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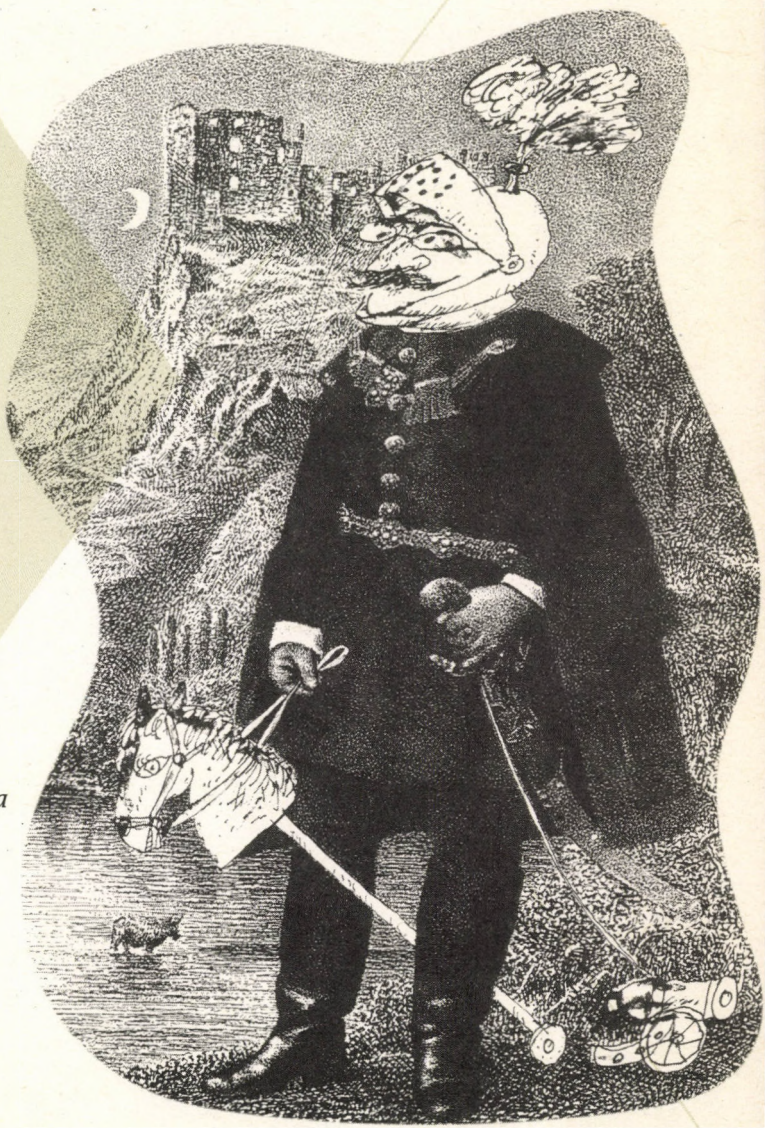

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Árpád Göncz

Intellectual or Politician?

What is the political responsibility of an intellectual, in my own case that of a writer? I have sought an answer to that question ever since I started to write, that is since I became an adult. This is easy to explain. After all, directly or indirectly, it was 1956, and the six following years I spent in a communist prison, and the ensuing years as a translator—an activity forced on me and rooted in the time I spent in prison, though happily undertaken—which matured me as a writer. A writer whose living and instrument is the written word.

What is the social responsibility of a politician (a professional politician)? That question has concerned me just as keenly since the profession became my calling, that is since I stepped across the threshold of early old age. Again, this is easily explained. As a President with limited powers I am daily made aware of the moral weight and social force of the word. Of the articulated word, which is my tool and daily bread.

I live in a country which finds itself right in the middle of radical political and economic and, therefore, also social change, just like its immediate neighbours, the other Central European post-communist countries. In a crisis of values as well, like the whole of the political Europe which, following a brief victory-induced euphoria when the Cold War ended, was as unable to digest intellectually, economically or politically that unexpected fact, sensed rather than comprehended, that the world as a whole lost the Cold War, that the end of four decades of balance of terror allowed ideas that were long believed dead to surface again. Forces of disintegration, of dissolution and rotting—also believed to be dead and also feeding on the past—now confronted forces of integration that had appeared to be victorious. This was true not only on a continental, regional or national level, but also in the minds of individuals, in terms of their values.

Árpád Göncz

playwright, novelist, essayist, and translator of British and American fiction, is President of the Republic of Hungary. This is the text of an address he gave to the September Academy Intellectual Forum in Vienna, on November 29, 1993.

This truly proves that the world is really one now: like it or not, a million unbreakable threads tie together continents, regions, countries, societies, and the lives of individuals, thanks to telecommunications, our collective consciousness, the world economy, and the fact, still not properly apprehended: no culture is autochtonous. Tap-rooted human culture has grown an immense number of branches which today, at the level of human coexistence, of the human environment, of the noxious aspects of civilization and of a rushed urbanization appear to be uniting again. To its disadvantage? To its advantage? Who can tell.

Do we know what and how much in this process depends on us? And if we knew, would we behave accordingly? All of us?

Hardly, but there are some who we have a right to expect this of. For, if they are truly such as they imagine themselves to be, then logically they minister to the human community, to smaller and larger human communities. If that is true, then they ought to be familiar with the unwritten rules of their service as intellectuals, and their related duties. To perform those duties, they must know their environment, at least up to the limits of the direct effects of their service, right up to the point where the language of their actions is understood. Beyond that point we are held together by the unconscious but unbreakable net of causality.

In a democracy these people are obviously recruited, if not exclusively then certainly primarily, amongst the élite of the politically active in the widest sense of the term, that is those who can occasionally determine, but at the very least influence, the process of social events, using limited and controlled instruments with which, in a democracy, the will of the people has entrusted them, or they are those who can do so using the means of persuasion.

It is also obvious that no political élite in the full sense of the term can take shape under a dictatorship, particularly not in a dictatorship whose strings are pulled by outside forces. A dictatorship eliminates small communities, the colleges where élites are trained, since spontaneously formed communities cannot be controlled from above or by force. A bourgeois society based on autonomy cannot, precisely because of the absence of autonomy, grow on the soil of dictatorship. But every kind of dictatorship, however cruel it may be, will sooner or later, as a matter of course, give birth to its own internal "semi-opposition", which does not as yet oppose the ideas which the dictatorship is based on but does oppose the instruments the dictatorship uses. The result is a bare enlargement of the imposed or tolerated framework of ideas, and a slight relaxation of the organizational and intellectual discipline of the dictatorship. This is, however, an extremely important link in the chain of the changes. One or another of the technicians of power, faithful links in the chain of—outside—commands, is sooner or later turned into a thinking politician. At the same time, and as a result of this, a constantly growing penumbra comes into being, but against the will of those in power, and not connected with them: political thinkers who openly oppose the ideas of the dictatorship and their moral justification.

This "semi-opposition", and the oppositional penumbra of power—largely made up of opinion-shaping intellectuals—already includes the new political élite, which is about to replace the "political technicians" (who are the political élite of dictatorship) and the intellectual élite around them. The dividing lines between them are not watertight, there is movement in both directions. This mutual infiltration is perhaps the most significant feature of the transition from dictatorship to democracy. The change of system is not a frontier but a frontier zone. Those who merely experience but do not shape the political changes only gradually sense changes in their lives, be they favourable or unfavourable. Their experiences and attitudes, their behaviour and their response to the economic and political changes around them also change as an ongoing process. This, however, is largely manifest in their private lives and not in the public sphere; not that they are indifferent to public life, their attitude should rather be described as a sober keeping of a distance in the interest of survival—a healthy wariness that reflects the conditioning of many decades.

After the end of dictatorship, the members of the new political élite, a minority of them recruited from the earlier semi-opposition, and a majority from the oppositional penumbra of the earlier system, were characterised, at least at the beginning, by a deep inner conviction and sense of calling steeled by persecution, and also by a political dilettantism explained by the absence of preparation and practice. This was suffused by their relationship to power—held or derived—and by their relationship to democracy. For some of them—and this is true not only for the political élite of societies in transition—politics is merely a means of self-realization, an inner prompting to stay on the inside, come what may, to adjust to the political structure of the moment and, by way of reward, to secure a share of political power and of the spoils of power.

Nevertheless, an important proportion of the politicians of the transition—the better half, let me add—look on politics not as a way of making good, but as an instrument that will achieve objectives; this is so precisely because of the reasons that gave rise to the new élite. In their case, the issue is rather whether for them democracy as such is an end in itself or a means, a means towards ends perhaps which can certainly not be called democratic, even if these ends, in keeping with their faith and the presumed evidence of history, may serve their country or an idea.

Their good faith is beyond doubt, and there is little reason to doubt their sense of responsibility. Their only test is the—possible—proof provided by the future, that is social reality.

But let us consider the "penumbra" as well. Those involved are at one remove from power, and their position—not holding elected office, they do not depend on delivering the goods on time—is defined by their intellectual status. They have more intellectual scope than the political élite, they are able to move more

freely. Their attitude, by its nature, is more flexible. Loyalty to party is of small concern to them, only the obligation to be intellectually honest, and the plain human honesty which follows from it, something that is difficult to define but easy to recognize.

Words are the stuff they live on, as they are for politicians. The words of politicians are qualified by their deeds, and by the deeds of those who agree with them, but the purity of their (the intellectuals') words depends on the courage of articulation, the readiness to speak true, always maintaining the right to be wrong. Which means that for them, too, the test is a reality that is difficult to palpate but that knows no mercy. Every word has to pass through its sieve sooner or later. That of politicians and that of thinkers. Reality is protean, it is indefinable but it exists, its components are without number: the distant past, the immediate past, a present that reaches out into the future, individual interests and group interests, a sense of values, different kinds of value systems, political and economic power, the close net of private and public complaints, collective and individual experience reaching back into the past, psychological and social ties, prejudices, good and bad reflexes, entangled patterns of behaviour, things that cannot be puzzled out but can be palpated and intimated. A reality which politicians and thinkers, who themselves work as part of reality and with reality as their material, have the right to judge, criticize and explain, to shape in a manner that pleases them or that they can handle, but one thing they may not do, they may not deny that reality is reality.

The reality of Central European countries, carrying the psychological and economic burden of forty years of communist dictatorship—in its time, sometimes crudely violent and sometimes hesitant in its aggression—and struggling with the social anxieties of a painful transition, is even more complicated than average. Whether they accept it or deny it, their immediate past is their companion. It defines their reactions and the nature of the metamorphosis, it fades or dyes the heritage of a distant past, enriching it with the new, and it cuts the cloth of the largely defensive modes of behaviour of their citizens.

A West European does not really know what to make of this, he has no first-hand experience of the immediate past of this region, he did not feel it with his own senses. So he does not, and cannot, understand the social side-effects of the transformation, of the delays in creating a bourgeois society, side-effects that on occasion border on the hysterical and the paranoid, and yet are predictable and understandable.

Central Europeans—and, I suspect, all Europeans—subscribe to a variety of values. The most organic and most conservative—and probably the least conscious—are Christian and national. Most European nations came into being as they were Christianized; for centuries Christianity was the natural and accepted organizing and defining principle of their socio-political order. Even bearing in mind the role of dynastic, economic and power interests, it must be said that a

good part of their wars to the death were fought in defence of their "country" and Christian faith. Even though the notion of national identity has suffered a great many changes in the course of time, it has still, to our days, continued as the most important element in the self-definition of an individual. For some this is a conscious feeling, for others less so. It is less so for members of ancient and great nations, since such things come naturally to them. In the case of smaller nations, not mature yet as collective identities, who feel themselves threatened, such feelings tend to flare up.

The other is the idea of freedom, which made itself felt even in the most severe feudal times. This was the prompting which, in the West, early on made a place for burghers and peasants within the order of estates. It gave birth to the protestant notion of autonomous man and created science in the modern sense of the term, with the right to doubt, as well as the autonomy inherent in pluralism, bringing with it the right to self-definition. Starting from Christian basic principles, liberty gradually knotted the ever denser net of human rights and in this fashion brought about the ever more sensitive social immunity system of our secular age. As regards its origin, it is perhaps even more European than Christianity itself or than the essentially universal idea of the nation, which naturally follows from the idea of solidarity.

The third is the idea of social equality which can be derived from the Christian principle of the equality of all souls before God. It is, however, strongly imbued by the consciousness of freedom, the instinctual human sense of justice, and the natural demand for equal opportunity, which is part of human rights.

I am convinced that these three values are held dear by everyone—that is every European—and that there is no society—no European society—in which every element of these three value systems are not present. But there is none in which the proportions do not differ, and I do not believe that all three are ever consciously held simultaneously or to the same degree. Furthermore, the relative ratio is in constant flux as a result of everyday experience and of changing reality.

I also venture to say that what is uppermost in the mind of every person and every society is what was offended against most recently. The offence then triggers off a psychological (political and economic) defence mechanism.

A politician would therefore do well to note which of the three values are least effective in his own environment right at a particular time, since he can take it as certain that society (primarily the intellectual penumbra of political power) will soon demand that the shortage be made up for.

I am convinced that I can take more evidence for my argument from Hungary than any western society that is more secularised and bourgeois. In a society where the division of church and state is effective in practice, it is as unlikely that the churches' right to evangelization be curtailed, as is the curtailment of the nation's sense of identity, not to mention that either should feel threatened as to

their very existence. It is also less likely that the idea of freedom—be it personal freedom or the freedom of expression—suffers damage in a "run in" democratic society, where the unwritten laws of democracy are instinctively obeyed, then in a society that was feudal not so long ago, then semi-feudal, afterwards authoritarian, where there are still many lacunae in the behaviour appropriate to a bourgeois society. In a country where an authoritarian administration was briefly replaced by a murderous form of fascism; where a short semi-democratic post-war intermezzo was followed by a foreign-controlled communist dictatorship, crude and rough at first, thawing somewhat as it drew to a close.

The Peace Treaty of Trianon shook Hungarian society to the core, and it understandably found itself traumatized. The political élite was recruited from a relatively narrow section of society, its reflexes were of the most conservative; it could not, and did not want to recognize what the age demanded, that is the political lay of the land. It escaped, not forward, into the future, but back, into the past. The catastrophic results are common knowledge: at home the rejection of land reform and the resulting fatal rigidity of the Hungarian social structure, in foreign policy the cul-de-sac leading to a second Trianon. Not that there were no warnings from the intellectual élite. The populist writers, on whose works a whole generation cut its teeth, painted a clear picture of the hopeless condition of the bulk of the population and of the blind alleys of bourgeois development. National values, however, had suffered such offence that, to its own peril, the very real offences against liberty and equality did not penetrate to the minds of the political ruling class.

At first, the communist political élite, held on a Soviet rein, was just as blind. They did not recognize the offence against Christian values (at the time of the dissolution of the monasteries, the nationalization of church schools, the imprisonment of the clergy, all churches were crowded, right up to the time when, at a later stage, a *modus vivendi* was found, and the martyrs' halo was entrapped in dialogue) or the offence against national feeling, nor even the offence against equality in the quasi-feudal ossified privileges created under the guise of alleged working class rule. At the first opportune moment, in 1956, grievances connected with national feeling and lack of equality exploded in open revolt. Industrial workers, branded as unpatriotic between the wars, granted an instinctive familiarity with reality, fought a victorious revolution for national honour and the emancipation of the oppressed, for working class property, and they did so with the support of the people as a whole. After the Revolution was suppressed, mass reprisals and later the swamp of "consolidation" extinguished the flame of renewed resistance, but the inner opposition that took shape in the Communist Party and the "populist opposition" (with stressed national feelings) that relied on it, as well as the "democratic opposition" which placed freedom at the very centre of its thinking, briefly united forces when the communist dictatorship was on its deathbed and once again created that "intellectual penum-

bra", whose sense of reality helped the country to move bloodlessly from a dictatorship, by then largely impotent, to a democracy which at that time existed only in dreams and on paper. Carefully holding itself to the written rules of the game, it breathed life into institutions planned on the drawing board with surprising success. A new, rather inexperienced political élite was produced, combining adherents of the old order who had seen the light, and the national and liberal elements of the old "penumbra". Those of them who came to power primarily sought relief for national grievances that demanded urgent attention. Not finding it elsewhere, they delved back for relief to the recent past, to the times before the Second World War. The move, problematical enough though it was politically, suggested a sense of reality. The balm, however, had grown rancid, and the drug hallucinogenous, suggesting enemies even where there were none (see the basically egalitarian but fatally derailed and murderously right wing forces at the end of the Second World War)—certainly unsuitable for alleviating the fast growing and painful absence of equality.

I think I can rightly say that the nation qua nation feels no grievance today (not counting shared anxiety for the fate of Hungarian minorities who remained outside the frontiers of the country). Christians as Christians are threatened only by their own forgetting of the essence of their faith, the living Christ, replacing Him by some sort of church militant, if they ignore that for man the only measure of another man's love of God is his visible love for other men. The Christian gesture is a hand passing gifts, and not a clenched fist.

The way I see things, and I cannot believe myself to be very much mistaken here, the three kinds of values, let us call them conservative, liberal and socialist for simplicity's sake, are not isolated but are simultaneously present in everybody, much like chips of glass of different colours in a kaleidoscope. As it turns, so the pattern charges. It is not us but history that turns the kaleidoscope—blind chance perhaps. We can count on the fact that, depending on how the kaleidoscope turns, the colours are rearranged even for individuals, creating a conservative, liberal or socialist pattern. The same is true for societies.

Let us hope that the revolutions of the kaleidoscope remain slow and that neither national anxieties, nor the changing role of the churches, nor social tension will produce radically new patterns. If the unwritten rules of democracy had taken root in the minds of men in this part of the world, our minds would be less like kaleidoscopes. An obligatory minimum of national feeling and Christian love would have a place equally for those who hold conservative, liberal or socialist values. No one would imagine that the idea of freedom threatened his sense of national identity, since that is as natural as the air he breathes. Everyone would practice his faith as a matter of course, it would not even occur to him that this threatened someone else's demand for equality. Democratic institutions built from the grassroots up, social autonomy, would properly ensure that the individual's, that is everybody's, natural need for equality and justice

was satisfied, since that is its very purpose: ensuring everybody freedom of thought and an institutional framework for the equality of all citizens.

Is all that a dream?

If the growth of our infant democracy continues uninterrupted, this will perhaps become established truth after two or three parliaments. Including a two, actually three-pole, conservative, liberal, socialist, alternation, a sort of political barter whose collective knowledge of reality, or collective sense of reality, lays the foundations of a political market of alternative options which do not snuff each other out pragmatically or morally. This can of course only happen if conservatives and socialists accept freedom as a legitimate need, if liberals and socialists do not doubt the legitimacy of faith and tradition, and liberals and conservatives accept equality and solidarity as legitimate needs as well. And if the three kinds of values are present in every man, and in every party, albeit in different proportions.

The only open question is whether these values are always supportive of progress, all of them, and always.

This is where the responsibility of politicians comes in, and that of the intellectual, artist or writer who moves on the fringe of politics. Does he, familiar with reality, and within the options granted by the economic order, with word and deed, and the position he takes up, help maintain the changing and dynamic equilibrium of these three kinds of values? If anyone of the three should get the upper hand, poised to destroy the other two, will he then cry halt in the interests of progress and the future?

Today, if we cast our eyes on any of the countries of East Central Europe, we get the impression that, everywhere, the past battles for the present. But the true objective, that of the ever changing present, is to build the future, if needs be out of the past. The three kinds of values surveyed are all the fruit of the past but, properly rationed, they are all three suitable as bricks for building the future. For this to happen we must know the past and the present, and we must plan the future. Otherwise we cannot choose that part of the past out of which we can build the future, all that can be fitted into a feasible future building that will stand the test of time, with the consent of free citizens who love their country. ❧

Anna Fábri

Where Time Stood Still

Images of Upper Hungary in the Work of Mór Jókai, Kálmán Mikszáth and Gyula Krúdy

Close to one hundred and seventy years ago, Hartleben in Pest published the copiously illustrated *Malerische Reise auf dem Waagflusse in Ungarn* (A Picturesque Journey on the River Vág in Hungary). The author was Baron Alajos Mednyánszky, a Hungarian magnate with properties in what is now Slovakia, a region that was generally known in Hungarian as the *Felvidék*, the Up-Country or Upper Hungary, as opposed to the *Alföld*, the Lowlands or Great Hungarian Plain.

A Picturesque Journey leads down the River Vág, all the way from its mountainous source down to the plains, where it joins the Danube. The 375 km reach is covered by raft, passing by towns and villages, and medieval castle ruins on rocks and hilltops. On occasion there is a pause, a closer visit, sometimes we have to rest content with a passing glimpse. The aristocratic guide is reliable, he is an official of the state administration who has done his homework. He provides demographic and economic information and draws our attention to the beauties of nature. Castles and ruins, a key component of the picturesque that forms part of the title, however, are dealt with exhaustively and in detail. Mednyánszky, who mostly published in German, was one of the early Hungarian Romantics. Another book of his, *Erzählungen, Sagen und Legenden aus Ungarns Vorzeit* (Tales, Lays and Legends from Hungary's Distant Past, 1829) is evidence of his keen interest in the romantic Middle Ages and in folk tales.

Mednyánszky's book and collection of lays pointed attention northwards in Hungary despite his concentration on one characteristic region only. Majestically savage mountains, infinite forests, castles and ruins appeared as metaphors of the passing parade. Seclusion and solitude, secret hiding places, a recurring location in the works of Hungarian romanciers,

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searching for their own voice in the footsteps of the French Romantics and Sir Walter Scott.

Poets were perhaps even more attracted to this region, for in the retelling of lays and legends in verse the Up-Country, the land of medieval magnates, had a distinguished place. The young Sándor Petőfi, barely sixteen years old, compiled a list of sixty castle ruins in Hungary; two thirds of them were up north. As he repeatedly pointed out, his heart was in the lowlands and he admired only from the distance the savage, romantic Up-Country. Later he spent many weeks travelling in its eastern regions, publishing his travel notes in five instalments. Hungarians, at the time, were absorbed in a Great Plains idolatry; these travel notes created a sensation, further strengthened by a poetic competition in which Petőfi engaged with two young fellow poets, the subject being an idyllic Carpathian landscape.

There was more to it than poetry: a number of prominent Hungarian politicians stemmed from Upper Hungary, especially its eastern and north-eastern regions. Those who gathered for meetings of the Hungarian Diet in Pozsony (Pressburg, later to be rechristened Bratislava) included Lajos Kossuth, the leader of the opposition, as well as the short-lived leading conservative, Count Aurél Dessewffy, who also came from eastern Upper Hungary. A surprisingly large number of the young opposition intellectuals gathering in Pest in the 1840s were of burgher origin from the towns up in the north, or had been educated in the famous schools there. Theirs were the key positions in the nascent press. One of the most prominent of them was Mór Jókai, whose cradle had stood in the south-western marches of the region; he was a journalist and editor, who published his first novel in 1846, at the age of twenty-one, and became one of the heroes of the 1848 Revolution.

Jókai, in a huge œuvre which defined the nature of Hungarian fiction, was the first to make systematic use of Mednyánszky's *Picturesque Journey*—not only of its data and set pieces but of journey by water as a narrative *topos*. Such are frequent in Jókai's works, achieving a key role in one of his major fictions, *Az arany ember* (Timár's Two Worlds).

Jókai was born in Komárom (Komarno), the destination of *Picturesque Journey*, where the Vág joins the Danube, and he spent the years of his childhood there. The romantic isles, used as recreation areas by a town built on both banks of the Danube, and the fortress of Komárom, one of the most powerful in the whole Habsburg Empire and which played so important a role in the dying days of the Hungarian Revolution (1848–49), all figured in a dozen Jókai works. Childhood impressions, and figures that the writer's memory faithfully preserved, the merchants of Komárom, river boatmen, artisans, soldiers, noblemen, and burghers, Hungarians and non-Hungarians were Jókai's companions in a working life that spanned almost six decades.

Mór Jókai 1825–1904

Novelist, editor and journalist, an important figure in the days of the 1848 Revolution, elected to succeeding Parliaments from 1861 on, appointed to the Upper House in 1896.

His first novel was published in 1846, his last in the year of his death. For nearly sixty years he enjoyed recognition, success and popularity. His narrative skills created a modern reading public in Hungary and his was the greatest influence on the writing of fiction in Hungarian. His works were translated into numerous languages; he was as popular in England as in Poland and most popular in Germany. His works were enjoyed by royalty and students alike.

His critics primarily objected to the involved plots, akin to those of the French Romantics. It was held against him that he served the tastes of his readers but they were compelled to admire a lively style which made him stand out amongst his contemporaries. It was not really critics but fellow writers like Kálmán Mikszáth, Endre Ady and Gyula Krúdy, who drew attention to the fact that Jókai placed the key problems of a Hungary in transition and undergoing modernization at the centre of his Romantic, historical fiction. As a rule he presented the struggle of the old and the new as a conflict between individuals and the community.

Jókai was wholly a child of his times, of the 19th century, a noble turned burgher, a town-dwelling intellectual who cultivated his own garden, a patriot and supporter of the community, a spokesman for the inviolability of privacy. True to Calvinism, the faith of his fathers, he proclaimed tolerance. He was a competent painter and sculptor, a recognized pomologist and oenologist, an amateur astronomer and enthusiast of technical progress. Like so many of his fellow writers, he too was a provincial boy who made good in the capital, but he is perhaps the only one of his fellows who, secure in his international success, was able to survey his own provincial and Hungarian origins without prejudice. The edition of his complete works runs to a hundred volumes.

Main works: *An Hungarian Nabob*, 1853; *The New Landlord*, 1862; *The Baron's Sons*, 1869; *Black Diamonds*, 1870; *Timár's Two Worlds*, 1872.

The city of Pozsony also frequently appears in Jókai's work. It is an inevitable location for a writer who, in the years of Habsburg despotism (1849–1867) that followed the Revolution, wants to evoke in his readers the encouraging memories of the recent past. It was Pozsony, the city of the reform diets, where the representatives of the Hungarian nobility had legislated to modernize the country and to wipe out (in 1848) the privileges of the nobility, and with them the nobility itself. It was in that spirit that Jókai abandoned the noble suffix of-y from his name and replaced it with the -i of non-nobles.

The other face of Pozsony, Pressburg, the town of German burghers, also figures in his works. He spent two years there, in his boyhood, learning German in a German speaking family. He was thoroughly familiar with burgher homes, and the smell of bakers' and pastrycooks'. In a surprisingly personal novel, *Mire megvénülünk*, (When We Grow Old, 1865) he devoted several chapters to the years of the 1830s he spent in the city. These images, full of life, contrast with the description elsewhere of a *fin-de-siècle* palace in Pozsony in which an aristocratic lady, sick of life and herself, shuts herself by way of penance. Nothing natural finds a place in this palace, the flowers in the conservatory are artificial, and the butterflies and dragonflies that flutter above them are mechanical. Apparently, Jókai looked only on the Pozsony of the ancient diets as alive; he seems to have intended the dead palace as a symbol of a city that had survived its own glory.

In addition to the two cities of autobiographical importance, a kaleidoscope of Upper Hungary locations is present in Jókai's oeuvre, a picturesque multiplicity of towns, villages, and romantic landscapes. A number of his historical novels on the Rákóczi rebellion in the early 18th century are set here, as is *Szomorú napok* (Days of Sadness, 1848–1856) which deals with the devastating events of the 1831 cholera outbreak. This novel also wrestles with the spectre of pan-Slavism, and is perhaps the first work of Hungarian literature which attacks the social aspects of the national question. Searching for the causes of minority resentment, it points to Hungarian national pride as one.

Any sort of prejudice or intolerance shown to the other ethnic groups which inhabited Hungary was alien to Jókai, a writer who had no rival in the country as regards readership or popularity. He never incited national hatred but attuned his readers to tolerance. His protagonists were usually neither Slovaks nor of other ethnic minorities. Hungarian problems were at the centre of his attention. Yet, although he wrote relatively little about national minority movements, he wrote still much more than other Hungarian novelists of his time.

In a number of his works Jókai stressed that the majority of Slovaks in Hungary felt as Hungarians in 1848–1849 and continued to do so. He described them as patriotric, talented and ambitious, as a people "too poor and fertile to make a living on the land God granted them, they were therefore forced to emigrate into the wide world. But they do not go begging like dervishes; nor are they mercenaries like the Swiss, but they work and trade... They cannot speak

Hungarian, but they have a love of country that is very keen, and they know how to shed their blood for it. They can do more, too: they know how to bear things for it, and to work for it."

Jókai effectively portrayed the major secular problem of the region, "the pauperism of the Carpathians." "The misery of Upper Hungary" was frequently mentioned in the press, even in the years preceding the Revolution, and news items to this effect noticeably multiplied in the 1850s, a period of growing economic and social anxieties in the region. In *A régi jó táblabírák* (The Good Old County Officials), written in 1856, Jókai brought to life the great famine there of ten years earlier, and described impossible property relations and the urgent duties that had to be tackled by the local administration. He was the first to show Upper Hungary as one of the characteristic locations of a feudal society about to perish. For the first time in Hungarian literature a medieval castle, this much favoured symbol in romantic writing of ancient glory, undergoes an ignominious degradation. It is stripped of all magnificence and left with the role of a stage setting. In this novel, the fearful edifice of medieval robber barons is first transformed into a warehouse by an immoral developer, who later, acquiring *nouveau riche* tastes, places the monuments of other men's past in the service of his own future.

A petty, tasteless life without dignity, led between walls that speak of ancient grandeur and power: the many variations of this subject are key elements in a number of Jókai novels, with the castles and their ruins becoming symbols of changed social roles and status, only to reappear highlighted in the novels of Kálmán Mikszáth, his younger contemporary.

The depiction of situations of isolation in time and place, like a fly caught in amber, is a frequently applied device in Jókai's oeuvre. The Up-Country is truly a treasury of castles on hilltops, villages locked in by ravines in the depths of woods, clans, estates, and cultures locked in. The northern Hungarian village in Jókai's most read novel *A kőszívű ember fiai* (The Baron's Sons, 1869), that has been called the epic of the 1848–1849 Revolution, symbolises the enclave character of Hungarian provincial life as such. The village is outside time and society, it does not even figure on any map. Its position is succinctly summed up by the most respected local landlord: "We are nowhere." The writer himself uses an anecdote to illuminate the peculiar mind-set that governs this fly in amber aspect: at the end of 1849, once fighting had died down, when asked whether the enemy had passed through the village, the locals answered: "not here, but *all three* passed through the neighbourhood, the Germans, and the Muscovites, and the Hungarians." Jókai splendidly described this village without an identity and in the complicated story of many strands he uses a comic figure from time to time, a half (or entirely) Slovak Hungarian nobleman, as a pledge so to speak of the problem that would determine the whole oeuvre of Kálmán Mikszáth, the most popular writer of the Hungarian *fin de siècle*. That is the problem of identity confusion or, more precisely, of identity pragmatism.

Jókai, the novelist of the romantic landscape, frequently welds nature and the state of the soul. A number of unforgettable examples are taken from the Carpathians. Thus, two Carpathian heights occure in *The Baron's Sons*. From one, patriots returning from abroad to fight for their country glimpse Hungary, from the other the traitors survey its occupation.

The Up-Country is the setting of one of the most extraordinary descriptions of nature in Jókai's oeuvre. In *Fekete gyémántok* (Black Diamonds, 1870) Jókai, in addition to a castle that has lost its ancient dignity, and a miners' village that has risen from poverty thanks to hard work, describes an underground landscape of fascinating beauty: the secretive world of a coalmine, replete with danger, which finally comes under the domination of man while preserving the memory of life on earth before humans.

The Up-Country is only one region, and not even the most important, in the huge world of Jókai's fictions. Gyula Krúdy, on the threshold of his own successes, writes of Jókai in his obituary of Kálmán Mikszáth: "When we buried Jókai, it was Mikszáth who wrote somewhere that Jókai was moving to another world like a king, an entourage large enough to fill a camp following him. The characters about which he wrote, whom he created, whom he saw from his desk. It was a colourful camp indeed: kings and bashi-bazouks, princesses and slave-girls. Not only Hungarian history but the history of just about every nation served as an attendant in the otherwordly procession envisaged by Mikszáth.

"...Jókai may have selected his otherwordly surroundings from a great many nations, whereas what Mikszáth did was to take a piece of Hungary with him into immortality. A county from somewhere in the Ipoly valley that stretches up to the Carpathians, laterally reaching Sáros and Beszterce. Wherever the writer may have walked. The mark of just about every one of his steps is found in his books. He takes the whole Up-Country with him, for his sojourn in another world."

Kálmán Mikszáth, the writer who can be considered *the* writer of the Up-Country, was born in a small village in northern Hungary and educated in nearby towns. He started his working life as a clerk in one of the northern county seats, where he met his wife, his employer's daughter. Ties of kinship and the experiences of his childhood and youth created bonds that survived his move to the capital at the age of twenty-six. With some brief interruptions, he lived in Budapest up to his death. That is where he became a successful writer—the greatest and most popular next to Jókai—a member of the Academy and of Parliament—but, unlike Jókai, he remained a provincial in the depths of his heart. A few years before his death, using his ever increasing royalties, he bought a property in his home area, and stayed there as often as he could.

Stories remembered from his childhood created his breakthrough as a writer, nineteen stories collected in two volumes, *A tót atyafiak* (The Slovak Relations) and *A jó palócok* (The Good People of Palocz). The village and peasants, country-

Kálmán Mikszáth 1847–1910

Novelist, editor and journalist. A liberal member of the Lower House of Parliament from 1887 to his death. At first he met with a failure as a writer but was nationally celebrated at the end of his life. A parliamentary resolution declared that an estate be purchased for him and the name of the village of his birth was officially changed from Szklabonya to Mikszáthfalva, though, being situated in Slovakia, it has since officially reverted to Sklabiná.

His early successes, in 1881–1882, were due to his descriptions of folkways, but he became a public favourite as a political sketch-writer and, principally, as a novelist. At the *fin de siècle* he was second only to Jókai in popularity. The image of independent men and women, of many differing origins, coalescing into a great Hungarian middle class, Jókai's dream, was also present in Mikszáth's work, but his narrative work was really centred on the twisted attitudes of a Hungarian nobility that had lost its legal privileges. Mikszáth knows his characters and shows great skill in describing them. His gentry heroes are both great eccentrics, obsessed with ancient norms of behaviour, and unprincipled time-servers, adepts of survival. As a narrator he was judgemental, but he made it quite clear to his public that he in no way thought of himself as above society or the criticized lifestyles or mind-sets, but that writer, characters and public all shared human frailty. Identification with the people he wrote about determined his narrative methods, he tuned his idiom to the speech habits of his readers—who were mostly of noble parentage—and employed their favoured form, the anecdote. This commitment was the main source of his narrative powers, and also of his peerless humour. He was the writer of an age and of a society that favoured pathos and brilliance as a means to cover the anxieties of transitoriness. Mikszáth, however, avoided both. Generally, his stories are tragic, comic parables of the recognition of relativity told with the immediacy of living speech.

Main works: *The Slovak Relations*, 1881; *The Good People of Palocz*, 1882; *The Siege of Beszterce*, 1895; *St. Peter's Umbrella*, 1895; *New Zrinyiad*, 1898; *A Strange Marriage*, 1900; *The Young Noszty's Affair with Mary Tóth*, 1906; *The Black Town*, 1910–11.

men, Hungarians and Slovaks, appeared in a new light in them, becoming more and more legendary characters from a world that was rapidly sinking and disintegrating. A world in dissolution became legendary. The fantastic success of *The Good People of Palocz* meant that Mikszáth himself became known as the Great Palocz. The Palocz of north-eastern Hungary, with their characteristic traits and dialect, became known outside Hungary thanks to bibliophile editions in English and German which already appeared in Mikszáth's lifetime. Later the book was translated into many more languages, including naturally Slovak.

Mikszáth was probably the Hungarian writer best known amongst Slovaks and very likely continues to be so to this day. All his major books have been translated. And that makes good sense. After all Mikszáth has, in his writings, immortalized just about every part of present-day Slovakia, and there is perhaps no other writer who has described Slovak life in all its variety as frequently. Often in his writings characters who would describe themselves as Hungarians will, giving way to a certain linguistic laziness, switch to Slovak in the middle of a conversation.

This is a true novelty. Certain foreign expressions and turns of phrase have always been used, particularly Latin, or French or English, also German, to help characterization. Indeed, Hungarian writers have also used national minority words, but nobody before Mikszáth used them intentionally as a method of characterization. What was particularly noteworthy was that Mikszáth himself as the narrator also used a Slovak expression now and then.

Mikszáth was a virtuoso narrator. His was no transcript of the vivacity of living speech, he created it anew, building on a myriad of observations, memories and experiences. Bringing to life the rich and varied world of Upper Hungary, he presented mixed idiolects as a clear manifestation of conflicts and their reconciliation.

The Up-Country is conveyed almost as an independent country, linked to national politics and to Budapest, the capital, only by Parliamentarism and the administration. In Mikszáth's simultaneously poetic and comic presentation, Up-Country life is self-contained. The archipelago of castles and ruins, however, rises from the calm sea of satisfaction of villages and small towns, because their past entitles them to a place in the historical Hungarian world, and because their present inhabitants dwell in the past and not in the present.

Beszterce ostroma (The Siege of Beszterce, 1894) is set in the valley of the River Vág, described in the *Picturesque Journey*. The feudal castle and the burghers', or rather small burghers', town not only symbolize the difference between the estates but also the gulf between the mind-set of Hungarians and Slovaks. *Szent Péter esernyője* (St Peter's Umbrella, 1895), Theodore Roosevelt's favourite book, sets the town not against the castle but the village. Mikszáth here also alludes to the problems of Slovak social stratification, presenting the assimilationist (sometimes dissimilationist) stimuli of town life, and the conservatism of villages.

Mikszáth's Up-Country villagers are seldom Hungarians, but the life-style, at least of the manors, set apart from village houses and streets by stone walls and parks with shady trees, generally is. These are the lairs of old noble families. Though little be left of ancient status or economic power, the spirit of the ancien régime is jealously guarded by the lords of the manors.

Mikszáth devoted the novella *Gavallérok* (The Gentry, 1897) to the pretensions of what had once been the nobility. It is set in the north-eastern county of Sáros (the Hungarian Gascogne, as he once wrote). The eponymous impoverished cavaliers now inhabit these manors, the ancestral homes of their kin who—underpaid petty officials—come to visit them. They all pretend that estates, property and status, all lost in the course of time, are still real. On festive occasions they feel the need to see and touch the accessories of bygone wealth, and to put on a show of generosity and cavalier manners. At such times, they assemble all that goes with carefree wealth, the silver and the porcelain, the jewels and the court dress, including a livery which will briefly promote the man-of-all-work to the rank of valet.

Mikszáth's Up-Country nobles frequently bear Slovak or Polish names, with the noble suffix -y at the end of their name as the only token of their Hungarian character. What is Hungarian about them is the history of their family, the memory of noble privileges and noble solidarity, and the good will of the administration, that helps them upwards in the bureaucracy as a counter to their decline. One of Jókai's nobles, half Slovak, speaking broken Hungarian, shows himself to be a dogged defender of noble privileges. Similarly, the majority of Mikszáth's Up-Country nobles are keen defenders of the Hungarian interest in public life and determined supporters of Hungarian as the language of education, even though they may well find it more convenient to speak Slovak in their homes.

The towns—and even more so the small towns—are the scenes of a self-satisfied, commonplace smugness. Mikszáth is a sympathetic, though ironic observer of small town life, primarily of burghers who wish to be masters of their own fate. He is well aware though, and shows it too, that urban freedom is pseudo-freedom. Generally his characters know it too, all except the young who are still closer to ideas than to reality.

Small-town burghers, who still keenly feel the surviving power of the feudal world, endeavour to secure their civic rights, therefore, are ready to conform, just as nobles who have lost their historic role are ready for the most impossible compromises in the defence of their illusionary status. These compromises and agreements manifest themselves in language, in mutually borrowed turns of phrase, in gestures and in the conventions of public and social life. Mikszáth depicts this world of mixed identities, indeed of troubled identities, which not even feudal or national ideologies are able to integrate. As the years passed, the Up-Country, in Mikszáth's mind, embodied the accumulation of conflicts which were generally swept under the carpet. Fatal clashes were avoided as a rule but irreparable damage was nevertheless done.

In *A fekete város* (The Black Town, 1910–11), Mikszáth's last novel, the opposition between the urban (burgher) vs. country (noble) mind is manifest and ends in tragedy. *The Black Town* is set in the time of the Rákóczi rebellion in the early 18th century; it is not this, however, that is at the centre of attention but the implacable conflict between antagonists very much aware of their historical rights and privileges: the burghers of Lőcse (Leutscheu–Levoče) in the Saxon Zips and the nobles of County Szepes. At the end of his life, Mikszáth, one of the most clear-sighted of political observers in Hungary, the author of numerous political satires, novels and sketches, considered the prospects for a Hungarian life that resolved conflicts merely on the surface, either violently or practicing self-deception, as a despairing sceptic.

Mikszáth's love of the Up-Country, the landscape and world of his youth, survived the loss of illusions. Right to the end mountains rose magnificiently in the distant blue, rivers calmly wound their way, flowers whispered in the breeze and bloomed as in the first successful Up-Country stories. Mikszáth's descriptions do not captivate because of their variety but because they are so personal.

In his Mikszáth obituary already quoted, Gyula Krúdy asked: 'Is the Up-Country truly as Mikszáth saw it?" As a writer he was well aware that the real question was whether we would for ever see the Up-Country through Mikszáth's eyes.

Gyula Krúdy had something to say about this latter question. Indeed, his first novel can be read as a collection of Mikszáth paraphrases. *A podolini kísértet* (The Podolin Ghost, 1906) is related to Mikszáth not only because it relies on Up-Country tales, but also because it too presents fly in amber situations.

Podolin is a small town close to the Polish border, which became the formative influence of Krúdy's life and work. He was sent to the Piarist College there at the age of ten by parents who hoped that they would make a man of him. The town, one of thirteen pledged to Poland by the Emperor Sigismund of Luxembourg, King of Hungary, as security for a debt, had remained Polish for three hundred years. Medieval remains of the Polish years, misty mountain evenings, the unusually long and severe winters, all helped to produce a kind of romantic mood in a small boy from the Great Plain. A series of medieval tales, drafted between 1906 and 1910, and set in County Szepes, are all witness to this, as is the first of Krúdy's Szindbád stories, which followed them and defined the tone of the whole series.

The persona of Szindbád, Krúdy's alter ego, a literally immortal character, is one of the great figures in Hungarian literature. After his first successful appearance (in 1911), it follows Krúdy all through his literary life. The close to a hundred Szindbád stories are linked not only by Szindbád's persona but also by his travels in search of the memory of his loves, of a lost past. Not surprisingly, his first journeys take him to the scene of feelings in bud, to the Up-Country, to Podolin.

