the first performance, the barred door of the prison, which surrounds the five people, opened by accident, though it should have remained closed. This gave birth to a spontaneous interpretation: what happens if the

characters escape from dictatorship? Will they use their freedom, too, to deceive one another?

Weöres's "historical waxworks", *The Double-headed Beast*, is not discussed for the first time on these pages. The basic layer of this verse play is a picaresque adventure, an escape story. It involves the long flight of Ambrus Bornemissza in the Hungary of the 17th century, sundered in three parts, one of which was incorporated in the Ottoman Empire. There are, of course, all the trimmings that are part of this Hungary: the great masked ball, a masquerade of national and religious costumes and insignia of power, a brilliant exchange of beliefs and convictions to fit the quick-changes and disguises, dissembling, shamming, role-playing. There are real people behind the waxworks, and the sweat of their defensive reflexes melts the wax off them, revealing their own pitiable or despicable, ridiculous or grotesque, faces.

The essence of the play is how the man in the street can keep his head above water, how he may avoid the stormy waves of history that are breaking over him. Through the monologue which concludes the play, Weöres gives the watchword: "Down with history!" A history that is no more than a series of endless party struggles made to appear as national interests.



Ildikó Nagy

The crying of lot 301

The Committee for Historical Justice requested designs for a monument to the martyrs of the 1956 revolution to be placed in the Rákoskeresztúr Budapest Central Cemetery. Eleven writers, art critics, architects and journalists were asked to judge the entries. The judges drafted the conditions and personally invited 28 artists to submit entries. These included sculptors, architects, painters, draughtsmen and concept artists, masters (Rudolf Berczeller) and young beginners (Valéria Sass, Tibor Szalay), traditionalists (Tamás Vigh) and quite a few from the avant-garde (among them László Rajk, Ilona Keserű, György Jovánovics, István Haraszty), the latter having been undeservedly neglected by the authorities in the recent past. Although neither the committee nor the judges sought to limit the field, the personal invitations were intended to suggest a break with cultural policy. This in all probability was one of the reasons why the much sought-after star sculptors (Imre Varga, István Kis, László Marton) did not participate.

The 97 designs submitted by the deadline were on display at the Budapest Gallery between October 23 and November 4 1989 (the dates of the beginning and the end of the 1956 revolution). The exhibition elicited unprecedented interest. Never before had contemporary Hungarian works drawn such huge crowds. Fourteen entries were submitted from the USA, one each from Mexico and Austria and the rest from Hungary. After deliberations lasting a week, the judges awarded first prize to György Jovánovics. No fee was involved and the cost of execution and erection will be covered by pub-

lic contributions. The exhibition was taken to Pécs, Szombathely and Békéscsaba as well: several towns have indicated that they too would like to use one of the designs for their own monument.

Memorial sculpture has fallen into disrepute over the past hundred years. Marked by academic clichés and empty pathos, it rarely expressed emotions springing from genuine shock. Directly after the Second World War, art did cry to the world with the same feelings of hurt as Expressionism had done in the 1910s. Post-war Neo-Expressionism produced a few monuments that shocked, and were art, for example Ossip Zadkine's memorial to the destruction of Rotterdam, *To a Destroyed City* (1952-3), or Reg Butler's *The Unknown Political Prisoner*, which won him an international competition in 1953. Such exceptions apart, sculpture as monument found itself outside the mainstream. In the second half of the 20th century, artists produced anti-memorials. A classic example is Edward Kienholz's *Portable War Memorial*. The Hungarian sculptor Tamás Szentjóbby's *Portable Trench* can also be included in this category. His is a conceptual work deliberately referring back to Kienholz.

Art thus seemed to confirm the impossibility of the memorial genre. In Hungary, however, large numbers of political memorials were erected: Lenin statues, memorials to the 1919 Republic of Councils, 1945 "Liberation" monuments, Imre Varga's postmodern sculptural group on Béla Kun. Such propaganda sculpture sparked off a multitude of jokes and anecdotes and true remembrance was forbidden. Would it be possible to break through this sham? Could sincere mourning produce genuine art? Those were the questions artists and judges alike faced.

The anticipation can, perhaps, best be compared to that which preceded the erection of the

Ildikó Nagy is currently at work on a book on the history of Hungarian sculpture.

first Budapest memorial, a statue of István Széchenyi, in the last century. How can a worthy form be found for a memorial for the brutally killed innocent, one which is about them but at the same time uses the idiom of the 1990s? And all that in the cemetery, on a plot where every leaf of grass, every clod of earth, is a memorial in itself, the unmarked, sunken graves as much as the mounds of the reburied?

Lot 301 is in the most distant corner of the Rákoskeresztúr cemetery, to which no road used to lead. It is divided from the cemetery proper by a wide no man's land, as it was used only to bury those who were hanged. Here, alongside the bodies of criminals, were buried nearly 300 of those executed after the 1956 revolution. The identification of the exhumed bodies often proved difficult. Nearby is the "Small Jail", in the courtyard of which the hangings took place at dawn. One can still see the iron gate, painted blue, in the concrete fence round the plot through which the bodies were dragged into the cemetery. Mothers who were given permission to take leave of their sons in the condemned cell (which in fact was rarely granted), hid among the trees of the cemetery at night to see where their boy would be hastily interred. For more than thirty years, flowers stealthily placed there were trampled in the mud by the horses of mounted policemen.

The *genius loci* could not be ignored. Just one artist dared to confront it. And he won the competition.

Some twenty designs deserve closer consideration; among them are traditional ones, and others trying to express tragedy and remembrance in the idiom of the avant-garde and post-modernism of recent decades. The most ascetic of the designs are based on the obelisk or the pyramid. Some constructivist or minimalist sculptors chose this as well, such as Gyula Gulyás, László Horváth and Ferenc Friedrich. Friedrich's design presents a truncated pyramid, the uppermost third of which only has the edges of a pyramid, while the slanting geometrical marble slabs covering the ground are placed so as to open the work, as it were, towards the infinite in the depth of the Earth. Enikő Szöllősy expresses a related concept: she lifts a huge stone high up and allows it to sway on thin iron

supports, in an explicit reference to Resurrection as a Christian symbol.

Several designs have turned to Stonehenge as a model, one which is suited to mark any kind of cultic site. The judges, although acknowledging the quality of these designs, were looking for something different.

As some avant-garde artists interpret it, a work of art—and therefore a memorial—is a visually experienced ritual i.e. process. That of István Haraszty was the most mature. He designed a mobile which brings to mind an orison, a belfry and a home, all in one. Entering the construction, the visitor himself lights a lamp, which, with the help of a moving device, reaches the height of several stories in the time the visitor going up the stairs reads the list of the victims on the walls. The gesture of lighting a lamp thus itself becomes a monument, it shines the more brightly and illuminates a larger space the greater the number of people paying tribute to the victims. Time is the main element in György Galántai's design. The sculpture itself consists of two, irregular, interlinked geometrical forms, one of stainless steel, the other of rusty iron, which gradually corrodes and crumbles away. It is surrounded by the "city of the dead": a brick wall, to be built by the visitors themselves, who are to take along a brick to the cemetery and add it to the wall. The memorial tablets, bouquets and votive lights are placed on the bricks. Tamás Ortutay's design is also based on gradual growth, but in his case it is an organic growth. He has visualised a grove planted into a spiral form, with each sapling planted to rift a rock. In the course of years, the grove would grow into a wood, and the spiral form could be continued endlessly in principle—in practice to the wall of the cemetery. The most attractive feature of the avant-garde designs is that they conceive the memorial not as a static, invariable work but, by composing repetitions or growth into it, the visitor becomes an active participant.

The youngest competitor, György Kungl, was one year old in 1956. His design is impelled not by remembrance but by confronting history. It has fragments, dug half into the ground, which recall the typical details of Stalinism of the 1950s (hammer, anvil, cogwheel, torch, flags, decorations, etc.). "They symbolize the disintegrating Communist system," the artist

writes in the description that goes with the work, "which received its first staggering blow from the '56 revolution." Gábor Bachman's work, too, carries a political message. Bachmann, an architect and set designer, was jointly responsible with László Rajk for the decoration of Heroes Square on June 16, 1989, where Imre Nagy and his fellow martyrs were laid in state. He was a small boy in 1956, and only remembers the flags with a hole cut out of their middle and the walls pockmarked by bullets. His fantastic design of an edifice is a model of chaos, seemingly recalling the constructions of the Russian avant-garde, but without their rationality. Its central part rises high like a bridge and, from a bird eye's view, reminds one of a holed flag. He intends to mount blown-up photographs and articles from contemporary newspapers on the surface of the structure, which is meant to reflect not mourning and remembrance but the historical lies and unfulfilled promises. The designs by Kungl and Bachmann represent a different view by a different generation. These young people do not look for personal tragedies in the history of the past forty years: their intention is not concentrated on individuals at the mercy of the authorities, but on historical responsibility. Their concern is how and why the life of people today has become so difficult and hopeless; they feel that the future of the young of today was also buried with the martyrs of 1956.

Several architectural designs were also entered, as for example a colonnade (Bence Vadász), a belfry, (György Csete), an arcaded vault (Will Nettleship), and a huge, windowless cube with its floor sunk deep underground. The slit cut in the ceiling forms the digits 1956 and the light projects it moving along the walls (Attila Kovács). The finest architectural design was submitted by George Famous and his team from the U.S. It envisages a memorial site with a circular ground-plan, framed by boldly arched walls; these divide it into two parts, forming the Chinese sign of yin-yang (the symbol of life and death, beginning and end).

Besides architectural symbols, some of the entries conjured up the symbolic power of nature. Sándor Csutoros has based his design on monuments one encounters in nature: the petrified basalt organ pipes of volcanic mountains.

He plans to form an artificial crater which visitors would descend with difficulty down basalt stones, and then light a candle or place their flowers at the foot of huge, inward bent basalt columns, quarried in the Balaton Highlands.

A mark of the judges' lack of prejudice, and their respect for artists, is their invitation to El Kazovszkij (Elena Kazovskaia), a Russian artist who lives Hungary, to participate. Her design, which is practicable, is in fact a beautiful, enigmatic painting. A meandering path leads up to a bare Golgotha, on top of which a huge bow-window with cruciform fields opens onto emptiness—or the infinite. Each of the two openings of the windows holds a head-urn painted in profile, one of them being turned upside down. (Cypresses are at the foot of the hill). El Kazovskij's design was the most lyrical of those submitted.

Though not their original intention, the judges awarded two second places. This, of course, is a purely notional prize, as only a single work is to be erected on Lot 301. Mária Lugossy has envisaged a black granite prism, eight metres high, with dull surfaces partly polished, partly sandblasted, holding a rising and declining bronze figure looking out of the clouds. The granite prism stands in the middle of a crater, which is covered by red marble slabs, with the names of the victims on them. The tract around the sculpture is planned in minute detail, by the landscape-architect Péter Szász. It is to be planted with various broad-leaved and coniferous evergreens. The baroque character of the memorial, full of pathos and the intimate mood of the plants surrounding it provide a contrapuntal effect. Pál Deim's design is also framed by a garden (by Ambrus Pirk). Here the plot is developed as a French garden of regular shape, divided by paths, and the memorial in the middle, a horizontal prism, resembles an altar, with the silhouettes of lying figures outlined in the foreground. The judges thought highly of both these designs, but did not feel them to be specific enough to Lot 301. (Lugossy's design will be executed at Mosonmagyaróvár, in memory of the victims of the volley which was fired into the crowd there in 1956.)

The design which suits only the site and could not be erected anywhere else is by

György Jovánovics. It has several parts and holds the whole lot as a composed unity. The black pillars, eight metres high, at the corner points of the lot, will be visible from a distance, marking out the area of mourning. Similar black pillars, resembling obelisks, flank either side of the iron gate in the fence, in remembrance of the last journey of the bodies as they were dragged through it.