Gyula Krúdy 1878–1933

Novelist and journalist. The writers' writer in the eyes of his contemporaries. A lone wolf, who joined neither literary movements nor political parties. His whole life was devoted to writing, the more than a hundred volumes he left behind vie with Jókai's productivity. He had his years of success and of failure, there were times when he spent a fortune on an evening's entertainment, but in the last year of his life he could not pay his electricity bill and had to work by the light of a candle. After his death things were much the same. For a brief period at a time he was ahead of all his contemporaries in popularity and then years passed when his name was hardly mentioned. He started publishing in the Budapest and provincial press at the age of fifteen but he only found his own voice—that of remembrancer—in 1911, well past thirty, with the stories collected in the volume *The Youth of Szindbád.* It was only that which allowed him to escape the oppressive influence of his literary models, Jókai and—primarily—Mikszáth.

The Red Stage-Coach was his first major success, and its characters, like Szindbád, kept on turning up in his later writings.

His is an unmistakable narrative voice: a dense lyricism, an authorative eye, powerful metaphors and a shy irony, unusual ways in handling time are characteristic of all his writings. The line dividing past and present is never clear, and neither is that between imagination and reality, waking and dreaming. They all overflow into each other. Every one of his successful works is somehow linked to the good old days before the War, and the more distant in time that period was the greater his interest in it, the more attractive it became to him as a writer.

The already present surrealist character of his writing was boosted by a feverishness in his style in the years of war, revolution, and counter-revolution. His similes live a life of their own, and lyricism permeates just about the whole of the narrative space. In his final creative period carnal joys and passions, and the illusions and troubles of the soul are manifest in simple stories. He abandoned all his stylistic excesses, his narrative voice became precise and terse.

Main works: *Szindbád stories*, 1911–1933; *The Red Stage-Coach*, 1913; *Sunflower*, 1918; *The Prize of Ladies*, 1919; *Seven Owls*, 1922; *Life's a Dream*, 1930; *My Bygone Days as a Young Master*, 1930.

The journeys in search of memories generally end in greater or lesser disillusion; what proves enduring, however, is the dreamlike isolation of the small town. Men and women grow old, but the moods of yesterday stay fresh and lively. Just as Baron Mednyánszky, the pedantic official had surveyed the stages of his journey by raft and thus the castles, towns and villages of the western Up-Country so, a hundred years later Krúdy, the most poetic of Hungarian novelists, following the path of his memories, prepared an inventory of the impressions of the small towns along the frontier with Poland.

School, convent, church, pastrycook's, inn—these are the most frequent stages in the nostalgic journeys of Szindbád and other Krúdy characters, so too are the houses of Saxon burghers, where decent families live, and a fire crackles in the tiled stove. And just about all the time, as in a distant Russian province, it is snowing, "the snow falling in the Carpathians has a voice," Krúdy maintains), sleighbells tinkle on winding mountain roads, and all sorts of travellers chase their fortune or the memories of their past.

In Krúdy's interpretation, the life in Up-Country small towns is quiet, dreamy, and so simple that the most commonplace commercial traveller appears as a secretive adventurer to the locals and, later, to himself as well. Krúdy keeps on stressing that this country is on the fringe in every sense of the term. Its past is not Hungarian and Cracow, the Polish royal city, is much closer than Budapest, the capital of Hungary.

This border nature is also an eloquent and multivalent metaphor for Krúdy, a stage on the journey, both a real place and something dreamlike and evanescent. It is also a fly in amber of a way of life centuries old, and the place of exile for misbehaving priests and schoolboys.

The Up-Country already appears as a memory, as a past preserved in the imagination, in fairy tales, and legends in the Krúdy stories of the 1910s and earlier, and even in *The Podolin Ghost*. Looked at from this angle it truly makes no difference whether the subject is one's own past or history, our own yesterdays or something that happened hundreds of years earlier.

Krúdy could not know at the time that later, in the twenties, memory would acquire a special intensity, that those hastening to the frontier would not have to travel to Podolin or beyond, that the borders would shrink and the Up-Country would cease to be the Up-Country. Once it became part of Czechoslovakia it lost even its name; the Hungarians there also called it *Szlovenszkó*. In 1925, in "The Cookery Book and the Toy Shop", (printed on p. 28), Krúdy for the last time sent Szindbád off on an Up-Country journey. The aging hero was shocked to note that on the promenade, "elderly ladies conversed in a foreign language around him.". The novel *Boldogult úrfikoromban* (My Bygone Days as a Young Master), a masterpiece if there ever was one, appeared in 1930. In it the Up-Country and its people and yesteryear's Hungarian life as such, appear as a conversation piece. Sometime, not all that long ago, that was reality, now just chatter. ❧

Gyula Krúdy

Two Stories

The Years of Youth

There used to be an old painting in the monastery of Podolin—a grey-haired man thought to himself one night towards autumn, while outside the mist curled into shades of chimney-sweeps walking the roof-tops in the damp moonlight—a painting of a shaggy-haired man with bushy moustaches turning up at the tips like a gallant's, a beard thick and rust-coloured like the curls of a redhead, ringed eyes that were almond-shaped and of a very light blue, and a ruddy face the colour of wine sparkling on a white table on a sunny winter day. This was Prince Lubomirski.

Who was he, what was he, this prince, before he took up his post within the shabby gilded picture-frame in the monastery? It is beside the point as far as our story is concerned. Suffice it to say he was there beneath the arch, on the wall, the peeling plaster of which still bore the traces of frescoes depicting long-departed saints disporting themselves. Saint Anne sat on a little tabouret, her face grown dim with age, her faded eyes looking questioningly at the pupils passing by, their booted feet making a clatter on the flagstones of the corridor. As if the saintly lady were forever seeking to know whether lessons had been properly learned. George was killing his dragon—Prince Lubomirski was placed between them.

There were many scholarship students at the monastery, and the good friars were forever threatening their pupils with the ringed-eyed Prince.

Long ago, at the time when the monastery was built, the Prince had contributed to the propagation of piety with a consignment of carved flagstones, and by this means acquired the right to interfere in the matter of disciplining remiss students even from beyond the grave. The poor Slovak boys, who had come within the thick walls of the monastery directly from the pine forests, doffed their caps reverently to the ruddy-cheeked prince.

The young ladies of Podolin stuck wild flowers into the Prince's frame on their way to confession, and the women who some hundreds of years before had brought a succession of red-bearded, shaggy-haired children into the world knelt to pray before the Prince's painting as they prayed before the pictures of

the other saints. (They had no doubt forgotten that some hundreds of years ago the Prince readily took off his buff-leather gloves whenever a woman knelt at his feet. But now he would never take off his gloves again.)

So Lubomirski in his death still remained the first Lord of the city; boys were often christened George, and on the Lord's Day, in the square in front of the town-hall, the liveried attendant of the magistrate would fire his mortar in honour of not only the old Lord but also in honour of György Lubomirski. (Using only half the customary amount of gunpowder, it must be said.)

The grey-haired gentleman (who sitting at his writing desk one night recalled the vaulted corridor where the students' boot-heels clattered, reverberating, until the last echoes died away in the distance) had been a pupil at and around the monastery at the time, and his name was Szindbád. (He had picked the name for himself out of his favourite story-book, *A Thousand and One Arabian Nights*, for this was still near to the time when gallants, poets, actors, and impassioned young students chose names for themselves. A hunchback boy, who knows why, answered to the name of Pope Gregory.)

Szindbád respected Prince Lubomirski, but raised his hat to him in much the same way that he raised it to Müller the paper-merchant, who had a little shop off a dark doorway, a little shop where it was always dark. And in the darkness nature had missed its mark, for Mr Müller did not have a moustache, but his big, black, and sly daughter Fanni did. Fanni was ashamed of her moustache for a long time, but then a young teacher came to town who said Fanni's moustache was beautiful and captivating. And Fanni was happy and in her happiness threw herself into the Poprád at the mill-dam. (The cause for Szindbád's self-possession was that his parents paid the school fees punctually to the monastery, and from time to time sent a barrel of wine as well for the holy mass, which Szindbád served in a red cassock, reciting the Confiteor with lightning speed, and ringing the hand-bell solemnly and majestically, as though it were his responsibility to make the pupils sitting in the back rows kneel down to pray. It was in the red cassock he wore to mass that he won Anna Kacskó's heart when she came to holy mass on Sunday.) What were the facts of the matter, exactly?

One reason why Szindbád did not greet the prince with undue reverence was that he boarded with the Kacskó family. Mr Kacskó was magistrate of the district, a magistrate of a kind commonly found in times past in small, secluded highland towns. In his youth he may not have been more than the liveried attendant of a magistrate, but later he became a clerk, grew an imposing beard, and learned administrative procedure through practice. His girth expanded too, and thus he became a magistrate. There is none of the jauntiness of the lowland magistrates in their highland counterparts: they are honest, staid and sober men, usually with large families, who lend a hand at home with the wood-cutting and the candle-dipping, and never lose their tempers except when the soup catches in the pot. Uncle Kacskó brought his chubby fist down on the table with a loud bang.

"I'm the magistrate!" he shouted.

To which Minka, his placid, mournful, smooth-haired wife would gently reply: "Yes, but not at home."

"Dare you say this to me in front of my daughters?" asked Uncle Kacskó, cupping his hand against his ear as if he were in his office, interrogating some Slovak against whom a complaint had been lodged.

"They are my daughters," Auntie Minka replied with a sigh. " Little does the Pan magistrate care about finding them husbands."

After that there was nothing for magistrate Gyula Kacskó to do but escape to his office—so hastily that the attendant had to be sent to fetch his favourite pipe.

It really seemed as though there were no one to concern themselves with marrying off the Misses Kacskó. There were three of them, handsome, tall and healthy young maidens, who lived on the upper floor of the house together with Szindbád. They took turns at doing the cooking, changing every week. Magda excelled at mutton, Anna at cabbage, and Róza at pastry; and in the afternoons and also in the evenings, when Szindbád had for some mysterious reason to leave the large family room downstairs (so that Uncle Kacskó and Auntie Minka could squabble to their heart's content, as the Pan magistrate could not then flee to his office), the young ladies also took turns in accompanying Szindbád, who was nervous when left to himself and a reluctant learner, to his solitary room upstairs, there to sit beside him at his writing-desk and read their endless novels while doing their needlework. Magda and Anna were so engrossed in their reading that Szindbád could go to sleep over his books with ease. But Róza, who was just sixteen and did not yet overmuch despise the adolescent Szindbád, often ran her white hands through the student's thick black hair, tugging it sometimes playfully, sometimes in earnest. The student wailed. Róza's face grew pink and she pulled harder and harder at Szindbád's hair.

"Learn your lessons," she cried, bright-eyed, "or Lubomirski will fail you for sure!"

Szindbád hastily bent his head over his books, until the wind rose and began to sigh and sough in the deserted attic where the sacks of oats lay strewn about on the floor in the empty rooms like the dead... Róza listened to the wind for a while with her eyes closed out of fear, then the fear grew so strong she gave way to it and clung to the student, trembling and pale, her head on his shoulder, her arms around his neck.

Szindbád, too, was so frightened by the wind that he dared not move, not even to turn the page of his book, though by then he knew the contents of it passably well.

So, at the time when Prince György Lubomirski watched over the students in Podolin, his buff-leather gloved hand grasping the hilt of a sword upon which the likenesses of the saints of the times were clearly represented—at the time

when Róza Kacskó would tug joyfully, eagerly and affectionately at Szindbád's hair, and, having meted out this punishment, would lay her head upon his shoulder, there was a boy who was always first in Scripture, altar-serving and the veneration of holy pictures, and who for this reason or some other was called Pope Gregory by the pupils at the old monastery. Pope Gregory was a hunchback boy with a head and features as delicate and fine as the host he took at Communion every week.—Though he often gave Pope Gregory a thrashing, Szindbád befriended the boy, and one afternoon, when it was Róza's turn in the Kacskó house to sit by his writing-desk and supervise his studies, he asked the hunchback boy over to the house. Assuredly to vaunt Róza's friendship, white hands and beautiful eyes.

This is how Pope Gregory's visit passed: Róza was silent and solemn all the while, looked down her nose at the boys, and did not once tug at Szindbád's hair, though she had never before neglected to do so.

Then, instead of laying her head on Szindbád's shoulder, instead of putting her arms around his neck, she snapped at him almost harshly:

"I wonder that Lubomirski tolerates such a bad student at the monastery."

Hunchbacked Pope Gregory opened his feverish bright eyes wide and stared entranced at Róza in her white house-dress, at the place where the sleeves fit tight over her bare arms, and the mother-of-pearl buttons rose and fell softly on her rounded breasts.

But Róza tapped his back and mocked him:

"Why, this boy is humpbacked like a camel."

Pope Gregory lowered his eyes, blushed softly, then left the attic, his eyes brimming with tears.

That evening Szindbád felt a strange bitterness when Róza playfully tugged his hair, laid her rosy cheek on his shoulder, and holding on to him tightly, rocked to and fro on her chair. He kept seeing the tear-filled eyes of the hunchbacked boy, and for this reason devoted himself earnestly to his studies, in order to vex Róza still further.

"What can you find to like about that toad?" asked Róza petulantly when Szindbád would not raise his eyes from his book.

She stretched, got up, and walked lazily over to the window. The night—it was a balmy June night—brought into the room from down below the elusive droning sounds of a little road winding up the hillside; stars twinkled above the distant mountains like children playing hide-and-seek.

"From now on, do your lessons with that humpbacked toad," said Róza later, assuming a serious air. "Let him teach you Latin, if you like him so much."

It was this little cloud that prompted Szindbád to go bathing in the Poprád with Pope Gregory the following afternoon, as one would with one's best friend.

The Poprád flowed at the foot of the old monastery, and within the walls of the dam, built of thick beams, the water was deep, still, and black, like a lake.

Midstream, the water rippled joyfully, playfully, gurgling, as if the ripples had learned the art of happy travelling from the carters in the mountains, who journeyed from one country to the next whistling, singing and drinking along the way.

Naturally, the boys bathed where the river was still and deep, holding on to the clamp-irons and swinging their legs in the bottomless water.

The little hunchback felt safe in the company of the brave and marvellous Szindbád, and all of a sudden gave a joyful, triumphant cry:

"I can feel the river bottom," he said, stretching his thin legs downwards. Then his inky fingers loosened their hold on the clamp-irons, and he went under without a word.

For a second or two longer his strange little hump was still there beneath the surface of the water, then a long silence fell upon the river, on the landscape, beneath the great linden-trees, as if a magic wand had touched the monastery and it had died forthwith, like in a tale from the Arabian Nights.

Szindbád sprang ashore as if a crab had pinched his toes, stared at the still water, gave it a stir with a broken twig—then quickly put on his clothes and began to run, silently, his teeth clenched, towards the wooden bridge that sprawled over the Poprád like a huge spider. He met people on the way, who stared after the pale little boy and shook their heads, and he could almost hear them talking of the mysterious Lubomirski.

There was a boat rocking on the water by the bridge, tied up with a rope. The student's pocket-knife was sharp, since his leisure hours were spent putting an edge on the blade. The rope was cut in a trice, and the waves were already speedily carrying the boat downriver, and Szindbád was staring with wide-open eyes towards the great linden-trees... Perhaps the hunchback Pope Gregory is still there, holding on to the clamp-iron, swinging gently in the water, and it was all just a bad joke after all...

But the place where the river appeared to be asleep was as silent and still as it was a few moments before. Szindbád steered the boat carefully over the spot where Pope Gregory had gone under, and dipped the oar deep into the water. Then he stretched his hands into the water, as if Pope Gregory were somewhere close by, close enough to be touched... Then began to row silently downriver. From time to time he stopped; until at last the oars were scraping the shingled, shallow bottom of the Poprád; large stones appeared in the distance just below the surface of the water, a Pope Gregory surfacing every time, if only for a moment; a pink trout darted by, alarmed, and the river sparkled and foamed as if someone were straining molten silver through a large sieve.

The parapets of the monastery slowly fell behind, fruit trees resplendent in yellow and red were passed by; in the vegetable garden Privánka, one of his masters, was weeding out the beds with his cassock tucked up and wearing boots; Szindbád threw himself flat on his stomach in the bottom of the boat in fright.

Then he rowed on, and the monastery was left far behind. Shrubs bowed over the river, but he found nothing beneath them except a rotting pine beam.

It was late afternoon, the sun had hidden itself behind the great mountains and the lean fields stretched desolate, forsaken by man, on both sides of the river. The Poprád's silver lost its sparkle, as if a great purple shadow had fallen on the surface of the water.

And then, far in the distance, in the middle of the river, he caught sight of the hunchbacked Pope Gregory floating face up on the water, his arms flung wide, his mouth open like a big black hole. His legs were sunk beneath the water.

Szindbád wiped his perspiring brow, for in that moment he realized what had happened. The hunchbacked boy had drowned, for which he would be held responsible, and Lubomirski would finally step out of his picture-frame, he is on his way already, his bushy red beard thrust forward. In the far distance, somewhere beneath the dark shrubs on the opposite bank, Róza is standing with her hands clasped behind her back, looking at him with grim, angry eyes, the way she looked at the stars yesterday... The river began to seem to him deep, mysterious and frightening as he rowed towards the corpse. At last he caught hold of the hunchbacked Gregory's feet and struggling, groaning, crying, pulled him into the boat.

He turned his back to him and slowly, tiredly began to row upstream.

All at once Szindbád woke to find himself at home, lying in bed.

The yellow light of the lamp fell upon Róza's soft pink cheeks.

The girl stared at him with bright, wide-open grey eyes and leant close to whisper into his face:

"You are a brave boy. And for that I shall love you for ever." ❧

[1911]

The Cookery Book and the Toy Shop

"No matter how humble it may be, the heart grows fonder of the home you have left behind for a space of time," began Szindbád the elder. "And so it is with the greater home: the homeland. Let us go abroad for a while, so that we may realize there is no better place for idling time away, and that there is no moustache wax to compare with that sold in Roykó's pharmacy in Tiszafüred."

Szindbád the younger did not at first understand why his father set such great store on moustache wax, never having had any use for it, but he complied with his father's order: he packed travelling chest number one, which he had bought in the olden days from an impoverished bootmaker from Miskolc, and which had the Hungarian arms carved upon it. "At least we shall be treated as persons on official business when we cross the border," said the older traveller, caressing the engraving with his fingertips.

By his own account, Szindbád had bought the trunk thirty years ago when he first began to travel, but the smell of boots lingered about it still from all the footwear the bootmaker from Miskolc had been unable to sell at the market.

"No matter, it is a Hungarian smell," said Szindbád. "I've known a man carry all sorts of home-grown herbs and grasses with him on his travels, to sniff at of an evening, should his thoughts take a melancholy turn."

"We could perhaps take a bit of garlic sausage with us, for the journey," proposed Szindbád's son, who was rather practical-minded in matters of eating.

"It is true that we Hungarians seldom set out on a journey without home-baked bread and other provisions; but let us assume that fate will provide for us, this once."

On this point, however, Szindbád was mistaken.

The spa where Szindbád hoped to find the lady with whom he had danced the polka a quarter of a century ago was near the Polish border... The place still abounded with women who painted their faces and entrusted their fine silk petticoats to the care of the wind, but no one remembered Szindbád's dancing partner except the leader of the orchestra, and he only after Szindbád had set the second tankard of ale beneath his chair.

"We are caught in our own trap," the traveller kept saying as they walked along the promenade where elderly ladies conversed in a foreign language around him. "They're talking about old General Bem still, as likely as not," he thought to himself. And, to shake himself out of his lethargy, he decided to buy a new hat, because a new hat commonly occasions a change in the lives of men as well as women. It can be moulded into a new shape to suit your fancy, there is none of the old stolidity about the brim holding up to the rain, and you can even tuck a feather in the band.

There was a toy shop that smelled of pine at the spa, offering a large selection of miscellaneous items. The scented soaps that brought to mind houses where only ladies dwelled had to contend with the strong smell of resin. The dolls in their boxes opened their eyes wide, and a rocking-horse that had shed most of its coat began to rock softly, as if it had been schooled to do so whenever a customer opened the door. It was a shop from the nineteenth century, and Szindbád's grandfather, if he happened this way, must have beheld the very same choice of merchandise.

Szindbád spotted a hat for himself at once, but dared not touch it for a while. It was a huge green Tyrolese hat with a tuft of chamois-hair at the back that no woman could miss, regardless of whether she kept her eyes demurely lowered before a gentleman or not. Franz Joseph had himself photographed wearing a hat like this when he dressed up as a Tyrolese huntsman. When Szindbád tried on the hat he knew straightaway that there was no need to pad the lining with newspaper. He was very pleased with it, and with himself.

"It's a gelder's hat," said Szindbád's son presently. Those are the hats they favoured, going from village to village, wildly barked at by all the dogs because of the smell of animal blood on their hands. The blood comes from castrating farm animals, poor things.

"Enough said," replied Szindbád the elder, turning down the brim of the hat. "Why, it may make some lady think of me, when she wishes to make a philandering husband jealous."

The brown-haired, grave-faced woman standing behind the counter in a black apron now addressed them in Hungarian.

"I too am of the opinion that the hat is a little too flashy to suit the gentleman."

Szindbád promptly took off the hat and declared he would never set foot in this shop again.

But, finding himself immeasurably bored, he was there again the very next day. He questioned the serious-faced woman about her antecedents, and it turned out that she was from Debrecen, that her name was Viola, and that her occupation would afford her much pleasure if it wasn't for the ladies in this part of the world who never buy anything, not even a cake of soap. Rouge and powder makes up for everything. To put the lady in good humour, Szindbád bought a shirted doll which he said he would keep in his pocket always, as a token of remembrance.

By the third day Szindbád was grumbling to Viola. He complained that the breath of the women in these parts smelled of camphor; that he had been unable to sleep all night because of the smell of camphor: he had fallen into conversation with a lady in the evening, and in consequence had dreamed he was lying in a coffin all through the night...

"Yes," said the solemn Viola, "besides make-up, the local apothecary stocks sweets of his own making, and sucking them is said to reduce bad breath owing to germs in the mouth or disorders of the stomach. It is one reason why the women around here are not in the habit of kissing."

"I shan't be staying here much longer, then," replied Szindbád.

Viola did not smile, did not remonstrate with Szindbád, but appraised her wares and offered him a large wooden hussar for sale, a most appropriate possession, she declared, for a man so fond of kissing.

Szindbád bought the hussar.

From then on he spent the better part of the morning, a time of day when customers were few and far between, in Viola's toy shop. It was a habit he had got into in Hungary, where he had idled away long hours lounging against tobacconists' counters, taking a seat in milliner's shops as one who has an assignation there, or watching florists make bridal wreaths. And there had been times in his life when he had even helped sell embroidery and other trifles of the kind, if the proprietress of the shop he was then patronizing asked him to do so.

All this did nothing to lighten Viola's solemnity. In the midst of all her cackling, cartwheeling, somersaulting toys this woman was relentlessly, inexorably grave.

She set the little four-wheeled donkeys in their place wih a determination and firmness befitting adult beings. And the toys noticeably pined under the care of this stern woman, like those little dogs that are kept chained up and are not allowed to run and play with the children.

Szindbád had gradually acquired everything a traveller might find himself in need of.

He had bought edelweiss, which he would pin on when he returned to Budapest; had bought a hand-mirror, a comb, a tooth-brush, a button-hook. The woman was more imperturbable than ever, though Szindbád had discerned certain similarities in her bearing, her eyes, the hair gathered into a coil at the back of her head with that woman of old whom he had once danced the polka with... "When the dancing rooms were over on the other side of the watering place." "No one around here remembers that any more," replied the proprietress.

Then one day Szindbád came into the shop delighted, and announced somewhat excitedly that he had found a great tree at the southern tip of the promenade that had been there "in his time". This plane-tree was known as the Hungarians' tree, for it had been a custom of the Hungarians to gather beneath it to have their daily, deadly quarrels.

"I know that old tree!" replied Viola. "It stands alone, so the local people do not like to sit under it, because lightning is more likely to strike a solitary tree."

"Well, from now on we shall be sitting there every evening, we shall revive the 'Hungarians' tree'. My son's an entertaining fellow. You might like to come and join us, keep us company."

Viola made no reply, but in the evening, after she had locked up the shop, she happened to pass by "the Hungarians' tree", and took a seat beside Szindbád and his son. She listened to the men's gallantries composedly, spoke as little as was possible about herself, did not complain and did not boast, but did once observe that she had not spoken so much Hungarian in the past five years as she had that evening.

"Dear heart," said Szindbád the elder, warming to his subject, "you must spend as much time as you can in our company, so as not to forget our beautiful language completely. I would not let that happen for the world. I belong to that class of gentlemen who still carry a gray parasol in the summer, though there are some who say it is no longer the fashion to do so. I am, in other words, a man of the old school who loves his country and his kind."

Viola pondered for a while.

"Hungary is so far from here" she said at last, stifling a sigh.

"It is here, in my pocket," Szindbád the elder unexpectedly replied. "Since I find it impossible to eat the local fare, I carry a Hungarian cookery book about with me, and satisfy my appetite by browsing through it every day. It is true that it is not a work by anyone of note, it's written by everyone's Auntie Rézi, but

from this book I can lunch and dine to my liking. Tonight I shall read the chapter on the various ways of preparing bean soup. For there is a great difference in the preparation of French beans and kidney beans. And as I read, I hear the wind rummaging in the attic back home, where the beans are always spread out to dry. A cookery book such as this is your best friend abroad."

A smile flitted across Viola's face.

"So the local fare does not suit your taste, then?"

"I can manage the trout... but what is trout compared to our sturgeon? When one recalls how differently the Gypsies play back home, so temperamental, so impassioned, the sound of the violins quickens your very blood ... when one thinks of the Danube depths of women's eyes, of the smell about the kitchens, if you happen to be passing by... it's enough to make you feel wretched," said Szindbád despondently. (—) "Wherever I look, there is not a single woman to be seen hanging out long stockings and gay-coloured petticoats to dry... Even the dogs bark in a foreign laguage. I suppose not even the clouds passing over our heads ever come from our way."

Viola stood up, for Szindbád had taken advantage of the lecture to make closer acquaintance with her hands.

"Wait for me here tomorrow. If it's a good supper you're wanting, I had better take you home to my house."

As befitted a solitary, forsaken creature, Viola lived beyond the spa in a secluded little cottage.

"This is part of the story too," said Szindbád as he knocked his head against the cornice.

It was just a plain beef *pörkölt* that was put on the table, but it had been prepared in the true Hungarian way, with tomatoes and green peppers. In her modest, peaceful little house Viola was more loquacious.

"Do not be surprised at the way I live. Five or six years ago— prefer to forget anniversaries—I was disappointed in love. It happened back home—the man I loved proved unworthy of my affections. I come of a very respectable family, and I ran away out of shame. Don't ask me how or why, but I ended up at this Polish spa, and here I set up my toy shop. I could have found a more profitable occupation, but I did not want to sacrifice my independence, my freedom. Now you know everything there is to know about me."

Viola tried to utter the words that clearly came from her heart simply and unpretentiously, and this circumstance gave special savour to the *pörkölt* that Szindbád and his son finished off with gusto.

"If you permit," said Szindbád presently, "It is a habit of mine to clean my teeth after a meal with the point of my pocket-knife."

"My father has the very same habit."

"With your permission, I like to unbutton my waistcoat after eating."

"Our gentlemen callers were always welcome to do so."

"And I am partial to a glass of wine..." added Szindbád bashfully.

"I have wine," said the proprietress of the toy shop, and placed a flask of Hungarian wine on the table.

For a while the company was quiet. The nectar of the Hungarian mountains induced silence. Images and memories of home appeared by and by to each, as if, close by, someone were singing a sad and solemn Hungarian song...

"Viola, I have a proposition to make to you. My son and I are at loose ends in this place, there is nothing to do but be bored and hungry all day. Things have come to such a pass that we are within a hair's breadth of eating each other out of boredom... What would you say if we were to take over your shop for you, while you stayed at home to cook us luncheon and dinner? That would be your job. You would have two assistants working for you, with the takings remaining yours, of course," said Szindbád on their way out.

"And for how long shall our arrangement last?" asked Viola, holding out her hand.

"Two or three weeks, for the duration of our stay."

So it came to happen that Szindbád and his son served as shop assistants for a while in a Polish spa. They had a very pleasant time, and with two well-dressed gentlemen offering such a miscellany of goods for sale, customers multiplied. Szindbád the elder sat all the children of the spa in his lap, while Szindbád the younger resolutely paid court to women of all ages. Trade in the little shop picked up visibly.

"There is nothing one would not do, abroad, for the sake of a Hungarian woman," observed Szindbád as he dusted the toys on their shelves in the mornings. "Now we've only to start selling tobacco in the shop to live comfortably. Have you done the marketing for luncheon?" he presently asked his son, who promptly set out for the market with a basket on his arm.

"The only woman who loved me disinterestedly," said Szindbád at the approach of autumn as he bid farewell to the little spa. ❧

[1925]

Translated by Eszter Molnár

Győző Ferencz

The Yield from Losses

The Poetry of Zsuzsa Takács

Zsuzsa Takács's work has long been a hidden, a latent asset of post-mid-sixties Hungarian lyric poetry. This latency was not due to its being hermetic, esoteric or enigmatic, nor was it wilfully kept away from readers. Her first volume was published in 1970, part of a wave that saw first books of poetry by Dezső Tandori (1968), and by György Petri (1971), and she has published several times since. *Némajáték* (Pantomime, 1970), *A búcsúzás részletei* (Details of Leave-taking, 1976) *Tükörfolyosó* (Mirror Passage, 1983), and *Eltékozolt esélyem* (My Wasted Chance, 1986) indicate important phases of a carefully planned oeuvre. Even the titles unambiguously tie her poetry to the range those two poets mentioned represent. *Némajáték* articulates the problems of self–expression, similarly to Tandori's *Töredék Hamletnek* (Fragment for Hamlet), while *A búcsúzás részletei* shows the techniques of detailed, factual circumscription found in Petri's *Magyarázatok M. számára* (Explanations for M). All three have brought renewal in Hungarian poetry, Tandori approaching from epistemology, Petri from politics, while Zsuzsa Takács captured for herself a no less important, primarily lyric territory. Unarrested in its development by any sharp changes of tone, her poetry has always centred around love, and of love she has been saying the same, in the tone she found at the beginning.

Yet the self-contained world of her poetry became apparent in its true significance in her volume of selected poems published in 1989, *Sötét és fény kora* (Age of Darkness and Light), which culls from the output of some twenty years. Characteristically, the selection dispenses with the usual chronological arrangement, which would not have been justified by either tonal or thematic modifications. The cycles of poems in the volume follow an inner logic that is unaffected by chronology. At the time the volume was published, an event marking a major stage in her poetic oeuvre, Takács was attracting serious attention and frequently published her later

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poems in periodicals. *Viszonyok könnye* (Tears of Relationships, 1992) grew out of these poems, which through a feedback to the oeuvre clearly showed, beyond its inherent worth, the true character of her poetry. Further facilitated by the acclaim perhaps, her next volume, a pair and sequel to the former, *Tárgyak könnye* (Tears of Objects, 1994), was soon to follow.

The explanation that outside circumstances slowed down appreciation of Zsuzsa Takács's poetry is all too obvious. The trend she belongs to could not have organized itself into a movement even if it wanted to. It has cultivated a sort of underground art made accessible and tolerated; this in itself meant a limited range. In addition, Takács has never wished to load her poems with direct political content. It has not been highlighted by the aura of opposition, whether visible or, when banned, invisible. The lyric texture has never displayed any artistic extremism either. Hungarian poetry of recent decades may abound in counter-examples, but the main thing is that such answers do not bring us closer to these poems.

One of the most specific features of Takács's poetry has become evident in her selected poems and in the structure of subsequent volumes. An unusual unity of poetic voice, the unison of intonation, the objectification of the poetic ego becomes manifest in larger forms only, since these are the only means for creating the pseudo-epic form. This larger composition is being constructed from poem to poem, from volume to volume, and it is time-consuming not only in terms of its construction but also in terms of critical appreciation. At the outset of her career, this tendency was obscured by the fact that the poems in themselves are also self-contained, and are also accessible and decipherable by traditional reading strategies.

These microunits, however, all make up one specifically dramatic situation. We hear a monologue: one of the *dramatis personae* is the poetic ego. There is another person present as well, about or to whom the poem speaks, and whether this character is the same or not each time, whether real or fictitious, a metaphor for the world, is never made unambiguous.

The organizing force in the poems is the duality of confession and self–reflection. These two modes of attitude and expression help the poet represent the duality of relationship and loss: in the final analysis, the ego recaptured through the loss of relationships is shown in this way. Either because the stunted personality that remains after loss reawakens to a wholeness, suddenly viewing itself through the other person's eyes, as at the end of the poem *Átváltozások* (Transfigurations): "Black and stiff, the person who not long ago / was lying on your pillow, is watching". Or her life collapses upon her, as it were, and in this continuous tumble she recognizes the essence of her existence, as at the end of *Egy forradás az ágyam mellett álló fikuszon* (A Scar on the Rubber Tree by my Bed): "(I am lost, I said, finished now, / so revel, all my green hearts!)", the brackets themselves playing a role. In another poem she also uses brackets, say-

ing, as though incidentally: "(It takes no more than a fraction of a second, of course / to think over if I lived righly.)" (*A fürge szolgák* —The Nimble Servants).

Love, Takács's exclusive poetic subject, is then a heightened emotion, a red-hot state, passion, an impulse of the psyche—whether its object is man, parent, child, or God—through which the psyche, the life of the poetic ego is revealed. This is how she learns more and more about the world and herself—through loss.

In Takács's poetry, love becomes a philosophical issue. This is why the poems do not impress one as confessional. Unlike the poems of the great American confessionalists, these confessions do not divulge much about the relationships themselves. Confession, if at all, is depersonalized, distanced in her poetry; in any case, the romantic illusion of immediacy is discarded. Hers is indirect confession, with the structure and other formal elements serving as go-betweens. Tercina, for instance, her favoured verse form in the last two volumes, has such a function. She uses the Dantesque form loosely, without rhyming, yet it is tercina. Also, the two books in which this verse form is dominant contain references in their titles to Virgil, Dante's escort in his descent to Hell (cf. *sunt lacrimae rerum*).

The hell of human relationships is thick with steam and vapour. Though the poet admits us, allusively, to her relationships, at times in quite intimate detail, which fill the poems with dense and heavy material, the outlines of the personae remain blurred. How many of them are there? Are they the same or do they alternate or change? To what extent are they fictitious within the fiction of literature? Takács makes it always clear, often through detailed descriptions and references, that they come from a fictionalized reality. She always halts the reader at the point where he would pass from the poetic to the private sphere. We hear monologues on loss. But the first person singular of the narrator allows neither complaint nor self-pity. We hear an objectified first person singular: one single vast dramatic monologue.

The dramatic monologue is characterised by heightening: the very nature of the dramatic and the monologue makes it possible for it to constantly refer outside itself, to events and other personae, thereby creating a delicate balance of expression and suppression, which in turn widens its scope. In the dramatic monologues of the great master of the genre, Robert Browning, the other persona is given sharp outlines, and the tangle of his relationships is more difficult to unravel. Zsuzsa Takács does of course not write dramatic monologues in the classic sense of the word. She hides the narrator—who is not differentiated from the poetic ego—and the other protagonists of the relationships in a fog, and gives clear and sharp outlines to the almost impenetrable tangle of the relationships. Though the title of one of her volumes is *Tears of Relationships*, tears certainly do not dim her eyes. To unravel this tangle is a difficult, painful process. As she intends to be defined in the context of these relationships, she also remains in the dark, just like the other participants. But her voice is clear and re-

veals the inner regions of the narrator's personality as well as the inner regions of human relationships.

The issue at stake in Takács's poetry is epistemological: the possibility of self-definition within constantly changing frameworks and protagonists, and gaining through loss. "I met him yesterday on the metro," begins *Tegnap a metrón (*Yesterday on the Metro), which ends: "I had to greet him (he too looked at me). / But hearing his name he shook his head, / in the pale blue shirt he always wears." It cannot be known precisely what is going on here. It is as if she recognized or thought she recognized a stranger, while the known person in turn remains a stranger. In many poems, there appear streets, squares and rooms, the scenes of relationships and encounters. Many poems speak of travel, movement, and the figures exchange greetings all too frequently. All this indicates the intention to show relationships ever more precisely, and the hope of achieving self-definition. Yet however frequently the figures may exchange greetings, they mistake or fail to recognize each other just as frequently. In *Az utolsó szalmaszál* (The Last Straw), everyone is somebody different: the narrator wishes to meet a poet, and mistakes him for someone who is not a poet, while the unknown man, a student who happens to be there, and the waitress in the café in their turn all mistake her for someone else. In *Egy ismeretlen ballonkabátos férfi jön* (An Unknown Man in Raincoat Comes), the narrator takes a man's gloves with her by mistake and, we learn from another poem, *Vasárnapra, lehet, megjönnek a tankok* (By Sunday, Perhaps, the Tanks Will Arrive), his raincoat too. The incident is explained: "I felt of course that it was too loose / and longer than usually is, / but the evening itself was so much different / why should my raincoat remain the same forever?" It is in the course of losses and fatal misunderstandings that we learn something about our existence and the nature of our relationships.

Epic fragments drift in Zsuzsa Takács's volumes in abundance—wisps of memories, events, scenes and conversations. Yet they are not insufficient for deciphering a relationship, do not offer enough fixed points. What becomes outlined is the range (and changes) of the mental process through the volumes. Everything else, such as the epic-narrative elements, are subordinated to this purpose and remain fragmented.

Such poetry needs time to write itself. It needs time to recognize its true nature. The time is needed not for living the relationships, losing them, processing, distancing or objectifying the experience. These are bibliographic details or psychological problems at most. It is finding the adequate poetic form that has taken decades of work. Zsuzsa Takács has recognized the character of her poetry clearly: that requires not only a bent for self-reflection and structural certainty, but talent as well. By editing her selected poems she has made the kind of large poetic form she uses unambiguous. Akin to her poetry in this genre are some cycles by 20th-century American poets, such as John Berryman's *Dream Songs*,

Robert Lowell's *History*. This form is called, after the American poet and critic M. L. Rosenthal, the plotless epic. It has no planned plot, even though many poems tell stories or several of them together represent an event. The cycle can be enlarged and shaped by re-editing at will. The points of connection for a conscious building of the oeuvre clearly offer themselves. Zsuzsa Takács, as she came upon this poetic form, re-edited her poetry retrospectively. This is indicated by parallel motifs, identical or similar titles (*Választottja könnynek és örömnek—Viszonyok könnye*, Chosen by Tears and Joy—Tears of Relationships). The organization of the cycle provides the framework for continuous speech, the gravity of an ongoing epic melted into the lyric modes; yet by preserving a lyric quality, the vantage points do not tumble down. Out of the ranges of speech rise peaks such as *Négy vers* (Four Poems), a vision of the birth of a dead baby, a factual description of a dream that carries its interpretation. Takács's poetry articulates experiences from the extreme border zones of human relationships. ❧

St Jerome and the Lion. Lithograph.

Zsuzsa Takács

Poems

Translated by George Szirtes

The Double

A hasonmás

My worst obsessive nightmare after our separation
was that I would see you at a table
outside a cheap café in the Octogon,
every time I left my students and walked home
I'd see you lounging there where in return
for some minor favour they buy you
a scone or a cheese roll.
Each time my heart stopped still:
the same physique, same shape of head and beard,
and—don't be angry—the same slightly
down-and-out posture, have they been starving you?
or are you begging for love?
and all the time you're wearing this horny expression.
I imagined it was you,
and forced myself to miss the bus,
watched you in secret, frightened of course
that I'd draw attention to myself by my behaviour,
that this other would misunderstand me,
since he surely wouldn't believe why I was doing this,
I'd be pleased to get away with
no worse than paying for his scone, or rather, yours,
since I spoke of him to myself in the second person.
But my fear was groundless,
for he never noticed me, or rather, you didn't,
and I was tortured by the thought I was no longer

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attractive to men such as you,
it deeply wounded my self-respect.
And while I was thinking all this, you got into such
an awful situation, I almost cried out,
you had been given a slip of paper
and were to take it to the photo shop next door,
there must have been something rude written on it
for if the girl behind the counter refused you
you would be beaten up, and if she didn't
she would join the rank of your torturers;
but you must clearly have been hoping
that if you returned out of breath, you could
take your place among the card-players again
and though you had lost all your money
they'd give you credit (I also recognized
your passion for gambling).
So you waited for the note,
the first time they handed it down to you
from a height, then suddenly snatched it back
and dangled it under the table between the table legs,
and you made several grabs at it,
just like a dog after a bone, I was already
feeling ill, and you laughed willingly; your laughter
lashed me like a whip; it was how you used
to laugh at some sophisticated joke.
Meantime the spectators had changed about,
buses were coming and going.
Soon you had finished your errand
and returned with money. I recognized
neither your stained suit, nor your exotic tie
which showed monkeys swinging from a tree.
It would be an exaggeration to say I was crying
but I wept bitterly in my heart.
It was my cousin who disturbed this fantasy,
thinking I was waiting for a bus, not knowing
I was saying a final goodbye to you.
We got on the bus together and she asked me
what had happened. I said, my students had died,
it was my last journey on this route, it is autumn,
the trees are rotting, do I need to make myself clearer,
the gravestones are toppling,
no, she said, she understood.

Anima

Soul, don't peer into our human night!
Everywhere you'll hear the wailing of the creatures.
I know you are alone, exiled far from home,
forced to live in darkness.
Our darkness weeps out of the earth at you
like severed heads living still and crying.
And you try to recall the light
but your memory forsakes you.
You, free spirit, winged and chill,
you glance at us and turn away with a shudder.
We cover the mud with our kisses
and however miserable a spot on earth it is
we call it home.
And after this idiotic slobbering you're seized with anxiety;
your heaven doesn't exist, it's merely a product of your imagination,
you are forced, as everyone tells you, to live
your entire botched life here.
This overpopulated place is made for you to rot in—
where the most innocent blade of grass must also rot,
where the blade triumphant rises from corruption—
and murderous joys haunt you,
something is drawn from you,
you will grow dry, prickly, wounding.
...

What has happened to make this town,
the scene of my failure, so important to me.
I kneel at piles of rubbish people have thrown out
and make a new world from what I find there.
I envy the simple directness of the body,
I thirst for the touch of skin
as my soul once thirsted for a sight of God.
I tread the dim paths of a woman about her business
who earns her crust by the sweat of her brow,
who goes to have her hair done and looks
with fear at her reflection in the mirror,
who writes letters and believes it's her poems
addressing the world.

I am with her on her walks through the poisoned air,
lost in her yearnings and desires
as she watches a man's mouth,
I, immortal soul, am forced to share
a body with her.
But at night, when it's time
for moonlit contemplation,
I yank the loose stake from the ground,
attach it to my chain and drag it round
the infinite yard, and let those upstairs
hear that terrible clatter, breaking down the gate,
running through bog and brake, bloody voiced,
as if it had sliced my back open,
as if the iron had punctured my intestines,
rushing till I gasp for breath, pausing
only till I can start again, cursing
the verdict, which isn't my verdict,
the destiny, which isn't my destiny,
but some alien's desire.
While it dreams I take revenge on the body
I mock its hasty incomplete encounters,
I plant skeletal deathcamp trees in its forest places,
I disguise its loves with a wolfish mask,
and roll up its heaven
like a withered scroll.
...

If you have time to spare, if you have a word for me,
if you raise your eyes to your imagined God,
if you can close your imagined eyes
to such a blaze of light,
if you're blinded by that which I cannot see,
intercede for me!
At the bottom of the jasper stairs, before
the carpet with its golden weave I stand
dumb among the halleluyah choir,
THE SOUL'S FANTASY, THE BODY.
My movement has fractured the air,
my heels have crushed the secret signs,

in sickness, at vigil, at fast,
in disgrace, as cheat,
as stranger and death-desirer
as one beaten but not destroyed, I beg.
...

I gladly surrender my bloody roses,
I happily extinguish the bright torch of my eyes,
my laughter full of brilliant teeth dies away,
I do not tremble before my chosen one,
when he takes the flower from my hand,
when he wipes the hours from my face,
I reserve only that hour of terminal pallour
when my lovestruck child hides it from my eyes,
drawing the final jubilant pictures of the Place
into a vibrating membrane, so she should give birth
once more in disgrace and delight.
When the body clads itself in incorruptibility,
the temporal in the eternal,
when Earth grows bleak and desolate again.

The Loveliest Movement

A legszebb mozdulat

Whatever is forced to join together
is sure to fall apart. No need to fight
it anymore, things come to pieces just

as I intended, link and chain divide.
(I failed to adjust, I must confess
although, God knows, how hard I tried.)

Leaf, how tenderly you dropped onto
the surface of the water. More tenderly
than any lover on the sex of the beloved.

Leaf, thank you, of all movements it was the loveliest,
neither a mingling nor a tremor of the breast.
It was of all movements the loveliest.

To Leave

Kimenni

the crowded hall as the applause reaches
its climax, just as the world-weary clowns
are performing their brief routines,

not to sit up for their endless tricks,
to break the enthusiastic ranks,
to reclaim your coat, your hat, your umbrella

from the ecstatic attendant for a dime,
then set out across town, just as they
are shifting scenes but the set isn't yet ready

and the hours too stand still, and your only
companion is the smell of disinfectant
which floats down each street of the plague-stricken town.

Continuation

Folytatás

not to ring anyone (in any case the plants
will outgrow their pots and push
windows open leaning out over the street),

not to take revenge, but not to take it
lying down either, not to cure your toothache
nor your inflamed retina, your leukemia,

not to open the doors to the fire-brigade though the house is burning,
not to snatch at straws when you are drowning,
to turn back from the detested door

at the moment of arrival. Not to look ahead
while walking, but backwards only. To bear the lash.
Then a leaf may fall onto the surface of the lake.

Refurbishment

Átrendezés

Some slips and vests, the sticky blouses, jumpers
shrunk or stretched, that prickly woollen
waistcoat, a lot of unwanted stuff
picked up at sales, that skirt too easily creased,
soaked walking boots in which
my cracked heel used regularly to bleed,
paper tissues in a chequered pocket,
the blown pages of an Updike dropped in the bath,
inkstain, greasestain, heartstains
on discarded rags. "A prosodic approach to the translation
of Lorca", offprint in eighty-seven copies.
A white tie mourning with a dirty edge.
Second rate authors, duplicate copies, prescriptions
not collected, an empty notebook with the word DIARY
silver-embossed on the cover, children's bathing towels.
a one-week luncheon voucher dated seventy three
(each day I dined with someone else)
a dried ink cartridge, in which
is written the terrible truth:
farewell my youth.
I sit before the open doors
of the wardrobe, while workmen rip
the house apart, and twenty years spin by.
The inflatable paddling pool, stuck together now,
the Italian gymslip which fitted years ago,
and a hospital report (ab. incompl.) slips
from the silk pocket of a sun bleached denim handbag,
my brows cloud thinking of that May morning.
Clods of earth are falling
like plaster in the renovated flat.
I sit entombed within myself, picking at
the masty grapes of autumns past.
And I can hear the neighbours arriving, but no-one
crosses the mountain of rubble. Dust flies, creeps
under doors. I might once have feared cockroaches
but their thousand feet are not so fearsome now.
I manage among the sounds of demolition.
Clothes unmade and yet already ruined
flap on the clothesline of the future.

I writhe in sweaty man-made fibres and sandals.
Undeveloped rolls of film make me laugh
with ever greater abandon.
Hoarded addresses, unrecognized telephone numbers
bulge in tomorrow's diary which slips behind
a drawer and I cannot find it again,
only paper bubbling from jammed drawers
I've tried to force open.
To have been dwarfs in Lilliput,
what is that to the millennia?
—Our lives, that's all.
Our one hand gropes about
our sentimental heart. Our laced up feet, like Magritte shoes,
wait for permission to enter the secret gate.
Our eyes, cracked with use, drop the odd stone
or tear on stitched-up uncomplaining lips.
Wrinkled necks of silk hiss in the resurrected wind.
A sagging lacy breast lights like a butterfly
on an ancient bony shoulder. Their blood
was fire in a bottle of scent.
I can still start over again, wrote the
hand, slowly drowning, on the sunworn horizon
of the fading shore.
The day was long ago.
If non-existence proves possible
under such fertile soil, I may forgive you.

Lajos Grendel

The Story That Didn't Make the News

(Short story)

The news that armed men had occupied the cellar was brought to the knowledge of the chairman of the tenants' committee by the caretaker's wife at six o'clock in the evening. By then the caretaker had been negotiating with the commander of the troops for an hour and a half. The intruders had obviously got into the house in the morning, when they had only the pensioners and the unemployed to contend with. "Alright, madam, compose yourself, we'll think of something," said the chairman of the tenants' committee, who was a university lecturer.

The news spread like wildfire, but luckily did not create a panic. No one knew where the armed men came from, nor what they wanted. Some suspected a military putsch, others the outbreak of civil war, but on the whole it seemed most likely that two rival gangs were about to settle old scores.

"Which would be preferable," commented the bachelor from the first floor, who had been a secret policeman under the communist regime, and whom some of the tenants still went in fear of. "A gang war is always better than civil war."

There was a lot to be said for this opinion. The chairman of the tenants' committee knew his duty at any rate. The awareness of his responsibilty at once infused him with great courage. He called the police without delay.

"We are aware of the situation," they told him. "We have taken the necessary steps."

After this the chairman of the tenants' committee called an emergency meeting of the tenants for nine o'clock in the evening. The caretaker was also present at this, though the impression he gave was that of someone under the influence. True, this was the impression he most often gave. He was the only tenant who admitted to beating his children.

"There are a great many of them. A great many," he said, and his lips continued to work even when he had stopped speaking.

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"What do they want?" someone asked.

"They want us to clear out, " said the caretaker.

Several people broke in.

"But why?"

"Ask me another," said the pale and rattled caretaker, and his face registered all the misery that went with his job. "But there sure are a great many of them," he repeated dumbly.

However, the chairman of the tenants' committee did not lose his head. He assured those present that the police were on the job, all set to smoke out the armed intruders, and would intervene at a propitious moment. The atmosphere of the meeting changed. The tenants who up until then had definitely been alarmed, regained their composure, and some of them were already beginning to make conjectures.

"Most likely it's the Hungarians who are behind it all," said one.

"No, no! It's the Jews for certain, " said another.

"We killed off all the Jews in the war."

"Then it's got to be the Hungarians after all."

"Gentlemen, gentlemen!" placated the widow from the fourth floor, mother-in-law of a famous actor and who for this reason thought a great deal of herself, sometimes acknowledging her neighbours' greetings, sometimes cutting them dead, never anticipating their greetings. "Let's not make a political question out of banditry."

"Our fate is in the hands of our courageous police force, " said the chairman of the tenants' committee, and broke up the meeting.

The remaining hours of the evening passed peacefully and quietly. Radio and television news bulletins included no disquietening news on home affairs. The government was in place. The armed men did not come up from the cellar. The chairman of the tenants' committee rang the bell of every flat, encouraged everyone to persevere, and bade them goodnight. At the request of a number of tenants he called the police again.

"We wish to avoid unnecessary bloodshed," came from the other end of the line.

By midnight silence descended upon the neighbourhood, those with good nerves dropped off to sleep while the worriers stayed up for a while longer. It seemed certain that the police would surround the house under the cloak of darkness and ambush the intruders. There was no need to fear armed conflict as the tenants were unarmed. And besides, Christmas was coming, the feast of goodwill. The armed men, bandits or not, did not conduct themselves inimically. True, they wanted to seize the house, but for the time being they were satisfied with the cellar. It would have been pointless and unwise to provoke them. It seemed increasingly obvious that two rival gangs were waging war against each other, so the situation was not desperate. It is best to remain neutral, in local feuds of that sort, and life goes on anyhow.

In the morning most of the tenants decided not to go to work and stayed at home. There was still no sign of police intervention. The chairman of the tenants' committee was beginning to lose patience. First he sent the caretaker down to the cellar to resume negotiations, then telephoned the police again. The police, too, were running short of patience. They told the chairman of the tenants' committee to stop harassing them.

"What should I do, then?" asked the chairman, despairing.

"Bide your time."

In the meanwhile the caretaker reappeared, looking like a startled field mouse.

"They insist on our leaving the house," he said miserably, reporting the failure of his mission. "If not, they'll turn off the heating."

"By what time are we supposed to leave the house?" someone asked.

"I forgot to ask," said the caretaker, and went back to the cellar. Presently he came back. "They did not specify."

A storm of indignation swept the corridor leading to the cellar steps, where fifteen or twenty people had gathered, the chairman of the tenants' committee among them.

"Let's storm the cellar," proposed a hot-headed young man, said to be a sportsman.

"That would be a very irresponsible thing to do," said the former secret policeman.

"How many of them are there?" someone asked.

"A great many. More than yesterday," replied the caretaker in a choking voice.

Luckily, the chairman of the tenants' committee did not let his emotions run away with him.

"You had all better sit tight and keep your heads," he said. "The police may be here any moment now."

The remaining hours of the day were spent in nerve-racking waiting. The tenants' committee was in continuous session in the chairman's flat, and co-opted the caretaker. The caretaker informed them—in strictest confidence—that the armed men down below are cooking goulash in a stew pot on an open fire, and from time to time sing marching songs. There are no women among them. The situation seemed grave but not desperate. The armed men have no intention of harming the tenants, and this indicates that they may not be bandits after all. One of the committee members surprised the meeting with the suggestion that the armed men could perhaps be persuaded to lay siege to another house, if the chairman of the committee were to ask them nicely.

It was the caretaker who carried this message to the cellar in lieu of the chairman, but was back in a short time, crestfallen. It was this house that they wanted, and no other. The chairman contacted the police again.

"Preparations for the operation are in progress," they replied.

In the meanwhile the armed men carried out their threat and turned off the heating.

Acting upon the proposal of the tenants' committee, approximately half of the tenants—the women and the children—temporarily left the building to take refuge in the homes of friends and acquaintances. The caretaker was once more sent down to the cellar to relay the departure of the women and the children, and present it as a compromise to the commander of the armed forces. The caretaker spent less than five minutes down below.

"They say it's not enough," he reported. "We all have to go. Or else they'll turn the electricity off tomorrow."

On hearing this piece of effrontery the despair and anger of the tenants reached its peak. The chairman of the tenants' committee cautioned against precipitous action and disorder, and others too were of the opinion that anger is a bad counsellor. The armed men obviously had substantial reasons for besieging the house. It seemed unlikely that they had come to rob or plunder. In any case, they had promised the caretaker that they would touch neither the furniture nor the furnishings.

According to the caretaker, their commander is a remarkably intelligent man of experience who speaks several foreign languages and even has a Ph.D. The armed men are not in uniform, are all well-dressed and well-fed, pleasant and cheerful chaps on the whole. There are no foreigners or Gypsies among them. The spirit of the troops in the cellar is fine, you might even say excellent, but most of all comradely. They are all patient, though determined.

The caretaker's account did much to appease the ruffled feelings of the tenants. At half past seven in the evening everyone retired to their unheated flats to watch the news on TV. Nothing out of the ordinary had happened on this day either. There was a fire in some remote corner of the world. In other places there were floods and civil wars raged here and there. At home, peace and quiet reigned. Parliament was in session. The president of the republic received a foreign head of state, the foreign minister an ambassador. A referee was insulted during a basketball game. In the Zoo, the heating in the lionhouse was turned on. Employees of the State Railways elected a beauty queen.

After the news the committee assembled again to map out a course of action. The chairman called the police again, but all he got was the answering machine. The answering machine assured him that the police force was in place and occupied with the prevention of crime.

"Well, at least that's something," said one of the committee members.

The committee had just agreed not to give in to the threats of the armed men when the house was suddenly plunged in sepulchral darkness. The perfidy of the armed men caused general consternation. Moreover, the water was cut off at the mains.

"Something must have happened down there," said the caretaker in the dark, while the chairman went to fetch a candle from the kitchen. The caretaker stumbled down the cellar stairs to parley some more. There was nothing to be gained by his doing so, however, as the words of the commander—though spoken politely and pleasantly—soon made clear.

"They told me to tell you that they can't wait any longer."

The sportsman's blood was up again.

"And what is that piece of cheek supposed to mean?"

"It means that if we aren't out of here in an hour, they'll blow the house up."

The ultimatum of the armed men added fuel to the fire, and placed the chairman of the tenants' committee—whose authority had already been shaken by the dark, the cold, the inaction of the police, and the protracted negotiations—in a position where he had no choice but to take matters into his own hands, and this he was called upon to do, or to resign. After some hesitation, he chose the former.

Candles and floating wicks lighted the corridor leading to the cellar, as if it were All Souls' Day. At the bottom of the stairs a veteran with a submachine gun barred his way. But the chairman did not lose heart.

"I'm the chairman of the tenants' committeee," he said. "I want to speak to your commander."

The commander sat on a crate in front of the boiler-room door in an unbuttoned winter coat, smoking a cigar. He looked tired but resolute. He could not offer the chairman of the tenants' committee a seat, or perhaps did not want to. He remained seated during the conversation, with three young bodyguards standing by to see he came to no harm. Through the half-open window the draught brought in flakes of snow.

"Why did you occupy the house?" asked the chairman.

"So that it should not fall into enemy hands," replied the commander.

"What are your intentions?"

"To join battle with the enemy."

The chairman of the tenants' committee politely and patiently gave voice to his incomprehension.

"I see no sign of the enemy. There are only peace-loving, well-intentioned citizens living in this house."

"I know, " said the commander. "The enemy is over there," he said, pointing towards the neighbouring house.

"And what is going to happen now?"

"We are going to annihilate the enemy."

"But why?" asked the chairman, still uncomprehending.

"Because otherwise they'll annihilate us."

"Is there some kind of ideological dispute between you?"

"Nothing of the sort," smiled the commander.

"Financial then...?"

"Not at all."

"There must be some reason for your being at war with each other."

"Of course. They're our enemies."

"That's not a reason," said the chairman.

"But it is! You couldn't find a more substantial reason, sir!"

The chairman of the tenants' committee saw that his efforts were in vain, he would not be able to drag an intelligible answer out of the commander. So, recklessly, he flung in his face:

"We are not going anywhere. This is our house."

"As you wish," said the commander, and turned his head. His bodyguards led the chairman of the tenants' committee away. He was greatly agitated, his eyes brimming with tears of frustration and anger. "We'll defend the house to our last breaths, " he called back from the stairs.

But it would have been too much to expect heroics from the chairman of the tenants' committee. He had done what he could do, and everyone was saving their last breath for some later date. While he was parleying with the commander down below, the tenants had packed up their valuables and evacuated the house, assembling in front of the building. Only the mother-in-law of the famous actor stayed behind to wait for him.

"They charged me to tell you this was a decision reached by mutual agreement. Old Vojtek's the only one who chose to stay in the house."

"A courageous man," nodded the chairman of the tenants' committee.

"It's easy for him. He's going to die soon anyway," replied the woman.

Darkness descended upon the neighbouring houses as well. It was not difficult to guess that they too had been occupied by armed men. In the park enclosed by the houses, under frosted trees weighed down with snow and hoarfrost, a great crowd of people had gathered, as though a mass-meeting were in preparation. Mostly men, but the chairman saw a couple of older women, and even some inqusitive children. It was cold. A rumour spread that the police had closed off the neighbourhood, but that was shortly denied. The people did not talk much, and did not mingle, the tenants of each building forming separate groups, as if this had any sort of significance.

"They sent emissaries over to our lot from Number 7," the former secret policeman informed the chairman.

"How do you mean, our lot?" said the chairman indignantly.

A woman answered his question.

"Well, those who occupied our house... They're our lot now. They're defending our house from the enemy. That's the way the whole house sees it. Don't you?"

The chairman thought this over for some time.

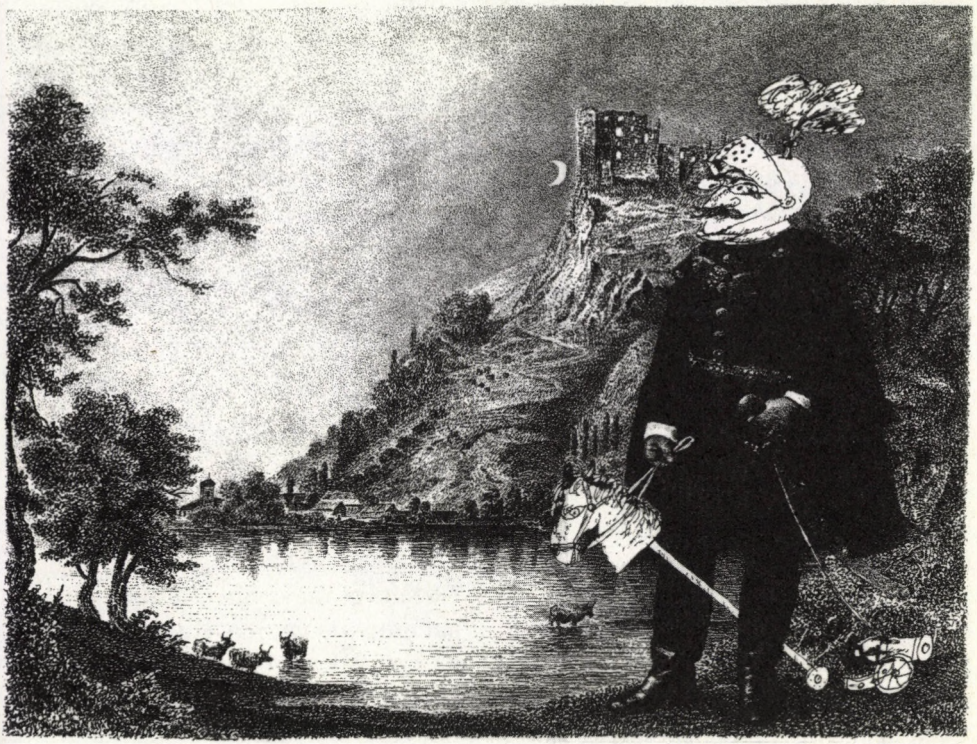
"There's something in what you say," he said at last.

"Once the fighting begins, it is our duty to range ourselves with our lot against the enemy. It is the only ethical thing to do, " continued the former secret policeman. "Of course, they may make peace and go away. That's why they're parleying now. We've got to be ready for any eventuality."

"And negotiations may drag on, for several days," said the chairman, and moved away.

He left the perilous neighbourhood stealthily, practically unnoticed. It crossed his mind that perhaps he ought to have resigned before leaving, but he did not have the heart to turn back. The tenants had given evidence of great patience, civic discipline and wisdom, from now on they will surely get along without him. Some of them will perhaps supply the troops with provisions, others, the hot-headed ones, will engage in the fighting. The way it usually happens. ❧

Translated by Eszter Molnár



Kálmán Mikszáth: The Siege of Beszterce. *Pen and ink. Cover.*

Gergely Fahidi

Paying for the Past

The Politics and Economics of Compensation

After the changeover from one-party rule to parliamentary democracy, one of the most difficult jobs for the old "socialist" countries was to face up to their own past, to provide symbolic or actual financial compensation to their citizens for the wrongs they had suffered. In Spain, after the end of dictatorship, the victims on both sides in the Civil War were paid their due recognition at a common memorial. This was declared as unacceptable in Central Europe, where pressure groups of the surviving victims had no feelings of mercy towards those who had acted as devoted servants of the previous regime. There were few instances of individuals being charged before a court, as in the Zhivkov trial in Bulgaria or in the prosecution of Honecker and his fellow leaders in Germany, but the rhetoric of the "new" democracies was harshly anti-communist in almost every country. The victims of the previous regimes were assured of moral as well as financial compensation, as complete as possible, in a similarly passionate political tone. In the end, however, the map of the regions, as regards compensation, has turned out to be variegated.

Political considerations repeatedly proved stronger than the principles of justice and right, even in the very definition of those entitled to compensation. For example, the possibility of compensation for the several million Sudeten-Germans was clearly rejected by Czechoslovakia—and also by its legal successor, the Czech Republic. In Romania, Romanian citizens who had served in the German armed forces, even in the SS, were declared to be more worthy of support than those who had been drafted into the Hungarian army after the re-annexation of North Transylvania by Hungary. The Hungarian Parliament proved quite liberal in this respect. Beside present Hungarian citizens, those who were citizens of the country at the time they suffered the wrongs concerned are also entitled to compensation. That includes, for instance, the above-mentioned Transylvanian Romanians who became prisoners of war as soldiers of

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the Hungarian army of Regent Horthy, as well as Jews deported to Germany from another re-annexed territory, which is now again part of Slovakia. The only major limitation was that, for property damages, reparation was due only if the nationalization, confiscation or other injury concerned property in the territory of present-day Hungary.

Where the manner of compensation was concerned, disagreements in the region were even greater than over the issue of who was to be compensated. The majority of states made it possible to return at least a considerable portion of "lesser" properties in their original form. In the Czech Republic, restaurants, shops and houses were returned to some 100,000 people to the value of 4 billion dollars. In Romania, but also in Yugoslavia, which continued to be ruled by communists, most of the land was given back to the original owners.

In Hungary, after a pitched political battle, the idea of the restoration of original property in its natural form, that is, reprivatization, was rejected by a parliamentary majority, and this parliamentary decision was backed by the Constitutional Court. Thus the issuing of compensation vouchers was accepted as the uniform way of compensation. The only exception was that relatives of those illegally executed for political reasons, after being sentenced by a Hungarian court, were entitled to direct cash payment.

Since the issuing of the first compensation vouchers in January 1992, at that stage still of a symbolic quantity, up to November 1994, some 115 billion forints' worth of compensation vouchers were handed over to those entitled to them by offices established directly for that purpose. This amount was enough to meet more then 90 per cent of the total of the 1.3 million claims submitted on the basis of the three Compensation Acts, two of which dealt with property losses and damage caused after 1949 by nationalization and forced collectivization, by the confiscation of Jewish property, the deportation of ethnic Germans, and the confiscation of large plants and estates between 1938 and 1944. The third Act covered compensation for loss of personal freedom, for instance by forced labour or captivity as prisoner of war. However, in March 1994, "additional" compensation claims were also accepted, thus prolonging for a short while the deadline for the submitting of all kinds of claims. The some 600 thousand "latecomers" are entitled to a further 20 to 30 billion forints worth of compensation.

The laws were formulated in such a way that the real value of compensation could only be limited. No person can be given compensation vouchers to a nominal value higher than 5 million forints—the price of an average middle-class apartment in Budapest today—except in extreme cases (when, for instance, a single descendant "inherited" entitlement from both parents). The method of calculation serving as a basis for compensation is such that, while the amount offered to "minor property owners", especially to farmers, is relatively acceptable, urban property and large estates are drastically devalued. Characteris-

tically, the former owner of a nationalized apartment house in some of the most sought-after neighbourhoods in Buda would hardly be able to buy even a small bedsitter in the same area for the vouchers received in compensation for it. Thus the vouchers expected to total some 1.5 billion dollars are a mere fraction of the value of the entire property that went into collective ownership in successive waves of nationalization.

The officially declared objectives of compensation were restoration of justice and the creation of a new class of middle-class property owners. One objective remained undeclared but was noticeable to all, namely, that the same class was meant to deliver enough votes for the re-election of the "Christian-national" coalition which came to power in 1990. This latter turned out to be a total failure, but the creation of a new class of property owners has, however, partly succeeded. The bulk of compensation vouchers was used for purchasing land, and was also accepted in payment for state property that was being privatized. Mostly cooperative lands were offered for auction, and the people entitled to bid were permanent residents of the villages to which the lands belonged, or those who were entitled to compensation in return for land confiscated in the same area. Therefore, the bidders who had similar interests and came from the same, relatively narrow circle, could form buyers' cartels and, at some 80 per cent of the over 21,000 auctions held, were able to purchase land at the lowest price still acceptable, i. e. for compensation vouchers of no more that 500 forints in nominal value per Gold Crown (a unit establishing soil quality).

Given the fact that people were given 1,000 Ft worth of compensation vouchers per Gold Crown, many were able to acquire twice as much land as what they had lost. One third of the country's arable land, 37 million Gold Crowns in value, went into private ownership that way. Cooperatives received compensation vouchers to the nominal value of nearly 20 billion forints. In addition, the Compensation Act made it possible that only the theoretical fertility of the land, i. e., its Gold Crown value, be taken into consideration, disregarding the kind of crop it actually carried. Some people came into possession of forests with fully grown trees or even walnut groves for a fraction of their real value. In several areas this led to a considerable destruction of standing timber, the extent of which, in figures, has not yet been established. Characteristic of the present situation is the fact that in the hilly area north of Lake Balaton, a tenth of the grapes remained unpicked in the autumn of 1994, thus some of the produce was lost because of uncertainties over ownership. On the whole, however, the former owners of small holdings were among those taking the greatest advantage of compensation. It is another story that, due to a lack of capital and equipment, a considerable proportion of the new owners do not, or will not, cultivate their newly obtained property.

Although, in theory, foreign citizens were permitted to bid at the auctions only if they were entitled to compensation in their own right, this did not prevent

Austrian farmers from buying, through straw men, much of the available land in the western border region. They will have no trouble whatever crossing the border whenever they wish to cultivate their property. This is something quite contrary to the theory behind the entire compensation process, but it will certainly not be to the disadvantage of standards of agriculture in Hungary. Attempts have been made to buy back some of the large estates as well. A considerable number of properties above one hundred hectares were established; indeed, the aristocratic Batthyányi family is alleged to have got back several thousand hectares of their "ancestral" lands. On the whole, however, the typical farm is small, and cannot really be cultivated economically. It is destined to be leased for cultivation, sooner or later, to cooperatives or larger farms. Only a minor portion of land is still to be auctioned, and altogether some 2–3 million Gold Crowns' worth of state-owned land remains to be sold. Half of that, however, can be bid for by anyone compensated in his or her own right, which makes it conceivable that in 1995 there may be land auctions in which thousands of people participate.

Tenants of state-owned dwellings who bought their homes for compensation vouchers fared better than others. Here the local authority was obliged to take the vouchers at their nominal value plus any interest due. Since, according to the law, up to the end of December 1994, the interest on compensation vouchers is set at 75 per cent of the central bank's base rate, an amount which automatically increases the nominal value of the voucher. In November 1994 a 1,000 forint voucher was "officially" worth 1,690 forints. Vouchers to the value of over 5 billion came into the possession of local government authorities in return for dwellings and other premises.

The "final destination" of compensation vouchers is to be shredded under the supervision of the Budapest Securities Company. That, however, is the fate of only the vouchers for which state property has already been transferred to somebody, which means that cooperatives and local government authorities represent only half-way stations on the road traversed by vouchers. Of the vouchers, the total nominal value of which, along with the additional compensation, is expected to reach 130–140 billion forints, only 29.87 billion forints worth has been cancelled by the State Property Agency (ÁVÜ) and 13.94 billion by the State Property Shareholders' Company (ÁV Rt.) so far. Two main types of compensation-voucher privatization have come into being: one is when certain companies—usually smaller—are sold, and the winning tenderer is permitted to pay part of the price in compensation vouchers. On the other hand, the two privatization organizations have also announced exchanges where, at predetermined rates, vouchers could be handed over directly for company shares.

The first variant turned out to be incredibly advantageous for large investors who, in the summer of 1994, were, for example, able to "buy" a plant or real estate offered at 100 million forints for no more than 25 million. At that time the

market value of compensation vouchers was some 40 per cent of their nominal value, while the same nominal value, with interest added, was 160 per cent. That extraordinary advantage, however, could only be used to the full in cases where a relatively high ratio of the selling price was payable in compensation vouchers, and there were few bidders, for in the case of genuine competition, the would-be buyers were ready to offer four times as many "compensation forints" as real forints. Right after the 1994 elections, the new Soc/Lib government began to organize special tenders for cooperatives forced to take compensation vouchers in return for their land. For instance, the shares of a number of food-producing or agricultural trading companies were made available exclusively to cooperatives in return for vouchers.

From the point of view of those receiving compensation, unless they sold their vouchers for cash, the best opportunities were provided by those public bond issues where they themselves were able to pay in vouchers, and the rules of allocation were expressly designed so as to place them in an advantageous position. In the spring of 1993, the role of stalking horse was filled by two companies—Alfa Trading and Müárt—not very successfully, in fact. There was an almost complete disinterest in Alfa, whose shares were offered against vouchers on a one-to-one basis, while the Müárt stock sold against vouchers totalled 3.7 million forints. A new Müárt exchange was announced for September, but by then the exchange ratio was 1:2. Those subscribing in the spring, calculating at the then 700-800 forint market rate of the vouchers, had been able to purchase Müárt shares at half price, but the autumn buyers got them at a 30–40 per cent exchange rate. In 1993, however, the company went bankrupt, so the "lucky" ones were those able to get rid of their shares at a 20 per cent price in time, while those who were slower were stuck with completely valueless shares.

The first really successful exchange for shares took place in June–July 1992, when shares of IBUSZ, the first Hungarian company to go on the stock market, were sold for compensation vouchers at a 3:1 rate. Shares totalling 3–6.5 billion forints at their nominal value were offered and immediately sold as expected since the shares of the travel agency had a price of 3,400 forints at the Stock Exchange at the time. Although the price had gone into a slide, even at 2,800 forints more than 900 forints could be made from a compensation voucher which was then purchasable for 700–800 forints. On December 1, trading in compensation vouchers began on the Budapest Stock Exchange, which made it possible for those compensated, the majority of whom knew little about the stock market, to obtain reliable information on the value of their vouchers. There were times when more trading was done on the Stock Exchange in compensation vouchers than in all other shares together.

The trade-ins continued: shares which have since taken a lead role at the Stock Exchange, of the Pick Salami Producing Company, were issued in November. This stock was offered for both cash and compensation vouchers by

ÁVÜ. The exchange rate of the vouchers was no longer calculated automatically on the basis of their legal nominal value, then already at 1,225 forints, but they were openly "devalued": the price of a share was 1,200 forints in cash or 1 voucher plus 120 forints in cash. Even so, the potential profit, given the 800 forint exchange rate of the vouchers, was still 280 forints, which meant that speculators could earn 23–24 per cent within days. The genuine surprises, however, were still to come, and they were pleasant ones, too. The value of the stock of the company, extremely successful by Hungarian standards, broke through the 3,000 forint barrier within a year, and, during the biggest boom up to this day on the Budapest Stock Exchange—also acting as the motor of the boom—peaked at a rate of over 11,000 forints, if only for a few days. Its price moved to and fro between 6,000 and 8,000 for the rest of the year. Considering the extremes, the lucky ones who could take part in the first compensation exchange and sold their Pick shares in the neighbourhood of their peak value, were able to realize 900 to 1,000 per cent gains on their vouchers within one and a quarter years. There was good reason why during the following Pick sales the terms of exchange changed, too, in June 1992 to 3:2, and in November to 5:2. It was also due largely to these sales that small investors were encouraged to start speculating in compensation vouchers, something that is clearly shown by the fact that because of oversubscription, one person could buy no more than 22 shares in July, and only 18 in November.

The real "fireworks" were lit towards Christmas 1993 by a government which already had the coming elections in mind. Beside Pick, stocks of two companies as profitable-looking were offered: Prímagáz and Globus Canning. Eleven shares of the gas company were sold in exchange for 10 compensation vouchers, and the biggest of the owners also announced a buy-back operation at the rate of 1,300 forints at the same time. Thus, with a voucher price of 750–800 forints, speculators could count on a completely risk-free, certain profit of 500 forints. In the case of Prímagáz, and even more in that of Globus a little later—where twelve shares could be bought for ten vouchers—the overdemand was astonishing. Those stocks also produced substantial profits for the lucky ones who owned them: during the spring bull market, they reached three to four times the value at which the stocks had been issued.

In January 1994, one could still get hold of shares of Chinoin Pharmaceuticals, a company with extremely good economic indices, with relative ease, giving 50 one-thousand-forint vouchers for two shares with a nominal value of ten thousand forints. With that, however, the Golden Age of profitable trade-ins for "simple" compensated people had come to an end. It was not as if supply were running out. In fact, the government, looking on compensation increasingly as an operation to win votes, launched some astonishing projects. For instance, in the process of the Small Owners' Share-Buying Programme (KRP). Shares of the

Sopron Brewery and the plastics processing plant Pannonplast were given away practically free, at a registration fee of 2,000 forints per person, to be paid in instalments months later in compensation vouchers (the set-up of the offer meant that a hundred per cent profit was all but guaranteed). It is nevertheless unavoidable that the "man in the street" should be literally squeezed out of fabulous deals of this kind. Only the luckiest and most persistent compensees—those who were ready to spend two or three days queuing and even sleeping in the street—had any chance against organized groups of investors frequently moving "hot" money, using violence and hired queuers, not to mention people let in by the back door as a favour.

Somewhat surprisingly, it was precisely in May 1994—election-time—that the privatization supply began to dwindle, thus the boom, so much expected by speculators and the beneficiaries of compensation, similar to that of last Christmas, never took place. Compensation, in any case, did not save the "Christian-National" parties from heavy defeat in the elections. Strangely enough, its candidates performed more poorly in those, largely agricultural, regions where compensation considerably contributed to the welfare of potential voters than they did in the wealthier districts of Budapest where "compensation forints" represented at best the icing on top of the cake of already fair-sized family incomes. The absolute majority of seats won by the Socialists, on the other hand, made a more dramatic impact on the value of compensation vouchers than on the quoted rate of any other bonds or shares. The exchange rate of a voucher, still worth 550–570 forints in May, dropped to 400 forints on the day following the first round of the elections, from where it was still able to climb back temporarily, regaining more than a hundred forints. However, the doldrums on the stock market since May, then the beginning low, coupled with the new government's hesitation where privatization was concerned, permanently brought down the exchange rate of compensation vouchers to a level around or below 400 forints.

Since the Horn government came into office, practically no public stock sales have been held. Indeed, even the shares of the big pharmaceuticals plant Richter Gedeon, meant originally for compensees, were sold off for cash to foreign and, to a lesser part, Hungarian buyers. On announcements of privatization tenders, the opportunity to pay in compensation vouchers was increasingly limited, and, up to the end of October, the comments of politicians were anything but encouraging. It was suggested that, in 1995, 8 to 10 large investment funds would be established to serve as "dustbins" into which the remaining minority share packets still in the possession of the ÁVÜ and the ÁV Rt. would be swept, while the compensation vouchers still on the market or yet to be issued would be overstamped and exchanged directly for the vouchers of these funds. Furthermore, the Finance Minister seemed not to oppose the idea that compensation vouchers should simply be invalidated at the end of 1995.

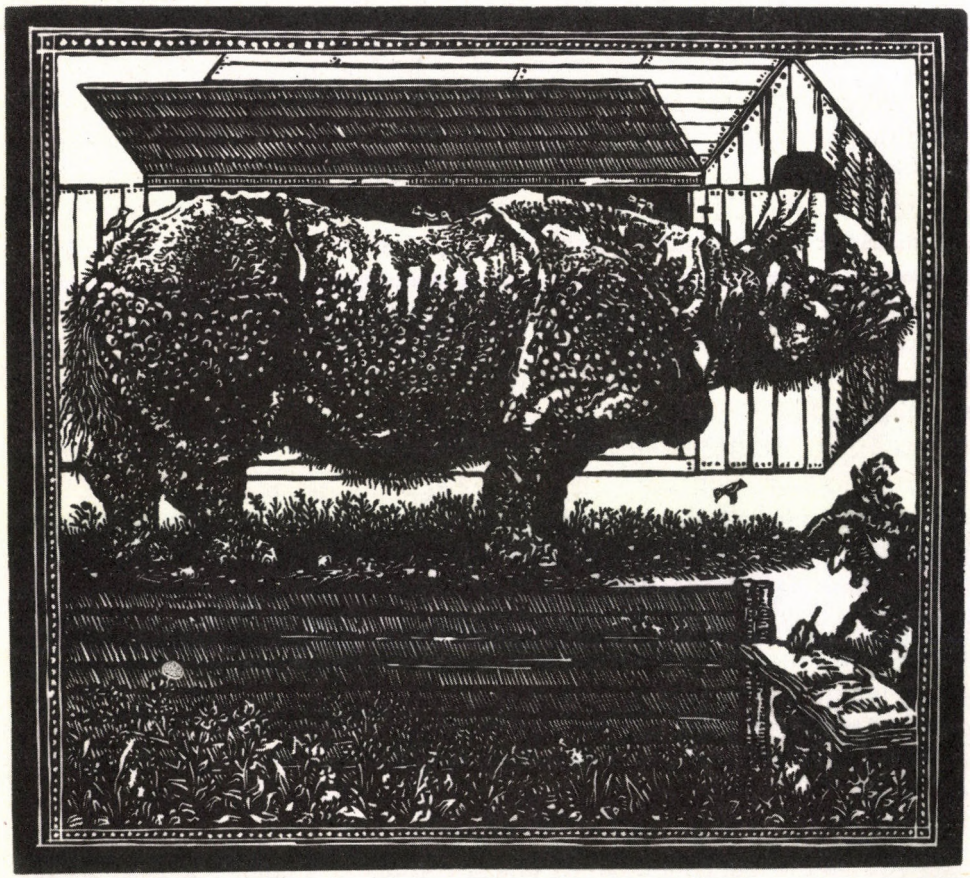
It is small wonder that compensation vouchers reached a nadir, a stock market value of 300 forints—true, in connection with a minor Stock Exchange scandal involving only 10 vouchers—less than 20 per cent of the interest-added nominal value. People have had so far only the worst experiences where investment funds created by the ÁVÜ were concerned. Two major attempts had been made up to then, called Pillar 1 and Pillar 2, real estate funds subscribable in exchange for compensation vouchers, which can now be sold on the stock market at a very low price, a mere third of the net asset value.

At this time of short supply, two young men, not known on the stock market before, came up with a brand-new idea, indirectly offering tax cuts for compensation vouchers. The gist of the idea is that vouchers are exchanged at a price close to their nominal value, that is, at four times their purchase price, for the openly issued shares of a newly founded company, for which investment-supporting tax benefits are due. Persons obliged to pay the highest category of personal income tax—i. e., 44 per cent—could make a profit of 75 per cent at the expense of the Treasury which had treated compensees so cruelly in these recent months. For instance, compensation vouchers to a nominal value of 100,000 forints, actually purchased for 40,000, were "bought" by the young men's company, HB Westminster, at an exchange rate of 160 per cent. As an investor, the buyer of 160,000 forints' worth of shares is entitled to a tax cut of 70,400 forints.

This company was followed by eight others into the market; in the meantime the compensation policy of the government also changed—at least where promises were concerned. The Prime Minister suddenly began to worry about the large numbers of the compensated—all this happened a few weeks before the municipal elections—demanding measures to stop the fall in the price of compensation vouchers. These statements did have an at least temporary impact. The price of vouchers stabilized in the neighbourhood of 400 forints. This was followed by a radical decline in interest in the newly launched compensation-voucher-investing companies, and investors began to hope for the start of direct share trade-ins. Those who had hopes about the offering of well-known companies traded at least on the over the counter market, such as the oil industry giant MOL, or the telecommunications company MATÁV, were disappointed even on the rhetorical level. Notions discussed mentioned only that 10–15 per cent of the shares of ten gas and electricity companies each should be made available to beneficiaries of compensation, and that cooperatives and local government authorities be able to pay in compensation vouchers for state property obtained through bidding to a greater degree than before.

It was said that those originally receiving compensation should be given access, still in 1994, to property to the value of 15 billion forints. Up to the beginning of December, however, not a single sign of this could be seen. It is only at the ÁVÜ that the foundation of investment corporations holding a basket of minority interests is continuing. Among these, beneficiaries of compensation are

most likely to meet first the shares for a company called Váltó I, with a portfolio including stocks of brokerage companies. It is planned that the first fund, with a capital of 1.2 billion forints, offered at 150 per cent of nominal value, will be followed by two more, similarly mixed, portfolios, then regional funds would follow. These are to be delineated quite literally: a horizontal line is to be drawn across the middle of the country, two verticals at roughly the line of the Danube and the Tisza, and six regions have been instantly created. The main shortcoming of these "brilliant" solutions, however, lies in the utter uncertainty of the pricing of the future mixed portfolios. Since at the moment not even the shares of the big gas or electricity companies are openly traded in Hungary, their actual market value can only be estimated, but even that depends to a great extent on future energy prices and the eventual subsidies to be determined by the government. In other words, right now, there is nothing for the beneficiaries to buy for their vouchers. The future so far holds nothing but a pig in the poke for the altogether 1.9 million Hungarians who have claimed compensation. ❧



Rhinoceros. Lino cut.

Tamás Vajna

The Business of Survival

The Invisible and the Black Economy

When any group of people meet in Hungary, living standards and their difficulties soon become a subject of conversation, regardless of the composition of the group as to sex or social background. You take a taxi and your driver will complain after the second exchange of words that the price of petrol keeps rising inordinately, putting his livelihood at risk, and there is all that bother about making out invoices (needless to say, when you have paid the fare, he forgets to give you the receipt). The businessman or entrepreneur you talk to wails about the recession—which is, of course, hitting him particularly hard—and under the same breath brags about his latest feat of doctoring his income tax return. At the butcher's, you are sure to hear about the outrageous price of meat and the lamentable state of Hungarian agriculture in general, but are likely not to notice that the one kilogramme of beef you asked and paid for is only about 80 dekagrammes.

When you ask Hungarians how and on what they live—not taboo questions here—they will almost unfailingly say "badly" and "on virtually nothing!". They may even add that without a black (Chinese) market, without the possibility of evading the taxes due, if they had to present a bill on every thing they sell, and without occasional tips or small spinoffs and some profits from the black economy, things would be even worse, for "you can't live on your wages or salary in Hungary nowadays."

The studies conducted on a representative sample of households, in particular those which trace the changing social and financial position of the same family over several years, provide evidence for what everyone knows, namely that the political and economic changes have lowered the real incomes of many more people than the number of those whose financial positions they improved. This is true even though Hungarians are apt to assess their standing and the chances of improvement more pessimistically than people in other European countries (compare the relevant results of the Gallup and Szonda Ipsos polls).

The general gloom is also darkened by the steady decline in the number of people who can afford to put aside any money after taking care of daily necessities and monthly bills. On the other hand, it is a fact—showing that there are many paradoxical aspects to the Hungarian economy—that total savings are growing. This

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means that it is wrong to describe what is taking place in Hungary by simply saying that there is general impoverishment. Accepting research results that the gap in the respective financial positions and living standards of certain sections keeps widening gets one closer to the truth.