The memorial has two levels. The lower level consists of rough, unpolished blocks of stone, which flank a low and narrow corridor. In the post-1956 trials, many who were given death sentences were told at the gallows that their sentences had been commuted. They have all spoken of the corridor along which the victims were taken to the scaffold, from where they could call out a last message to their fellow prisoners. The visitor must pass through this corridor, and stepping out of it, he finds himself face to face with that large uncarved stone that features in the will of István Angyal, one of the hanged ("a great, rustic stone should be the memorial of the nameless mob from which we have come, with which we have become one, and with whom we have departed.") There is a sham door—"the gate to death", painted blue and sunk into the stone, with this sentence of István Angyal's carved in the stone above it. The upper level of the monument is snow-white, floating above the Underworld, the image of the Other World, a symbol of the nation's belated homage. A sarcophagus covered with a white sheet stands on a flat slab, with a slightly inclining white column behind it and reliefs on the sides. (These resemble Jovánovics reliefs of the 1980s.) From the right edge of the upper level, a simple column leads down into the Underworld, connecting the two levels.

The memorial, the rock city as Jovánovics calls it, is situated in the area between the five

central graves (those of Miklós Gimes, Géza Losonczy, the Unknown Revolutionary, Pál Maléter and József Szilágyi) and the grave of Imre Nagy, which has been left in its original place. A path leads off from it on either side. In the middle of the square before the central graves, the sculptor has placed a hexagonal black granite prism into the earth to a depth of exactly 1956 millimetres.

This approximately tallies with the depth at which Imre Nagy and his fellows were once interred. The granite prism rises only a few centimeters above ground and it carries the date 1956.

A paved road leads from this prism to the gate of the rock city, with the names of the martyrs carved into the stones of the pavement.

In Jovánovics's interpretation, the memorial signifies a pilgrimage one must go on, living through the last journey of the martyrs, reading their names, and standing face to face with that gate, which is both concrete and abstract. The Gate of Death is the most ancient symbol employed in sepulchral monuments, from the Egyptian burial chambers to the great Baroque mausoleums. In Christian art, it also signifies the door leading to salvation. The Angel of Death is always accompanied by the Angel of Resurrection. Those who have lost their faith can no longer take refuge in this hope. Jovánovics can only express the homage of posterity, above all by not permitting oblivion. His concrete references keep recalling events: here it is not a question of natural death, nor of mourning in general. Alongside grief and a sense of tragedy, crime and responsibility are also present, and this is what a visitor must remember throughout. The fact that the sculptor does not represent or recount all this, but conjures it up, ensures an exceptional place for his work.

Géza Perneczky

The charm of the countryside

Julia Szabó: *Painting in Nineteenth Century Hungary*.
Corvina Press, 1988. 323 pp. (In English)

Let's be realistic. If an academic from Los Angeles, a Tokyo businessman versed in the European countries, a Moscow or a London undergraduate picks up this large-format album of 19th century painting in Hungary, published in several languages by Corvina Press, then it is a good guess that he is scarcely interested in what the artistic reflections of national self-awareness were in the course of that century (as the jacket notes introduces the book).

All these potential readers have at best only a vague knowledge of where exactly Hungary lies on the perimeter of the Balkans, and they will have no idea at all of the history of the Habsburg Empire or of the Austro-Hungarian dual monarchy, without which one can hardly come to terms with Hungary in the 19th century. (Obviously the author had this in mind when she included a Chronological Table of Events for the orientation of the reader, but which the publisher regrettably omitted from the foreign language versions.) Readers of this kind have to rely on their memories of somewhat exotic restaurants with Gypsy music, on some interesting landmarks of recent political history, or possibly on one incident or another in football matches of the fast receding past. If they happen to be better educated, this knowledge may be supplemented by that herdsman-goulash romanticism which will have reached them via Austrian mediation. What can they begin to do with the book?

I tried to put myself in the place of a reader of this kind. I began to count the pictures depicting

the steppe. In all honesty, there aren't many but if we add that they are (in pictures by Miklós Barabás, Károly Markó, or Károly Lotz) complete with *Shadouf* wells—one must not forget that structures like them can be found from Mongolia to Mexico, that is, they are internationally known motifs—then we can be satisfied with the result: the art of Hungary was markedly delineated in the 19th century.

It might also strike the reader—and it will perplex him if he knows his geography—that there are almost as many paintings depicting stormy seas to be found in the book (those by Károly Kisfaludy, Bálint Kis, Miklós Barabás); the same reader might still cast a look at the 19th century map of Hungary, and will readily put his mind at rest by seeing that the Hungarians had access to the Adriatic—hence the sea.

The really educated browser will conclude with satisfaction that most of the pictures were painted by Hungarians taking their inspiration from Mozart's *Il Seraglio*, for a lady is being rescued by a European gentleman (all this presented in a very Hungarian way, that is, on horseback). That motif bespeaks a high musical culture, he might be tempted to conclude, (this is where Bartók came from, isn't it?). It is only when he dips into the text that he learns that it is about a legendary event during the 150 years of Turkish occupation and the protagonist in these pictures is the knight Dobozi rescuing his young and newly-wed spouse. He will soon find out also that his mistake was not all that bad, because some of these almost identical pictures illustrate not Dobozi but an incident going much farther back in time, namely, the medieval king S. Ladislas giving chase to a Cumanian knight, an abductor of women, dressed in wide Turkish-style trousers and leopard skin. It seems

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as if these Central Europeans had used the same turban from the time of Mozart up to the poet-painter Károly Kisfaludy, every time they were out to paint something very much out of their world. Rococo?

The educated foreigner is likely to leaf over the battle scenes with a certain boredom, since similar pictures were painted by others and in a much better manner too: in Delacroix, for example, the steeds are wilder and the women barer—ah, well, those French! While in the battle scenes of the North American painters—another provincial culture—at least you get some genuine Indians now and then.

Having clarified in himself the misunderstanding that these Hungarians weren't painting a Venice with implausibly classical buildings but simply the Great Flood of 1838 in Pest, the educated foreign reader will be surprised to note that there were a few really European artists working in the country around 1870; for example, Pál Szinyei-Merse, and that there are to be found quite presentable museum pieces too, as good as if one were looking at the catalogue of the Tate or that of the Chicago Art Institute. The fact that Szinyei painted his most "museum-worthy" canvases under the impact of the Parisian artistic climate or in the vicinity of the Munich Academy, he will probably remain unaware of, nor is he likely to notice that Károly Ferenczi and the Nagybánya School that can be grouped around him (à la Barbizon) was no more than an amiably puritan plein air branch of Munich art nouveau—which made frequent incursions into the Carpathians.