Today about 35 per cent of Hungary's 11 million people live under subsistence level. (According to Central Statistical Office surveys, a citizen living alone in his own home needs about 20,000 forints a month to scrape by. This is considered "too much to starve and not enough to eat your fill", as the Hungarian saying goes. The sociologist Rudolf Andorka says that today two and a half million people in Hungary live below the poverty line, though in the early eighties the poor numbered "only" one million. He is especially concerned about the growing threat poverty poses to children. Almost half of the under–18 population of Hungary live in households where the per capita income is less than subsistence level.

There is a scarcity of data available on the "relatively poor" who live at subsistence level or on incomes a few per cent below. Last year's Central Statistical Office study on average living standards offers only a few index numbers. For instance, there is a considerable difference between the two sides of the poverty line. On subsistence level, people spend between 30 and 40 per cent of their income on food, whereas those under the poverty line find that on the average 60 per cent of their income goes there. For them, even paying for the use of the essential utilities is close to an unsurmountable problem. The total of accumulated debts to the Hungarian Electricity Board this year reached almost one and a half billion forints. The Budapest Municipal Gas Works is now owed seventeen times as much as it was two years ago.

Even worse off are those in the "severely destitute" bracket. The Social Research and Informatics Association (TÁRKI, after the Hungarian initials) estimates that about 4 per cent of the population falls into this category. Some forty thousand of them—and according to some assessments, a still larger number—are homeless. Apart from having to cope with extreme poverty, they are also hit by the condemnation they generally receive for not having a roof over their heads and for being forced to live in the streets, a life which public opinion holds to be closely linked to alcoholism and criminality. (A survey by the Crisis Management Bureau of the Ministry of Welfare indicates that 7.2 per cent of the homeless have served at least one prison term, while the proportion of those who have received a custodial sentence is 1.7 per thousand in the population as a whole. There is no evidence, however, that people just above the poverty line commit fewer offences than the homeless below it; the probable reason for the former's cleaner penal record is simply that they are better able to avoid being called to justice.

The homeless are actually expected to live on an average monthly income of 4,500 to 6,500 forints, with the exchange rate of $1 equalling Ft 110 in December 1994. At the same time, only 33 per cent get any kind of social relief (to an average of 1926 forints!) whereas the majority of 47.2 per cent live off odd jobs. For the some 25 to 30,000 homeless people in Budapest, there are fewer than three thousand beds in refuges, and the soup kitchens cannot offer one hot meal a day to more than five or six thousand people.

The invisible economy

The invisible—or sometimes called hidden or grey—economy is most ambiguous both as a term and as an economic

sector. It is responsible for about 23 to 25 per cent of the GDP, this year nearly 550 billion forints.

Ildikó Ékes, a staff member of the Trade Union Institute for Economic and Sociological Research, who is thoroughly familar with the field, defines the phenomenon in the following terms: In Hungary the hidden economy includes the economic, business or allied activities that evade statistical registration and taxation, and yield undeclared incomes in cash or kind. The term covers a wide variety of incomes deriving from the transfer of money. Tips given to waiters and filling station attendants are included, the gratuity slipped into the doctor's pocket (an accepted feature of the "free" Hungarian health service for decades now); "up" to the millions presented in an attaché case to the high-ranking public servant who was "helpful" to someone in the course of the privatization of a coveted industrial company.

A variety of incomes acquired through actual work performance also come under this heading. Such is, for instance, the popular pastime of producing at the workplace—and largely out of workplace materials—useful things on the side for one's own profit, and doing and providing work illegally. Illegal employment is now practiced in two forms, hiring foreign workers—chiefly from Romania—unregistered and for a fraction of the legal minimum wage, or registering certain employees with the social insurance authority as receiving only the minimum wage though in fact they are tolerably well paid. Since pensions are based on the stated minimum wage, the employee concerned finally receives a much lower monthly pension than he should be receiving.

Of course, money deriving from black market sales, from smuggling, profits coming from illicit foreign currency dealings and from various ways of defrauding consumers, also fall under the heading of undeclared incomes and represent profiteering from the hidden economy.

Before the nineties, tipping, knocking together presentable or sellable objects, gratuities or small inducements made up the main areas. Today tax fraud or evasion, corruption and embezzlement constitute the most lucrative practices. The change is due not only to the simple fact that, in consequence of the decline in real incomes, people living on wages and salaries can no longer afford tips and therefore either do without the services that require tipping or pay only the basic price and, whether expected to or not, refuse to tip. The big deals in the hidden economy stem from the transfers of money in the private sector which came to pass during the years of transition marking the major political change.

Unlike the previous period when the employer arranged the tax returns of employees, most people now fill in their annual tax returns without, however, declaring each and every item of their taxable incomes. Tradespeople perform work saying, when it comes to payment, that the cost will be lower if no invoice is required. Examining simply the files of the tax authority, one would find that most private self-employed artisans and businesses in Hungary—and their employees, too—barely make ends meet.

Economists react to the existence of the hidden economy in two ways. Some say that it is a valuable outlet that is actually of assistance to people in bearing the difficulties of the transition period and changing market conditions, and it is also a way to preserve living standards. Others consider the phenomenon distinctly harmful as taxes and social insurance payments fail to come in. The present government is trying to compensate for unrealized tax revenue through raising taxes and—using its knowledge of Hungarian tax morale—making

people modestly living on wages and salaries pay for the vast wealth accumulated and shrewdly kept tax free by the rich.

Ildikó Ékes says that the hidden economy is both a benefit and a curse. What is certainly bad is that it keeps Western investors of substance from the Hungarian market. Ékes bases her opinion on a 1991 study by Richard Rose, who conducted surveys in Romania, Poland, the then Czecho-Slovakia, Bulgaria, and Hungary. He found that foreign investors are kept back from investing in a climate that benefits and enables to keep afloat only those businesses and people who are willing to resort to unfair practices.

A complete liquidation of the hidden economy has proved impossible even in countries where taxes are paid in a disciplined manner. There are, however, means to influence at least tax evasion, a phenomenon that can be traced back to the hundred and fifty years of Turkish occupation. Then it was just as "virtuous" a deed to refuse to pay tribute to the alien oppressor as it was under communism to cheat officialdom. Hungarian society still positively assesses all kinds of "clever" manoeuvring. In some ways, psychologists point out, citizens are in perpetual disagreement with their government—regardless whether they have voted for it or not. For one thing, they are certain that they are not treated fairly when it comes to taxes. And, regardless of the amount of the taxes to be paid, they believe that the government makes unsatisfactory use of the money.

The black economy

For 1994, the amount turned over by illegal trading in Hungary is estimated to be about 300 billion forints. This is something quite different from the hidden economy; in this case we are up against patently illegal activities.

Merchants and purchasers are equally interested in dodging the intentions of the authorities, irrespective of whether the latter are about to cream the profits of traders or make things more expensive for buyers. This is a bond between two potentially antagonistic parties. The handling of invoices is obviously one area where control can be sidestepped, but there are more sophisticated practices that often fall into the category of criminal behaviour. In principle, purchaser and seller share equally in the savings deriving from such practices, but it is hardly ever the buyer who gets the true benefit of illegal commerce.

On the black market, things do cost considerably less. Economists think, however, that the reasons for its existence are fundamentally social and that one would have to dig down deep into the hidden recesses of the economy to come up with the real explanation.

The geopolitical features of Hungary are certainly one factor. It is in the eastern regions of the country that unemployment is at its highest, and cheap goods are in greatest demand. The financial position of the neighbouring countries undoubtedly also plays an important part. For instance, the Ukrainian economy is much too badly off to maintain its citizens, who do their trading in the border zone in both senses of the term. The situation is similar—and prompts similar behaviour patterns—throughout the eastern part of Hungary from areas adjoining Slovakia to those bordering Serbia.

The range of goods on sale is very broad. From disposable nappies to submachine guns, everything is available and finds purchasers. Ordinary tools are on display, above all on the markets of County Szabolcs–Szatmár, on the Ukrainian and Romanian borders. Machinery and equipment is available inside the country, particularly in Bács and Pest

Comparative Prices of Goods

Item	On the Black Market (in forints)	Official
Sneakers	900–1,500	2,500– 6,500
Casual Wear	2,000–3,500	5,000–10,000
Women's dresses	1,200	6,000
Men's shirts	450	1,500
Coffee (1 kg)	200	500
Marlboro cigarettes	90	150
Vodka (0,5 l)	280	750
Handgun	5,000	40,000
Mobile phone	10,000	75,000
A pre-recorded audio cassette	300	750

Trend in Monthly Wages and Prices (1990 to 1994)

Year	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994
minimum wages					
in forints	5,600	7,000	8,000	9,000	10,300
average wages					
(gross—in frts)	13,241	16,934	20,253	24,710	29,700
consumer price index					
in per cent	128.9	135	123	123	120
wage index					
in per cent	124.6	127.8	119.6	122	120
minimum wage index					
in per cent	151.3	125	114.3	112.5	113.3

Source: Central Statistical Office

counties, and the situation is similar with respect to arms, which cross into Hungary from the east and keep moving southward. The prices range accordingly. A simple drill costs only 10 forints in the eastern town of Nyiregyháza, is 15 forints in Kecskemét, but at Érd, part of the Budapest agglomeration, you have to pay 20 forints for it. And if you are interested in buying a submachine gun, drive to Debrecen—where the biggest arms stores of the Soviet army were located—there it may be had for 15,000 forints, while in Kecskemét, closer to Budapest, in the middle of the country, the price of the same weapon will be ten thousand forints higher.

The social landslide of the early nineties created a new situation for individuals as well as the authorities. "The Hungarian economy was suddenly struck by liberalization," said the Undersecretary of the Ministry of Trade and Industry, "that may have been the reason why so many people thought that all restrictions were lifted, that trade was absolutely free." As a result, coffee from Austria, brandy from Yugoslavia, Romanian socks, and Italian shoes cluttered up the market. In consequence, for instance, the amount of coffee officially imported remained well under the coffee traded on the black market.

Hungarian authorities, including the Consumer Protection Board, are doing whatever they can to reduce illicit trade. They employ two methods. "Minimal action": disguised as ordinary customers, representatives of the Board visit the various illegal markets and make random purchases to probe into the nature of how these markets operate. A more effective means of control are raids. Here, some six to eight hundred officers—representing the various authorities from the Consumer Protection Board through customs officials to the police—are mobilized. All entrances and exits to the market area are sealed off, and all vendors found are screened. The coordinated "raids", held in Nyiregyháza, Mátészalka, and Kisvárda at the same time, will remain memorable for a long time to come. Dozens of people were caught redhanded and reported, and an even larger number of cash penalties were collected on the spot. (Cash penalties, at long last, were also raised in 1993. The 10,000 forint penalty was raised to 30,000, the 20,000 to 50,000, and the penalties the Board had authority to impose on the spot were raised from 3,000 to 5,000 forints.)

For all the prohibitions and penalties, the black market continues to flourish. The reasons are probably similar to those that have kept alive the oldest profession. After all, it is not only easy availability that is, the cheaper goods and services, but also the unaltered bouyancy of demand that keeps a trade going. Nor is the greed of the pimps a negligible factor.

Yes, the "pimps" are there in illicit trade, too, though there they are more likely to be called distributors or wholesalers, fences and smugglers. In fact, vice is the source of much of the particularly sought after goods that appear in practically all the black markets of the country. For commodities brought in by way of border-zone traffic, and also for the military equipment the Soviets left behind (this is reputed to include tanks, machine guns of fighter planes, not to speak of mine detectors and vast quantities of petrol), the connection is obvious. But smuggled goods make up the bulk of the commodities supplied by the wholesale merchants. The trucks arrive in Hungary legally, properly bonded and provided with the customs seal, but carrying something other than is specified in the bill of lading. The goods there itemized have been chosen to be subject to minimal duty, duly paid at customs; the trucks then go somewhere to unload the goods and carefully repack

them. Original Italian leather shoes are, for instance, sold on the illegal markets in unmarked white boxes. The vendors who deal with the customers get only minute profits for passing them on. The route from truck to consumer is much the same, regardless of the commodities involved.

Domestic fakes are another important source, selling imitation brand-names, as "original"—Adidas sneakers, and Levi's slacks, whatever is in high demand. After the first cleaning or laundering, the imitation brands are more often ready for the garbage bin than for wear. Nonetheless, extremely low prices have greater appeal for many customers than reliable quality. A brand-name piece of clothing in elegant stores costs about five times as much as the fakes on the market.

Neither poor, nor rich

Of course not all Hungarians are either filthy rich or pauperized mendicants. Most are wage and salary earners, making something on the side. It is they who keep the economy going.

Take an average professional couple, Mr and Mrs Béla Kovács, aged 50 and 48 respectively. They, and their two children (both at secondary school), live in a condominium in the Buda hills, on the right bank of the Danube. Mr Kovács is an agronomist by training, with additional qualifications as an agricultural economist and teacher. Before the political changes he was the chief agronomist of a collective farm within the Budapest agglomeration. He has since founded a company engaged in agricultural and food production research, particularly concerning bio-products, for the introduction in Hungary of chemical-free agricultural methods. His wife is also an agronomist with teaching qualifications, she used to teach in a secondary school; four years ago she became a public servant and is now responsible for further training and basic research in one of the ministries. Together they earn 90,000 forints a month after tax. Of this, 20,000 a month goes on financing various loans, including 10,000 for their three room flat which cost three milion, and a further ten to fifteen thousand on water, gas and electricity bills, and the service costs of the condominium. In practice they have to manage on 65–70,000 forints a month. Running expenses include the maintenance of two cars, the wife's small Citroën and the husband's larger VW, insurance, registration, petrol (which at the end of 1994 was close to 100 forints a liter). This also amounts to close on 25 to 30,000 forints. Thus around 40,000 forints are left to feed and clothe four persons. It is difficult to get away with under 5,000 forints for a weekend's shopping, and 1,000 forints a day for food, since both children are active and come home ravenous from their sports training sessions. Adding it all up, it is clear that the Kovács couple are happy if their money lasts to the end of the month. Extra expenses, repairs to the cars, more serious items of clothing, trousers, shoes, overcoats, a fortnight's holiday a year, can only be covered by what Mr Kovács makes on the side. Fortunately, he is commissioned four or five times a year to produce longer reports on this or that, and this allows him to contribute close to a million to the family budget. Without it they could certainly not have paid for their off-season two weeks in Greece, nor for the theatre or cinema tickets which are part and parcel of their way of life, even though they are so busy that they can seldom find the time. That extra is also needed to cover the children's pocket money, a total of 2,000 forints a month. Furthermore, if Mr Kovács were to include all the extra money he makes in his tax return, close to half of the extra million

would go on tax. What he does is to have his various fees paid to his children or their friends, giving them two or three thousand forints for a 50,000 forint item.

The Kovácses are actually doing quite well compared to the average. They have a home, two cars, and thanks to Mr Kovács, they can even afford to go away on holiday if they are careful with their money.

Things are nowhere near as rosy for the young in their first jobs. M. M., to give an example, is a young teacher. He finished college this year, and like all his peers, he had plans. Thanks to his mother's connections he landed a job in a primary school in a provincial town. He was prepared to take on the extra work involved in being the 'form teacher', and coach of the school basketball team. As a result he gets 25,000 forints after tax as a starting salary. He boards with a retired teacher couple, who charge him, as a colleague as little as 8,000 forints a month for a room and the use of the usual facilities. He does not own a car, and travels home, right across the country, by train to see his parents. He spends five to six thousand forints a month on travel. He could not survive without his parents' help. They largely provide him with food, and he only has to pay for bread, milk, etc. All the same, M. M. can't afford books or entertainment, and has to do without them. Unless he wins the national lottery, or he abandons his chosen profession for some well-paying job, there's not much chance of him getting on in the world.

Millionaire employees

It should be noted, however, that apart from those who are fast becoming impoverished and depend on the black market, there are groups of the quite rich even among the salaried. Managers of medium-sized and large enterprises and of joint companies—not to speak of the owners—include billionaries.

The average CEO, called general manager in Hungary, is paid approximately 4 million forints a year before tax, and about the same amount in bonuses. Such perks as the full-time use of a company car, share options, paid further-training opportunities, and contributions from the employer to the highly-rated employee's holiday programme, are taken for granted.

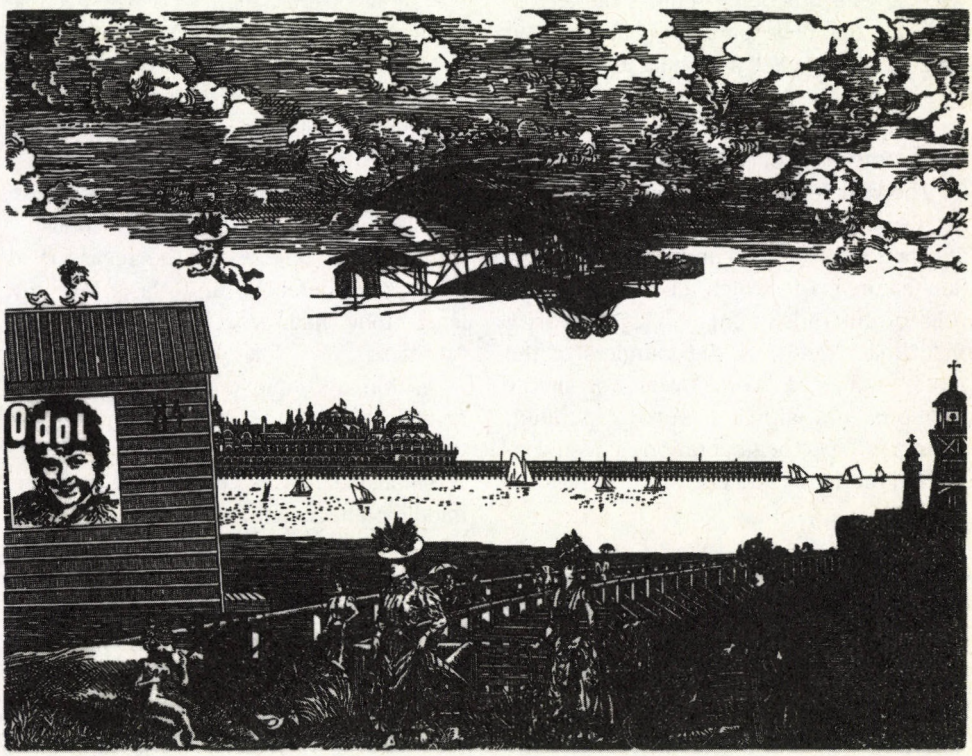
Generally only big companies have CEOs or general managers; medium-sized and smaller firms have managing directors with gross incomes ranging between 4 and 6 million forints annually. Typical medium-level managers draw incomes of about 2 to 2.4 million forints. While managers can always get a company car and some other perks, such benefits are considered extra attractions in the case of department heads.

The bonus system is the accepted thing in the case of executive officers, but considerably less frequent for medium-level managers. Top management, their deputies and the director-ranking chiefs of divisions and departments generally receive almost half of their incomes from recurrent fixed bonuses or from bonuses linked to performance. Obviously, the system is considered valuable not only because it stimulates competition and high performance but also because of the tax exemptions it makes possible.

The practice in Hungary matches the internationally accepted compensation system only in part. The custom of including in the employment contract a share option package for a manager or director is just now getting a foothold. Smaller perks, without involving risks, are as a rule preferred by Hungarian executive officers whose incomes are in substantial part made up by non-cash benefits. Besides company cars, they often include business

travel to far-off places, or life insurance packages provided by the company for certain directors.

The income of an executive is not necessarily a function of his place in the hierarchy. Directors in jobs in which suitable applicants are in short supply—for instance, personnel directors—find themselves in a position where their pay is often just about the same as that of their CEO. There are, of course, differences between companies, too, depending on ownership and the economic sector in which the company conducts its business. The best rewards are in the financial sector. The heads of banks and brokerage firms may earn as much as ten or twenty million forints a year. The heads of commercial firms often make 8 to 10 million. They are followed by top managers in the service and industrial sectors, with between four to eight million forints. Typically, state-owned firms pay from 50 to 70 per cent of this and the perks they are able to offer are also limited. The worst-paid executives are, however, those at governmental and local government institutions. The chief police officer of the country, for instance, receives only a little more in pay than a secretary to the CEO of a private company. It is therefore hardly surprising that there are cases of corruption in public administration or that a ministry official may buy sneakers for the kids on the black market. ❧



Grannies' Beach. Lino-cut.

György Marosán

The Business of Business

The New Entrepreneurs in the Making

The news is in the papers for everyone to read: Pekó Works has ceased production, Mr Mach is at the centre of a lawsuit with a bank, Controll has gone bankrupt, Microsystem has collapsed, and Kontrax is awaiting liquidation. There is nothing surprising in all that. After all, dozens of bankruptcies every day is part and parcel of the way capitalism is being "built." The fact is, however, that these particular businessmen and their companies were held up as examples in the past couple of years. Indeed, they might be said to be the role models for the restructuring of one country.

The year 1990 appears to have ended a far from homogeneous era, with several sub-periods, which all had their own peculiar features, and which all had their "heroes of enterprise". Mr Mach, Mr Morvai the "Boiler King", or the founders of the Pintér and Pekó Works were not simply entrepreneurs with a national reputation but personified the generation of businessmen of the 1970s and 80s.

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teaches at the School of Foreign Trade. He held CEO posts at the Hungarian Credit Bank (1988–89) and the Hungarian Fund for Enterprise Promotion (1989–90).

That reality is never as simple as the theory is well shown by the illusions and expectations these enterprises aroused. At the beginning of the 80s, when the Kádár leadership gave more freedom to individual initiative than before, most people expected that the next generation of genuine entrepreneurs would emerge from among the small businessmen who had become familiar with the pros and cons of owning private businesses over the previous decades, with all the difficulties and the sometimes devious ways of dodging them. They all had their well-established customers and market experience, had accumulated an amount of money which, especially at that time, could be regarded as quite considerable, and—last but not least—they had what was then called "contacts".

Within a couple of years, however, it turned out that the "business heroes" of the 80s would not be the early proprietors of small businesses. They came from the middle management and young executives, then in their thirties, of the then still state-owned enterprises and research and development institutions. The motivation of the two groups was basically different. The small businessmen were content with a relatively easy life—a solid middle-class standard of living, as one might say today —for themselves and their families. They

did not, or did not necessarily, want to grow, and were content with simple artisan production or services. Most of them were continuing a line of business that was traditional in their families, and they had no wish to abandon it. At most, they wanted their children to continue the family business, and to be left alone by politics.

Nevertheless, the first few entrepreneurs who emerged to become media stars came from among these people, even though they were the exception rather than the rule. Their life and success had the message that this was a land of unlimited opportunities. In reality, however, what was behind that success was the exploitation of a web of political contacts and rather murky personal relationships. Credit, an order, or official approval depended much more on a phone call from a high-ranking patron at the right time than on a well-thought out and presented business plan. In the end, these people themselves began to believe that everything was possible, that they were able to arrange or fix anything. The only thing to be done was to look for the right person, and to offer the right price.

The new generation of entrepreneurs emerging in the past decade, on the other hand, wanted independence, and wanted to make use of all the knowledge they had accumulated. They wanted to compete, to grow, to build empires. The majority was already experienced in production and management, and their knowledge covered an entire line of business or— industry. They had become familiar with the market as developers or customer service employees, and were well-travelled enough to see the international dimensions, albeit in most cases their foreign experience had only been in the "socialist" countries. They knew what customers wanted, and, within the given conditions, they were able to meet that demand. In the market of the old socialist countries, Hungary, producing goods "quasi Western" in quality, was highly competitive, and enjoyed a good position. That market seemed practically limitless at the time. However, they were well aware of what kind of future lay ahead if they chose to remain with a state-owned firm. It meant a very slow climb upward on the ladder of the hierarchy, servility toward the superiors, a great deal of time wasted in infighting, all of which would be rewarded with a salary barely above average and a small apartment in a housing estate. Many were content with that at the time but many were not.

Thus at the starting line were the private businessmen of the previous decade and the young managers in the large state firms who yearned for independence. The first group had experience behind them, the major content of their intellectual luggage. They knew the ways and means of doing business in socialism, knew the main commandments: never argue with those in authority, never make political comments, keep a low profile to the extent of being practically invisible, offer personal services to authority and hope for personal favours in exchange. One must not think of large-scale corruption, of large amounts of money changing hands. Most of the time, it was sufficient to provide prompt or extra service, or special commodities of a better than usual quality. There were, of course, also other types of help, more easily expressed in figures, such as doing up an apartment or a holiday house at "production cost" or importing a particular commodity, then in short supply in the country, from the West.

The reward for all this was a kind of political "umbrella" during the more inclement seasons of the political climate, help in the form of a phone call ensuring spares otherwise not available, foreign currency for the purchase of something need-

ed, the granting of permits, or the settling of complaints. Looking at it today, with the present order of magnitude in mind, all this may seem peanuts. Nevertheless, this was what made it possible for things to work smoothly. It was a strange relationship. The ruling élite of the times looked down upon the "maszek", as the private business owner was then called, making him feel that his existence depended on the benevolence of authority. The businessmen themselves—some of them on the face of it and others for want of something better—accepted the situation. Already at that time, it was quite a commonplace that the two élites were beginning to come together through marriage, close friendships, etc.

In this new structure, the economic and political system, opposed to private ownership and private enterprise in theory, began to integrate certain elements of entrepreneurship, and the businessmen of the times began to integrate into the system. They had no intention of overthrowing it; all they wanted was to bargain for, and establish, the best possible conditions for operating within a framework which they accepted as given. "To handle" the authorities and officials became something like a conditioned reflex, as did thinly veiled assistance in the form of finding "back doors" and ways of exemption from the rules. A peculiar system of "mutual assistance" developed and worked quite independently of the legal system, indeed running counter to it at times.

When you needed money, the place you went first was not the bank but the local government authority, the ministry, or perhaps even the office of the county or city Communist Party department responsible. It was they who had to be convinced that the "cause" was a "socially positive" thing, worthy of support, strengthening the position of socialism. Achieving all these exalted objectives would take no more than a phone call to the bank which would then provide the money for the deal, and to the office which would grant the permit needed for the actual order. That what was at stake was really the meeting of social needs would be quite apparent to the "comrade responsible" himself, since one or more models or examples of the object in question would be delivered to him for his own use, free of charge, of course (as a sample) or at "production cost" or, since it had suffered minor damage in shipment (the "damage" supplied if necessary) at cut price.

Looking back from the nineties, many small businessmen actually feel that it was the eighties, the final years of the "Kádár Era", that were the real paradise for entrepreneurs. That is ridiculous, but it is undeniable that the main problem in that period was not the market but getting the political "green light" and obtaining all the necessary licenses. With a little perseverance, however, these could be obtained by anyone. The price, of course, had to be paid. Unprincipled compromises were struck, scrutable networks of interests sprang up with a system of obligations and favours due. Members of these networks learned reasonably well how to fish in troubled waters, to make fairly precise calculations of the value of services inexpressible in money terms, and to adjust reciprocation accordingly. They learned to arrange and settle, to get permits, to order spare parts and to obtain credits. To put it briefly, they learned to live within the system and to shape rather murky conditions to their own advantage. This all means that those people who had become entrepreneurs in the 70s had a different approach and system of values. They took advantage of the sloppiness characteristic of "socialism"; they knew that anything could be arranged if only you found the right contact.

At the time of the changeover to a market economy, however, it was the young managers who took the leading role. They were those who, taking advantage of the transformation legislation and new corporation laws, were in a position to begin privatizing state property.

This new generation appeared to thrive in the year following the changeover. They grew at an unprecedented rate. Corporate empires worth billions appeared. Aggressive businessmen, good at communicating with the press, became "heroes of our times" in many eyes. The media spread the message that these were the men to get the country back on track: intelligent investors, they would give skill the status it deserved; they would be patrons of culture and sports and, at the same time, even of charities.

By 1993–1994, however, disaster had struck. The model businessmen started to topple in quick succession. They had liquidity difficulties, then went bankrupt. First there were only rumours, then articles in the press about their difficulties, denials and tergiversations. In the end, there came the moment of truth, the sad reality. Yesterday's robust, giant companies, with full order books, paying generous salaries, especially to their executives, collapsed overnight, the balloons burst. Their assets, estimated at billions only yesterday, were decimated by the banks that had granted them credits amounting to hundreds of millions, even billions at times. The whole thing is being watched uncomprehendingly by one and all, from the Social Security authorities to the Tax Office, from the banks to the suppliers, and the public at large. Charges and countercharges are flying to and fro. This bank failed to act the way it was expected to; those owners escaped with most of the money, already deposited in banks abroad; employees acted in collusion with those placing orders, and so on and so forth.

In most cases, however, the explanation is much simpler. The companies in question gradually withdrew from actual production. They were producing megalomaniac plans, financing advertising campaigns of exorbitant cost, all at a time when, due to further liberalization, the number of competitors had grown suddenly, and profit margins were falling. The new competition exerted pressure from two sides. Big western multinationals appeared on the market with high-quality products, and were able to offer more advantageous payment conditions to customers with money. On the other hand, in the wake of liberalization, hundreds of small firms were established, sometimes for a single deal only. They supplied products of uncertain origins and quality at very cheap prices, thus undercutting the traditional suppliers of certain goods.

Hemmed in between these two pressures, the businessmen who had grown big in the 80s, and who already had to support major enterprises, chose forward flight, i. e., attack as the best form of defense. They tried to expand the market at any cost, to increase sales in any way they could, to invest, to continue to grow, to maintain their dynamism (or at least its appearance). And all the time they had to keep the whole business empire moving, which, in the meantime, had become nearly ungovernable. Costs sky-rocketed, interest rates shot up, new branches of business produced nothing but losses, and the mergers with, and buyouts of, new companies did not produce the results expected. The empire continued to grow but an increasing number of its parts were burdened by debt, and therefore only seemingly a part of the empire.

Growth was financed by the banks for a while without questions asked. This generation of businessmen was able to explain "the only viable" company strategy very

convincingly. That strategy seemed favourable from the banks' point of view, which, in any event, found it advantageous to have a major ownership stake in huge corporate empires, or—if only because of the sheer size of the loan extended—to have a good view of how the empire was run, and to sit on the board. In fact, the banks were in a difficult position, too. After all, whom were they to finance? Small enterprises were risky and demanded much work. They would have to be investigated for months on end—much money and effort spent—before a couple of a million forints' worth of loan could be extended. On the other hand, there were the state-owned firms which, with their collapsing markets and the uncertainties of privatization, were all headed toward bankruptcy anyway. And the few well-functioning companies with foreign ownership stakes had already been taken by foreign banks with their more flexible business policy, their names which had a better ring to them, their more favourable conditions of payment, and faster and more convenient operation.

All in all, money was poured without restriction into the new large companies. They sensed, of course, that all was not well. They had already been singed by certain "entrepreneurs" who, taking advantage of the lack of experience of the banks—and sometimes (although far less often than the public believes) in collusion with bank employees—stripped the banks of a couple of hundred million forints. At any rate, the banks had no illusions either, but they hoped that the "big small businessmen" of the previous period would at least think rationally, and could be controlled by the usual bankers' methods. They were more surprised than most upon realizing that the fast-growing enterprises were practically on the verge of bankruptcy. When they did, they reacted like a child touching a hot stove. They did their utmost to get back the money invested, and while doing so, they helped push the companies, parts of which could still have been salvaged, even more deeply into the abyss.

Bankruptcy is—with a little exaggeration—a collective job. Not only in the sense that it is rarely the consequence of crime or error by a single person, or by only those who work for the enterprise in question. The responsibility of the creditors is also clear. The role and responsibility of the Hungarian banks in failing to initiate bankruptcy proceedings, and in other cases, in clumsy crisis management, is huge and undeniable. In addition, contrary to what the public believes, the bulk of the bad debts had not been inherited from the past but was piled up over the last four years. The money was not embezzled. The money simply went down the drain, became devalued, was lost. A considerable part was lost—to cite a real-life case in illustration—because for reasons of prestige, two banks were unable to agree, or, even more simply, while two bank departments continued endless disputes over who should control the account of the company in trouble, the agreement fell through, and the company's assets declined from 2 billion forints to a mere 100 million.

When we try to find out today who can be expected to develop dynamically, who has a chance to become the role model of the future, the hero of the next period, a highly interesting picture emerges. These people have not yet or hardly been noticed by the media. They are not among the leading representatives of business interest groups. They have not yet been noticed by the politicians either. They themselves are too preoccupied with themselves. They fall into two characteristic groups, and—for different reasons—both groups have thus far chosen to keep a low profile. Some of them because they

deliberately shun the public. Some because they are still not interesting enough for the media.

It is the first group who really know what the name of the game is. They are aware that what is at stake is who will have others working for him, and who will work for others. Who will amass a huge fortune which will then have to be taken charge of, and who will be those who, having no fortune of their own, will have no choice but to increase the fortunes of others. Many of them are lawyers engaged in the financial sphere, who work on the restructuring of companies in connection with their privatization. Their participation in privatization has not only brought them much money and a highly developed systems of contacts. They have put many people in their debt. They have not only come into the possession of many personal and confidential information which makes their customers and business partners dependent on them. It is even more important that, in many cases, they have a better view of the real value of certain enterprises than the very owners. They knew the potentials of these firms as well as their strengths and weaknesses. They know the managers who can be counted on, and know the ones who ought to be fired. Today they "only" arrange for capital, help the deals through, asking for a share in exchange. They act—for the moment—as go-betweens for others. They do this efficiently and for a sizeable fee. Tomorrow, however, they may become able to buy the companies they themselves have surveyed, should it turn out that the present owner is unable to run them efficiently. Their share-holdings and real property investments are not spectacular but very tangible. They have no wish to step into the limelight, to pronounce opinions. They have realized that these are times when it is best not to make noises. A wise man is one who assembles his fortune silently and cautiously, and does not call to himself the attention of either the Tax Office or organized crime.

Step by step they are developing and shaping a family network which they can rely on and trust. They are establishing a base—in the form of foreign mixed companies—to which they can retire at any time. They do not attract attention. When somebody has to speak up or interests have to be represented, they employ straw men. They take out their share of illegal deals as well, but personally they have no connections with such circles. They do not get directly involved in politics. They maintain contact with every political party. Whoever forms the next government will remember a good party where he had fun in the company of people of his own kind, or recall certain favours done for him or members of his family. They can even afford not to be too aggressive when they hand in the bill. They are some of the top businessmen of the future.

Others began in the 1980s but, for various reasons, did not make it into the big time. For them it was the changeover from socialism to free enterprise which produced the real breakthrough. They grew more rapidly, their organizations grew more stable, and their relationships extensive. They have cleverly organized the segment of the market in which they are involved, they make good use of the potentials of small enterprises. They are flexible, customer-oriented, and work at low costs and with a low overhead. Looking back today, they call themselves lucky because they have managed to grow practically without bank loans. Their debts are negligible, and the specific area of their products and low overheads have furnished the basis for rapid growth. They operate mostly as family businesses or small private companies. Their approach and attitude is still that of

the small-time businessman: you have to work hard, be quick, and properly reward employees who laid the basis for the growth through their talent and hard work.

Their growth speeded up after the change of the political system. Taking advantage of liberalization, with the disappearance of political pressure and with the establishment of a system of laws and institutions creating a proper framework for small enterprises, they have managed to boost their sales year after year. These people did not, or—by the usual Hungarian standard—only rarely took advantage of their "socialist" and later "capitalist" contacts. The basis of the fast development of their business was hard work and high professional skills. They have, however, reached a crossroads. So far they have reinvested the cash they accumulated as a kind of natural reflex. Today, however, their market share has reached a level where they are in serious competition with the multinationals operating in this country. Their potential for growth has therefore diminished, and, in the given market, they have to face increasingly tough competition. On the other hand, the question is where to reinvest the profits they have made.

Many have begun to diversify, and entered areas of business different from those in which they have been thus far engaged. That, however, is pretty risky. Simplicity and informality have been part and parcel of their operation and business organization. From now on, however, they will have to develop and run a well-defined company structure, to assign tasks appropriately, and delegate responsibility in a precise manner. That is a step which is habitually put off by all small entrepreneurs for as long as possible. It is the point where it will be decided whether the previous dynamic development will continue and a corporate empire be built, and whether the new owners will become consolidated, or there will be another period of crisis. Whichever of these alternatives will ensues, the future is being born now. Hungary, too, is trying to move toward the European Union. It will be increasingly important to adopt a European business culture, observing all its written and unwritten rules. The new generations of entrepreneurs will thus increasingly adapt—they are forced to, but are also moved into that direction by their own choice of values—to conditions that are becoming universal. The generations of businessmen succeeding one another embody the same evolution by which the Hungarian economic value system is gradually becoming European. ❧

Gusztáv Megyesi

Autre pays, autre mœurs

It's a pity the National Information Office is no more, now there's no one to protect our good name in the outside world.

Take *The Times*, for instance. That world-famous and authoritative paper published an article by its Budapest correspondent on the situation in Hungary, paying particular attention to the nouveaux riches. It can't be denied that my English colleague has little affection for our current crop. He reckons our new élite is incredibly boorish and uncultured, dressing in shiny tracksuits, wearing moccasins with their dinner jackets; their sartorial habits and their behaviour reveal bad taste and aggression. In short, our new élite is loutish.

I don't understand my fellow journalist.

This country is alive and happy. Especially nowadays. It hasn't been entirely modernized as yet, but we can see the light at the end of the tunnel. According to a manifesto from one of the parties in power, even if sulphurous rain falls from the sky, or ethnic minority children keep dropping on us, in the year 2000 exactly this country will enter the large and civilized community of Europe. That seems to be the main point. The kind of clothes and shoes in which a nation's élite marches to join the continent's best society, or indeed, the state of its manners is, I reckon, neither here nor there, and to pass judgment on a class on these grounds is a mistake, to say the least.

Granted, the British have always been finicky and sour. They don't understand the essence of life. They are incapable of grasping how much vital force is inherent in the movement needed to slip into a fine, rustling shiny jogging outfit and go out into the street. Whatever's wrong with an outfit being shiny and rustling? It does not shine or rustle for its own sake, but to be shinier and more rustling than other jogging outfits. The rustling has music, a rhythm, a hidden message. Let's give it a try (after all, we've all tried one on in secret at some time or other) and see what a delight it is to stride out boldly: the trouser leg flutters, while the contact of triacetate and polyester under the arm directly recalls the sound of

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angels. For a moment the city's attention turns on us, infinite peace and calm takes over our hearts.

As for the moccasins, I just can't see what's wrong with them. Can there be a more absorbing moment than standing at home in front of the mirror in a dinner jacket, getting ready to settle pressing national issues; the bow tie has already been clipped neatly under the collar, but we're still in our socks, those white towelling socks (with Disney characters or perhaps the Olympic rings breaking the monotony of the white ground just around the ankles); in the meantime we polish our moccasins, paying special attention to the tassels, which in smart society should always be a little bit shinier than the actual shoe—but everyone knows that, don't they?

And can there be a better feeling than walking into a restaurant, and casually tossing a combination-lock briefcase onto the table? Then, when the waiter cometh, resting our chin in our palm and murmuring, well, let's see, that's forty-two-fourteen-W, and the combination-lock briefcase springs open: inside is everything you need, and the crowd of fellow-diners can only gape. There are coloured files in the briefcase, as well as a mobile telephone, and of course a carry-bag too, which can at any moment be strapped to our waist, even under the dinner jacket if we so wish. Apart from that, there is a vast key ring lurking there with a mass of important keys complete with a genuine synthetic fur beaver's tail, plus, of course, sunglasses. At this stage, it makes sense to ask for some sort of house speciality, let's say, Gordon blue (I don't mean Cordon and bleu, only a peasant would ask for that!), then to send a special message to the chef, or rather, to send for him to make sure he gives us alphabet pasta with the prawn chowder. Because alphabet pasta is good. Eating alphabet pasta is not only nourishing, discovering new letters all the time at the bottom of the spoon can be such fun too. And when, among all the vowels, an *umlaut* happens to emerge from the soup, even a business partner has a chuckle.

It's no good living an insipid, sour life.

And the mobile telephone. For Christ's sake, will someone tell me what the hell is wrong with a mobile telephone? Is it not the final expression of *vis vitalis* to be standing in the middle of the zebra crossing in Kossuth Lajos utca (by the old Pioneer Department Store) and order by phone a hundred barrels of treated oil for cash, or give instructions to your broker? Then there's the cinema. Stock exchange business is best done from a cinema, when we're settled down to watch a thriller and the whole auditorium has gone quiet. Some sort of supporting film is being shown, natural history: a long-legged skin-diver is stalking flatfish, so the old GSM is a godsend. In a brisk tone, we snap out those stock market orders, and when the line goes, we swear as a reflex, "Who'd believe they could be such idiots." At which point almost the whole cinema comes to life, turning their heads in the dim light: who can it be throwing his weight around, and at the whole stock exchange for a start?

Well that's us. Who else could it be?

And then in the evening, weary after a trying day, we relax ever so slightly at the bar of our favourite pub, mopping the perspiration on the back of the neck with a paper handkerchief. Our mobile telephone stretches up like a tower, loaded and triggered on the bar counter, but we, musing on the way of the world, only have eyes for the Ukrainian opposite. It can't be easy for him either. With matted hair he sips at his whisky, crunching an ice cube—which he places in his mouth with a slow, deliberate, macho gesture—between sips, because whisky is only good chilled.

What does an English gentleman know about all this? ❧

Translated by Elizabeth Szász

Robinson Crusoe. Lino-cut.

Péter Bokor

The Darkest Year

Conversation with Archbishop Gennaro Verolino on the Siege of Budapest

Poland had already been overrun, and German troops were stationed all along the West European shores of the Atlantic Ocean, but Hungary was still in a state of relative calm, an ally of the German Reich but, in the words of the then US envoy R. Montgomery, an "unwilling satellite" which, for the time being, had only thrown minor forces into the actual fighting. In the summer of 1942, Father Gennaro Verolino arrived in Budapest to fill the post of *uditore* to the Nuncio, Angelo Rotta, who had been in Hungary for some time. That position, in Vatican terms, is roughly the equivalent of First Secretary of a legation. Very soon, Verolino became the right hand man of the aging Nuncio.

More or less as a prelude to his activity in Budapest, he went on a short trip to Pozsony (Bratislava). He was entrusted by the Vatican with the task of carrying a "top secret" package to Monsignor Burzio, the Nuncio in Bratislava. Burzio's character and role would come into the spotlight two years later: it was to him that, in the summer of 1944, the leaders of the surviving Slovak Jews would hand the protocol which contained the evidence of four escaped inmates of Auschwitz testifying to the dimensions and the reality of the genocide taking place there. Burzio would be the man to ensure that the document got to Switzerland, Rome—everywhere, including Budapest. But in June 1942, when Verolino saw him, Burzio was still fighting his battle on his own. As Verolino recalls:

"I spent one or two days with him in Bratislava. By then he was already in the middle of a a bitter fight to save the Jews of Slovakia. Actions against the Jews there had begun as soon as Slovakia had become an independent state in 1939; first they were only deprived of all their possessions and horribly humiliated, but from 1941 on it became increasingly clear that their very lives were at stake too. When I visited Monsignor Burzio in 1942, the deportation of Jews to camps in territories under German rule had already begun. There was still no reliable information about what was happening to them there, but the cir-

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cumstances of the deportation process were well known to the Nunciature, and that left little doubt about the ultimate purpose of the deportation. Monsignor Burzio wrote note after note to the Slovak government, while urging the diplomats of other nations to act similarly."