We will have notice that the educated reader with an interest in Hungarian art has skipped through Munkácsy and needs to be reminded: look, that young man who had got as far as Düsseldorf and became one of Ludwig Knaus's pupils won a gold medal in the Paris Salon in 1870! We ought to call his attention to Munkácsy's exquisite landscapes—*The Park in Colpach* and similar canvases—at which it would turn out that he did in fact like them but thought them to be works by László Paál. Then there is that more restrained Paál, who is called Géza Mészöly, and the fantastically misty and mystic landscape artist, László Mednyánszky. Yes, Mednyánszky's tramps and will-of-the-wisp autumn twilights are certain to fascinate

the browser, who will find too few of them in the volume. For it is the mysticism and symbolism of the *fin de siècle* that loom in these pictures (we should add that Mednyánszky was attracted to his disfigured models by a homoerotic interest as well.)

At this point a Western reader, if he is lucky, will lift his head and ask questions about Csontházy: the East-European artist-messiah, a madman, a bizarre art nouveau master, some of whose "life-size" landscapes were on display at the Brussels World Exposition of 1858. What about the road leading to him? Sadly, there is none to be traced in Hungarian painting. Tivadar Csontházy-Kosztka too derived inspiration for his work from his stay in Munich. Yet Antal Ligeti or József Molnár (examples to be found in the album), as well as some other minor painters had earlier used some such characteristically Csontházyesque motifs (a Hungarian speciality?) as the cedar tree and the camel.

The book contains just one early picture by Csontházy by way of suggestion, since he belongs to the 20th century, but by way of compensation there are all the more Rippl-Rónais to finish off the book. We are told that József Rippl-Rónai was one of the Nabis group in Paris and one of his major works of this period is a portrait of his friend Maillol conceived in a modern style. So he too was an expatriate in Paris, our reader will say, like Picasso or Chagall. How great French painting is! It would be difficult to contradict him knowing that no sooner had Rippl returned to Hungary, then he began to paint in a very different manner, and in a very un-French way too. But that is a 20th century story that belongs to another book.

The really interesting part of the background to the book will never be known to the interested reader in New York, Tokyo, or Berlin, namely, that their author is that Julia Szabó who wrote a few years ago a monograph on Hungarian activism, that is, the constructivists representing the spearhead of the avant-garde, the circle usually associated with Lajos Kassák, author-painter. That book has not yet been published in a foreign language. The Publisher (or was it the distributors?) seem to have sensed in good time that modernism would not have a market appeal, that is, that the avant-garde was passé and

it was the post-modern that was soon to be marketable. By which we must understand a trend to include, if it is served up cleverly, 19th century academism, both the naive and pedantic varieties, just as much as the bizarre *fin de siècle* kitsch and mystical decadence that anticipated art nouveau.

However, Julia Szabó makes an asset of this compromise. She was never part of that tradition which saw nothing to appreciate in 19th century art other than the road leading through the Impressionists to Cézanne (i.e., modernism), and therefore tended to relegate anything else to the lumber room of academism and parochialism. Although her former professor, Lajos Fülepi—himself a partisan of modernism and Cézanne around 1908 in Paris—had taught her just this kind of perfectionism, she did not think it important to adhere to so strict an austerity. With understanding and affection, she bows to the minor masters and even to their inferiors, to the painters who had strayed into Hungary (from Austria, Germany, and even as far afield as Denmark or Italy), and she even included such mementos in the material of the book as painted signboards or aquatinted coats-of-arms.

It is therefore not so much the theoretical part, the introductory survey, that is of real interest in the book but the ample and varied pictorial matter, which is more than a history of art, since it grows into a kind of cultural history. So too, naturally, is the unstinted text that provided analysis to the pictures. For this contains the fruit of wide-ranging research extending to little known details. Julia Szabó refers meticulously to the national aspirations of the Hungarian artist to foster the advance of national art. Turning the pages of the book, however, one might get the impression that these enthusiastic manifestations might well have been more important for the contemporary public as a kind of psychotherapy. What derived from them was not a higher quality but a credible human atmosphere, the warmly glowing enamel of the provinces. The fine arts themselves did not naturally become the better for them, nor more Hungarian in spirit, though without them they would have been inconceivable (i.e. not Hungarian painting but "painting in Hungary"—as the title has it).

With time, painting improved since the bad foreign examples were supplanted gradually by the influence of the best - and this was attributable to the improvement of the general situation, to the broadening of the political and cultural horizons. And it only became more Hungarian in spirit because it became better. For the good artists simply became more self-assured—for example, in respect of how one should comport oneself (and paint) when being born Hungarian ceased to imply a mission. The Hungarian 19th century was merely superficially, and only in terms of artistic means, what they then called a century of national awakening of self-awareness. In reality it was an era of slow political and economic emancipation, often disrupted by setbacks. The outcome of that emancipation was the Austro-Hungarian Empire, so hotly argued over and so often wished back.