At that time Father Verolino could not have anticipated that exactly two years later he himself would be engaged in the same kind of battle.

I visited Archbishop Gennaro Verolino in Rome in January 1978, following several exchanges of letters. Relations between the Vatican and the Hungarian regime were far from cordial. Verolino nevertheless agreed to be interviewed on camera. I was shooting a film series for the Hungarian state television on Hungary's history in the 20th century. My main objective was to give an almost day-by-day account of the events of the year 1944 to an audience which previously had little opportunity to learn anything but prejudiced oversimplifications. A couple of letters sufficed for Archbishop Verolino to understand and appreciate the aim of my series.

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What are your memories of March 19, 1944, the day the Germans occupied Hungary?

The news that Hitler had given orders for the military occupation of Hungary did not come entirely unexpectedly to us at the Nunciature. Of course, we were aware that the Hungarian government had been making efforts to contact the Allies for some time. Monsignor Rotta had a very good relationship with Prime Minister Kállay, and he knew that Kállay and some members of his cabinet would do everything in their power to break away from Hitler. We knew that an informal agreement had been made in September 1943 in Istanbul in secret negotiations between representatives of the Hungarian government and the British Ambassador, Sir Hugh Knatchbull-Hughessen, which, to all intents and purposes, could be considered as a preliminary cease-fire agreement in the event that the Allied forces managed to push closer to Hungary. We knew about it all. Unfortunately, others did too. Hitler himself knew quite a lot! So when, on March 15, Hitler demanded that Horthy travel to see him in Salzburg—to report to him, as it were—we were really worried. By the time the Regent arrived back in Budapest on March 19, the Gestapo had already begun making arrests there, and German troops had effectively completed the occupation of the country. After a day or two of uncertainty, the Regent appointed a government satisfactory to the Germans, headed by General Sztójay, who had been the minister to Berlin. We trusted that Sztójay would not be willing to take actions as extreme as some well-known Nazis would. As for the kind of demands Hitler would make on the new government, we had enough knowledge to guess. One of his principal demands, we knew, would be the full mobilization of the Hungarian army, sending it to the front, then the delivery of more Hungarian grain, bauxite and oil. And measures against the Hungarian Jews.

In early April, the official government gazette published practically nothing but anti-Jewish measures. So this did not come to you as a surprise, then?

Anti-Jewish laws had been passed in Hungary earlier, too. In 1938, 1939, then again in 1941... Those laws had been motivated by all kinds of highly dubious interests, feelings and objectives, but not by the intention of genocide. The final purpose of the measures of the Sztójay government, on the other hand, were fairly obvious, at least to those who already had some knowledge of what had gone on in the other occupied countries of Europe. Before the occupation, Hungary had refused to apply the German methods used all over Europe. Now, however, the objectives were quite clear from decrees published day after day: Jews would be forbidden to pursue any occupation which would allow them to make a living, then prevented from moving about freely. They would be moved into certain predetermined areas—ghettos—and forced to wear a distinguishing sign, a yellow Star of David. After these measures had been published, the Nuncio called on Prime Minister Sztójay in his capacity as the representative of the Vatican, but also as the *doyen* of the diplomatic corps in Budapest. He used some very tough language in demanding humane treatment for people who could not be blamed for anything except their origin. Sztójay did, in fact, make certain promises.

Then the deportations started. We got the news instantly. News, and appeals for help. The Nunciature sent its first note of protest to the Sztójay government on May 15, 1944. Attached to this, there was also a personal letter addressed by Angelo Rotta to Sztójay. Relying first of all upon the classic arguments of what is called "natural law", the note pointed out that once God had given life to a human being, it could not be taken away by anyone unless the person concerned committed a grave crime carrying the death penalty. But to persecute people—to persecute them to death and to send hundreds of thousands to death just because of their origin—that was against the law. It was unjust! It was impossible! And in his personal letter to Sztójay, the Apostolic Nuncio included a sentence that was incredibly serious at the time. He wrote "We are fully aware what deportation means in reality."

Did you really know? Did you have concrete knowledge?

Yes, we did. By then we knew they were being taken to Auschwitz. We knew that those found unfit for work were being murdered right upon arrival. There were people who accompanied trains, had seen certain things... and reported them to us with horror. We demanded of the government that it allow us to go there! We wanted to see these people, we said, at the places where they were allegedly beginning a new life. We wanted to travel on those trains ourselves. Our demands were, of course, rejected. They kept repeating, in their official replies to the notes we submitted as well as in personal conversations, that those people were only taken away for compulsory labour abroad. Hungarians are being taken to fight, they said, Jews to work... Is that so? But work requires able-bodied people! So what do they need babies and children for? Why do they take away old people of 70 or 80, why cripples? The government replied that it had realized Jews preferred to have their families with them. In that way they worked better. Oh, indeed? And why was that privilege limited to Jews only? What about the Hungarian labourers working in Germany? Why could they not take their families? Let alone the fact that orphans without families were also taken away just as solitary old people were... Where were they being taken? For what purpose? Why? To none of our questions did we get a satisfactory answer. Nor could we.

How about the Hungarian clergy? What about the Prince Primate?

Cardinal Jusztinián Serédi made certain moves too. He intervened with the government. After that—at the urging of the Nunciature and the Hungarian episcopate—he wrote a pastoral letter. At first he had hesitated, not being certain that this would be the most effective means. He thought it might be more helpful to negotiate personally with members of the government rather then make the public gesture of issuing a pastoral letter. He was afraid of angering the government even more. In the end, however, he realized that there was no other alternative. He must write a pastoral letter, and make the position of the Church public. So he wrote the letter, it was printed, preparations were made for it to be sent to every diocese, and it was decided that it would be read out at Mass in every Catholic church in the country on the second Sunday of July... But the government heard of it, and they went to Serédi, asking him to revoke it. Serédi said that he would do so, provided the government ordered the immediate cessation of deportations. Meanwhile—roughly at the same time—Horthy also received the Holy Father's telegramme. Anyway, telegrammes, messages, warnings, even threats were arriving from many quarters. From the King of Sweden. From the British government. From President Roosevelt. Thus, at the end of July, Horthy—who in fact had always disapproved of the deportations but did not dare to do anything against them—plucked up courage, and ordered a halt to the deportations. Serédi did not rescind his pastoral letter, but in the end it was read out only in a couple of churches. In fact, it never even got to most of the churches because with the help of the Postmaster General of Esztergom, agents of the government seized the parcels containing the pastoral letter. Unfortunately, too, by that time they were not really needed any more since the deportation of the Jews in the provinces, more than half a million in number, had in the meantime been completed, and the government had ordered that the deportations be stopped.

By mid-July, fifty or sixty per cent of those taken away had been swallowed up in the gas chambers of Auschwitz. But the Jews of Budapest, some 200,000 in number, were still there, and there were at least another hundred thousand Jewish men serving in the labour battalions organized within the army.

Horthy felt encouraged by the Allied landing in Normandy. He thought the fall of Hitler could be expected fairly soon. He took determined measures to remove from the government the ministers and secretaries of state who had actually managed deportations. Without the active participation of the Hungarian bureaucracy, the gendarmes and police, he knew, Eichmann's team would never be able to complete the deportation of the remaining Jews. By the way, in consequence of Horthy's attitude, Himmler was forced to withdraw Eichmann's commando from Budapest—if only for a couple of weeks.

If I remember correctly, it was in the middle of August that we got news of preparatory moves for a new round of deportations. The Nunciature then invited the few foreign diplomats still in Budapest to a meeting. The only diplomats remaining were those of the neutral countries. The conference was attended by the Apostolic Nuncio, the Swedish minister, the *chargés d'affaires* of Switzerland and Spain, and a representative of Portugal. A memorandum had been prepared by the Nunciature in advance, which was then signed by the

heads of every delegation. The text included the following statement: "Nobody must be condemned to death because of his or her origin". I recall one of the diplomats saying, "We had better be careful about this sentence because it almost sounds as if we were calling the Royal Hungarian Government a bunch of murderers". And I also remember myself interjecting: "I am sorry to say but that is the truth!" And that controversial sentence stayed in the document. Next day the Apostolic Nuncio, in the company of Minister Danielsson of Sweden, presented himself at the Foreign Ministry. They handed over the document, and a copy of it to the Regent. This was followed by a relatively calmer period. At least as the issue of deportation was concerned, that is.

This was the period when other issues came to the fore. At the end of July, the attempt was made on Hitler's life; in mid-August, the Eastern front buckled, and Romania quit the German alliance. With great difficulty, Horthy also brought himself to a decision: he made the crucial move. At the end of September he sent envoys to Italy and Moscow where an agreement on the conditions for a cease-fire was signed on October 11. Then came October 15, the day Horthy made his attempt to bring the truce agreement into force. He declared on radio that he had asked for a cease-fire. By that time, however, the German leadership was ready for this move. They simply pushed Horthy aside through a coup, and replaced him by their own man, Ferenc Szálasi. By then, however, the Eastern Front had reached the Danube in places.

Did you have any personal contacts with Regent Horthy?

Yes, of course, I saw him sometimes. I remember one of those occasions quite vividly because it was not a formal encounter. It must have been still in October, at the beginning of the month, when we already had information about the Regent's wish to conclude a cease-fire with the Russians—without the Germans, of course. All sorts of discussions were going on, attended also by Cardinal Serédi, the Chief Justice and a number of others. The cease-fire and a separate peace were the current issues. It was in that kind of atmosphere that Monsignor Rotta was called to a meeting by the Regent. Horthy talked about chances, alternatives, possibilities, "ifs". That he was worrying about the safety of his family, should something happen to him. Would the Nunciature give sanctuary to his family? Naturally, Monsignor Rotta's answer was a categorical "yes". Several days went by, then suddenly—it must have been on the 12th of October, or more probably the 13th—the Regent asked for me. I went over immediately, and asked to see him. He declared that he was getting ready for a major move, so he would repeat his earlier question: would the Nunciature offer safe haven for his family in the event of danger? I answered that it would be our privilege. We would do it gladly. However, we were not in a position to guarantee absolute protection against anybody and in any event. But that was something he himself was well aware of. Then, on Sunday, the 15th of October, in the evening, a few hours after his cease-fire proclamation had been broadcast on radio at noon, the wife, the daughter-in-law and the grandson of Horthy, young István, came over to us at the Nunciature, along with the boy's nanny. The Nunciature was just one or two hundred steps away from the Royal Palace. They stayed with us for a day or two. I remember being asked, perhaps two days later, to accompany the nanny over to the palace to pick up a few pieces of clothing, some underwear and travelling things,

when they had to travel to Germany. We walked upstairs to the Regent's private apartment, and found Germans, the SS there already. They were none too friendly either, especially toward the young lady... I also remember—and I always will—that the Nunciature had a beautiful inner courtyard with a magnificent view of the Danube, the Chain Bridge, Parliament. You could see up to Margaret Island from there, it was marvellous. And one afternoon the two ladies, the Regent's wife and his daughter-in-law, the widow of István Horthy, who had died earlier in a plane crash, were walking there, taking the air, when suddenly the younger lady remarked to her mother-in-law, "Oh, Mother, look, the whole place is teeming with soldiers, they are all around the Nunciature!" To which Mrs Horthy replied bitterly: "Haven't you noticed, dear, that we are prisoners?"

The siege of the royal palace was called off; the German coup succeeded. After a quarter of a century in power—which may not have been real dictatorship but was not a real parliamentary democracy either—Horthy had to reconcile himself with the fact that from now on he would be under Hitler's "protection" in a castle in Bavaria.

Through the coup, the Nazi leadership succeeded in forcing a government upon Hungary which made it possible for war to rage for another half a year over the country. By that time, however, what could be called Hungarian territory had shrunk to the region west of the river Danube.

A couple of days after Horthy's removal, Eichmann's commando was back in Budapest. Deportation to Auschwitz was no longer possible: the trains had stopped moving. From the autumn of 1944, tens of thousands of Budapest Jews were being marched on foot westward, first to the Austrian border, later to Mauthausen or even farther off. Then—after the encirclement of the capital had become complete and its siege began—mass executions of Jews started on the banks of the Danube.

On November 14, 1944 a new memorandum was drawn up, written in a tone even harsher than the previous ones. I think it was handed over by Monsignor Rotta and Minister Danielsson, this time directly to the Foreign Minister.

That was Baron Gábor Kemény.

Yes, it was him. And it was also into his hand that we passed our next memorandum, on 23 December. That one concerned children only. Because we wanted... we would have liked at least children to be saved. It was quite obvious that the issue was the complete extermination of Jews, and we were powerless to do anything. "Spare the children at least!" That was what we asked for in that special memorandum.

This was on December 23; a day before the Russian circle would close around Budapest...

Monsignor Rotta, like all the diplomats of the neutral countries, had been offered a chance to move to the western border region, perhaps to Szombathely or somewhere near. But he refused to do so. He stayed in the capital. For one thing—and he made that absolutely clear to the officials responsible—he had no intention of following a government which did not keep its promises. Of course, its treatment of the Jews was not the only thing he meant by that but it certainly was the main thing. At any rate, he stayed in Budapest. Or, more exactly, in Buda, since by then connections between the two banks of the Danube had been severed, especially after all the bridges had been blown up by the

Germans. We lived in Buda, in the cellars beneath the bombed-out building of the Nunciature for some two months. Thank God, all of us survived the bombings unharmed and in good health. Just imagine... There were two occasions, in fact... But I must tell you first that during the siege the Germans received supplies from the air. Even ammunition. On two occasions some of the parachutes landed in the garden of the Nunciature. The first delivery was some kind of huge shell, the second consisted of eleven smaller ones. In came the Germans, demanding their ammunition. "These are ours! These were sent to us!" I talked to them, and I said, "Sorry, gentlemen, this is a diplomatic issue. The Nunciature enjoys extraterritorial rights, which means that it is neutral territory. It is not in our power to provide any of the belligerents with means suitable for the continuation of warfare."

As for the continuation of warfare, there was certainly no reasonable justification for that after the encirclement had been completed.

That was exactly the reason why, on one of the last days of December—I can no longer recall that particular date precisely—we decided to make one last move which could hardly be called diplomatic. The Apostolic Nuncio and the Swedish ambassador visited the commander of the Hungarian forces fighting in the capital. His name was Iván Hindy, and he was a general.

He had had a major part in the success of the coup against Horthy on October 15.

At that time we only knew about his earlier activities. He used to be regarded before as one of the officers close to Horthy. The Nuncio and Mister Danielson argued that the unreasonable defence of the capital demanded enormous sacrifices, and terrible losses were suffered also by the civilian population. General Hindy declared that the situation was far from hopeless; a relief force was moving in from the West. It was because of Hindy's attitude that our plan failed. In fact, we approached the Hungarian commander first because we had thought that, once he replied favourably, we would move on and raise the same issue with the German commander, and after that we would have asked to see the commander of the Russians as well, suggesting a cease-fire. However, after the failure of the first move, there was nothing left to continue. Then our underground life began. We spent months in the cellars of the Nunciature. Worse, after an especially heavy explosion, when the Nunciature was almost completely destroyed, we had to move on down, even deeper. Some 300 or 400 years ago, probably during the Turkish times in Buda, deep tunnels had been dug under Castle Hill. They were like catacombs. That was where we sought shelter. Like the early Christians in ancient times... If I'm not mistaken, we lived there from January 17 or 18 until February 12. Things became worse by the day. We ran out of food, and there was no drinking water. It was only in the evening, after 7 o'clock that there was a lull in the fighting. That was the time, we supposed, when the Russians were getting their evening meal... That was the moment we ventured down to the Danube, to fetch some water. Of course, there was no electricity either. We used candles in the catacombs, but sparingly, because we had no way of knowing how long this state of affairs would last. We had no supplies, no medicines for the wounded. And there was no place to bury the dead whose number was horrible. We dug holes in the gardens and inner courtyards of once-beautiful

palaces in Buda to put them into the ground somehow... At the beginning of February we decided to make another attempt. The Swedish minister could no longer be contacted so this step was taken by the Nunciature on its own. On February 3 we asked for an audience with SS General Pfeffer von Wilderbruch, the commander of the German forces. His headquarters were in the cellar of the Royal Palace. He sent word that he would see us at seven o'clock in the evening. He too must have known that this was the relatively calmest period. We only had to cross Dísz tér which separated the already nonexistent building of the Nunciature from the Royal Palace. A short walk but what a walk! The building next to the Nunciature, that of the Foreign Ministry, was in flames. The Ministry of Defence, on the opposite side of the square, was aflame, too. Flames rose toward the sky from several places in the Palace itself. And in the square there were bomb craters, trenches, wreckage... There were only the flames to light our way. Two Hungarian gendarmes provided an escort. They had already served as defenders of the Nunciature for some time... Then, inside the palace, we had to descend lower and lower. Wherever we passed, in every hall, every corridor, there were wounded, operations were in progress on ordinary tables, we heard cries and wailing everywhere... Hell itself. Then, somewhere very deep, we found the general who—how should I put it?— received us, the Nuncio and me, with ceremonious respect. Monsignor Rotta described the situation, which was, of course, only too well known by the general himself. He said: "Please, if anyone wants to go over to the Russians, they are free to do so. The Danube is covered with ice; it is possible to walk across." It was easy to say... It was something young sportsmen might have attempted, but the majority of the population was old or they were children... And if someone had tried, he or she would be sure to be cut down from either bank of the river. Then I asked him straight: "General, why do you not agree to a cease-fire?" He replied: "That is outside my competence. Only the High Command has the right to do so." "Turn to the High Command, then!" He promised he would do so. I believe he really did, too. A couple of days later one of our men, who was listening to Berlin Radio, heard news of the action taken by the Budapest Nuncio. In the evening of February 11 an officer of the German general came over to the Nunciature with a short letter in which General Pfeffer von Wildenbruch announced that he had decided to evacuate the city, and he was placing the many thousands of wounded, whom he was forced to leave behind, under the protection of the Nunciature. That meant nearly nine thousand wounded soldiers, two thousand in the palace, and the others in various buildings. At dawn they made an effort to break out of besieged Buda—on the Pest side the war had ended weeks earlier—but only a few dozen Germans actually managed to get out. I don't know the exact number. The majority were killed or fell prisoner, like Pfeffer von Wildenbruch himself. The next day the Russians moved into Buda. The siege was at an end, and we were facing new problems. Together with Monsignor Rotta we walked from the Nunciature, reduced to a pile of ruins, over to the Pest bank. We were taken in for a couple of weeks by the convent in Váci utca. We left Hungary only when the war ended everywhere—not only in Hungary. I loved Hungary. I would be delighted to visit Budapest again. ❧

Gyula Vargyai

The Ninth Circle of Hell

The Siege of Budapest, December 24 1944–February 13 1945

It was Budapest that suffered worst as a result of Horthy's failed attempt to slip out of the war.

The Hungarian capital, while subjected to a vicious Arrow-Cross terror, also saw heavy street fighting for fifty-one days. Traces of all this are visible to this very day.

The sentence on Budapest was passed on October 15, even though the actual order by Hitler that "Budapest must be defended to the last building" only came later. Yet Budapest had been, up to the spring of 1944, one of the few European metropolises to escape the ravages of the Second World War. Then, from March 19, the day German troops occupied Hungary, Allied bombers appeared over the capital. The impact of their murderous load, however, had not seemed catastrophic.

Preparations for the defence of the city started early on. In August 1943 a plan was put forward at a cabinet meeting by the Interior Minister, for the evacuation of the capital.

When orders were finally given to build encampments along the perimeter of Pest, this was based on war plans originating in 1915. It seemed inconceivable that the city might be threatened from the west as well. Even the Germans considered establishing a bridgehead in Budapest for the first time only on 22 September 1944.

On the Soviet side, a comprehensive plan for the occupation of Budapest was drafted first in October 1944, within the framework of a strategy involving the entire Eastern Front. In the Soviet General Staff, the Stavka, and the High Command, the view became prevalent that the best place to direct the main blow was the central section of the German front.

Operations concerning Budapest were affected by the fact that, as a result of the Debrecen battle, troops of the 2nd Ukrainian Front reached the Csap-Kisvárda-Nagykálló-Újfehértó-Polgár-Csongrád-Kiskunfélegyháza-Baja-Zombor line. In order to continue an attack on the Budapest-Vienna line, the 2nd Ukrainian Front was reinforced. The 2nd Guards Mechanized Corps and the 23rd Rifle Corps were moved there, and the 4th Guards Mechanized Corps was taken from the 3rd Ukrainian Front and subordinated to the 2nd Ukrainian Front. The first two corps were at full strength. The 2nd Guards Mechanized Corps consisted of 206 tanks and 42 self-propelled guns. The 4th Guards Mechanized Corps, which took

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part in the battle for Belgrade, had a total of 73 tanks and self-propelled guns at the end of October.

The idea of the Stavka was that Budapest would be captured by the 4th and 2nd Ukrainian Fronts, making a detour from the East and South, thus avoiding a frontal blow, if possible. They seemed to have the necessary strength for that. At the end of October 1944, the relative strength of the 2nd Ukrainian Front and the German Army Group South developed as follows: Soviet superiority in manpower was twofold, in the number of guns (not including antitank and antiaircraft guns) it was fourfold, and threefold in air power. The 2nd Ukrainian Front was able to muster 526 tanks and 181 self-propelled guns against 230 German tanks and 150 self-propelled guns.

There were, however, other aspects as well. Following the Debrecen tank battle, the grouping of the Soviet troops became less favourable. The state of preparedness, the condition of arms and equipment, and dwindling supplies of ammunition of the Soviet troops, constantly fighting since August 20, seemed to indicate that preparing for new operations would take a longer time. This can be illustrated by the fact that the strength of Soviet rifle divisions in general fell from 6,000–7,500 men to 4,000–5,500. The losses in tanks and self-propelled guns were also considerable. Logistical difficulties had also to be taken into account.

This was well known to the Stavka, too; the decision made higher was that the 2nd Ukrainian Front should, without any break in operations, continue to attack, and occupy the Hungarian capital off the march, with a frontal attack, as fast as possible.

Today the background to that decision is also known. In mid-October, Churchill and foreign minister Anthony Eden had travelled to Moscow. During their talks, operations in Hungary were also touched upon. Before his departure, Churchill declared that he hoped the British and Americans would soon reach the Ljubljana "gap" in Yugoslavia, and thus be able to extend their help to the Soviet army fighting in the Carpathian Basin. The measures taken by Stalin in reaction were explained by one of the members of his military circle, General Shtemenko, in his memoirs: "...Of course, we studied Churchill's words very thoroughly. His declaration could mean nothing else than the intention of his government to get ahead of the Soviet troops, and to reach Hungary and Austria, through Ljubljana and circling the Alps from the south, before we did. Thus the Balkans variation was raised again, only in a different context. The Stavka naturally took notice of this at once..."

So Stalin's decision was hastened mainly by Churchill's announcement. But he received reports, too, from which he concluded that an attack on Budapest would succeed easily. The author of these reports was Major General Lev Zakharovich Mekhlis, the chief political officer of the 4th Ukrainian Front, who sent news—realistic enough—of the collapse and demoralization of the 1st Hungarian Army to Stalin.

Although the Soviet Chief of Staff called attention to the fact that Mekhlis's information could not be regarded as valid for all the Hungarian armed forces, on October 28 Stalin nevertheless phoned Rodion Yakovlevich Malinovskii at his headquarters, and ordered him to begin the attack on Budapest the very next day because the Hungarian capital had to be occupied in the shortest possible time. Fully aware of the situation, Marshal Malinovskii asked for a break of five days before beginning to carry out these orders. Stalin, however, could not be made to change his mind.

"Why this stubbornness? Don't you get it? This is also a political question. The assault on Budapest has to start tomorrow."

The Soviet command thought that with only the exhausted divisions of the 3rd Hungarian Army, a fighting force of well below full strength, the left wing of the Second Ukrainian Front would be able to anticipate General Hans Friessner, so the Germans would be incapable of resisting a subsequent Soviet attack as well.

Following Stalin's order, Soviet troops of course went on to the offensive immediately.

Marshal Malinovskii tried to carry out the operational ideas of the High Command. The Soviet troops were given a very difficult and heavy task: to cover a distance of 40 to 70 kilometers in one and a half days.

On October 29, 1944, following a short preparatory artillery barrage, the attack of the Soviet 46th Army began. The defence, deployed around a system of strongpoints, was assaulted by Soviet troops along a 95 kilometer long section. Following the attack, the balance of these one and half days could be drawn as follows: the Soviet concentration, attacking between the Danube and the Tisza, broke through almost along the full length of the 3rd Hungarian Army's front, but instead of the 40 to 70 kilometers planned, they covered only 18 to 25 kilometers. As a result, Friessner was able to react rapidly and flexibly to the attack by the left wing of the 2nd Ukrainian Front in the direction of Kecskemét-Budapest. The deployment of the 24th Panzer Division in the region of Kecskemét slowed down the Soviet attack. Malinovski, trying his best to comply fully with Stalin's orders, sent his reserves into battle in an order issued at 3 p.m. on November 1. The pace of the attack increased, but this was not enough for a significant speeding up of the push forward. The reason was that through fast regrouping, a German operational unit—that of Fretter-Pico—was reinforced with three Panzer divisions by the 1st of November. In the wake of operations continued with varying success, Fretter-Pico established a new defence line, which made the job of the attacking Soviet troops even more difficult.

On November 3, 1944, the southeast perimeter of Budapest was attacked by two Soviet mechanized army corps with strong air support, in cooperation with the two rifle divisions closing up to the same line. The repeated attempts, however, were essentially unsuccessful, since the plan to break down the defenses of the German Panzer divisions and to occupy Budapest off the march failed. The Soviet attack achieved major successes but Stalin's basic objective was not accomplished.

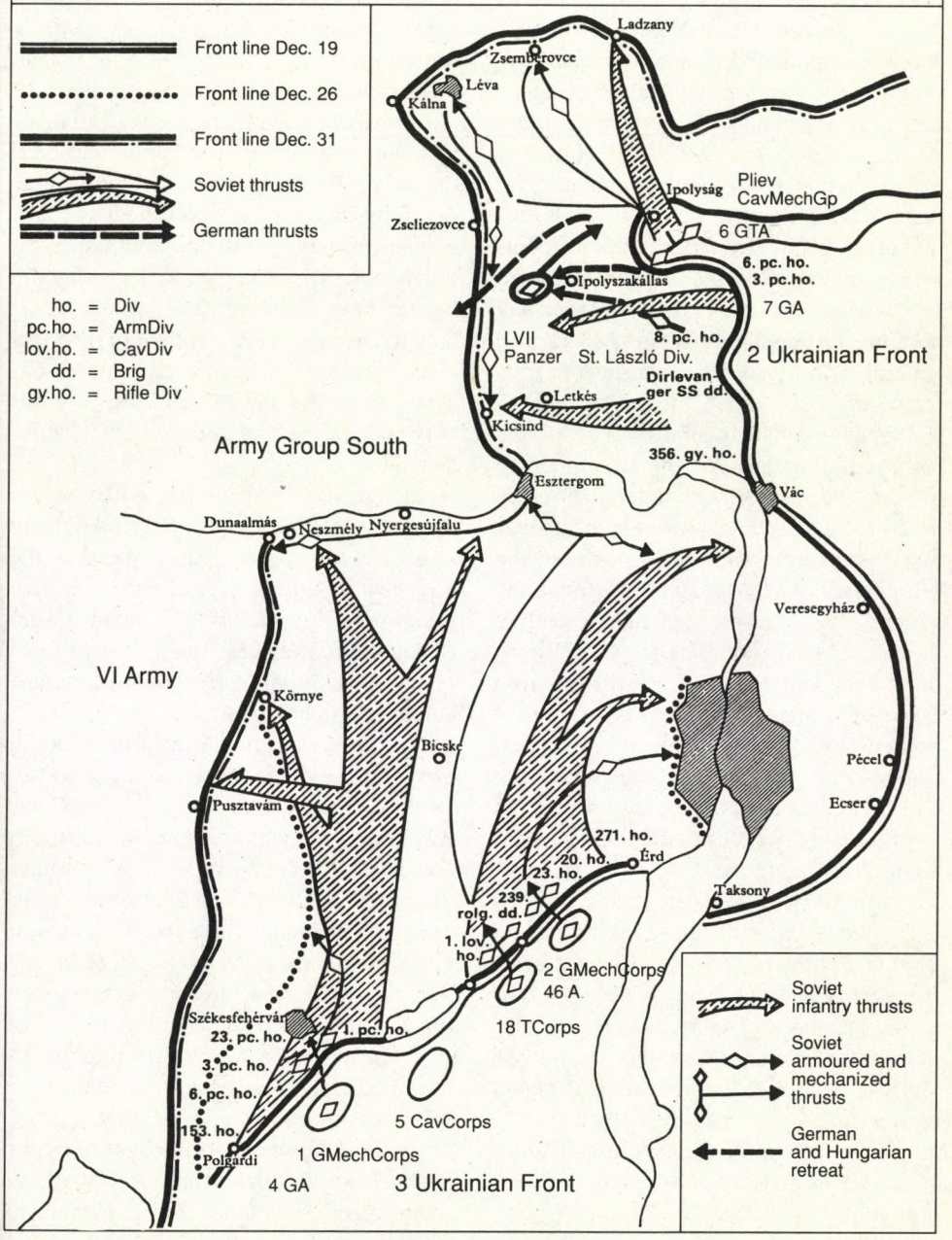
The operations between 29 October and 4 November basically proved that Malinovski's reservations had been right. The Soviet 46th Army was not sufficiently strong to take Budapest rapidly.

The defence of the Hungarian capital was organized by the Germans. They had no use for the military ideas of Ferenc Szálasi, the Arrow-Cross leader who had become Prime Minister on October 16, 1944.

On the appointment of SS Obergruppenführer Otto Winckelmann as Platzkommandant, a *Führerbefehl* came to Budapest. It contained nothing new, simply reiterating Hitler's order that "Budapest must be defended until the last building". On Hitler's instructions, Guderian, the German Chief of Staff, ordered that "...in accordance with the interests of German military operations, demolition and destruction of industry and transport must be carried out methodically and thoroughly", and Hungarian interests were not to be considered at all. Guderian even provided

CLOSING THE RING AROUND BUDAPEST

December 20–31, 1944



justification: if the Hungarians wanted to see their towns spared, they must do more to have Hungarian forces fight better.

Winckelmann's appointment as Platzkommandant did not last long. On December 5 he was ordered back to South Germany where he was made Deputy to the Chief of Police. His successor in Budapest was another SS Obergruppenführer, by the name of Karl Pfeffer von Wildenbruch, the commander of the 9th Mountain Division of the Waffen-SS. A Wehrmacht officer, Lieutenant Colonel Lindenau of the General Staff, was attached to him.

Little is known about the circumstances of the dismissal of Winckelmann. The widest held view is that Friessner had no faith in the military skills of the police general, and urged his replacement. Thus far it has been rarely mentioned among the reasons for his dismissal that he had regarded as paramount the strengthening of Pest, which Friessner wanted to give up.

Following the appointment of Pfeffer who, as a matter of course, inherited the full powers of Winckelmann, a Hungarian general was also granted full powers in Budapest. This was General Iván Hindy, one of the key figures in the Arrow-Cross takeover. Hindy's "full powers", however, existed only on paper. The city's administration collapsed spectacularly even before the closing of the Soviet ring around the city. The majority of the Arrow-Cross leaders took flight in time.

In these circumstances, there was little use in the Mayor of the district of Kispest reporting that the population were sabotaging the work of building strongpoints. According to the German war diary, out of the 1,862 persons called up on November 15, only 29, and out of the 262 summoned for labour service, only 9 presented themselves.

In the meantime, the operations aimed at a full encirclement of Budapest were continuing.

In terms of the entire front, the superiority of the Soviet troops was more than double in the Hungarian theatre of war. Because of the threat to the back door of the Reich, the Germans were weakening that section of the Eastern Front which lay in the zone of the main strategic thrust of the Soviet army. The Stavka therefore decided, after a short tactical halt, to continue the attack on the southwestern front.

The order was issued on 12 December for the troops of the 2nd and 3rd Ukrainian fronts to encircle and occupy the Hungarian capital by hitting it simultaneously from the North and South.

The order was carried out during the last ten days of December.

On December 26, troops of the 3rd Ukrainian Front completed the encirclement of the capital and the outside perimeter of the ring had also been established.

Pfeffer von Wildenbruch noted in his diary that the fact of the surrounding of Budapest, the events of December 24—the day the first tank with a red star on its side rolled along Hidegkúti Road from Budakeszi to the northwest of the city and reached the St. János Hospital—came as a surprise to him and his staff.

The fact was that Army Group South expected the main threat from the southwest of Budapest, and sought "the only way out" in withdrawing the 8th SS Cavalry Division "as rapidly as possible" from Budapest and redeploying it southwest of the capital. There were, however, other proposals as well. On December 22 the chief of staff of the army group urged that "...the eastern side of the Budapest bridgehead should be withdrawn to the inner line". Even the earlier argument of the Arrow-Cross leadership was given a place among the arguments of those waiting for a decision from higher up, namely, that if the troops in the capital were compelled to

fight in encirclement, then an uprising by the hungry population in the rear of the army was to be expected—and there was little chance of putting it down.

It was Guderian who conveyed Hitler's decision to the Army Group South's commander, who vainly kept repeating his warnings about the anti-German mood of the starving population. During their telephone conversation, Guderian told him that Hitler was convinced that the loss of Budapest would diminish the chances of success of the Western offensive—the operations in the Ardennes—by 50 per cent. He himself used the argument used earlier by the army group itself to counter Friessner: if a German division were to be brought out of Budapest, the Hungarians would not hold out any longer. Nor did the reason change: the Hungarian capital must be held for political and economic reasons.

Most of the Arrow-Cross leadership was also of the opinion that Budapest must be defended at all costs; they contented themselves with some remarks concerning the food supply situation. Guderian, however, thought that "in the given situation we are not in a position to consider the population."

Otto Wöhler, replacing Hans Friessner, used a richer battery of arguments in trying to persuade the High Command to give Pest up. He made reference to the fact that never in its history had the city been defended on the open and flat eastern side, and the inner ring could be held even in the event of the withdrawal of the 8th SS Cavalry Division. This last argument won out in the end. Hitler gave his approval to the withdrawal of the division, upon the condition that the eastern bridgehead must be held at all costs. On December 25 it was noted in the German army group's diary that from the point of view of supplying Budapest, the only route still open was the Pilisszentlélek-Pomáz road, but that could also be expected to be cut.

Both the chief of staff of the army group and its new commander urged falling back from the eastern bridgehead for the sake of a stronger western defence.

On December 27, the Germans retired to the so-called inner circle in the eastern bridgehead which, by then, was situated on the outskirts of town. At the same time, the western bridgehead had also become narrower because the Soviet spearheads stood only 2 kilometers from Buda Castle.

The Germans in control of the defence of the Hungarian capital no longer had any illusions. They were well aware that Budapest—and not only the Pest side, the "Eastern Bridgehead"—would soon have to be given up. There was only one way left for them: they ought to attempt to break out of the Soviet ring. Breaking out, however, was categorically forbidden by Hitler.

The German army group's report on its fighting strength on December 30, 1944, put the number of troops surrounded in Budapest as 95,000: 45,000 German and 50,000 Hungarian soldiers.

According to the handwritten notes of Lieutenant-Colonel Lindenau from 1969, "...the number and composition of the troops at our disposal proved unfit for the defence of a large city like Budapest from the very start. After all, what could Panzers, anti-tank and cavalry units do in a labyrinth of houses?"

It was also a situation dictated by necessity that—and this is again reported by Lieutenant-Colonel Lindenau—"The staff of the defence had no independent signals system of its own. We used the public telephone lines of Budapest instead. During the siege that resulted sometimes in the paradoxical situation that the number called was answered not by our people but by the Russians who were already there..."

Despite all that, the nearly hundred thousand strong defending army was a formidable force. The three attacking Soviet

army corps were supposed to occupy the Pest side of the capital by the evening of the 23rd of December, and reach the left bank of the Danube. This they were unable to do. Although on December 27 the Germans already thought that if they did not retire from the eastern (Pest) side of the river, failed to blow up the bridges and shift the centre of the defence over to the west, there would be disaster, the Soviet attack moved more slowly than planned. In the first half of January 1945, most of the fighting still went on for the possession of Pest.

With their experience gained in Stalingrad, the Soviets organized special assault squads. These consisted of 15-30 riflemen with sub-machine guns, 2-5 men with flame-throwers, and 2-3 sappers.

On January 3 1945 the Germans noted that the push of the Soviet 18th Rifle Corps was especially dangerous because it was threatening their landing strip—none other than the Budapest race-course.

The German report of January 6 described the supply situation of Budapest as critical, and that of the wounded catastrophic. On January 9, 3,880 wounded were registered in Budapest, 1,400 of them incapable of moving. Only a fraction of the wounded could be taken out by air.

It was only on January 16 that Hitler gave a free hand to Pfeffer von Wildenbruch regarding the Pest side. By that time the defenders' first line was already the Great Boulevard. On January 17 the last German units left Pest. The Elizabeth Bridge and the Chain Bridge were dropped into the Danube after their departure. The Petőfi Bridge had been blown up on January 15, around noon. (Margaret Bridge had been blown up months earlier, by accident, when crowded with traffic.) In the German decision, the blowing up of the bridges was not subject to any kind of Hungarian approval. They kept the privilege of issuing those orders to themselves.

On the western, hilly Buda side of the capital, conditions for successful operations were even more difficult for the Red Army than on the eastern bank. Until the second half of January, no major fighting took place in Buda, that is, on the western side, because the Soviet troops there were ordered onto the defence. The reason for that was that, because of the German attempts at relief, any eventual effort at a breakout had to be prevented.

The Stavka issued its orders for the occupation of Buda on January 18. The task was assigned to the Budapest Group of the 2nd Ukrainian Front, which was composed of three rifle corps. Each of these rifle corps consisted of 3-5 rifle divisions and a brigade of marines was also attached to one of them.

The German daily report for January 25 described the situation in the following words: "...the counter-pushes launched in order to eliminate the inroads of the enemy, which they gouge out with great firepower, demand huge sacrifices... fighting is going on for every inch of ground." The next day Pfeffer von Wildenbruch realized with a shock that he could no longer count on the relief of Buda either. The situation had become hopeless for the defenders. According to a German report dated January 29, "...enemy attacks by newly deployed tank units... may be counted on... Attack by ourselves is getting ever harder. The number of wounded exceeds the number of those fighting... 34 thousand German and Hungarian soldiers are without health care.."

Hitler, however, continued to repeat his previous orders: "The defending army must hold Budapest until the hour of relief comes."

A short time later, Vérmező, the open space lying below the western slopes of Castle Hill, also fell to the Soviets. That meant that the Germans were completely

cut off, not even gliders or the smallest courier planes (*Storch*) could now land.

These events compelled the German platzkommandant to ask Hitler for a "free hand". To no avail. Nor did the Papal Nuncio achieve anything when he called on the SS General. Pfeffer von Wildenbruch did pass the appeal of the Nuncio on to his superiors—to consider the immeasurable suffering of the civilian population and its massive destruction—but Guderian thought there was no need to take action. By February 10 the area still held by the defenders had become limited to Castle Hill and its closest surroundings. Their number was now down to 26,000. They were desperately short of food and ammunition.

The Germans decided to attempt a breakout. As Lindenau remembered, "...our reconnaissance men, mostly Hungarians, reported to us that behind the Russians we would hardly encounter any resistance. There were only supply units of the Russians there, mostly elderly people..."

Pfeffer kept his intention to break out secret not just because he wanted to achieve a surprise but also because he wanted to present his superiors in Berlin with a *fait accompli*. The final message he sent over the radio said: "...we have run out of ammunition. We have no food. Holding out in Buda any longer would only result in letting ourselves be massacred or surrendering unconditionally. I reject both alternatives. Therefore I shall now leave Buda with my troops, and seek a new basis for further fighting."

The breakout ended in complete failure. Surprise was not achieved. The Buda hills were reached only by some four thousand of those taking part in the action. According to some sources, only about 785 men succeeded in getting from there to the German lines.

The occupation of Buda was completed on February 13, 1944.

Civilian losses numbered 25,000 dead. Of the forty thousand buildings of the capital 74 per cent were damaged; 27 per cent was destroyed. A total of 32,363 homes became inhabitable. All the bridges across the Danube were blown up. Factories and plants sustained heavy damage. ❧

László Szarka

The Slovak National Question and Hungarian Nationality Policy Before 1918

The Slovak population of pre-1918 Hungary was 2,008,774 according to the census of 1900 and 1,967,970 according to that of 1910, which amounted to 10.5 and 9.4 per cent, respectively, of the total population. Before 1910, some 85 per cent of all Slovaks lived in a contiguous area in 16 counties in Northern Hungary. There the ratio of Hungarians (Magyars) exceeded 35 per cent, more than 90 per cent of whom were native Hungarian inhabitants of the counties the linguistic frontier cut through. Despite the rapid population growth in the counties north of the linguistic frontier, it was only in 1910 that the ratio of Hungarians reached 10 per cent—and that ratio was then reached in three counties at the same time (in Zólyom*, Sáros and Szepes).[1]

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* CONCORDANCE OF COUNTY NAMES: Abaúj-Torna–Abov-Turňa; Árva–Orava; Bars–Tekov; Gömör–Gemer; Hont–Hontianska; Liptó–Liptov; Nógrád–Novohrad; Nyitra–Nitra; Pozsony–Presporská (Bratislavská); Sáros–Šariš; Szepes–Spiš; Turóc–Turčianská; Trencsén–Trenčianská; Ung–Užská; Zemplén–Zemplín; Zólyom–Zvolen

1 ■ In eight of the ten Upper Hungarian counties on the left bank of the Danube, namely in Árva, Bars, Liptó, Nyitra, Pozsony (49.5 per cent in 1910), Trencsén, and Turóc, the number of Slovaks exceeded 50 per cent—and, with two exceptions, 70 per cent—of the population. In addition, the Slovak ratio was between 20 and 40 per cent in the districts or villages situated above the linguistic frontier. In the eastern part of Upper Hungary, in the regions on the left bank of the river Tisza, Slovaks made up an absolute majority only in the Counties of Sáros and Szepes, whereas in the Slovak parts of the Counties of Gömör, Abaúj-Torna, Zemplén, and Ung, only 20–40 per cent were Slovaks.