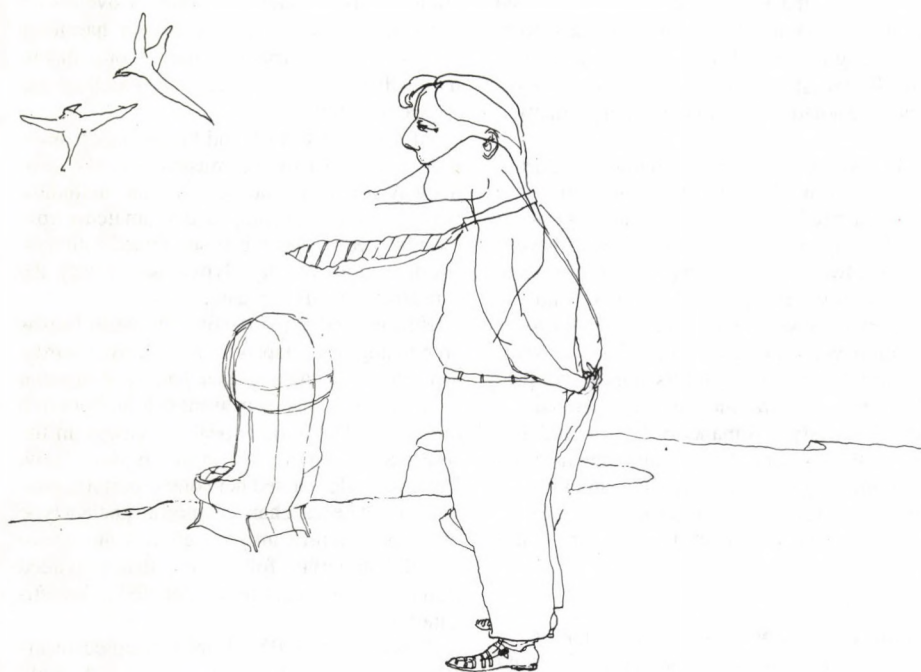
How much of all this can be understood by the foreign reader? And what can he be expected to know about that same emancipation being reenacted once more in the entirely altered circumstances of the 20th century? Names like that of Béla Kondor indicate that being a painter in later times (say, around the 60s) had still its perils, ones that demanded, especially of the most gifted, public courage rather than a sound orientation in the contemporary arts. It is very well worth delving into 19th century painting in Hungary, if only because that venture has still not ended in this part of the world.

It is questionable, though, that what Julia Szabó's book presents, perhaps for the first time in so much detail and illustrates with so many examples, that is, the warmly glowing enamel and charm of the 'countryside', is still as much alive today as the struggle for emancipation that started in the 19th century. Probably not. In fact, a good deal of what made this book so captivating has vanished irretrievably in the intervening decades. Almost coinciding with the publication of the book, a gas explosion occurred in Kosice (Kassa), Slovakia, destroying the material of an entire room of the local picture gallery—just that collection which gathered together the works of the Hungarian and German painters active in the old Upper Hungary (now part of Czechoslovakia). Among them were

many of the originals of the pictures published in the book. One is the painting by János Rombauer *Youth in a Landscape* (1804), which embellishes the cover, a portrait in the classical style, with a cool glittering lake, silver-and-green leafed trees and a cupolaed and columned gazebo in the background, as well as the young

man with a pocket of poetry and a slim-stemmed pipe emitting wistful coils of smoke in his hand.

Reader, if you take this book in your hand, please be kind to it. The poet has died and since the fire his portrait has perished too—so you hold in your hands the last memory that remains of him.



Benjamin Suchoff

The Bartók–Kodály connection

At the turn of the century, following the celebration of the Hungarian Millennium and the fiftieth anniversary of the ill-fated 1848 revolution against the oppressive Habsburg monarchy, a swelling tide of resurgent national feeling brought a great demand for a specifically Hungarian literature, art, and music. Béla Bartók and Zoltán Kodály, destined to be counted among the nation's most illustrious sons, were in the vanguard of politically-oriented students at the Budapest Royal Academy of Music—yet they were not to meet until after their graduation in 1903.

"Everyone, on reaching maturity," Bartók wrote to his mother, "has to set himself a goal and must direct all his work and actions toward this. For my own part, all my life, and in every sphere, always and in every way, I shall have one objective: the good of Hungary and the Hungarian nation." Musical proof of Bartók's intention was realized in his *Kossuth* Symphonic Poem (1903), with its sensational parody of *Gott erhalte*, the Austrian national anthem. The first performance of *Kossuth* in January 1904 propelled Bartók into the national limelight as a composer, and he quickly followed this success with his *Rhapsody for Piano and Orchestra* and, in 1905, the *First Orchestral Suite*.

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An abbreviated version of the present essay was commissioned by *Stagebill* magazine for the Winter 1990 Chicago Symphony Orchestra edition.

The Budapest press hailed the 22-year old genius as "the Hungarian Tschaikovsky," thus adding to his previously-won acclaim as a "piano virtuoso, the worthy successor to Liszt." Nevertheless, Bartók felt that his works were leading him to a dead end, since they were predominantly a combination of Liszt's Gypsy-styled Hungarianisms, Richard Strauss's overblown orchestral forces with a dissonant harmonic texture, and Hungarian popular art song (that is, national melody or *magyar nóta*) as thematic source material.

At that time Bartók and his predecessors—indeed, the rest of the musical world—erroneously assumed that the national melodies, which were mainly composed by amateurs from the educated classes and disseminated with typical distortions by city Gypsy bands, were the true Hungarian folk music.

But during the summer of 1904, while he was composing the *Rhapsody*, Bartók overheard a girl singing a melody that had very unusual qualities. She was of peasant origin, born and raised in a Hungarian-speaking village in the southeast corner of Transylvania (now Rumania). He noted her song repertory, convinced that he had chanced upon an ancient type of melody significantly different from the so-called Hungarian folk songs that pervaded Budapest's musical life. He decided to investigate further.

"I set out in 1905," Bartók recalled in his 1921 autobiography, "to collect and study Hungarian peasant music unknown till then. It was my great good luck to find a helpmate for this work in Zoltán Kodály who, owing to his deep insight and sound judgment in all spheres of music, could give me many a hint and much advice that proved of immense value." Their meeting that year was brought about by Emma Gruber, a gifted composer and Bartók pupil, who married Kodály in 1910.

Kodály's "spheres" included an Academy of Music degree in composition and, in 1905, a University diploma as teacher of Hungarian and German. He then returned home to Galánta, (formerly in northwestern Hungary, now part of Czechoslovakia) to collect folk songs in neighbouring villages. These specimens and other sources available to him were analysed and the resultant findings published in his remarkable Ph. D. dissertation, *The Stanzaic Structure of Hungarian Folk Song*, in 1906.

Bartók and Kodály initiated their lifelong friendship that same year, when they decided to collaborate on the self-publication of twenty rural Hungarian folk songs, fitted with easy piano accompaniments appropriate to their simple, unpretentious character. (For many years they were unable to sell a single copy, in part due to the appearance in Budapest of song hits from Franz Lehár's *The Merry Widow*.)