The area within the Hungarian-Slovak and Ruthenian-Slovak linguistic boundaries, made up of these ten counties with a Slovak majority, along with six more counties with smaller Slovak populations, may be regarded as the "Slovak Region" of Hungary in the era of the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

On the national and ethnic minority regions of "historical" Hungary, see László Katus: "Über die wirtschaftlichen und gesellschaftlichen Grundlage der Nationalitätfrage in Ungarn vor dem ersten Weltkrieg". In: *Die Nationalitätenfrage in der Österreich-Ungarischen Monarchie 1900–1918,* Budapest, 1966, pp. 149–216. László Szarka: "The dimensions of small national identity: Slovakia as a nationality region of pre-1918 Hungary". In: *Bildungsgeschichte, Bevölkerungsgeschichte, Gesellschaftsgeschichte in den böhmischen Ländern und in Europa.* Festschrift für Jan Havranek zum 60. Geburtstag, Wien–München, 1988. pp. 179–190.

The area defined by the linguistic boundaries and by the western and eastern state frontiers—informally called the "Up-Country" (*Felvidék*) by Hungarians—was already referred to as *Slovensko*, "Slovakia", by Slovak intellectuals in the 19th century, although, in conjunction with that, up to 1918 the expressions *Horný vidiek*, *Horniaky* (Uplands, Highlands) and *Horné Uhorsko* (Upper Hungary) also came quite naturally to them, too.

In the 18th century, Slovak enclaves came into being in regions that had become depopulated in the wake of the Turkish occupation of the Great Hungarian Plain (in the Bácska, Békés, Csongrád, and Nyírség regions); as a consequence of internal migration, the Slovak villages in Counties Komárom, Pest and Nógrád also grew larger. In Hungary's Slovak linguistic areas outside the Slovak Region, nearly a quarter of a million Slovak speakers were registered by the Hungarian censuses in 1900 and 1910.

During the years 1848 and 1849, several documents were produced by the Slovak national movement which may be treated as political programmes. One of these, the Liptószentmiklós (Liptovský Svätý Mikuláš) Petition included the demand for a Slovak National Assembly, a national guard, and the free use of Slovak national symbols. The 1849 Slovak Petitions to the Ruler, however, sought the establishment of a Slovak principality directly subordinated to Vienna. The territorial-administrative system, introduced after the Hungarian Revolution had been crushed, established two districts in the Slovak-inhabited regions, but these were not formed on a national basis.

In accordance with the 1848 Slovak political programmes, counties with a Slovak majority and "the Slav-inhabited parts of Counties Pozsony, Nyitra, Bars, Hont, Nógrád, Gömör, Torna, Abaúj, and Zemplén, cut across by the dividing line between nations" were also identified as the area of "the Upper Hungarian Slav District", to be invested with territorial autonomy as laid down by the autonomy plan drafted in the 1861 national memorandum in Turócszentmárton (Martin).

The Slovak question

The fundamental dilemma of 19th century Slovak national evolution, manifest also in 1848–1849, lay in the undefined character of the national region and in the consequent lack of constitutional traditions. Furthermore, in the wake of the codification of the Slovak literary language, the movement developing around the ideal of an independent nation had only a very modest urban and intellectual basis, a fact that had internal as well as external reasons. The integration of Slovak national society was accomplished without any genuine historical antecedents to speak of, against the will of the Hungarians representing the majority and against that of the Viennese government. In fact, it kept running into stiff resistance and constant interventions from those quarters.

After the Austro-Hungarian Compromise of 1867, the term "Slovak question", was synonymous with the conflict between a struggle for Slovak national emancipation and the idea of a unified political nation ensuing Hungarian governments stood for. The liberal spirit of the Nationality Act XLIV of 1868 gradually disappeared almost completely from the "Slovak policies" put into effect in the decades to follow. In the face of measures aimed at forced assimilation in education, public administration, association, Church matters, etc., all that remained for the non-Hungarians in Hungary was to demonstratively withdraw from national politics, in other words, to choose the tactic of political passivity.

At the turn of the century, membership of the Slovak National Party (SNP) (founded in 1874) and the movement it controlled was limited largely to intellectuals; the eastern parts of the Slovak Region was almost completely inactive where the national issue was concerned. The confusion over national identity was aggravated, apart from the effects of the inherited religious (Catholic-Lutheran) conflicts, also by the dilemmas of loyalty to the Hungarian state and people's relationship to the concept of Czech-Slovak national union.[2]

The cooperation that developed between Romanians, Slovaks and Serbs in Hungary at the turn of the century was undoubtedly based on a new recognition of the value and function of a clear sense of national identity, an identity that was to be consciously adopted and also expressed on a massive scale. Based on traditions of parliamentary cooperation between the national minorities in the 1860s and 1870s, a common programme was accepted by the representatives of the three nations mentioned above. It advocated a reform of the administration of "historical Hungary" on nationality lines, and the creation of legal guarantees for national emancipation. In the wake of constant conflicts between the central (Hungarian government) and regional (non-Hungarian) interests, the effects of all this reached formerly indifferent people as well, and became markedly strong, for instance, among the landowning peasantry and local industrial workers. In the Slovak region the process was slow and limited to the radius of attraction of various national centres.

Despite their stubborn insistence on using early 19th century expressions like "pan-Slav subversion" or "pan-Slav movement" in public administration and on police surveillance of national minority organizations, Hungarian governments had a pretty shrewd idea of the wider context of these processes, thanks largely to some officials who had seriously studied the problem and had their share of personal experience and a critical approach. This is clearly indicated, for instance, by the arguments found in ministerial documents dealing with various "Uplands" and "American" operations in connection with Slovak emigration at the beginning of this century. In the spring of 1903, Prime Minister Károly Khuen-Héderváry saw national feeling as "the dominant psycho-political factor" of the age. "We do not have an ideal weapon with which to counter that factor, a virtually irresistible weapon in the hands of nationalist subversives," he wrote, "among the ordinary people who have no appreciation of the great traditions of history. It must not be forgotten, no matter how unpleasant or even dangerous it may be from our point of view, that the ordinary Slovak or Ruthenian cherishes his national identity or even his pan-Slav ambitions or vague sentiments in the same way, and regards them quite as holy from a moral point of view, as we do our love for our own race."[3] Such a realistic judgement of the situation, however, was rarely followed by the outlining of an equally realistic programme. During the fifteen years preceding the Great War, Hungarian policy-makers tried to deal with the new activism of the national minorities solely from a position of strength.

2 ■ Milan Podrimavský: Slovenská národná strana v druhej polovici 19. storočia, Bratislava, 1983; Robert A. Kann—Zdeněk V. David: "The Slovaks" In: *The People of the Eastern Habsburg Lands* 1526–1918. Seattle—London, 1984. pp. 379–392.

3 ■ ME 2570, July 22, 1903. Národný archív Slovenskej republiky (NASR), Bratislava, UMV inv. č. kr. 42. 8.

Counties in the Slovak region, 1867–1922, with the Trianon border. Source: Jozef Klimko: *Vývoj územia Slovenska a utvárenie jeho hraníc* (The Regional Development of Slovakia and How its Borders Evolved). Bratislava, 1980.

In the first decade of the century, not a single attempt was made towards a rapprochement between the Hungarian government and Slovak representatives. During the election campaign of 1910, attempts were made by Slovaks, Romanians and Serbs to enter into a pact with the Party of Labour (*Munkapárt*), thus trying to get a higher number of national and ethnic minority representatives into Parliament. The failure of those attempts could hardly have come as a surprise to anyone. It is understandable, too, that the rather narrow limits of the substance and the framework of the negotiations with the Romanians initiated by the government of Prime Minister István Tisza in 1913–1914 also compelled the increasingly radical Slovak politicians to seek a new course. It was observable that beside a sincere desire, similar to that of the Romanians, to find a compromise and to achieve some kind of internal federalization (a desire that played a decisive part in the policies of the SNP until 1914), there was a new tendency to move closer to the concept of Czecho-Slovak unity and a complete or partial identification with the unity movement. Before 1914, the alternative of abandoning the framework of the existing state was seen as a kind of vision born out of sheer desperation rather than a well-considered, realistic and topical idea (as evidenced by the resounding slogan in 1913 of the Slovak weekly *Slovenský týždenník* published in Budapest: "A flight from the Hungarian Herod to the Czech Egypt").

Because of the described problems of national evolution, but mainly because of the unambiguous rejection it met with by the Hungarians, the traditional Slovak political programme based on national territorial autonomy—the limit and goal of Slovak nationalist ideas in the era of the Austro-Hungarian Empire—proved to be unfeasible.

As a consequence, the idealistic concept of a Slav nation, so popular at the end of the century among politically active Slovak organizations, was increasingly replaced as the main trend in national ambitions by minor, daily cultural and economic activities, even in the Slovak region.

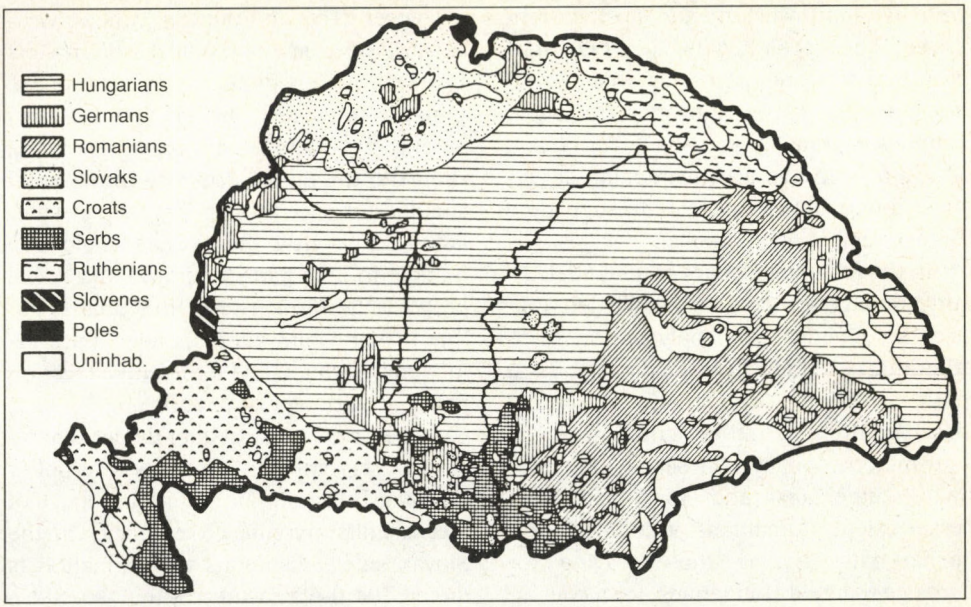
With its conservative centre in Turócszentmárton (Martin) and with the arch-conservative Russophile ideology and authoritarianism of Svetozár Hurban Vajanský (1847–1916), the SNP became increasingly fossilized, and increasingly a burden weighing upon Slovak political life, the complexity of which was growing rapidly. Regional centres were emerging around the bourgeois liberal and radical newspapers influenced by the Popular Party group led by Andrej Hlinka (1884–1939), Ferdinand Juriga (1874–1950) and František Tománek (1879–1948), or taking on the idea of Czecho-Slovak mutuality and, eventually, unity. Slovak banks, trade cooperatives and reading clubs furnished the base whereby the familiar narrow intellectual groups turned into Slovak national centres with a broader circle of influence.[4]

It was in the course of this powerful and continuous process of differentiation—developing at first as a consequence of personal conflicts rather than through deliberate division of labour—that contacts were made with the section of the peasantry receptive to the ideas of standing up and protecting their interests. Along with that, a more flexible organizational system gradually evolved, better suited for countering the oppressive policies of the Hungarian government and the county administrations *vis à vis* the national minorities.

Ultimately, the Slovak National Party, reorganized along the lines of the Parliamentary Nationality Party, laid the emphasis on Czecho-Slovak mutuality. In fact, from the last years of the 19th century on, the Slovakophil idea, which considered the Slovaks living within the borders of "historical" Hungary as part of the Czech nation, was successfully revived amongst Czechs. In the wake of the activities of the Czech-Slav Unity Movement, active in Prague from 1896 on, an increasing number of Slovak politicians attached themselves to Czecho-Slovak unity aspirations, veiled in phrases about "the cultural and economic mutuality" of the two nations. On the other hand, some representatives of the Slovak People's Party, including Ferdinand Juriga and František Skyčák (1869–1953), urged cooperation with Tisza's government. True, cooperation with the Hungarian government was accorded an important place in the plans of the two successive Presidents of the Slovak Natioal Party, Pavel Mudroň (1835–1914) and Matúš Dula (1846–1926).

The deftest Slovak politician of the early part of this century was Milan Hodža (1878–1944). He had gained considerable political experience as secretary to the Serbian-Romanian-Slovak national minority group in the Hungarian Parliament, the only Slovak member of the "shadow cabinet" of Archduke Franz Ferdinand, heir to the throne, and a central figure in national agrarian organizations and the opposition Slovak press. He held ministerial office in two Czechoslovak cabinets in the interwar years, and was Premier of Czechoslovakia from 1935 to 1938. In the years before the Great War, following his failure to gain a parliamentary seat, despite supporting a pact with the governing Hungarian party, Hodža temporarily eliminated bargaining with the Hungarian government from his strikingly diverse political toolkit, and

4 ■ Imre Polányi: *Szlovák társadalom és polgári nemzeti mozgalom a századfordulón* (Slovak Society and National Movements Around the Turn of the Century). (1895–1907). Budapest, 1987. pp. 117–124.



Ethnographic map of Hungary in the late 1910s (based on a map produced by the Hungarian Institute of Geography). Source: Sándor Frisnyák: *Magyarország történeti földrajza* (A Historical Geography of Hungary). Budapest, 1992.

thought the most effective antidote against Hungarian national minority policies was organizing Slovak agrarian party activity.[5]

In the first decade of the century, the most serious problem confronting Slovak national evolution lay in the extremely adverse demographic developments brought about by the combined effects of extensive assimilation, emigration to America, and internal migration. These three factors, and especially the decline in natural population growth in the counties most heavily affected by emigration, resulted in a rapid decline in the Slovak population both in absolute figures and in population ratios. The acceleration of the assimilation process in the 19th century was seen by the Hungarian government, very carefully keeping track of assimilation trends, as well as by the contemporary Hungarian demographers (who studied the process from more than one aspect), as a consequence of closely intertwined natural and economic causes. These, in their view, followed from the peripheric location, mainly in mountainous areas, of the national minorities, and especially from the relative overpopulation in the nationality regions. These fringe minority regions contended with difficult economic conditions even at the best of times; they were affected even more severely than others by the unevenness of economic development, the agrarian recession at the end of the century, and the resulting lack of jobs. Most heavily hit

5 ■ Susan Mikula: "Milan Hodža and the Politics of Power," 1907–1914, in: Stanislav Y. Kirschbaum ed.: *Slovak Politics: Essays on Slovak History in Honour of Joseph M. Kirschbaum.* Cleveland, 1983, pp. 15–23.

were the northwestern and northeastern areas of the Slovak Region, i. e. Árva, Trencsén, Szepes, and Sáros, as well as the neighbouring, partly Hungarian-inhabited, counties of Zemplén and Abaúj–Torna, and Ung, a part of the Ruthenian region. It was these four counties that were to supply the largest number of emigrants.

In the first fifteen years of the 20th century, more than 200,000 people left that area for America, with only one in three returning to their homeland. That is a point where the Hungarian government deserves the most severe criticism for its anti-minority policy. On seeing that Slovaks, Ruthenians, and, to a somewhat lesser extent, Romanians, accounted for a higher ratio among those leaving for America than did Hungarians, for a considerable time the various Hungarian governments of the early 20th century made little or no effort to stop this wave of massive emigration. In 1903, for instance, the Hungarian Prime Minister argued: "The capacity for growth of the Slovak population is quite considerable, nor is that of the Ruthenians negligible. In such circumstances halting emigration would mean deliberately lowering the proportion of Hungarians—for the sake of the above mentioned." István Tisza himself began to realize the harmfulness of this short-sighted, nationalist emigration policy only around 1910. In the first period of his second term as Prime Minister, Tisza tried to fight excessive emigration by establishing industries, supporting agriculture and organizing lectures.[6]

In the northern Hungarian Slovak Region, the strongest declaration of active assimilationist policy could be found in *A felvidék* (The Up-Country), a book written in an extreme nationalist vein by Béla Grünwald, Deputy Lord Lieutenant of County Zólyom. Grünwald argued that among the national minority regions of Hungary, the Slovak region was the most suitable for speeding up linguistic assimilation. In his view, the Slovaks would only be able to take part in cultural and social progress by turning into Hungarians. For that reason Grünwald demanded a powerful administration and a forceful education policy promoting assimilation.

One of the most frequently debated issues concerning the contemporary policy of "Magyarization" is the social effect of the assimilatory education policy. On the Slovak side, unanimous condemnation is directed at the measures of the 1907 Education Act, commonly known as *Lex Apponyi*, which made an attempt to introduce Hungarian as the "state language", that is not simply as a curriculum subject but as the language of instruction in national minority schools. Intensive teaching of Hungarian eroded the standards in other school subjects. Thus the large-scale "Magyarization" dreamt of by Béla Grünwald brought anything but cultural and social progress. Björnsterne Björnson, who entered a debate with Apponyi in the European press, used the chauvinist spirit of Hungarian education policy as an argument against Hungary's policies regarding the national minorities. All this resulted in the slowing down of the spread of Slovak-language culture, concomitant with a strong trend of assimilation among those who took white collar or professional jobs.

Nor was it less unfavourable for the national minorities that Hungarian patriotism

6 ■ See Note 3. On Tisza's realization: e.g. Aladár Komjáthy: *A kitántorgott egyház* (A Church in Emigration) Budapest, 1984, pp. 73–74. The most complete summary on Slovak emigration: Monika Glettler: *Pittsburg—Wien—Budapest. Programm und Praxis der Nationalitätenpolitik bei der Auswanderung der ungarischen Slowaken nach Amerika um 1900.* Wien, 1980.

Population of Hungary (without Croatia and Fiume)

According to Languages Spoken

	Civilian Population in 1,000			in Percentage			Growth in per cent
	1850	1880	1910	1850	1880	1910	1850–1910
Germans	1,349	1,870	1,884	11,6	13,6	10,4	39,7
Slovaks	1,739	1,855	1,937	15,0	13,5	10,7	11,4
Romanians	2,240	2,403	2,933	19,3	17,5	16,2	30,9
Ruthenes	446	353	463	3,8	2,6	2,6	3,8
Croats			178			1,0	
Serbs	600	632	458	5,2	4,6	2,5	20,5
Sokci and Bunjevci			87			0,5	
Slovenes	45	63	74	0,4	0,5	0,4	64,4
Gypsies	83	79	113	0,7	0,6	0,6	36,1
Jews*	250	–	–	2,2	–	–	–
Others	45	69	98	0,4	0,5	0,5	117,8
Non-Magyars	6,795	7,324	8,225	58,5	53,3	45,5	21,0
Magyars	4,812	6,404	9,868	41,5	46,6	54,5	105,1
Total	11,609	13,729	18,094	100	100	100	55,9

[The census takers did not consider Jews a "nationality" from 1880]

Balance of Population Growth According to Ethnicity 1880–1910

(in 1,000s)

	Germans	Slovaks	Romanians	Ruthenes	Southern Slavs	Others	Total Non-Magyars
Natural Increase	+653	+752	+725	+198	+239	+64	+2,631
Net Migration	–140	–370	–150	– 60	–33	+80	– 673
Effective Growth	+14	+82	+530	+110	+102	+63	+901
Loses Due to Assimilation	–499	–300	–45	–28	–104	–81	–1,057
Assimilated Jews	104	24	11	18	–	30	187
Net Loss	–395	–276	–34	–10	–104	–51	–870
In per cent of 1880 popul.	21,1	14,8	1,4	2,8	12,1	34,5	11,8

Source: László Katus: "The Status of Ethnic Minorities in Hungary During the Age of Dualism (1867–1918)" in: Peter E. Hidas, ed.: *Minorities and the Law from 1867 to the Present.* Montreal, Dawson College Publications, 1987.

and non-Hungarian nationality, a combination that had developed without any special difficulty or crisis of conscience earlier, became increasingly difficult to reconcile from the last decades of the 19th century on. The growing intolerance in Hungarian public opinion, which treated the Romanian, Slovak and Serb languages as "foreign" languages, and non-Hungarians as "aliens", and the increasingly close relationship between success and assimilation, made the moral and political attitudes of a "good Hungarian patriot" and (or) a "good Slovak, Romanian or Serb" virtually mutually exclusive.

It is not surprising, then, that many of the educated, who had chosen assimilation, protected themselves by trying to isolate themselves from Hungarian culture, and identified with German or Czech culture instead. The majority of course—especially those in administrative and white-collar posts, in the public or private sector—chose the now exclusive road to success, that leading through assimilation.

An investigation of the contemporary social prestige of the Slovak language must not ignore the significance of the high-quality and rapidly growing Slovak press, whether strongly pro-government or oppositionist. Indeed, there was a continuity, even without institutions, of Slovak scholarship, arts and associations. It is questionable whether this should be attributed to the inconsistency of the practice of forced assimilation or to the survival of an institutional basis for the national cultures, one that had been established in a liberal spirit in an earlier period. With an ever-growing base among the middle-class, well-to-do peasants, intellectuals, and professionals, the Slovak national movement made very good use of opportunities offered by institutions independent of government. The opposition and radical press had a special capacity to replace the banned or unauthorized Slovak secondary schools, associations and political forums.

"Magyarization" in schools contributed both directly and indirectly to the intensification of assimilation. For one thing, the complete elimination of secondary-school education in Slovak made it extremely difficult to add to and replace the Slovak intelligentsia. The combined results of education policy and an inner assimilation closely connected to urbanization and embourgoisement were clearly indicated by the fact that no more than 350 devotedly Slovak intellectual families and 39 Slovak-language intellectual centres of a "familiar" character were counted by Anton Štefánek (1877–1915), the editor of the Budapest-published Slovak daily *Slovenský denník* (1910–1915). Peter Makovický, a factory-owner in Rózsahegy (Ružomberok), spoke of 1,100 members of the Slovak middle-class, intellectuals and professionals, who were loyal to their nation. According to official statistics, the number of Slovak-speakers in the white-collar professions was 3,304.[7]

The arguments brought up by Hungarians in support of an assimilationist education policy were various. For instance, in an exchange of letters with Jozef Škultéty, who edited the papers *Národnie Noviny* and *Slovenské pohľady*, published in Turócszentmárton (Martin), and one of those who did not shun Hungarian culture, the author and journalist Jenő Rákosi emphasized that a knowledge of Hungarian,

7 ■ László Katus: "The Status of Ethnic Minorities in Hungary During the Age of Dualism (1867–1918)" in: Peter I. Hadas ed.: *Minorities and the Law. From 1867 to the Present*. Montreal 1987. pp. 3–27. Károly Vörös: "The Magyarization of the Language of the Minorities During the Age of Dualism (1867–1918)" Ibid. pp. 32–39.

as the official language of the state, was the only way in which gifted young Slovaks could achieve success. Nevertheless, there can be little doubt that for the majority the main reason and the actual objective of the whole of education policy was to enforce assimilation. That was naturally unacceptable to Slovak politicians, just as it was unacceptable to politicians of the other national minorities.[8]

On examining the actual process of forced and natural assimilation—accepting the existence of "statistical Magyarization", although we can reject claims that falsification ran into the hundred thousands as a huge exaggeration—we come to the same conclusion as the Slovak reply to Oszkár Jászi's all-round enquiry concerning the nationality question in 1908. This was that in the non-Magyar regions—with the exception of towns, one might add—the really decisive factor in assimilation was the "force of the masses", and that "Magyarization" was not the only assimilation process. Similar processes were going on in the "Slovak Region" with regard to Slovak-German, Slovak-Ruthenian and Slovak-Hungarian respects—demonstrably to the advantage of the Slovaks.

In the end, the enforcement of an assimilation that education policy was thought to speed up turned out to be counterproductive. The nurseries and schools established along the linguistic frontier proved to be too few and ill-suited for their objective. It was practically impossible for the Hungarian staff of these isolated schools, who hardly spoke a word of Slovak, to teach the Hungarian language. The only thing those attempts were good for was to provide spiritual ammunition for those who claimed that "forced assimilation" had been the single cause behind the entire assimilation process gathering speed in the ten years before the Great War. It was not so and it was sensed even by contemporary Slovak politicians that István Tisza's readiness to negotiate, the changes in the Balkans and the rallying of the democratic forces inside Hungary together might sooner or later lead to a positive change in Hungary's policy *vis à vis* its national minorities.

In January 1914, Milan Hodža completed the "death certificate" of "Magyarization" with great self-assurance: "Those whom the Hungarians did not manage to force into assimilation before last year, they will never force into it now; they can only embitter them... It must be clear to any Hungarian statesman in his right mind that the Romanians, South Slavs and Slovaks along the frontiers will only retain their emotional bonds with Hungary if they do not ever have to run to their brethren beyond the borders because of any injury."[9]

The process of assimilation among the Slovaks before 1914 was also promoted by the intensification of inner migration due to industrialization and the extremely dynamic development of the central regions of the country, especially that of Budapest. Of the Slovak-inhabited counties, the greatest numbers of immigrants to Budapest came from the counties of Bars, Hont and Nyitra, which were less affected by the

8 ■ The most detailed discussion of the Slovak aspects of assimilatory school policy is to be found in: Michal' Potemra: "Školská politika madarských vlád na Slovensku na rozhraní 19 a 20 storočia" (The Education Policy of Hungarian Governments in Slovakia at the Turn of the Century). *Historický Časopis,* 1978, No.4, pp. 497–536. Jenő Rákosi's letters to Škultéty can be found in the archives of the Matica slovenská. Škultétyho korešpondecia, LA MS, Martin.

9 ■ Milan Hodža: "Pohnime sa za slovenskú školu" (Let's Defend Slovak Schools!) *Slovenský týždenník,* 1914, No. 2.

emigration wave to America, and through which the linguistic frontier ran.

Comparative studies of the population of Budapest according to origin, native language and languages spoken, indicate clearly that, after a few years, half of even those coming from purely Slovak counties claimed Hungarian as their native language.

A comparison between the industrial and national development of the towns of Upper Hungary shows that the two processes undoubtedly ran parallel in Hungary at the turn of the century. It was mainly the industrialization of the towns in the valley of the river Vág, especially that of Zsolna (Žilina), and the evolution of a couple of villages into towns (Ruttka/Vrútky, Korompa/Krompachy) that brought considerable changes in the composition of the population.

Population growth in the older, traditional towns (Pozsony/Bratislava, Besztercebánya/Banská Bystrica, Eperjes/Prešov, Lőcse/Levoča, Kassa/Košice) was less dynamic; yet their ethnic composition showed a powerful trend in favour of Hungarians. Despite that, however, up to 1900, in the towns of the region, they were in an absolute majority only in Kassa and Jolsva (Jelšava), and, a few years later also in Zólyom (Zvolen), Nyitra (Nitra) and Nagyrőce (Revúca). In towns with a German majority, after 1910 that absolute majority was retained only in Késmárk (Kežmarok/Käsmark) and Gölnicbánya (Gelnica/Göllnitz). The instability of the ethnic make-up of the region is indicated by the fact that out of its 34 towns, beside the 14 towns with a Slovak, 5 with a Hungarian and 2 with a German absolute majority, in 13 towns the majority of one or another nationality was only relative. Körmöcbánya (Kremnica/Kremnitz) and Poprád (Poprad/Deutschendorf) partly retained their original German character; the former absolute Slovak majorities of Trencsén (Trenčín), Bártfa (Bardejov), Kisszeben (Sabinov), Igló (Spišská Nová Ves) and Lőcse/Levoča) relative majorities. On the other hand, in Leibic (Lubica/Leibnitz) and Szepesbéla (Spišská Belá/Bela), previously with a German majority, it was the Slovaks who, according to the last census of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, attained a relative majority. The Slovak-majority towns, where the relative majority shifted to the Hungarians, were Besztercebánya (Banská Bystrica) and Eperjes (Prešov); the same thing happened in Dobšina (Dobschau), whose majority had been German in earlier times.[10]

Assimilation closely associated with industrialization was even more intensified by two-way changes due to inner migration. The rate of assimilation of Slovaks settling in the central regions was extremely fast: they adopted the new language within a generation or two. At the same time, those moving to the "Slovak region" were almost exclusively Hungarians. This, together with the rapid "Magyarization" of Jews, resulted in major changes in the ethnic composition of the region's towns, changes which were strongly emphasized and deliberately represented as spectacular by the statistical literature of the times.

Upper-Hungary policy

The most serious flaw in the Hungarian government's notion of trying to react to the "Slovak question" with an "Upper-Hungary policy" lay in the failure to recog-

10 ■ György Ránki: "Gazdaság és nacionalizmus Magyarországon a századforduló körül" (Economy and Nationalism in Hungary around the Turn of the Century). In: *Gazdaság és társadalom* (Economy and Society). Budapest, 1974, pp. 59–79.

nize, right up to 1918, that winning the cooperation of the opposition Slovak movement, the Slovak National Party, was indispensable. On the contrary, the Hungarian government tried actually to ignore it completely. It saw the Slovak attempts at a rapprochement as a sign of weakness, and tried to take advantage of them in an effort to divide the Slovak movement, instead of using them to gradually settle administrative and cultural issues. Changes in approach to the "Slovak question" also show that the Hungarian government, on seeing more and more signs that war was imminent, gradually retreated from the idea of rapidly establishing a "Hungarian nation-state", something long considered feasible. On the contrary, after a time, it recognized the impossibility of achieving that objective on an ethnic basis. The initial benevolence towards the national minorities in the early years of the Dual Monarchy had been, from 1875 on, replaced by an "iron fist" policy during the fifteen years Kálmán Tisza was prime minister. Before the turn of the century, another prime minister, Dezső Bánffy (1895–1899) wanted to introduce a consistent policy of "Magyarization" of place names and in education policy. He established a special "nationalities department" alongside the Prime Ministerial Office. The administration following Bánffy's, that of Kálmán Széll (1899–1903), adopted a much more tolerant attitude. Nevertheless, no genuine change took place in the assimilationist education policy that proceeded in conjunction with the extension of the state educational system. The next government, the first cabinet of István Tisza (1903–1905), combined concessions, conciliatory policies and heavy-handed, forceful measures. The same ambiguities were clear in the nationality policies of the transitional Fejérváry cabinet, so favoured by the monarch.

The coalition government of 1906–1908 used the "American operations", intended to neutralize the "subversive tendencies" among Slovak emigrants by mapping out the influence of the movement for Czecho-Slovak unity and possibly to reduce that influence among those emigrating or returning home. In 1907, however, Prime Minister Wekerle warned the makers of foreign policy in Vienna and the Hungarian interior minister of the need for operations in Upper Hungary rather than in America, if the new trends of the Slovak national movement were to be counterbalanced.

It took the collapse of the coalition government and two or three more years for the administration to realize that its policy toward Upper Hungary should be based on something other than bans, police and official interventions. What was needed was not "operations" or "actions" but a framework of patient, step by step measures leading to agreements with the national minorities.

Such efforts were being made already by the coalition government. The Minister of Agriculture established employment agencies in Fiume (Rijeka), Zsolna (Žilina) and Királyhida (Bruckneudorf) to help people returning from depression hit America. The agency at Zsolna was given independent authority, and operated in the counties Árva, Liptó and Trencsén first as an intermediary in government aid operations, and later as a bureau which supported economic associations and farmers' groups and as an organizer for major local investments.[11]

Nevertheless, under the coalition gov-

11 ■ *A hegyvidéki, erdélyrészi (székelyföldi) és felvidéki miniszteri kirendeltségek 1910. és 1911. évi működésének ismertetése* (Report on Economic Actions in the Uplands, in the Transylvanian Parts [Székler–Land] and in Upper Hungary). Budapest, 1912.

ernment, the majority of the measures taken were repressive in nature. The establishment and extension of policing on the border was designed to achieve stricter control over the movements of the national minorities. The "iron-fisted" policy of the coalition government also led to an event that brought a major change in Slovak attitudes and in the "Slovak question"—the Salvos of Černová (27 October 1907), claiming 16 victims, which followed the publication ban and imprisonment of the Rózsahegy (Ružomberok) priest Andrej Hlinka. The incident was well publicized in the foreign press as proof of the "Asiatic methods" Hungary employed to oppress the national minorities, albeit measures of that kind were never sanctioned by the central government. In fact, on several occasions it did its best to restrain some overly chauvinistic local county officials.

Repressive measures were nearly always counterproductive. This was also true with regard to the movement for Czecho-Slovak unity, which intensified within the framework of the "neo-Slav" movement. The high degree of bewilderment—complete in certain counties —in the face of Czecho-Slovak economic and cultural cooperation is mirrored by the negative or irrelevant replies to the Prime Minister's circulars inquiring about the impact of the Czecho-Slovak unity movement. It was precisely over the "Slovak question" that the minority policy of the coalition government showed the highest measure of uncertainty and bewilderment. Ignoring the genuine causes for the new momentum in Slovak political life (i.e., the spread of political groups which involved larger numbers of people, temporary parliamentary cooperation between various ethnic groups born out of the very real threat of the withdrawal of the Nationality Act, the national minority aspects of the suffrage struggles), Wekerle suspected intervention from abroad. "When the various elements of the new trends in the Slovak national movement are carefully considered and compared with each other," he wrote, "one cannot but come to the conclusion that the whole operation is being led by some unknown, unified force. In America, the Hlinka affair is used to persuade Slovaks to make financial sacrifices, the objective of which is both to boost the Slovak movement at home and to create an anti-Hungarian mood abroad. The same objective is served by Björnson's well-known attacks, and it is not inconceivable that his information comes from American Slovak sources and his militancy is fuelled by Slovak–American money."[12]

The Slovak policy of István Tisza

The "Slovak policy" of the entire period here investigated was aimed at achieving what Tisza had begun at the time of his first cabinet: trying to divide the "agitators" and "peaceful non-Hungarian people", and to deal with the various ethnic groups in a differentiated manner. Yet it was also Tisza who realized that the "policy of stepping on toes", with the increasing number of actions taken against the press and with the petty restrictions it entailed, could achieve neither the objectives of the Hungarian state nor those of the "political nation". Nor did he regard the abolishing of the Nationality Act as desirable, and thought new regulations concerning the use of the native language and the educational system of national minorities were necessary. It also gradually dawned on Tisza that con-

12 ■ ME res. 1908/136, March 10 1908. NASR UMV. č. kr. 48.

tinuing to ignore the existence of national parties would simply be pursuing previous ostrich-like behaviour. Moreover, calling the national minority policies of the coalition period a *cul-de-sac*, he also took a moderate position in opposition to forcing assimilation in schools.[13]

The thrust of Tisza's strategy towards the minorities was to reach a compromise which, while keeping in mind the objective of "Magyarization", he thought could be achieved through meeting some of the demands of the minorities. In pursuit of that end, the government actually made plans to boost economic and cultural life in the minority regions.

These were the aspirations. How they materialized in Tisza's prewar "Slovak policy" is a different story. A set of Slovak cultural demands which Pavel Mudroň, President of the SNP, drew up on the invitation of Prime Minister Khuen-Héderváry, and first submitted in 1911, remained unanswered when they were repeatedly submitted to Lukács, the new Prime Minister, in 1912. In the autumn of 1913, in the aftermath of Tisza's controversial negotiations with the Romanians and of his hints at a more conciliatory stance towards the minorities, the cultural memorandum was handed in once again, this time to Tisza, by Matúš Dula, who headed a Slovak delegation.

Recognizing the growing, almost critical, diplomatic isolation of Austria–Hungary, and the relationship between the pressing international situation and national minority aspirations, Tisza made an attempt to take the initiative and, by means of a conciliatory policy, to move the negotiations toward some kind of a general agreement with the nationalities. From that point of view, the attempt by Matúš Dula and the Slovak People's Party, independent since 1913, to achieve a *rapprochement*, was clearly useful. In return for school instruction in the native language and for other language rights, Tisza asked for the same thing in exchange as he did from the leadership of the Romanian National Party. If an agreement were to be arrived at, then, according to the draft, "it ought to be declared in some appropriate form that the party concerned would accept the solution offered as wholly satisfactory and as a permanent settlement of the nationality issue, that it would, without any reservation whatsoever, act in the future on the basis of this solution, that it will take those parts of its programme off the agenda which go beyond it, and focus its operation on the full realization of the agreements..." However, even without the extension of instruction in the native language ordered in 1914, and even without the war, this would have been inadequate grounds for a settlement of the minority issues in Hungary, including that of the "Slovak question."

Tisza himself probably saw clearly that partial concessions would only be a superficial treatment of some symptoms. In the autumn of 1913, he tried to furnish the practical basis for a framework of definite measures. The detailed plan was hallmarked by the name of Lajos Steier and was to be accompanied by intense action in Upper Hungary.

During the time in office of Tisza's war time cabinet (1913–1917), the most com-

13 ■ *Tisza István képviselőházi beszédei* (István Tisza's Speeches in the House of Representatives). Vol IV, Budapest, 1937, p. 76. In 1914, Tisza went even further than that, declaring in Parliament that "It is not learning the Hungarian language that makes a difference. The nationalist leaders of the minorities know Hungarian as well as they do their mother-tongue." *Budapesti Hírlap,* 10 April 1914. For a detailed analysis of Tisza's policy, *cf.* Gábor Vermes: *István Tisza.* New York, 1985.

prehensive Slovak attempt at a rapprochement was associated with the name of L'udovít Bazovský (1872–1958), a lawyer from Losonc (Lučenec), who was somewhat isolated from mainstream Slovak political groups, Bazovský supplemented the above mentioned prewar cultural appeals with demands involving the use of native language in public administration and by the judiciary. Specifically, the requests in the original Bazovský Memorandum included the employment of "qualified persons of Slovak nationality" in the government offices of the Slovak region, parliamentary representation reflecting the ratio of Slovaks in Hungary, appointment of Slovak coadjutors to work with the Bishops of Nyitra (Nitra), Besztercebánya (Banská Bystrica) and Szepesváralja (Spišské Podhradie) and, in general, a protection of the interest of Slovaks in the Catholic dioceses, restoration of the original Slovak place-names, and an end to the persecution of non-Hungarian minorities. Tisza met Bazovský several times but he continued to refuse, even while promising concessions, to fully restore rights guaranteed by the Nationality Act of 1868. After that, due to passivity in Slovak political life, Tisza had to be content with the use of the police and informers, with taking advantage of corruption and conflicts among the Slovaks. There were, however, some large efforts made along those lines. Thus, for instance, attempts were made, through a well-prepared press operation, to exploit the anti-Czech attitudes of S. H. Vajanský, a highly influential ideologue of the Slovak national movement for decades, to diminish the appeal of the Czecho-Slovak unity movement in exile for Czecho-Slovaks. Plans were made for August 20, 1916, for an official Slovak delegation to visit Tisza; however, those supporting that operation remained in a minority, and the visit was called off. Also, taking advantage of the willingness of the son of the former Slovak party chairman, Ján Mudroň, attempts were made repeatedly to organize a moderate Slovak party. These attempts, however, were all parried by the Slovak political groups in exile, which, with the increasing appeal of the Czecho-Slovak orientation, cooperated with each other despite their general political passivity.

The radical opposition and "the Slovak question"

The only Hungarians whose comments were regarded by the Slovak political camp as objective and competent were those linked with the perodicals *Huszadik Század* (founded in 1900) and *Világ* (1910) and especially the radical thinker and politician Oszkár Jászi. They were also seen as the only potential partners in political cooperation.[14] The foundation of the Radical Party in 1914 was seen by all Slovak political groups as a positive development, even though Ján Mudroň, elected to the party leadership, thought it wiser for tactical reasons to remain in the background for some time. The opposition Slovak press regarded it as a major step forward that Jászi's ideas on the national minority issue were incorporated in the programme of the new party. It is true, of course, that some Slovak political leaders in Budapest, including Štefánek and Hodža, more than once voiced their doubts about the sincerity of Jászi's ideas on the nationality issue, and even more about their feasibility. It was mainly on whether it was possible to cooperate on a democ-

14 ■ László Szarka: "Jászi szlovák kapcsolatai 1918 végéig" (Jászi's Slovak Connections until the End of 1918). *Századok,* No. 5, 1985.

ratic basis with the other Hungarian political parties that Hodža's views differed sharply from those of Jászi after 1910.

After the Great War had broken out, Jászi had ample opportunity to see that in the new situation the entire complex of nationality issues had taken on new dimensions, and that even the possibility of a domestic solution now depended on the outcome of the war.

The exchange of letters also indicated that the advocates of a compromise with Hungary on the basis of the Nationality Act of 1868 were gradually being pushed out of leadership in Slovak politics or had changed their earlier views. Dula, while expressing sympathy with Jászi's optimistic assumption that "the defeat of chauvinistic reaction is inevitable, and the Hungarians and progressive elements among the national minorities will work together in an intimate relationship", nevertheless emphasized the negative developments. "It is depressing and painful for me and for my fellows," he wrote, "that we were disappointed in the hopes that we had pinned on the results of the bloody battles fought for the protection of our country with equal enthusiasm and gallantry by the sons of the national minorities and by those of the Hungarian nation. [...] The chauvinistic madness has caused, not only in the educated Slovak classes but also among simple people, a bitterness so great that God only knows when the wounds will heal... I cannot but see our position as very dark and entirely without prospects."[15]

These reservations were subsequently voiced in the merciless Slovak criticism aimed at the alliance between Jászi and Count Mihály Károlyi, an alliance developing towards the end of the war. Károlyi, regarded as the leading figure of the Hungarian opposition camp, had sensed the dangers of a German-oriented Hungarian foreign policy even before the war. Minority leaders, on the other hand, were actually hoping for the forthcoming war to entail complete isolation for the Empire and, within it, for "historical Hungary". They were also hoping for what they called the "catastrophe solution" of the national minority issue in Hungary, more or less in the way things actually happened after 1918, in conditions even more favourable for them than they had ever imagined. A change in foreign policy orientation, as suggested by Károlyi, especially a move towards Russia and America, would have prevented the realization of that vision of catastrophe, a notion gaining momentum as time went by. The reaction by Slovak political opinion to Károlyi's Slav policy, his plans regarding Russia, and the somewhat ambiguous results of his American tour *vis à vis* the Slovak emigré circles in 1914, was unanimously negative.

Jászi did not accord great importance to the prewar Czecho-Slovak unity movement. He regarded, not unjustifiably, the main trend of Slovak political life before the war as a movement towards compromise with the Hungarians. However, the combined effects of concession policies, limited anyway where the Slovaks were concerned, internal shifts within the Slovak political movement, and finally, the foreign and domestic landslides released by the war, caused Czecho-Slovak political orientation to gain the upper hand. The real effect, that is, the fact that a Czecho-Slovak state promised far more to the Slovaks, and was therefore much more attractive to them than any autonomy programme within a Hungarian state, was not really recognized by Jászi. This was the most fundamental single short-

15 ■ National Széchényi Library, Manuscript Division, *Jászi levelek* (Jászi Letters). 114/19.

coming in his ideas concerning the Slovaks. Nevertheless, it would be wrong to suppose that this was the reason why the Hungarian–Slovak discussions, initiated by Károlyi and held between September and December 1918, ultimately developed fully in line with the concepts, formed in Prague, on the foundation of a Czecho-Slovak state.