In 1907 Bartók discovered a previously-unknown melody type in Transylvanian Hungarian villages, whose characteristic tonal organization is the Central Asian pentatonic scale. In addition to this ancient Magyar heritage, however, he found other examples of "pure" Hungarian peasant song that had been "contaminated" by certain elements the villagers had taken over from transient Slovak farm hands and peasant workers from other national minorities of pre-World War I Greater Hungary. He became fascinated with this "Mixed Class" of Hungarian material and, till 1917, collected thousands of vocal and instrumental melodies in Hungarian villages inhabited by Slovak, Rumanian, Ukrainian, Bulgarian, and South-Slav peasants. And in 1913 he visited Arab villages in North Africa and recorded their unique music.

Kodály on the other hand, concentrated on collecting Hungarian folk music, extending his field trips to Slovak and Rumanian areas for Hungarian material. Among the melodies he collected in 1914 was a folk song related to a seventeenth-century ballad, the Song of Árgirus (*Árgirus nótája*). Kodály's remarkable achievement in reconstructing the long-lost music notation—on the basis of the peasant melody!—turned him toward historical musicology, in terms of the bearing of folk music-derived data on Hungarian art music. His next, related step

was the investigation of Hungarian folk song with regard to its connection with popular art song and church music.

Bartók, meanwhile, inspired by the tonal and rhythmic diversity of the huge corpus of musical folklore he had collected, composed pieces incorporating the ancient Magyar pentatonic scale and the more recent "dotted" rhythm (e.g., *Evening in Transylvania*, No. 5 from Ten Easy Pieces for Piano, 1908), Rumanian bagpipe motifs strung together in indefinite form (*First Rumanian Dance*, op. 8a, 1908), and, in *Allegro Barbaro* (1910), the so-called Slovak rhythm contraction and the Lydian folk mode (a major scale with an augmented fourth or tritone).

Eventually Bartók arrived at a fusion of national music styles, to the point where their characteristics and performance peculiarities became his "musical mother tongue." The outcome of this attainment was a unique compositional style which reflects the atmosphere or "spirit" of folk music. A dynamic example of the newly-won means is found in Bartók's Dance Suite for Orchestra, commissioned in 1923 for the fiftieth anniversary of the merging of Pest, Buda, and Óbuda. The first movement of the Dance Suite is based on a chromatic melody within the interval of a tritone (Example 1, see p. 158). This kind of narrow-range chromaticism (Example 2) is characteristic of the Arab peasant music that Bartók collected in North Africa in 1913. The rhythm schema, however, is that of the Ruthenian (i.e., Ukrainian) *kolomyjka* (Example 3), a dance rhythm which is commonplace in Slovak folk music, the Hungarian *kanásztánc* (swineherd's dance), and the Rumanian *Ardeleana* ("Transylvanian").

Between 1906 and 1920 Kodály composed a small number of chamber works and songs for voice and piano, for the most part limited to Hungarian folk music characteristics as the source for tonal and rhythmic invention. In 1923 he, too, was awarded a commission to compose a work for the abovementioned anniversary celebration. The result was his *Psalmus Hungaricus* (Op. 13), for chorus, orchestra, and organ, set to the text of Psalm XLV (Example 4). It is most interesting to note that, like Bartók's Dance Suite, the *Psalmus Hungaricus* also begins with a fusion of disparate styles. However, and quite unlike Bartók, Kodály's musical

language is specifically Hungarian: the melody is based on the ancient Magyar pentatonic scale (Example 5) and the rhythm scheme, moreover, though derived from the *galliard*, a Renaissance court dance in triple meter, is ingeniously varied by use of Hungarian dotted-rhythm (Example 6: boxed notations).

The year 1923 also marks the appearance of *Transylvanian Hungarians. Folksongs* (Erdélyi magyarság. Népdalok) a collection of 150 melodies by Béla Bartók and Zoltán Kodály, which was published by the Budapest Popular Literary Society. Although Bartók transcribed most of the melodies, editorial control apparently was Kodály's responsibility, and the latter decided to classify the songs on a "lexicographic" basis, that is, according to the height of the end tones of each four-section melody.

The next year, however, Bartók's scholarly study, *The Hungarian Folk Song* (*A magyar népdal*), was published in Budapest in which the basis of classification is his "grammatical" method. The melodies are first grouped with regard to the three major types of Hungarian folk songs: Old Style, New Style, and Mixed Style. Each of the three groups is then further classified according to the metrical, melodic, rhythmic, and formal structure of the melodies.

Bartók followed his "method of methods" with the preparation of his Slovak and Rumanian materials for publication, according to similar grammatical principles of classification, including the determination of foreign as well as indigenous variant relationships of the melodies. He extended his investigation into choreographic details, and he developed a method for classifying the folk texts and their diverse variants. His extraordinary transcriptions, notated after patient, repeated listening to thousands of recorded vocal and instrumental melodies, brought to light the diverse rhythm schemata, altered scalar systems, and unique peculiarities of performance (Example 7: Béla Bartók, *Slovak Folk Music*, critical edition in preparation). In fact, many of these idiosyncrasies of peasant music eventually became an integral part of Bartók's new musical language.

Concomitant with his ethnomusicological studies, Bartók pondered the possibility of a new style of composition which would synthesize East European folk music with such West

European art-music techniques of composition as the polyphonic texture of Bach, the progressive form of Beethoven, and the harmonic possibilities innovated by Debussy. The more or less strict contrapuntal practice of the German Baroque, however, was alien to Bartók's Hungarian temperament, and he looked elsewhere for creative inspiration.

In 1925, during his concert tour in Italy, Bartók discovered that Bach's Italian predecessors and contemporaries—Girolamo Frescobaldi (1583-1643) and Azzolino della Ciaia (1671-1755), among others—composed keyboard works in a more lyrical and less rigid contrapuntal style. The adaptation of this style in Bartók's "Synthesis of East and West" period began with his First Piano Concerto (1926) and continued with other masterpieces till his death in 1945, all of them now performed internationally as standard repertory works of "the composer *par excellence* of the twentieth century".