None of the governments of the period under review had ever reached the point of recognizing what Károlyi's cabinet ultimately did, that the only way in which the "Slovak question" could be settled was by an agreement with the representatives of the Slovak National Party, treated as equals. This was undoubtedly a recognition born out of necessity, under pressure, but it is equally clear that during the negotiations in Budapest, at the end of 1918, it was the Slovak party that rejected any such agreement. ❧

Katalin Vadkerty

Hungarians in Postwar Slovakia

By April 4th 1945, the day when President Beneš appointed the new Czechoslovak government with Zdeněk Fierlinger, a democrat of known leftish views as Prime Minister, the German Army had been expelled from Slovakia, though there was still fighting in Bohemia and Moravia. This new government proclaimed its programme in Kassa (Košice) on the fifth, a programme which took its name from the city where it was issued.

Both democrats and communists in the government attributed victory in war to the Soviet Union. As Vladimír Clementis put it: Europe was liberated from fascism by the Soviet Union and the Slav nations, the saviours of Europe. One of these Slav countries was the Czechoslovak Republic, of which Slovakia, with its fascist reputation and pro-German policy, formed an organic part. Czechoslovak policy, both foreign and domestic, was formulated accordingly, special attention being given to non-Slavs in the country, the more than three million Germans in Bohemia and Moravia, and the close to six hundred thousand Hungarians living in compact blocks in the southern frontier zone of Slovakia.

The Czechoslovak leadership aimed at creating a state of the two Slav nations. It used ethnic cleansing as an instrument, trusting in the support of the Soviet Union and its Western allies.

The Košice Government Programme blamed the German and Hungarian minorities for the break-up of the Czechoslovak Republic. They were therefore collectively declared to be war criminals. Germans and Hungarians are mentioned together in the sanctions, but it is evident in the determination of responsibility that the Allies agreed to the unilateral expulsion of the Germans, but rejected from the start such arrangements concerning the Hungarians.

The expulsion of non-Slavs "is a manifestation of the national ideology of the revived Czechoslovakia, and of the strengthening of the progressive forces of the Republic," backed also by Chapter V of the Programme. It declares that in districts and parishes where the population is unreliable, that is non-Slav (in the present case Hungarian), commissars would be appointed, i.e., that these would not be administered by elected national committees.

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The above article is based on her book, A reszlovakizáció *(Re-Slovakization). Kalligram, Bratislava, 1993.*

Chapter VIII declared that the only Germans and Hungarians entitled to citizenship were those who took part in the armed struggle against fascism, who defended the interests of the Czechoslovak Republic, who did not participate in Magyarization, and who were persecuted because of their anti-fascist and Czechoslovak sentiments. All other Germans and Hungarians would be deprived of citizenship and expelled from the territory of the Republic for all time.

Chapter XI dealt with the property of those deprived of their citizenship. Land owned by Germans or Hungarians, including the improvements on it, was nationalized. Its utilization was to be overseen by the National Fund. Only persons allowed to retain their Czechoslovak citizenship in terms of Chapter VIII were allowed to keep their real estate.

Chapter XV provided for the further humiliation of Hungarians. All schools with German or Hungarian as the language of instruction were to be closed with immediate effect in Czech and Slovak towns. "We are going to close all German and Hungarian schools in Czech and Slovak towns... The Slav line will be strengthened in our cultural policy." Education policy would serve to strengthen the Slav line.

The roots of the nation-state policy and of discrimination against the minorities as expressed in the Košice Government Programme lay in the early forties and in the legitimate grievances of many centuries. After the dissolution of the Czechoslovak Republic, Czech and Slovak politicians in exile in London and Moscow naturally worked for the postwar revival of a state which united the two nations. Priority was given to cleansing the future state of all unreliable elements. The principle of the collective responsibility of Germans and Hungarians was declared. Who exactly argued for what is not clear. As more and more documents become available in the archives, the need to examine them critically becomes all the more crucial.

On May 11th 1944, Klement Gottwald outlined what he meant by a nation-state, and President Edvard Beneš officially confirmed this on February 16th 1945. The new republic would be a nation-state without Germans and Hungarians.

The manifesto issued by the Slovak National Council on February 4th 1945, in the days of the Slovak Uprising, discusses the relationship between the Hungarians of Slovakia and a revived Czechoslovak Republic. The Hungarians were divided into three groups. It was the duty of the democratically minded Hungarians of the first group to expel from their ranks all those belonging to the second, the fascist, anti-Slovak and "Hungarist" elements. Magyarized Slovaks made up the third group. The manifesto declared that all those of Slav origin who had registered as Hungarians but wished to return to their roots must be given an opportunity to join the Slovak nation.

The Communist Party of Slovakia published an anti-Hungarian, discriminatory appeal in the Bratislava *Pravda* on March 11th 1945, which can be considered as an hors d'oeuvre to the Government Programme. The appeal was issued in the interests of retribution for the offences committed by the Hungarians against the Slovak nation. Party discipline was invoked, demanding that democratic and anti-fascist Hungarians support this retribution. Re-Slovakization was narrowly interpreted, covering only those who had been Magyarized by force in the previous six years. The appeal outlined the convening of future administrative committees and demanded that the best arable land owned by Hungarians be transferred to Slovak ownership, i. e., that Hungarian real estate be confiscated.

The Košice Programme was of national importance, its realization furthered by a whole line of bills, but laws concerning par excellence Slovak matters, including the Hungarian question, were to be passed by the Slovak National Council, the supreme administrative body. The total deprivation of all rights of the Hungarians in Slovakia came with Presidential Decree 33/1945 on August 2 1945, when the Košice Government Programme became law. This made possible for the state to dispose in an unlimited way over the persons, property and labour of Hungarian inhabitants.

In the same spirit, the Slovak National Council issued Decree 44/1945 on May 25th, ordering the immediate dismissal of Hungarian public servants. After May 31st, public servants' pensions were no longer paid. Decree 69/1945 of July 3rd provided for similar treatment for all those in private employment. The reason given was "Hungarian ethnicity."

Presidential Decree 71/1945 of September 19th obliged all the unemployed who had been deprived of their citizenship to work. This was in response to a decision by the Potsdam Conference rejecting the unilateral expulsion of Hungarians from Slovakia. Presidential Decree 88/1945 of October 1st on compulsory labour was designed to disperse Hungarians on a mass scale. Every man between the ages of 16 and 55, and every woman between 18 and 45, was obliged to work wherever the economic interests of the Republic demanded, for one year, which could be extended by no more than six months. Decree 174/1948 raised the duration of forced labour to three years. It allowed for the one year basic obligation to be twice extended by a year at a time.

Between the autumn of 1945 and the end of 1947, according to figures available to date, more than 45,000 (mainly smallholders), were deployed in Bohemia and Moravia with reference to the compulsory labour service. 11,548 families including 5,422 children under six were affected. They left behind 13,852 hectares of real estate and 7,002 houses, which the authorities allotted to Slovak settlers and to what were called trustees.

The demands for land by other Slovak settlers were satisfied by the confiscation of estates owned by Hungarians and Germans. Decrees by the government and the Slovak National Council were implemented by the Slovak Settlements Office and the Office of Agricultural and Land Reform Commissars.[1]

Decrees 4/1945 and 104/1945, issued by the Slovak National Council on February 27th and August 23rd respectively, confiscated, with immediate effect, German and Hungarian real estate for land reform purposes. The order covered all Germans and Hungarians who were not citizens of Czechoslovakia on November 1st 1938, as well as Slovak fascists and collaborators. Others of Hungarian ethnicity only lost properties in excess of 50 hectares. Unless they could offer evidence of antifascist activity, the property of all German and Hungarian corporations, companies or associations was confiscated.

Decree 129/1945, issued by the Slovak National Council on October 22th, brought further discrimination against Hungarian farmers. It confiscated, without compensation, untilled land and the lands of those who had failed to comply with the compulsory delivery of produce. The decree expressly drew attention to the property owned by persons made stateless by Presidential Decree 33/1945.

Decree 64/1946, issued by the Slovak National Council on May 14th, declared the confiscation of all landed property and agricultural buildings owned by people of Hungarian ethnicity. This had been preceded by the agreement on the exchange of

populations concluded on February 26th 1946 between Czechoslovakia and Hungary, and was designed to provide sufficient land for distribution among Slovak colonists and those resettled from Hungary.

It ought to be mentioned that Presidential Decree 12/1945 issued in Prague on June 21st had established earlier that confiscated German and Hungarian landed estates could only be distributed to applicants who were Czechs or Slovaks or others of Slav race.

Presidential Decree 108/1945 of October 25th implied that Germans and Hungarians were deprived of all rights. Those covered lost even the little that remained of their property. Not only land but also every other kind of real estate, homes, tenements, factories, workshops, and their equipment. A National Commissar was placed in charge of all property.

All this land proved insufficient for the needs of Slovaks resettled from abroad and for colonists at home. 89/1947, issued by the Slovak National Council on December 19th, therefore confiscated all landed property owned by Germans and Hungarians which they had sold after the 29th of September 1938 by a valid contract of sale.

A decree issued on November 4th 1948 reflected the changed international and domestic situation. It allowed the Corporation of Comissars to cancel confiscations of areas of land smaller than 50 ha if the owner had his Czechoslovak citizenship restored to him in terms of 245/1948 by the Slovak National Council, but this exemption did not apply to land that had meanwhile been allocated to repatriated Slovaks or settlers.[2]

The resettling and population exchange form a dark chapter in the history of Hungarians in Slovakia. The Czechoslovak government, primarily Slovak political forces and national associations, put their hopes in the unilateral expulsion of the Hungarians of Slovakia. Their diplomatists sought the support of everyone they considered a friend. Their hopes were high because they felt sure of Soviet backing. They were so keen on this form of ridding themselves of Hungarians, that the competent section of the Ministry of Home Affairs suggested in January 1946 that the Czechoslovak Delegation at the Paris Peace Conference "should move that Allied military forces should temporarily be present in Hungary at the time of the expulsions," since "a defeated Hungary, threatened by economic catastrophe," would not be able to take in several hundred thousand expelled persons deprived of their property.

The Western Allies rejected the Czechoslovak plan to expel Hungarians, they looked on the Hungarian question as a domestic issue affecting both countries, and recommended that the two states should come to an agreement. On February 27th 1946, the two states agreed on an equal exchange of populations. The Czechoslovak government spared no expense and employed a huge force to recruit Slovaks in Hungary where, according to their own claim, they did an honest day's work. The results nevertheless fell far short of the hopes of Slovak politicians. At a meeting of the government, Clementis declared that the Czechoslovak political leadership was not interested in Slovaks in Hungary who rejected the possibility of "homecoming". They were well aware that the Hungarians would Magyarize these in the decades to come, and "Good luck to them".

A total of 105,047 persons were to be resettled on the basis of the equal exchange of populations. More moderate realization prompted the implementing authorities in Slovakia to boost the numbers to be resettled, on the basis of Chapter VIII of the agreement, by a number of war criminals who could be unilaterally ex-

pelled. The selection of such war criminals, and their prosecution, fell within the competence of local and district authorities. Mass arrests were further encouraged by the fact that the local administration disposed over the property of the arrested. Close to 28.5 per cent of the convicted were Slovaks, 58.8 per cent Hungarians, the remainder were Germans or belonged to the "Others" category. In other words, People's Courts convicted twice as many Hungarians than Slovaks. The proportion was reversed amongst those found not guilty. Of all the Slovaks charged, 22.3 per cent were found not guilty, as opposed to 73.45 per cent of Hungarians. Whatever the original intention, only 2,905 Hungarian war criminals were expelled from Slovakia.

Altogether 89,660 persons of Hungarian ethnicity left Slovakia for Hungary, 68,407 as part of the population exchange scheme and 21,253 were resettled under other headings. They had owned a total of 109,295 Hungarian yokes in Slovakia. 73,273 Slovaks from Hungary alone moved to Slovakia, their total property had been 38,380 Hungarian yokes, which does suggest one of the real reasons why they wished to be repatriated. Others were repatriated from Romania and Yugoslavia and—a few—from Western Europe. More than 90 per cent were resettled in the ethnically Hungarian areas of Southern Slovakia, breaking up homogeneous Hungarian areas.

The postwar settlement of the German and Hungarian question considerably boosted the income of the Czechoslovak exchequer. Only some of the figures are known. According to the closing statement by the Bratislava Settlement Office, more than 350 million crowns obtained from the sale or letting of 13,712 buildings and 2,559 smaller or greater industrial plants or manufacturing works were paid into the accounts of the exchequer. But this did not mean that the confiscations had come to an end. Close to 140 million crowns resulted from the partial sale at auction of the property of expelled Germans and Hungarians—if and when auctions were held. True, the repatriation of Slovaks cost the Czechoslovak State 15,052 crowns each. The Settlements Office felt this cost to be high but was able to say in mitigation that the expulsion of close to 80,000 Hungarians "did not cost us a penny."

Slovak laws and regulations would only recognize as Slovaks those who spoke Slovak at home. Hungarian was banned from public life, the churches or the streets, and they even did their best to influence the private sphere. *Na Slovensku po slovensky!* (In Slovak in Slovakia) was a familiar slogan of the times. It was displayed not only in offices but in all sorts of public places, like shops, coffeeshops, cinemas, and so on. Those speaking in Hungarian were insulted with impunity. Hungarian inscriptions vanished from Hungarian territories. Since most people were unfamiliar with Slovak, spelling and grammatical errors abounded in the new Slovak inscriptions. By 1948, they were so thick on the ground that the Office of Home Affairs Commissars felt obliged to rush to the defence of the purity of the Slovak language. The National Committees of larger towns such as Bratislava, Košice, Trencin, and Nitra, or the local leaders of the National Front issued pamphlets and posted notices warning citizens that those speaking German or Hungarian would be asked for their identity papers by the police.

Hungarian was no longer printed, or used in public life or education, and the administration tried to eliminate it in private life as well. This, however, proved a failure, village-folk, in particular, insisted on using the language of their ancestors.

Presidential Decrees 33/1945 and 108/1945 were very much like the 1942 an-

ti-Semitic constitutional legislation of the Slovak Republic.[3]

In the first week of 1946 Rezső Szalatnai gave an eyewitness account of the situation of Hungarians in Czechoslovakia.

"In roughly a year the Hungarians of Czechoslovakia were deprived of their land, their houses, many of them of their flats. Public servants are paid no salaries, the retired no pension, no Hungarian enjoys the protection of the authorities since a Presidential Decree deprived every Hungarian of his citizenship. Every Hungarian can be carried off on *corvée* anywhere in the country, without pay, there is no single Hungarian school, not even a primary school, not a single Hungarian cultural association or social club, no Hungarian may be admitted to college or university, Hungarians may not engage in sports; there is no Hungarian press, no Hungarian books are published, no statements may be issued in Hungarian, those of Hungarian ethnicity may not own a radio, in many places Hungarian religious services have been prohibited; many thousands of Hungarians have been interned all over the country, many thousands, frightened out of their wits, have been prompted to leave their native land, and plunged into ruin and despair; Hungarian innkeepers, shopkeepers and artisans were deprived of their premises and works without compensation, including the tiniest of workshops; the state seized the property of Hungarian landowners and industrialists, to speak Hungarian in the street is prohibited and risky, Hungarians are exposed to all kinds of denunciations with no means of defending themselves, registered Hungarians, under the supervision of gendarmes, in a maze of national and local prohibitions, have now also lost their peace of mind."[4]

That was the situation Hungarians in Slovakia found themselves in when the Czechoslovak government proclaimed the policy of re-Slovakization.

The 1945–48 policy of re-Slovakization

Re-Slovakization means the return to their Slav roots, to the "ancestral nation," of people induced by their education or convictions to declare themselves members of some other nation—Hungarians in the present case.

The origins of this policy and process go back to the foundations of the first Czechoslovak Republic, and its first stage took place between 1918 and 1938. The governments of the time gave high priority to reclaiming those who had been Germanized in Bohemia and Moravia in the course of the centuries, or who had been Magyarized between 1870 and 1918 in the present territory of Slovakia.

After 1945, in the delirium of creating a Slav nation-state, it seemed the time for a final solution of the Hungarian question in Slovakia had arrived and that Czechoslovakia too could join the huge process of ethnic cleansing taking place under Soviet leadership. In the great sharing of the loot nothing was done to guarantee internationally the rights of minorities created by new frontiers. National minority problems were taken to be the domestic business of the countries concerned.

The Czechoslovak government and the Prague authorities considered re-Slovakization as a political and national security issue, but, in their words, a non-violent, a far from violent, movement. In Clementis' view it was the most powerful pillar shoring up migration within Slovakia as a force creating a nation-state. Once it was completed, it would be possible to establish where colonists were needed, and how many of them, to ensure a local superiority in numbers, and to strengthen the "consciousness" of the Slovaks living in a particular place.

It was the Slovak view that it was the business of re-Slovakization to do away with the consequences of the inappropriate and liberal national minorities policy of the first Czechoslovak Republic.

The Slovaks rejected the cultural and educational policy of the 1920s and 30s primarily for permitting the operation of schools with Hungarian as the language of instruction, which helped the survival of a Hungarian sense of identity, and of a Hungarian integral unit in South Slovakia, making it impossible for Slav families settled midst a Hungarian majority to achieve economic and social domination over the Hungarians. It was the fault of Czechoslovak bourgeois educational policy that these Slovak families fraternized with their Hungarian neighbours and learnt Hungarian, assimilating to the Hungarians. They did not carry out their national mission, which was making the marches Slav territory. Their greatest sin, however, was not to recognize the Hungarians as enemies.

The key proposition of Slovak policy was consolidating and universalizing the image of the Hungarian as *the* enemy. Re-Slovakization as historical justice, in other words as retribution, is therefore a recurring theme. Presidential Decree 33/1945 was the legal basis, and in keeping with that, it was interpreted purely as a domestic measure. They opposed the publication of all details which "ought to be kept from international opinion". Financial aspects in particular were considered confidential. If, according to the Slovak League leadership, they were to discover abroad what the financial background of the whole business was, the moral basis of re-Slovakization would be destroyed.

The stick was combined with the carrot. Those who would seize the chance offered by their Slav ancestors, or some other opportunity, openly proclaiming their Slavness, and their Slovak nationality, would be properly rewarded by a political leadership engaged in creating a nation-state. They would be granted Czechoslovak citizenship, which implied equality before the law.

The first stage of re-Slovakization

According to proclamation 20,000/I-IV/1-1946 by the Office of Home Affairs Commissars, all those could register as Slovaks who had done so in the 1930 census, as well as those who felt to be Slovaks on account of their Slovak, Czech or other Slav descent. However, there were strings attached. Only those could be granted Slovak status who had never offended against the Czechoslovak Republic, had never been officials of Hungarian fascist political parties or organizations, and had not supported Magyarization. It counted in one's favour if one had fought against fascism, or for the liberation of the republic, or if one had been persecuted under fascism.

This proclamation was the official beginning of re-Slovakization. In fact, things already started in the spring of 1945 when, in territories that had been allotted to Hungary by the 1938 Vienna Award as part of the Munich Agreement, every adult or head of family had to report to the local authorities at a given time and place. In front of a commission they were asked to declare freely, in the absence of any outside pressure or psychological constraint, purely on the basis of their innermost convictions and family traditions, what nationality they were. Whoever felt to be a Slovak could be a Slovak.

Those who did not freely declare themselves to be Slovaks but Hungarians, had their surname examined, and their place of birth, and their pre- and post-November 1st 1938 domicile. The Hungarians were classified in two groups. The first included

all those who settled in the given town or village after November 1st 1938. They were given pink papers. Others, who had lived there earlier, were given white cards. After a few weeks, those with pink papers were deported without being given further notice. In general, three officials appeared, wearing armbands, in their presence the Hungarians could pack luggage weighing 30 kg per person, and these officials would then escort them to the Hungarian border. Their movable property and their real estate were confiscated and their homes were, in general, sealed. In the towns it frequently happened that the new residents were already outside the gate, awaiting the deportation of the Hungarians.

Owners of white papers could look forward to the exchange of populations, to forced labour in Bohemia and to official re-Slovakization. Planned assimilation awaited their descendants.

The data of the 1945 "census" have not been published yet. Those who prepared re-Slovakization determined figures on the basis of which they worked as follows up to February 1946:

Slovaks 2,490,000,
Ukrainians 96,000,
Czechs 10,000,
Jews 66,000,
Germans 135,000,
Hungarians 758,000,
Others 45,000.

In the early weeks of 1946, a conscription of the 25 districts of South Slovakia was ordered. This was carried out by people familiar with local conditions, mostly university students. The Slovak League leadership arranged special courses for them. The Settlements Office acted as the patron of the conscription.

727,832 persons were recorded on the territory of the 25 districts, 544,444 of whom declared themselves to be Hungarians. Those directing the re-Slovakization were, however, in search of historical motivations.[5]

On the instructions of the Corporation of Commissars, senior staff members of the Slovak Bureau of Statistics produced a historical analysis of the relative numbers of Slovaks and Hungarians within the present borders of Slovakia.

It is up to demographers to comment on these data. I shall merely describe the line of thought and give the results. The number of Slovaks is estimated at 750,000 in the early 18th century. Given unlimited economic and social progress and 1 per cent annual natural growth, this figure would have doubled every 73 years, putting the number of Slovaks at 6,000,000 at the end of the 19th century.

On the basis of Austrian data they calculated that 2,200,000 Slovaks lived on the present territory of Slovakia in 1840 and 2,247,000 in 1859. According to the authors, "Magyarization had not affected the broad masses of Slovaks before the 1860s," that is how long free Slovak national progress lasted. In the age of fast capitalist development from the 1860s on, this came to an end. Of the presumed 6 million, 1,400,000 emigrated overseas, 600,000 dispersed all over Europe, "a further million were lost". Their greater part contributed to Hungarian population growth, they say. These lost souls went to Budapest, major provincial towns, and industrial centres. The authors do not mention however, that those in search of work settled anywhere where they found jobs in the Austro-Hungarian Empire and not just in Hungary, and there, being in a minority, they were largely assimilated. Nor can it be denied, and it is not denied by Hungarian historians that, especially after 1900, the cultural assimilation of minorities grew apace in Hungary.

In the survey it is pointed out that figures are not precise but they demonstrate

developments since "they were distorted by neither statistics, nor by superficial Magyarization".

The losses of the Slovaks are thus attributed to the last three generations, in this way too backing the idea of re-Slovakization.

As a proof of Magyarization it is explained that, according to the 1921 census, 200,000 superficially Magyarized Slovaks returned to their nation, and a further 50–60,000 declaring themselves to be Hungarians in 1930 must be considered Magyarized Slovaks. The process of discrimination had not yet stopped then, however, and among those who declared themselves to be Hungarians in 1930, a further 200–250,000 were to be considered Magyarized Slovaks.

The Slovak demographers tend to question all data that do not support their notions. They declare the 1930 census data to be manipulated, accepting them fully only for educated Hungarians, since those had a fully developed sense of Hungarian identity. This group had to be "written off" for this very reason.

They take language use as their primary criterion. As regards the 1910 census, they presume that most of the 583,000 who knew both Hungarian and Slovak were Slovaks. One can, however, raise objections against this reasoning.

Before 1918, in historical Hungary, an active knowledge of both Hungarian and a given minority language did not imply the only and main criterion of membership of that minority. Officials or businessmen who found themselves in a given language area had to learn that language, and their children naturally grew up in a multilingual environment. This applied to Hungarians in Slovak areas as well as vice versa.

Special attention was given to the 1930 data by the justifiers of re-Slovakization since the proclamation of the Bureau of Home Affairs Commissars was also based on them. According to the Slovak demographers, those data resulted from "subjective statements," since they contained no information on descent. They rejected the view of the Czechoslovak authorities of the time that ten years of living in the Republic sufficed to make one aware of one's national identity. They argued that, in 1930—presumably for economic reasons—many Hungarians declared themselves to be Slovaks and then reverted to Hungarian status in 1940. The same reasons explain why the number of Slovaks in South Slovakia declined by 80,000 in 1938, and by 100,000 two years later.

This shows clearly that demographers, anticipating the politicians as it were, determined the number of persons who could be re-Slovakized and their territorial distribution. They recommended the re-Slovakization of 200–250,000 "disputed," that is Hungarian, persons.

Bearing in mind the various forms of expulsion, they recommended the following distribution for re-Slovakization:

a) 3–5,000 of the 105,000 classified as suitable for population exchange;

b) a maximum of 2,500 of 66,226 Hungarians and persons of disputed nationality who had been classified as war criminals to be unilaterally expelled—35 per cent had applied for re-Slovakization;

c) 50 per cent of the 47,084 who owned more than 5 Hungarian yokes of land, that is 23,500 persons;

d) all of those, and their families, who owned less than 5 Hungarian yokes of land, that is 120,894 persons.

e) 7,000 of the 9,020 asking for resettlement from areas ouside the zone designated for resettlement in Slovakia.[6]

The number of those permitted to apply for re-Slovakization was defined by the public interest. That is why Slovak status

should only exceptionally be granted in the frontier zone. Their numbers must only be allowed to grow once the re-Slovakized have been resettled within the country. Applicants from the Hungarian diaspora in a Slovak environment should be treated more generously, but only where the assimilationist capacity of the Slovak ambience is highly rated. Much the same applies to mixed marriages. In Hungarian areas only those should be granted Slovak status who can prove that at least their great-grandparents were Slovaks.

Economic consequences should also be borne in mind, the aim was after all to transfer the land to Slovak hands. Wealthier landowners must therefore be excluded from re-Slovakization, but so must shopkeepers and artisans. The landless and agricultural labourers should be treated more liberally, but only as many as the ambience and political and cultural influence can easily and completely assimilate.

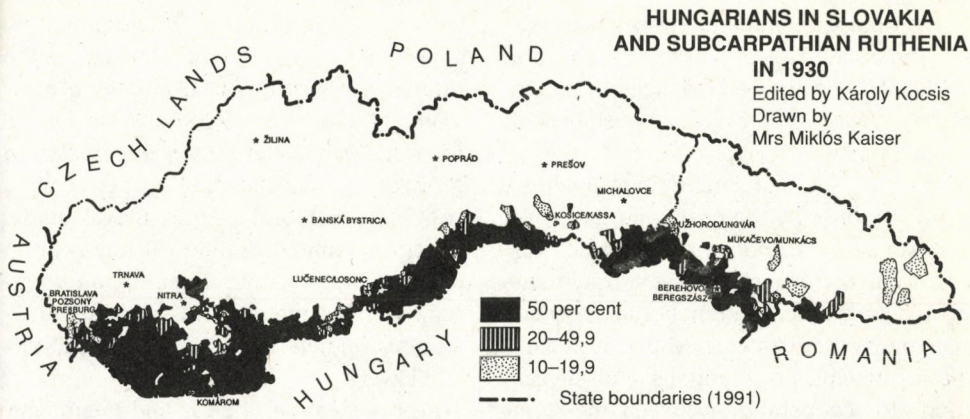
According to the politicans and demographers, 150–200,000 persons in the southern resettlement zone were due for Slovak status. The number of applicants therefore surprised the organizers. In the first stage of re-Slovakization, between June 17th and July 1st 1946, 325,718 persons in the 28 districts of the southern zone and the cities of Pozsony (Bratislava) and Kassa (Košice) applied for Slovak status, regardless of "powerful Hungarian counter-propaganda," and that figure amounted to 60 per cent of "all Hungarians who figured in the statistics."

The number of applicants constantly changed—when they were counted at the time. J. Gašparik e. g. reported 305,272 to Daniel Okáli who was negotiating about the population exchange with Hungary in Starý Smokovec. According to the final figures issued on July 25th 1946, a total of 352,038 applied for re-Slovakization, out of these 342,942 in the southern resettlement zone, 9,096 from other districts.

The second stage of re-Slovakization

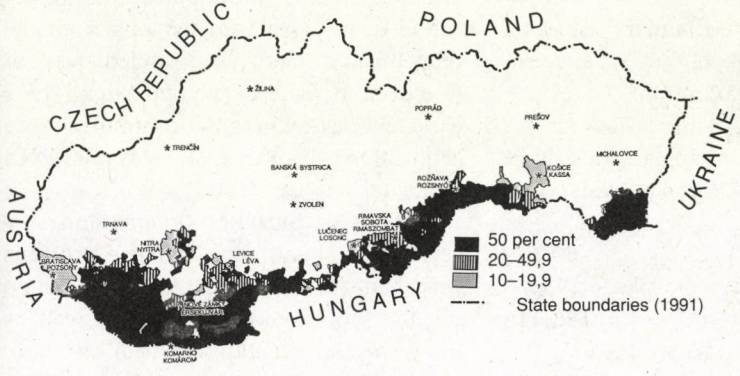
On October 3rd 1947 the Corporation of Commissars, with the eager support of the Re-Slovakization Committee and the Slovak League, proclaimed the second stage of re-Slovakization, to last until January 1st 1948. Commentators declared that this was not a new stage but merely the continuation and conclusion of the first. As official justification it was pointed out that there were still large numbers who had not exploited the opportunity offered, "because they were influenced by Hungarian counter-propaganda and had either not dared to apply, or else they were not aware of the possibilities." Such persons must be sought out, they must be persuaded. It was "a mortal sin from the point of view of the nation" if even a single soul was lost.

The official papers drafted for internal use prescribed that the number of Slovaks in the resettlement zone must be increased by at least 30,000; nevertheless, in the second stage, only those applicants could be granted Slovak status "in whom the national conditions of re-Slovakization were present in fact." The reports made no secret of the fact that the search for suitable persons and the handling of the applications also offered an opportunity to establish the precise number of Slovaks in the resettlement zone. The presumption was that, satisfying their demand for land in keeping with the promises made would make it necessary to confiscate more land owned by Hungarians. At the same time, promises made to Slovaks recruited in Yugoslavia and Romania would also have to be kept. But state land reserves were insufficient, especially if the population exchange agreed between Czechoslovakia and Hungary suffered further delays and the selected Hungarian farmers were not resettled. Should the latter, however, take



HUNGARIANS IN SLOVAKIA AND SUBCARPATHIAN RUTHENIA IN 1930

Edited by Károly Kocsis
Drawn by
Mrs Miklós Kaiser



HUNGARIANS IN SLOVAKIA IN 1991

Edited by Károly Kocsis
Drawn by
Mrs Miklós Kaiser

place in accordance with expectations, the second stage of re-Slovakization would prove superfluous. In that event the bulk of the applications would be rejected.

Attention was concentrated on districts where, even after the first stage, more than 25 per cent of the population were still Hungarians, but applications could all the same be submitted from any area.

At this stage, agitprop work was done with even greater circumspection. Those in charge in various districts chose their staff amongst teachers. In the Kékkő (Modrý Kameň) and Losonc (Lučenec) districts they called at just about every house.

The relative lack of success of the second stage and the lack of understanding shown by the Hungarians was attributed to five reasons:

1) Administrative errors in the first stage;

2) The compulsory introduction of Slovak into Church life;

3) Errors made in the selection of those to be resettled as part of the population exchange;

4) Bad timing (peak season in agriculture);

5) Hungarian national consciousness.

The second stage of re-Slovakization affected 242 towns and villages in 25 districts. It was completed on November 9th 1948.

Slovak national circles explained the poor response by the change in the political situation at home and abroad. The chance that citizenship and minority rights would be granted, internationalism which Communist Parties everywhere declared a basic principle, negotiations and suggestions for cooperation between the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (Slovakia) and the Party of Hungarian Communists, all aborted the successful conclusion of the undertaking.[7]

A final report, dated January 1st 1948, summed up the results of the first and second stages of re-Slovakization.

According to the Commission for re-Slovakization 120,636 applications were submitted, covering 435,264 persons.

Of these

Group A	**89,179**
(declared themselves Slovaks in 1930)	
Group B	**193,415**
(claiming to be Slovaks by descent)	
Total	**282,596**
Number of rejected persons	99,401
Grand total	**381,995***

As a result of re-Slovakization, expulsions, the exchange of populations, and compulsory labour in Bohemia, the number of districts with a Hungarian majority dropped from 13 to 4.

According to Czechoslovak state authorities, Re-Slovakization Decisions are important state documents rendering owners members of the state-constituting nation, thus citizens of Czechoslovakia, with all the rights that go with that status. The legal position of those who underwent re-Slovakization was determined by a prescript issued by the Ministry of the Interior on April 6th 1948 and by a decision by the Bureau of Commissars for the Interior. Both declare that persons able to produce re-Slovakization papers enjoy continuity as Slovaks, "their Slovak status cannot be limited in time." It follows that persons formerly considered to be Hungarians were exempted from any kind of discrimination determined by legal sanctions and laws.

The regulation is clear and unambiguous, but administrative offices—as they indicated—interpreted it in the light of their own understanding. Referring to a variety of circumstances, they "dated" the Slovak status of re-Slovakized persons from the time the document was handed over, or else from the date of the appliction. There were few cases where the continuity of the acquisition of Slovak status was not linked to a date.

The Re-Slovakization Commission, surveying the situation at home of citizens who had been granted Slovak status on the basis of re-Slovakization, as well as the expected reaction abroad, in more than one instance requested the advice and support of Daniel Okáli, the Commissar for the Interior. Okáli argued that the Slovak status of those who underwent re-Slovakization could not be limited in time. Presidential Decree 33/1945, i.e., the deprivation of Czechoslovak citizenship, therefore did not apply to them, but local aspects had to be examined. In fact, re-Slovakized persons had also been deprived of citizenship, and in the majority of cases this was still effective in 1947. According to Okáli, this implied intolerable discrimi-

* A supplementary report records 41,269 as missing.

nation. It was unjust to limit the citizenship rights of persons who, for objective reasons, only admitted to being originally Slovaks after some delay, exploiting the possibilities offered by re-Slovakization. The domestic reaction to discrimination was dangerous indeed, but that abroad could well be even more dangerous, causing a multitude of problems to the Czechoslovak government.[8]

NOTES

1 ■ Státní ústřední archív, Praha (hereafter SUA) file 100/24. *Klement Gottwald's Writings* Vol. 41 unit 837. Particular acts: *Sbírka zákonů a nařízení*, Praha. Regulations: *Zbierka nariadení Slovenskej národnej rady, Bratislava*, in the appropriate volumes. The complete Slovak text of the Košice Government Programme in *Pravda* (Bratislava), March 15 1968, pp. 6–7. See also: Kálmán Janics: *A hontalanság évei* (The Years of Homelessness) Budapest, 1989; József Gyönyör: *Mi lesz velünk, magyarokkal?* (What Will Happen to us Hungarians?) Bratislava, 1990; Imre Molnár—Kálmán Varga: *Hazahúzott a szülőföld* (The Native Soil Called us Home). Budapest, 1992.

2 ■ Slovenský národný archív, Bratislava (hereafter SNA). Povereníctvo podohospodárstva a pozemkovej reformy—B. General papers file 305.

3 ■ SUA—fond 100/24, vol. 139, unit 1494. The minutes of the 11th meeting of the Czechoslovak Government. *Ibid*. Ministerstvo vnútra—tajné spisy (hereafter MV-T) file 4. T-1028-26/3-47-I/1; SNA—Povereníctvo vnútra—sekretariát (hereafter PV-S), file 92, 865/48-sekr. *Ibid*. file 93, 1316/48; SNA-Povereníctvo financií (hereafter PF) file 1287. Fond národnej obnovy, 435/1960; SNA-Slovenská liga (hereafter SL), file 7, fascicle (hereafter f) Odvoz II.

4 ■ Rezső Szalatnai: "Memorandum". in *Regio*, 1990, No 2.

5 ■ SNA Osídl'ovaci úrad (hereafter OU), Reslovakizačná komisia (hereafter RB) file 52 f: Poznámky k reslovakizácii. *Ibid*. file 49, minutes for March 4th 1946. *Ibid*. OU-presidium, 540/prez-1946. Oktatási és Művelődési Megbízotti Hivatal (hereafter OMMH) file 260 1930/1946.

6 ■ SUA-MV New registration. A-1143, 276 file; Zpráva o výsledku reslov. k I lednu 1948.; SNR-Povereníctvo vnútra NVO file 6. 159-2-dov/1948-/1; OU-Re-Slovakization Commission, hereafter RSC, file 29, 543-48/RSC; file 53, 604/1948-RSC.

7 ■ AKL-MV New Registration. A-1143, 276 file; Zpráva v výsledku reslov. K I. lednu 1948 SNR-BMH file 6. 159-2-dôv/1948-/1 OU-RK, file 29, 543-48/RB; file 53, 604/1948-RB.

8 ■ SNA-PF, file 843, 7530/1946-VII/21; *Ibid*. IMH, file 260, 8272/1948 and 10897/1948; *Ibid*. OU-RK file 29. 603-48/RB

Miklós Györffy

Memories, Magic, Material

Piroska Szántó: *Akt* (Nude). Európa, 1994. 298 pp. • Ervin Lázár: *Hét szeretőm* (My Seven Lovers). Osiris–Századvég, 1994. 274 pp. • Vilmos Csaplár: *Gyermekkor, földi körülmények között* (Childhood, in Terrestrial Circumstances). Ferenczy, 1994. 159 pp.

"What have you done to my innocent heart, vile Age..." is the epigraph Piroska Szántó uses for *Akt* (Nude), an epigraph taken from the poet and writer Frigyes Karinthy. He died in 1938 but Piroska Szántó has had to live in this vile age ever since. "What has it done indeed?" she asks in the first sentence of her book. "Whatever imaginable, whatever this age could be up to, from—let's see—1933 to 1993." This collection of memoirs was published on her 80th birthday.

Despite a previous volume of memoirs, *Bálám szamara* (Balaam's Ass), published in 1982, her true calling is still that of a painter. Whether or not she started writing because of her husband, (the poet István Vas, who died in 1991) whether or not it was because she was surrounded by writers for decades, or simply because she discovered an original vein of expression and narrative talent in herself, she herself may not be able to tell. István Vas encouraged her to write. Indeed, at the end of his life he commissioned her, as it were, to commit her memories to paper, to continue the autobiographical cycle he was unable to finish. In *Azután* (Afterwards) he got as far as 1945, leaving unaccounted the very decades they spent together in marriage.

They had known each other long before 1945. Memorable passages in *Azután* describe how for long years Vas was torn between two women, attached to both and unable to come to a decisive choice. Eventually he chose Piroska Szántó, even though he owed his life to the woman who saved him during the Hitler years. In a longer piece of reminiscences, "An Account of My 'Work in the Movement'", Szántó recalls the prewar years that Vas also described from his angle. She places in the foreground her modest role in the communist movement—which appears in the background of Vas's memoir.

The "chronicle" "What does This One Man Want?" carries the title of a volume of collected poems by Vas. It is about the Rákosi era in the 1950s, the time of party meetings, seminars, activist days, when—*illo tempore*—both of them were sidelined and barely tolerated as "bourgeois survivals". In an unheard-of act of boldness at the time, Vas quit the party. He was not allowed to publish, he could only translate. Szántó could not exhibit her works, and made a living from illustrating books. They lived in constant fear, frequently getting into absurd, threatening situations. They had to put up with the insolence of party functionaries who had earlier been her

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is our regular reviewer of new fiction.

comrades in the underground. Yet they were able to make ends meet and, more importantly, they had a wonderful company around them, who made up for everything, of writers and literateurs, who are now all part of literary history. István Vas was a man whom members of different, even hostile ideological camps could keep contact with, without compromising their principles. He made good friends of poets like Ferenc Juhász and László Nagy, of peasant stock, who first supported the new regime but soon became disillusioned. He also consorted with writers and editors who made compromises in public in order to hide their "bourgeois" past, yet carried on unchanged in private, and also with one or two of the unrepentant, such as Géza Ottlik, who never compromised and were thus totally exiled from literature. This piece, together with some shorter pieces from the cycle "At That Time", is a valuable document for literary history and history alike.

"Suite revolutionnaire" is made up of rhapsodic notes, fragments of memories evoking the 1956 uprising. She writes at the end: "I wrote this account in 1984. I never thought at the time that it would be published." Several pieces of reminiscence are arranged around portrait sketches. Piroska Szántó can combine eminently in them her painter's eye and a delightful mode of speech, so unmistakably hers. We hear her harsh, strong voice, relish her colourful and straightforward way of expression, her witty, self-ironic overstatement and sarcastic comment. Meanwhile, as though unnoticed, figures, situations, careers are brought to life and rounded out into what amounts to short stories in some pieces. Thus "The Rest Is Silence" presents us the stiff, disciplined writer and editor, Endre Illés, when visited in his villa on Gellért Hill. The impeccable order in the flat, the rituals of hospitality he adheres to, project before us a man who made great sacrifices in order to be able to balance as best he could between himself and the social role he targeted—between literary honesty and literary career. At the other extreme, "Exiled in Badacsony" is about Sándor Tatay, a writer unwilling to give up an iota of himself, who went into self-imposed exile as the caretaker of a cheap tourist hostel on top of a hill, in order to keep his independence and write freely. Yet he is not withdrawn at all, on the contrary, his exuberance matches that of the author, trying to outdo her practical jokes.

Another piece commemorates that virtuoso poet and itinerant soul István Kormos, long dead now, who was once a lodger of the Vases. "Untitled" recalls an orgiastic primal happening from the 40s in which the Vases got involved at the home of Miklós Sz.—easily identifiable as the novelist Szentkuthy. "The Enchanted Huntsman" commemorates Géza Ottlik, with whom, as their friendship became the deeper the ruder the exchanges in their inevitable quarrels. One of the best pieces in the volume, coming close to a short story, "Roman Law", is about a judge the author used to know in her youth. Because of sentencing a Jewish woman, which led to tragic consequences, he was not given a clean pass after the war; this and remorse took his life off the rails.

The concluding and moving "Nude", depicts her husband István Vas's body as seen by a painter in love. Her integrity and painterly objectivity help her overcome the difficulties of the delicate subject. First she describes the man in his thirties in the nude, imprinted in her as the true shape of her husband, to which she compares all later changes. As Age did to his heart, so Time did to this body "whatever it could... sparing no effort". Weight, accidents, diseases, operations all left their marks behind, with Death putting on the final touches.

In the title piece, no longer than a page, of "My Seven Lovers", Ervin Lázár describes his seven lovers. Of the first lover we learn, for instance, that she has "bony shoulders, a horsy head, and she is a nag. She dislikes whatever I do, and warns me that I'll end up a nobody if I carry on like that." The sixth one is lecherous. "All she'd do is travel, lie about and dance. She goes to one cinema after the other... If the trees are in bloom she'd sit in the garden for hours... The seventh wears black all the time. I never saw her smile. She listens to interior voices, she is concerned with my soul. She is protective and instructive. She urges me to love them—all seven of them." However, the writer cheats on all of them. The first, because he does not work, to the third he lies, and "in vain does the seventh tell me to love them all". The seven lovers are the seven days of the week. The bony-shouldered is Monday, the lecherous one Saturday, and the one who never smiles is Sunday. They love and serve their lover for the time being. But what'll happen "if they cheat on me for once?"

The more recent short stories of this new collection of Ervin Lázár's are bizarre, grotesque improvisations, recalling the surrealistic pieces for children which first earned him a name. The volume also contains pieces from his previous period in which, like several others in his generation, he weaved the minute details of everyday life into realist short stories.