Turning again to Kodály's career during that time: he followed the *Psalmus Hungaricus* with such superlative works as *Háry János* (1929), *Dances of Marosszék* (1930), *Dances from Galánta* (1933), and a substantial number of important songs and choral works, all reflecting the spirit of Hungarian folk music to such a high degree that Bartók himself designated Kodály's compositions as "veritable apotheoses of the Hungarian rural music of all ages," or, in other words, that they "personify in the highest degree the Hungarian spirit, [and] amount to a well-nigh devotional profession of faith in the Magyar soul."

It should be obvious, of course, that Kodály's stylistic achievements resulted from his intensive study of the large corpus of Hungarian folk songs he had collected since 1905. In addition he minutely annotated Bartók's 1924 treatise,* and in 1937 brought out his book, *The Folk Music of Hungary* (*A magyar népzene*). The organization of his material into seven topical

* These annotations appear in Béla Bartók: *The Hungarian Folk Song*, edited by Benjamin Suchoff (Albany, The State University of New York Press, 1981).

chapters shows how far his ideas digress from Bartók's concept of three style-categories, particularly with regard to the inclusion of German folk music, Gregorian chant, folk hymns, and popular art-song. And the sharp dichotomy in classification procedure is apparent in Kodály's emphasis on the lexicographic principle of grouping all melodies according to melodic design, thus enabling the reader to locate each tune quickly and easily, and, moreover, bringing together all variant melodies as far as possible.

The very close friendship and mutual admiration that Bartók and Kodály had for each other—with regard to ethnomusicological aims and objectives—lessened in intensity to apparent estrangement, beginning in 1934, when Bartók left his position as professor of piano at the Budapest Academy of Music and moved to the Academy of Sciences. Here he had the sole responsibility for preparing the complete corpus of Hungarian folk songs for publication, including his own material and the large number of melodies collected by Kodály.

Bartók decided to classify the entire material—about 14,000 melodies—according to the innovative “grammatical” method used in his *The Hungarian Folk Song* publication (see above), with some minor modifications in terms of stylistic aspects and more detailed emphasis on rhythm schemata. Kodály, who had long indicated a preference for his lexicographic system—“the many secret affinities come to sight only in a melodic system”—was not consulted.

When in October 1940 Bartók emigrated to the United States, leaving his completed work behind, and Kodály discovered what Bartók had done, he was deeply hurt by such “mysterious” behaviour. (Both Kodály and his wife wrote to Bartók in America in English).

If you had the intention to make the whole thing alone, why not tell it to me in 1934? I had plenty of other work. And the questions we couldn't decide, because during 6 years you found not a single afternoon to discuss them thoroughly. I wonder why you became

deterred from “cooperation intellectuel”... Well, we studied different things enough, to change ideas without loss for each other, and added experiences of two are of more value than any individual.

At the end of the undated, unsigned letter (1941?) the content and poetic format of Emma Kodály's poignant postscript speaks for itself:

I am not an angel, like Zoltán.

You don't like to write?

Don't

You liked to forget us?

Forget! (If you enable it!)

But Bartók, who had always followed strict principles of scientific research in his studies of East European folk music, in order to determine and separate foreign elements from indigenous material, had not forgotten “my only friend, Kodály,” only differed diametrically from the latter's ethnomusicological objectives. In his last essay on Hungarian music (*American Hungarian Observer*, 4 June 1944), the year before his death in New York City, Bartók states:

There are two of Hungary's contemporary composers who have gained an international reputation—Zoltán Kodály and myself. Although we have a common outlook upon rural music and its part in the development of higher art music, there is a very marked difference in our works. Each of us has developed his own individual style, despite the common sources which were used...

Kodály studied, and uses as a source, Hungarian rural music almost exclusively, whereas I extended my interest and love also to the folk Arabic and Turkish territories for research work. In my works, therefore, appear impressions derived from the most varied sources, melted—as I hope—into unity... Apart from the great lessons we acquired from the classics, we learned most from those uneducated, illiterate peasants who faithfully kept their great musical inheritance and even created, in a so-to-speak mysterious way, new styles.

Svadobná
Wedding song / Lakodalmas

Examples 1—3.

Moderato

Bsn.1.

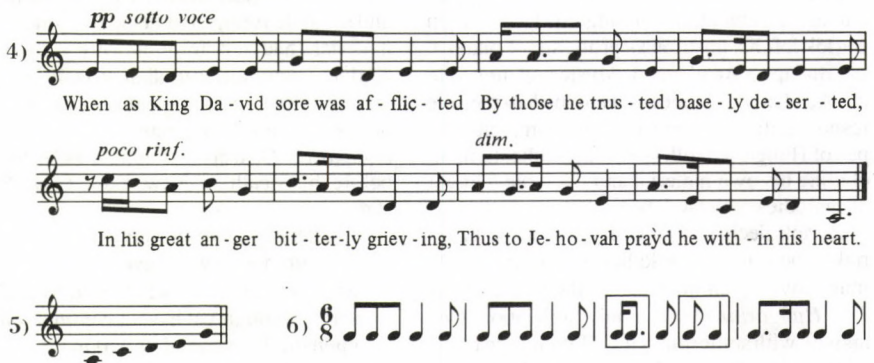
1) 

2) 


3) 


Examples 4—6.

Tranquillo

4) 

When as King Da - vid sore was af - flic - ted By those he trus - ted base - ly de - ser - ted,
poco rinf. *dim.*
In his great an - ger bit - ter - ly griev - ing, Thus to Je - ho - vah prayd he with - in his heart.

5) 

6) 

Example 7.

Tempo giusto, ♩ = 144

5, 1, 4, 1, 5, 4

7) 

1. Jan - ko - z Bá - no - ve - ca, Švar - ný mla - de - nec,
Tu - ta - hla - da - lo, Dvo - je džje - x - če - nec. 2. Jen - na - A - ni -
(sic)
čka, Dru - há - Ka - tuš - ka. Že - jej - ska - pa - la,
Strje - bi - ná stuš - ka. 3. Keď jej - ska - pa - la, Nech si ju - hla -

Paul Griffiths

Dohnányi records

The place of Ernő, or Ernst von, Dohnányi (1877-1960) in Hungarian music was always ambiguous, as ambiguous as the form of his name. He decided to study at the Liszt Academy in Budapest rather than go to Vienna, and thereby influenced his younger schoolfellow Bartók, with formidable consequences. Yet it was around Vienna that his music circled: his opus 1, the C minor Pano Quintet (1895), was admired by Brahms, and Dohnányi returned the admiration in his works for the rest of his life. So though he was based in Budapest from 1915 to 1944, though he conducted several Bartók premières during that period, he remained apart from the movement that was redefining what "Hungarian music" was. For him "Hungarian style" meant what it had meant for Brahms and Liszt: a matter of Gypsy inflections and vigorous rondo finales. And perhaps that is why he composed rather few works during his time in Budapest, during the three decades from his late thirties to his late sixties. Most of his works date from his youth, or else from his old age in Florida, when his distance from the new post-war Hungary increased still further the gulf between him and his homeland. And though there is now a Dohnányi utca near the Liszt Academy, his music—no doubt for reasons now more aesthetic than political—has still not been accepted into the Hungaroton pantheon, though international companies are beginning to take up his cause.

There are, for example, two new recordings of that prodigious opus 1: by András Schiff and the Takács Quartet (Decca 421 423-2), and by Wolfgang Manz and the Gabrieli (Chandos CHAN 8718). The work is in the orthodox four movements, and though there are flavours of other composers—a hint of Richard Strauss in

some traits of the first movement's principal subject, stronger suggestion of Schumann and then Wagner in the slow movement—the taste of Brahms is almost overwhelming, to the extent that the music's appeal lies very much in the youthful enthusiasm with which it goes about the task of imitation. Partly for that reasons, the quicker tempos of the Schiff-Takács recording are an advantage, though this is altogether a livelier and more virtuoso performance.

Those wanting a fuller picture of Dohnányi's chamber music, however, will need both records, since the Chandos disc continues with the Second String Quartet op. 15 of 1906, while Schiff and three members of the Takács are joined by the clarinetist Kálmán Berkes and horn player Radovan Vlatkovic for the Sextet op. 37 of 1935, the last of the chamber works, and the latest work of any kind included among these records. The quartet, in D flat, has an unusual form: a sonata allegro is followed by a scherzo, as in the op. 1 quintet, but the ensuing slow movement also functions as finale, enclosing themes from each the previous movements. One imagines Dohnányi had a liking for this Brucknerian principle, since it also occurs in the Sextet, but in the D flat Quartet it sounds artificial, which is perhaps why some commentators have looked for an explanation in terms of a programme. Comparisons with Schoenberg's *Verklärte Nacht*, however, seem far-fetched: not only are Dohnányi's textures never so complex, but his thematic development is nothing like as supple as Schoenberg's, which is one reason why thematic recollections sound like abrupt quotations from the past rather than re-encounters with old, well-travelled companions. There is also the besetting problem of a lack of personality. Often one feels one knows Dohnányi's ideas already—sometimes because one really does, as in the case of the scherzo from this quartet, which is so close to the opening of *Die Walküre* as to be almost a transcrip-

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tion. Of course, the marriage of Brahms with Wagner is indeed Schoenbergian, but it fails in Dohnányi's music to generate a new synthesis: the language is predominantly Brahmsian (though the bold from of this D flat Quartet could never be imagined as Brahms's), with touches of Wagner and the "Hungarian" Liszt (as in the Gypsy elements of the first movement).

The mixture is still very much the same in the Sextet, whose scoring makes possible a conflation of Brahmsian chamber-music textures. The first movement, obedient to sonata form even to the extent of having a repeated exposition, is dominated by a theme opening with a tritone plunge, and the language is both tenser and clearer in the earlier works. Then comes an adagio, after which the tone brightens for the whole second half, cleverly linked by a recall of the first movement's severe main theme to summon up the finale at the end of the scherzo. The liner notes speak of this finale as an "ebullient jazz parody", but that amounts only to a touch of cake-walk syncopation in the lively rondo theme, separating episodes which bring back tunes from previous movements and insert too a fetching Viennese waltz. It is rather as if Dohnányi's talent for imitation has turned, forty years after the op. 1 Piano Quintet, into a happy knack of satire. But there is perhaps too a sense of renegade on the seriousness of the first movement and the solemnity of the second, even in a performance which, as this one does, covers the ground superbly and brilliantly.

There are no such problems, of course, with the Variations on a Nursery Song op. 25 for piano and orchestra (1914), where Dohnányi's ironic handling of theme and style is complete. And though one might think it unfortunate that this is far and away his best-known work, eclips-

ing the chamber pieces and concertos, the comic form does allow Dohnányi for once to do something entirely original within the Brahmsian style, and the bravura of the music is fully brought forward in a new recording by Schiff and the Chicago Symphony Orchestra under Georg Solti (Decca 417 294-2), proving that this is a virtuoso work for the orchestra as much as for the soloist: the dramatic introduction is highly charged, and the waltz is luscious. Perhaps Dohnányi needs to be credited alongside Richard Strauss and Alban Berg as one of the waltz kings of the early twentieth century.

Another concertante piece recently recorded is the *Konzertstück* in D major op. 12 for cello and orchestra (1903-4), which is effectively a cello concerto in three linked movements: a short sonata falls through Wagnerian forest murmurs into a piece of grand cello-adagio rhetoric, after which the finale, accounting for fully half the work, provides an apotheosis of the first movement around reminiscences of the adagio in the unusual form of a cadenza for the soloist supported by an ensemble of cellos from the orchestra. It is symptomatic of Dohnányi's neglect that this work, even in a world underpopulated with cello concertos, has been ignored for so long. Perhaps this first recording (Chandos CHAN 8662), splendidly made by Raphael Wallfisch and the London Symphony Orchestra under Charles Mackerras, will encourage other cellists to take a look at the piece. There are also two more quartets to be discovered, as well as two piano concertos, two violin concertos and two symphonies, not to mention *Der Tenor*, which Bálint Vázsonyi in *The New Grove* describes as "one of the few true comic operas written in the first half of the 20th century". The Dohnányi renaissance has barely begun.