Lázár was born in 1936 and started publishing in the 60s. The start to his writing life was typical at the time. Coming from a peasant background, he spent his childhood years in a village. He then studied humanities at Budapest University, became a journalist in Pécs and then in Budapest. His autobiographical stories evoke his childhood and the adventures of a country lad in the big city. The figure with the biblical name, the author's persona, Ézsaiás Illés, is quiet, inhibited, yet of a loving nature. He seeks and tries to assert the kind of morality that was ingrained in him at home, that of man living close to nature. The cherished values are love, goodness, beauty and play which, in these early pieces, are often accorded metaphoric characteristics. A recurrent symbol of goodness is the colour blue. The eyes of the good are invariably blue. Objects play an important role in his world. The good always reach for objects with love and are intimate with them. These early pieces, just as the later ones, do not present a rounded story. Everyday situations and attitudes are varied and copied onto one another in loosely woven, lyrical images. Their minute realism may be somewhat old-fashioned, yet the signs of a childishly naive vision and playfulness, that point to elements of his later grotesque tales, are already noticeable.

These stories are not parables, they are intellectual in motivation, trying to grasp the magical, the playful in everyday life. The author claims in them that miracles do happen around us, it is simply that we do not notice or believe in them. The hero of a short story, "The Magician", fails to prove to his audience by repeating his act, that turning a hare into a tiger is not a trick but truly happens. When they cannot discover how it is done through a slow-motion film either, they leave in disappointment and anger. Miracles do not arouse their interest. The eponymous hero of "The Foolish Well-Digger" gets fed up with digging real wells one day, and starts drilling a well upwards in the air. Pieces of air fall from the sky, the hole gets deeper and deeper, the well-digger eventually disappears in it for good. In "The Heart of the Earth", an old man in a pub claims that he has to help the Sun rise, reach its zenith at noon, and set in the evening every day. No one believes him of course, and when, to-

wards sunset, he is about to leave they prevent him from leaving, pushing him back onto his chair. In a moment "the pub shakes, glasses fall to the floor, drinks toss. Blinking, the Sun comes to a halt on the horizon and waits for help. Houses are torn off their foundations, falling upwards, the roots of the trees are torn up cracking, bows and flowers fly like stones. The world bursts into smithereens." No one in the pub notices anything, except for the old man and the narrator's alter ego, Simf. And "perhaps the heart of the Earth. Hear the arrhythmic thumps?"

Simf is a successor to Ézsaiás. He too is not at home in this visionless, conformist world. In the wonderful grotesque story "Simf the Smoke", a man who turns out to be a piano-untuner knocks one day at the door of Simf's family. He untunes the recently tuned piano. Then some painters arrive, who scrape the paint off the walls; further workmen knock off the plaster and rip out the door and window-frames. Soon Simf returns Mrs Simf to her parents and gleefully watches his house being demolished around him. He hands back his diploma and school-leaving certificate. Eventually he stands naked in the middle of his former plot of land. At this point he is unexpectedly taken by "unhappiness, the longing for something indefinable, a feeling so strong that he felt almost physical agony. I have to study, he thought, then marry and buy land. I need a house on the land, with furniture in it and a piano... Whining, he lifted his eyes to the sky." Simf starts running, his feet hardly touching ground. He runs, runs from the admission that life cannot be escaped from.

Lázár finds consolation, joy, imagination in a child's instinct of playfulness. In their company, writing for and about them, he can set his linguistic fantasy free, bored as he is with worn commonplaces. At times like this he can forget that language is after all a set of arbitrary signs preventing genuine dialogue and that at times even the most loyal of lovers will be unfaithful.

Vilmos Csaplár (b. 1947), is one of the most prolific writers of his generation. Unlike his contemporaries, the shock of the political changes has made no real impact on him. His new novel "Childhood, in Terrestrial Circumstances" testifies to this, as it takes place in regions far from social reality—insofar as it takes place at all. There is a first person singular narrator, occasionally addressing his words to a "globetrotter" called Géza in specific situations. We do not learn anything in detail of his travels, nor indeed about himself. With ironic loquacity Csaplár speaks of this phantom in a manner that allows him to remain a mere name. Through verbal variations on the commonplaces attached to it, the designation "globetrotter" remains an empty word: "Géza is a bit familiar, though not much. Maybe I had not really seen him before he travelled. I recognized him as a globetrotter, and I immediately uttered his name. My, look at him, isn't it Géza the globetrotter! Now, this is a most peculiar trick on the part of globetrotters, although it might well be that only Géza can do such tricks, or this trick. Namely that he is recognized not only as someone globetrotting but also as him."

We do not learn much more about the person who narrates, i.e. "speaks géza". But Géza (narration?/the globetrotting writing?) is very important to him, he watches him, taking every opportunity to meet him. Yet not much happens when they do meet, if in fact the text of the novel is not to be understood as their meeting, as an incident. In any case, the narrator is a textual, verbal being. Rather than putting into words what happens to him as a human being in his childhood, for instance,

speech, language, narration happens to him—somewhat in the Derrida sense of language. In the narration certain words lose their commonly agreed meaning, becoming merely empty formulas reduced to sounds, and then take a new lease of life in Csaplár's writing. From this point on anything can happen to them—the border between language and reality, the nominator and the nominee is blurred. Speech shapes its subject, sentences modify the world and in turn the subject affects speech.

Past and present merge and interact. Events pile upon one another in some timelessness in this "narrating géza". Behind each statement is another statement. Several other statements in fact. The sentences directly visible are like the last coat of painting on a canvas that had been repainted again and again. They represent something, yet beneath them, in the same square millimetre, they hide details of countless other representations.

The outlines of certain childhood memories—a childhood spent in the 50s on the outskirts of the city—nevertheless do emerge from the text in the conventional narrative fashion as well. These might be familiar from Csaplár's earlier work: the narrator is dressed as a girl up to the age of five, the small children learn about sexuality among themselves. We hear about a car kept hidden in the Rákosi era and a grandfather who was an arch-bolshevist and veteran. For Csaplár, however, "doing géza" is noticeably more important, and he soon drops off these fragments of memory which get lost in some shoreless sea of speech. He switches over at one point to adulthood, the time when he lived with a young woman, and viewed from there, from the angle of a boundless ego concept, childhood is removed to a certain plane of timelessness. Somewhat ironically perhaps, the ego of the narrator is extended also "physically" and becomes part of a greater whole, the eternal cosmos if you like, just as narration becomes a living manifestation of eternal language. While waiting with his girlfriend, the narrator conceives of life as timeless movement bound to no living creature's form, and suggests that the living material that assumed their form may have memories other than those of their childhood. Childhood "in terrestrial circumstances" can never totally be known. It joins you to a past well before birth, to a timeless, eternal life of the material, "for there is no time in fact and everything exists at the same time. Metempsychosis is merely a version of a mythical tale about something we cannot express."

In his new novel Csaplár at places simulates "doing géza", the empty self-functioning of language, with beneficial irony. Yet at the end of the day the reader is left with the impression that the writer takes his ideological hypotheses a fraction more seriously than is justified, and this is counterproductive. Maybe there is more to recent views that claim it is not us who use language; language thinks and speaks in us. However, a continuous demonstration of this may destroy the accessibility of writing. Csaplár may be a very modern writer, so much so in fact that there is hardly anything of the traditional in him, but for that very reason his work is hardly enjoyable—in terms of the arch-conservative criteria of enjoyable art. ❧

László Ferenczi

A Liberal Anti-Democrat

Gábor Vermes: *Tisza István*. Translated by Ágnes Deák. Századvég, Budapest, 1994. 584 pp.

"Count István Tisza was the most prominent and controversial Hungarian politician of the early twentieth century. His unwavering support for the 1867 Compromise between Austria and Hungary, enthusiastic promotion of industrial and urban development, rigid resistance to political and social reforms, and relatively conciliatory politics toward Hungary's ethnic minorities incurred the opposition of many politically conscious individuals and groups. Nevertheless, as party leader and prime minister he exerted considerable impact no only on Hungarian domestic policies, but also on the relationship between Austria and Hungary and on the Monarchy's foreign policy." (p. vii)

Gábor Vermes's characterization of István Tisza in the opening lines of his book is quoted from the English original, *István Tisza. The Liberal Vision and Conservative Statecraft of a Magyar Nationalist*, published in 1985 in the East European Monographs series, volume 194, by Columbia University Press. The Hungarian edition for some reason makes no reference to either the original title or the U.S. publisher, although it does credit Ágnes Deák as translator. Herself a historian by training, Deák has done a good job, but the blunt Hungarian title prevents the Hungarian reader from being able to seize the gist of the subject as it is offered to English-speaking readers.

After the original edition was published, Géza Jeszenszky, urging its Hungarian issue in a review in 1986, welcomed "Vermes's exceedingly thorough monograph portraying Tisza the man and his age with utter objectivity and meticulous scholarship." Now, almost a decade later, the Hungarian volume is an important source for an understanding of the role, work and times of István Tisza. It is important, even if in 1988 another Hungarian-born American historian, John Lukacs, has come out with his book *Budapest 1900* (New York: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, subsequently also in Hungarian), an iconoclastic writing that touches many a raw nerve. His bibliography lists Vermes's monograph; Vermes in a Hungarian journal has been quite severe in his treatment of Lukacs's exquisite treatise, in some places, admittedly, open to attack. What irked Vermes most was Lukacs's approach and his subjectiveness. Ironically, Vermes's work only underlines two fundamental questions posed by Lukacs. First: in 1900

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Budapest was the world's second fastest growing city after Chicago. Second, István Tisza's Hungarian political opponents were impotent and frequently irresponsible. The premises are implicit in Vermes's analysis and do not require spelling out, though at times he cannot avoid value judgments of his own: "One of the remarkable qualities of István Tisza... was the axiomatic character he bestowed upon his convictions, which remained constant... . Such dependability offered a refreshing sight in the Hungarian political scene, where political reliability was a commodity in meager supply." (p. 150)*

István Tisza was born in 1861 into a provincial, landed gentry Calvinist family. His father, Kálmán, was Hungary's prime minister between 1875 and 1890. He consolidated the 1867 Compromise between Austria and Hungary, although he had originally opposed it. He bestowed on his son István an unconditional allegiance to the Compromise and the ensuing alliance with Germany.

Hungarian historical and political literature is still debating whether the Compromise was good, a necessary evil, or a tragic mistake. Also up for debate, and not only in Hungary and Austria but elsewhere too, is the question of who actually ruled the Monarchy, Austria, or Hungary?

István Tisza was first elected to parliament in 1886, when his father was still prime minister. The elder Tisza remained in that office until his death. Emperor Francis Joseph first appointed István Tisza Prime Minister in 1904. In the 1906 elections he suffered a devastating defeat, causing him to dissolve his party and make a political retreat, though he held on to his parliamentary seat. He made a triumphant comeback, taking advantage of the weakness of his opponents who had gathered in a hybrid and perpetually reshuffled coalition. In 1910 he founded a new party, in 1912 he became the Speaker of Parliament, and in 1913 he became Prime Minister again. Tisza enjoyed the unconditional trust of the aging Francis Joseph, and while he was alive Tisza's position remained secure. However, his successor, Charles requested his resignation in the spring of 1917, for reasons of domestic and foreign policy, and on personal grounds. Nevertheless, Tisza headed the largest parliamentary party and as such he retained his leading position in Hungarian politics. In October 1918 it became his duty to announce in parliament "We have lost this war." In the dying days of the Monarchy, specifically on October 31, 1918, rebellious soldiers broke into his house and killed him.

Abroad, Tisza was known as an unconditional supporter of the German alliance, and during the war as one of the Central Powers' aggressive leaders. Within Hungary, aside from a handful of subservient followers, people hated him. Without regard to their political affiliation, they considered him an Austrian lackey, while in Vienna, especially in the circle around Franz Ferdinand, the heir to the throne, he was seen as the epitome of Hungarian chauvinism. In Hungary, from the mid-nineties until his death, he was under almost constant attack by clericals and agrarians. After 1906 he also became a target for the liberals, radicals and socialists. They were in conflict with each other as well, even though many had previously backed him against attack by the clericals. Liberals and radicals sensitive to social problems considered him the Devil incarnate and accused him of betraying liberal tradition and leading the country to ruin. Others simply would not forgive him for being the son of

* All quotations are from the 1985 Columbia University Press edition.

Kálmán Tisza, the man whom they had finally got rid of after fifteen years at the helm. Again others labelled him a parvenu count, or a member of the gentry. Defeat in the war, the collapse of the Monarchy and the dismemberment of Hungary seemed to justify the criticisms, no matter how contradictory these were. Tisza's fall was inevitable, though its necessity was interpreted in many different ways.

Három nemzedék (Three Generations) by the Catholic conservative historian Gyula Szekfü, published in 1920 was to provide Hungary with an ideology for the twenty-five years after the Treaty of Trianon. In it Szekfü called Tisza a tragic figure of the declining liberal era; he reproached Tisza for his liberalism and his undue belief in the role of Parliament.

In the revolving political constellations after 1919 there was none to cherish the values Tisza had cherished, namely the institution of parliament and freedom of speech, of the press and of assembly. Nor did they cherish opposition to government interference, such as Tisza had practised—though not at all times and not always consistently (perhaps since he had been a witness at first-hand to Bismarck's methods). Tisza's rejection of anti-Semitism, just as his aversion to religious orthodoxy, they valued least of all.

But while he was alive and after his death, Tisza was criticized for more than that. He was an adamant opponent of universal suffrage, even during the Great War, when the social changes brought on by the war caused more and more to demand the extension of the right to vote. It was one of the objections Charles brought up for dismissing Tisza. The question of suffrage had been cardinal to Hungarian politics and society much earlier, and was called for in the programme of the coalition that defeated Tisza in 1906. It is interesting to follow Vermes's persuasive argument that these parties would have been the most terrified had they actually had to fulfil their promises. The day after Tisza was named Speaker of Parliament in 1912, the Social Democrats organized a huge demonstration in Budapest calling for universal suffrage. The gathering was dispersed by the police, and several writers at the time expressed dismay about the event.

The explanation behind Tisza's opposition to extending the suffrage lies in his view of the "nation." He held the traditional belief which identified the nation with the nobility and the aristocracy. Political power after 1867 was largely in the hands of the Protestant gentry and the Catholic aristocracy. Whatever parties were in opposition at a given time also came largely from these ranks. (There were individual exceptions, like Sándor Wekerle, who in 1892 became Hungary's first non-noble prime minister. There was also a Jewish lawyer from Pest, Endre Vázsonyi, who came to parliament in 1906 and who, after Tisza's fall, in 1917 became Minister of Justice.) As a landowner from the county of Bihar, Tisza regarded the peasants as a class to be ruled, to be subservient to their landlords. They were not part of the political nation. Loyal peasants had to be protected from subversive or socialist agitators. He did not stand in the way of hundreds of thousands of peasants, of Hungarian or ethnic minority origin, emigrating to America. That was in line with his belief in non-interference, but perhaps also because, as Vermes suggests, he considered it a means of alleviating social tensions. Tisza believed in urbanization and industrial development, but was unwilling to consider the social and political consequences. In the years before the Great War, in most countries of Europe, including Austria, the Social Democrats gained strength in parliaments and occasionally in government; in Hungary they had no

parliamentary representative. Tisza's ideal was to have Hungarian workers organize along the lines of the English trade unions and not to become engaged in politics.

A more realistic evaluation of Tisza had to wait for an increasingly realistic treatment in Hungarian historiography of the Age of Dualism and the discarding of the theory that it caused the country's decline. In 1985 Ferenc Pölöskei's biography of Tisza appeared, and that same year Vermes's book was published in the United States.

Vermes worked with excellent sources. He had access to the archives of several countries and had a full knowledge of the Hungarian and foreign literature. He made ample use also of contemporary Hungarian newspapers, and incorporated observations by American and other authors. The book provides an insight into Tisza's activities, often on a daily basis. Especially insightful is the description of the administration and diplomacy of Hungary during the First World War. The bulk of the book discusses the events between 1914 and 1918.

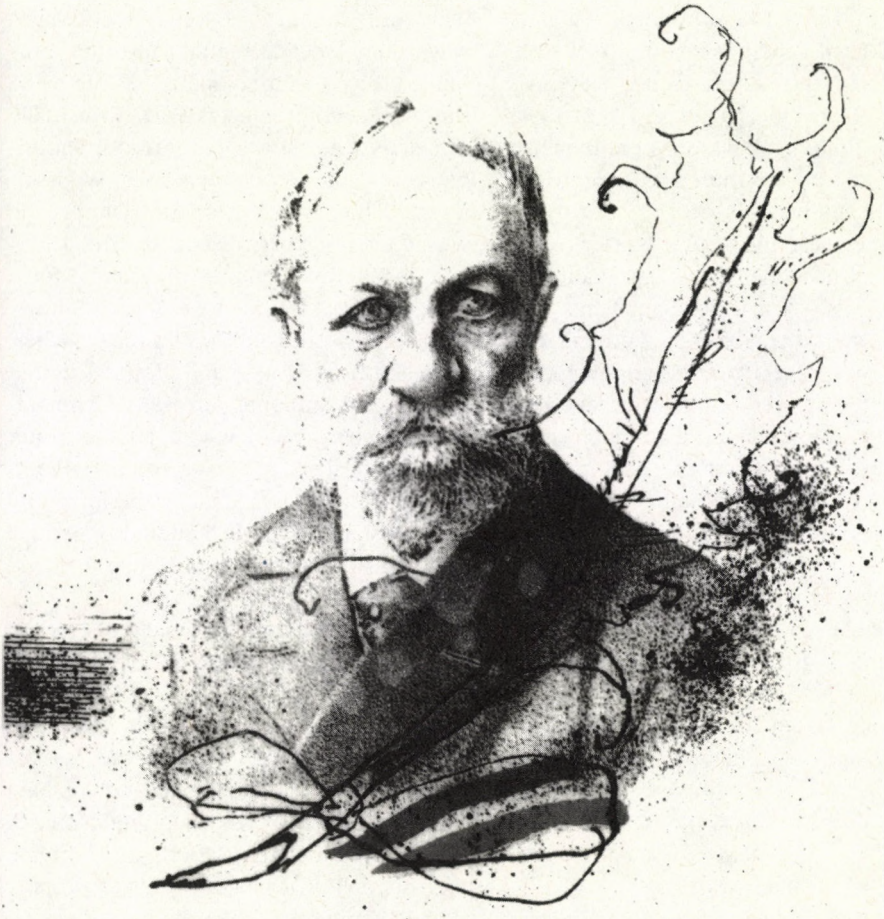
All his life Tisza saw Hungary as a fortress under siege, threatened foremost by Tsarist Russia and pan-Slav expansion, but in danger also from the Habsburgs' rekindled attempts at centralization and the various experiments in federalism and other restructuring of the Dual Monarchy. Franz Ferdinand had numerous ideas of his own on the matter, and he and Tisza cultivated a mutual contempt for each other. To defend the besieged fortress, Tisza considered as pre-requisites the 1867 Compromise and the upholding of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, and because of the Monarchy, the German alliance. At the same time, he was out to strengthen Hungary's position within the Monarchy without endangering the alliance; at this he was successful, especially between 1914 and 1916. He was outspoken on anti-Austrian, ingrained Magyar nationalism. He was almost as sharply outspoken on the harassment of Hungary's ethnic minorities. "Tisza defied the popular current of Magyar chauvinism. Indeed, he was the only major Hungarian politician to consider a policy of concessions to ethnic minorities, particularly the Romanians" in questions of education and culture, Vermes writes. (p. 461)

With a Calvinist sense of mission, Tisza considered himself a man of history whose duty was to avert a catastrophe. The same sense of mission drove his political opponent, born in the same region as he was, the poet and journalist Endre Ady. Their animosity was mutual. Tisza saw in Ady a renegade, a man of noble birth like himself. Both Tisza and Ady invoked the same history, the history of the Hungarian nobility. But while Tisza was out to sustain the indivisible superiority of the Hungarian nobility, Ady, though always proud of his ancestry, extended a hand to the peasants and workers. Posterity sees Tisza and contemporary Hungary through Ady's apocalyptic poetic vision. Vermes rejected the view that Tisza had ruined Hungary. He pointed out that during the War Tisza did his best to uphold civil rights, even against the military authorities.

For two weeks in 1914, Tisza persisted in opposing Austro-Hungarian military action against Serbia. Finally he capitulated over the ultimatum to Belgrade. Vermes believes that the turning-point came when Tisza had to fear the dissolution of the alliance with Germany, which he thought indispensable, and he was afraid of losing his personal prestige in Germany. Vermes also points out that Tisza initially opposed unconditional submarine warfare, but subsequently submitted to German pressure on this matter as well.

Vermes's book is neither an apology nor an indictment. It is an account of a quarter-century of history and the deeds of a por-

tentious statesman. Tisza was a liberal, yet anti-democratic, a believer in urbanization and industrial development, yet an adherent of the social status quo. Yet, this was not the cause of his downfall, but his belief in the necessity of an alliance with Germany, which he considered a prerequisite for maintaining the Monarchy. England had a stake in sustaining the Habsburg Empire, in the nineteenth century and earlier. When the German and Austrian Emperors became allies, and especially after the turn of the century, when English-German antagonism grew, the British stake in the Monarchy became secondary. Tisza made overtures toward England, but England ignored them. He was not the only twentieth-century political leader to miscalculate the strength of England—and the United States—in shaping the course of history. ❧



Kálmán Mikszáth: The Life and Times of Mór Jókai. *Cover.*

Géza Galavics

The Burgher as Art Collector

The Praun Collection of Drawings in the Budapest Museum of Fine Arts, 21 October–31 December 1994

The close on one hundred and fifty items shown at this exhibition were all from the museum's own holdings. Supplemented by other Praun collection pieces, on loan from other museums, they were displayed in the Germanisches Nationalmuseum Nuremberg in the spring of 1994, on a visit home as it were, where they had spent close to two hundred years up to the early 19th century.

In Nuremberg the display was given the slightly old-fashioned title "Das Praunsche Kabinett" with "Kunst des Sammelns," not quite literally: the collector's art, as one subtitle, and the more descriptive Masterpieces from Dürer to Carracci as another.

The Prauns had been Nuremberg merchants from the end of the 14th century. The collection was formed by Paulus Praun, who belonged to the sixth generation, at the end of the 16th century.

Paulus's grandfather and father entertained close ties with Italy, which the grandfather's grandfather had already initiated, and Paulus himself spent half his life in Bologna. At the time when Paulus's brother rode to Constantinople in 1569, passing through Hungary as a member of the Holy Roman Emperor Maximilian II's embassy to the Subline Porte, Paulus was living in Bologna, in charge of the family's velvet and brocade manufacture that employed three to four hundred, at the same time collecting objects d'art, principally drawings, the works of Carracci, Parmigiano and their contemporaries. What interested him was not status symbols, he was guided by his own taste. The 1590s once again found him in Nuremberg for a time, where he collected German drawings, the work of Dürer, Wolf Huber, Augustin Hirschvogel, and primarily of the painter and draughtsman Hans Hoffmann of Nuremberg, with whom Paulus Praun had established personal contact. Praun died in Bologna in 1616 and the inventory of his estate listed six hundred drawings, six thousand engravings and two hundred and fifty paintings.

An extraordinary collection for a burgher at the end of the 16th century, but far from unique in Nuremberg. There were six to eight others, including Hartmann Schedel's, to which we owe the earliest medieval view of Buda Castle, and Willibald Imhof's. Imhof was the grandson of Willibald Pirkheimer, Dürer's good friend, and his collection included a fair proportion of the works which had still been in Dürer's possession at the time of his death.

Géza Galavics
has published widely on late Renaissance and Baroque art in Hungary.

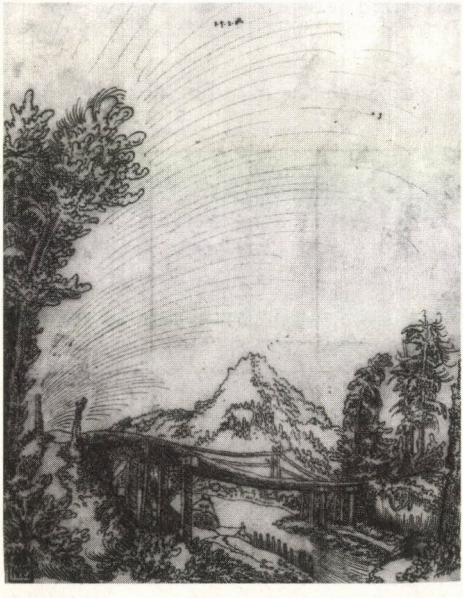
After Albrecht Altdorfer: *St. Barbara*, 1517.

How could the collection of a German burgher family survive from the end of the 16th century to our days?

Paradoxically enough, for this to happen it had to be purchased by some king or prince and incorporated in their collection. The Electors of Bavaria bought the Hartmann Schedel collection, they, and the Habsburgs, the Imhof collection. The Praun collection became the property of the Princes Esterházy early in the 19th century. Every one of these later—in one way or another—came into the possession of a public museum, but this in itself would not have been sufficient for the burgher collections of yore to survive as units. A detailed inventory, if possible dating back to the 16th century, but at least to the eighteenth, was needed, otherwise the original collection would be lost midst much other material of different provenance; and also needed is a determined curator or team of art historians, ready to go through many thousands of items one by one, in an attempt to reconstruct the collection that was. In the absence of any of the links in this chain there is scant chance that a collection might be reconstructed.

Paulus Praun was lucky as regards posterity. After a hundred and fifty years had passed, a Praun commissioned a cata-

Albrecht Dürer:
The Virgin Mary with the Infant Jesus and St. Anne
Around 1502–1503.



After Wolf Huber:
Landscape with Wooden Bridge, 1528.

Parmigiano:
Venus and Cupid, 1527–1531.

logue of the collection which had not yet been dispersed, and he fortunately chose Gottlieb von Murr to do the job. Unluckily, he did not live to see the 512 page catalogue in French, since Murr, like so many of his successors, did not deliver on time, but by 1797 a catalogue up to the high standards of the period was available. Then, at the end of the 18th century, someone in the Praun family pointed out that the collection was *ein ganz todes Capital*—totally dead for commercial purposes—and that it had to be activated. This was soon done and, with the exception of family pieces, the collection was sold. Friedrich Frauenholz, a noted art dealer, acted as agent. An inventory was prepared, but the paintings and sculptures were nevertheless dispersed to such a degree that only a small proportion of the items could be identified in various museums, and that with considerable trouble. Thus a painting by Guido Reni found its way to the Museum of Fine Arts in Budapest. Most of the drawings, however, around four hundred items, were bought by Prince Miklós Esterházy, whose collection eventually reached the Museum of Fine Arts.

At the end of the 16th century, collectors did not yet use their own stamps. It is therefore difficult to reassemble them since museums or collections which acquired them later classified them according to altogether different principles. Edit Hoffmann, a Hungarian art historian, making good use of Murr's 1797 catalogue, identified some drawings as having belonged to the Praun Collection already back in the 1920s. Since then "from the Praun Collection" has frequently been given as the provenance of items in the catalogues of the Museum of Fine Arts.

Next the Berlin art historian Katrin Achilles-Syndram found the Nuremberg art dealer's 1804 printed catalogue. The numbers in it, and the numbers on the back of the drawings, permitted the identification of a further large number of drawings from the Praun Collection, continuing the good work started by Edit Hoffmann. She not only identified them but, on that basis, discovered and presented in detail the history of the collection itself. The catalogue of the exhibition held in Nuremberg in the spring of 1994 was based on her dissertation, with the addition of contributions by Hungarian art historians. The catalogue tells the story of the Praun family and of the Nuremberg merchants as such and their relationship to art. The attractive personality of Paulus Praun himself is described, his personal relationship to art and the character of his collection. "Praun collection" used to be no more than a note on provenance; here it truly comes to life. Its fate involves us in the beginnings of art history as a discipline, and the appearance of the modern art trade using printed catalogues as a sales tool.

The Nuremberg catalogue describes the displacement of the Praun Collection as a loss, the corresponding gain is, however, more than the quantitative growth of the Esterházy Collection. The bulk of this extraordinary collection of humanist inspiration could be preserved, thus creating an opportunity for the resurrection of this magnificent material assembled by a burgher living in the late Renaissance period.

This exhibition also draws attention to another collector, the Hungarian peer Prince Miklós Esterházy. The Esterházy Collection of Drawings, which itself later merged with an even larger collection of drawings, also included the collection of the late 18th century London art dealer Cesare Poggi, who had premises on Bond Street. Cesare Poggi, who was born in Parma, was Joshua Reynold's good friend, and the auctioneer of his estate. Prince Miklós Esterházy bought a number of first class drawings by Leonardo, Raphael and Rembrandt in Paris in 1810, and also a number of items bearing the stamp of old English collections.

Goethe, who took a keen interest in drawings, saw the collection in 1797, when it was almost two hundred years old. A few years after his visit, the Praun Collection ceased to exist as an integrity of works of art that mutually reinforced the impression they made, and as the intellectual imprint of a late 16th century collector. Now, after almost another two hundred years, it was born again, at least for the duration of this exhibition, thanks to the work of Szilvia Bodnár and Katrin Achilles-Syndram. It offers us the same experience as to Goethe in his time. Goethe looked through eleven folios or packages in the Praun house on the Weinplatz in Nuremberg. The finest items of this four hundred years old collection are now on display, allowing us, here in Budapest, to be Paulus Praun's posthumous visitors. ❧

Domenico Campagnola: *Maria Magdalen's Arrival in Marseilles,* 1550–1560.

János Makkay

A Crossroads of the Bronze Age

An Exhibition of Bronze Age Treasures at the National Museum, Budapest, September–December 1994

In the late summer of 1876, when Europe's leading archeologists gathered in Budapest to attend their 7th International Congress of Prehistory, one of the famous scholars present, Ingvald Undset of Norway, expressed his very first impressions in the following manner: "Upon arriving in Budapest I saw the prehistoric treasures that were on display at the National Museum and at the exhibition... I was most surprised and fascinated. As I studied these treasures in greater depth, it was quite evident of just what significance this beautiful country had been for prehistoric western and northern Europe. Consider the country's geographic position, crossed by the Danube, facilitating trade, a natural corridor for cultural contact, between the coasts of the Black Sea and the adjoining seas and the heart of Central Europe. If we were to travel in a north-westerly direction from the hearths of ancient civilization in Asia Minor through the Balkan Peninsula, we could hardly avoid passing through Hungary, where history speaks eloquently of how different peoples, as they wandered from east to west, penetrated Hungary in succession, some settling for periods of time."

Not quite a hundred and twenty years have passed since; in September 1994, Western and Central European scholars trooped again to Budapest, including notabilities such as Colin Renfrew of Cambridge, J. P. Mohen of Paris, K. Kristianssen from Gothenburg and G. Eagan of Dublin. Like the majority of those who came in 1876, they mostly specialize in the Bronze Age (in effect the archeological remains of the thousand years starting at 2000 B. C.) This particular meeting of Bronze Age specialists was part of the 1994–96 effort of the Committee of Cultural Heritage of the Council of Europe to promote the protection and better knowledge of Bronze Age relics. To honour this visit, the National Museum of Hungary put together an exhibition of its Hungarian Bronze Age treasures, accompanied by a splendid catalogue.* Indeed, there is no better proof of the great wealth of Bronze Age finds in Hungary than the fact that, albeit some of the best items of this period were on loan

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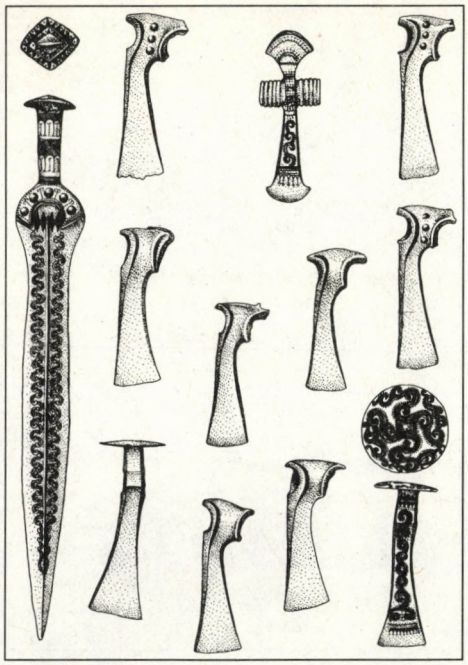
János Makkay
is the author A tiszaszőlősi kincs *(The Tiszaszőlős Hoard, Budapest, 1985) and* Az indoeurópai népek őstörténete *(Prehistory of the Indoeuropean Peoples, Budapest, 1991).*

* T. Kovács, I. Ecsedy and T. Kemenczei: *Treasures of the Hungarian Bronze Age*, Budapest, 1994.

to great museums in Western Europe, enough remained in the National Museum for this special show.

Making no comparisons, it should nevertheless be pointed out that it was the Bronze Age itself that was the focus of the first golden age in Hungarian archeology, in the 1860s and 1870s. In the study of the Bronze Age, standards in Hungary at the time were second to none. This was due primarily to two outstanding archeologists, Joseph Hampel, whose three bulky volumes of Bronze Age finds in Hungary cover a body of research unsurpassed to this day, and Ferenc Flóris Rómer, whose meticulously detailed study of burial sites and settlement finds is still considered outstanding. Hampel furnished clear evidence that, aside from Alpine regions and Scandinavia, the most important workshops in bronze and gold were located three thousand years ago right here in Hungary, around Velemszentvid on the western border and, surprisingly enough, also in the Nyírség in the north-east, where there are no raw material sources. Later on, in the period leading up to World War II, Lajos Márton's pioneering excavations provided exemplary methods for the exact excavation of multi-level tell settlements, of which one fine example, which has achieved world renown, is that at Tószeg, where V.G. Childe participated on one of the digs. Due to the visit to Tószeg by the 1876 Congress and to Lajos Márton's excavations, Tószeg became crucial for the dating of Bronze Age finds in Central Europe. Ferenc Tompa classified the finds of a hundred years and coordinated the dating with that customary in Western Europe.

After World War II things changed in archeological field work because of political reasons and because of and also what the study of prehistory as such demanded. Interest focused in the South-East, the Aegean World and Anatolia. It became quite clear, as Undset had suggested, that the origins of the peoples who migrated from East to West could only be determined by excavations on sites in areas under Soviet rule, i.e. more than half of all of Europe-Asia. Thanks to growing interest in excavations in that huge territory, we know that these migrations, starting with the little known Kurgan peoples, were followed by the late Bronze Age Cimmerian and Scythian tribes, the Sarmatians, whose language was Iranian, then, after 375 A. D., by Turkic peoples, the Huns, Avars, Magyars, Pechenegs, Cumanians, Tatars, and the Osmanli Turks. None of them got further than the central region of the Carpathian Basin, often no further than the rivers Tisza and Danube. There, for longer or shorter periods of time, they established their headquarters, and were slowly absorbed by the inhabitants of the region or, more rarely, as in the case of the Mongols, they withdrew. In Bronze Age research, this recognition resulted in the establishment of connections with the steppe, the Black Sea region, and Caucasia and Asia Minor; (for example, the 9th B.C. Cimmerian finds of the Gyoma grave mound relate them to Caucasia), great progress was made in the study of the Scythians as well. It became clear that from the Early Bronze Age, and especially in the Late Bronze Age, the Carpathian Basin's eastern half, and in some cases the great Hungarian Plain, came under the influence of eastern cultures and, very likely, eastern peoples. Even then, the western parts, in particular Transdanubia, as well as the western half of Slovakia, were always very much an integral part of Central European development. A good example of this is one of the most magnificent pieces in the exhibition, a bronze corslet that was dredged from the bed of the Danube river and is unique in Europe. This, as it were, is



The famous bronze hoard found at Hajdúsámson in 1907. Spiral decorated sword and different types of battle axes.

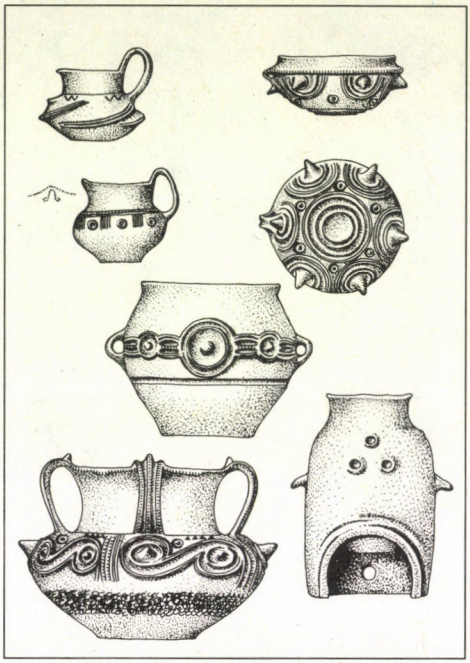
a projection of the fact that the Roman Empire was only able to incorporate Transdanubia, that is Pannonia.

In a different direction it turned out that Asia Minor and the Aegean World had a far from insignificant influence on Central Europe in the second millenium B. C., albeit this is not directly borne out by the finds. A third factor also became effective, namely, that archeology was more and more turning into the methodology of excavation field work. Excavations were started immediately after the Second World War, and in the last twenty years produced fine results primarily in the excavation of the Middle Bronze Age tell-mounds in the valley of the Tisza (finds which the National Museum is about to publish). These were begun by Amalia Mozsolics at Tószeg itself. Following in the footsteps of József Hampel, three volumes surveyed the place of gold and bronze in the Carpathian Basin in those centuries.

Traditions at the time of the Bronze Age, even then going back thousands of years, make things in the middle of the Carpatian Basin, in Hungary, even more complicated. For hundreds of years, in the regions of the Danube and Tisza, around 2000 B. C., lived peoples who fostered strong ties with peoples mostly from the south, the Balkans, and even further south. It might even be claimed that these peoples seem to have inserted themselves between the cultures of both east and west, if we did not know that those connections with the south went back to the Neolithic Age. What is undoubtedly true is that these southern links and new influences originating from the south brought forth the Bronze Age, after nearly a century of disturbances at the end of the Copper Age. (There are examples of this in the exhibition, the workshop remains, their moulds and smelting devices, and bronze axes which were all found at the Várhegy, near Zok.) With this began the great surge of works by bronze and gold smiths, whose peak, around 1400 B. C., is the magnificent Hajdúsámson Hoard. There are hundreds of bronze finds in the stores of museums, covering centuries, which clearly indicate a further blossoming; given that these items were hidden in the ground, the indication is of a sudden and great change that occurred, in all probability bringing this peaceful development to an end.

There is, however, an interesting aspect to this blossoming of bronze working, and it calls for an explanation. There is a route through the Danube-Tisza interflow taken by faience beads from the south to Central Europe, and amber south from the Baltic, tin from Bohemia, a route that led all the way to the Aegean, and most likely to the Hittites of Asia Minor. Evidence of this has been found primarily in grave sites in the

Szeged area, which contained faience beads alongside amber. We also know that the native gold of the Mycenean shaft graves originated largely in Transylvania. There is plenty of evidence of a lively trade but, to this day, not a single Mycenaen item has been found in the Carpathian Basin, which might have been paid for by that gold; for that reason no such item is on exhibit. Similarly, while a good number of objects of classical Greek origin can be found in the Alpine region and even further North, as well as along the northern shores of the Black Sea, in all of the Carpathian Basin, to this day, we know of only four Greek finds (four metal vessels), which most likely came here fortuitously and not through normal trade. It is more than likely that the almost permanent cultural division, resulting from the arrival of, and attack and conquest by, different peoples from East or West, made the Carpathian Basin an unstable and insecure region, which did not favour trade. The Mycenean Greeks, and later the Greeks, treated the region with caution, if not fear; only with the help of the Protothracians in the eastern Balkans, were they able to establish indirect contact trade. Naturally, the ancient Protothracians creamed this off, thus there is good reason why many gold treasures found their way to their territory. Any visitor to the exhibition, or anyone leafing through its catalogue, will be persuaded by the finds of the long-standing three-fold division of the Carpathian Basin, and also that most of the millennium was a time of peaceful developments. The skill of these smiths flourished and so did agriculture and animal husbandry. There was no lack of food, enough remained to barter for imported objects, mostly trinkets which were not essential for survival. Another impediment to long distance trade was that there were hardly any products or materials other then gold and bronze to be traded. There was plenty of wheat, livestock, leather, and



Clay vessels of the Middle Bronze Age Füzesabony culture with characteristic spiral decoration.

wine everywhere, including the Mycenean city-states. Around the end of the millennium there were larger migrations from both East and West, Troy fell around 1200 B. C., warlike peoples destroyed the Hittite Empire and Mycenean civilization, and shook even Egypt. For this period, bronze finds here in Hungary are more and more in the form of weapons, and more often than not they make up hoards, i. e. hidden loot, evidence of the confusion and insecurity of the times. These weapons, in their own way, are very fine products, but even so are proof that the centuries of gradual decline into insecurity had begun. Until that time, in the Middle Bronze Age, there were items which imitated Mycenean models, (for example the clay pots with spiral motifs); after 1200 B. C. these disappear, and from that time on, for centuries, weapons spoke loudest. ❧

Tamás Koltai

Home Advantage

Mihály Vörösmarty: *Csongor és Tünde* (Csongor and Tünde) • Menyhért Lengyel: *Taifun* (Typhoon) • Ferenc Molnár: *A király orra* (The King's Nose) • István Örkény: *Macskajáték* (Catsplay) • Péter Halász: *Hatalom, pénz, hírnév, szépség, szerelem* (Power, Money, Fame, Beauty, Love).

What more can a Hungarian artist ask than to be a part of Europe, of the whole world, by living and working in his own country? Some stake their entire life on it, others never think of it and simply follow inspiration. Some can never detach themselves from their home turf, others are forced to. Some sever their roots forever; others return at the first opportunity. Only a handful are given the chance to be at home everywhere at once. For theatre people, working in a strange, exotic language, the point is all the more acute. A few have, however, succeeded.

Mihály Vörösmarty, born in 1800, wrote his play *Csongor and Tünde* in 1831. It is both a fairytale and a poetic attempt to grasp the meaning of existence. Although it has been compared with *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, another comparison comes to mind, if for no other reason than because the year 1831 also saw Goethe finishing the second part of *Faust*. Without forcing a parallel between the magnum opus by Goethe and the tale written by a thirty year-old Hungarian poet, I detect in both the same inspiration, the same urge to interpret the meaning of man's universe. For is not young Csongor a Faustian figure, chasing a perpetually waning dream, a desire unattainable in the living world? Tünde keeps slipping away, and only in the other world, the Land of the Fairies, are they able to meet. Csongor wanders just like Faust, and the journeying of both is metaphorical: to capture an instant of happiness. In *Csongor and Tünde* there is no Mephisto, but rascally little devils and Mirigy, the witch, who conjures up an evanescent and delusive woman to Csongor, just as the "devil" does for Faust. In his study of *Faust*, Friedrich Gundolf stated that the totality of life's opportunities should appear condensed in a single "timeless moment". Vörösmarty presents three wanderers, the Merchant, the Prince, and the Scholar, as a way of dispelling man's foolish belief in having to make a choice between wealth, power, and knowledge. There is also a correlation between the lines near the end of the two texts: in *Faust* the Pater Extaticus, gliding in the spiritual regions, chants: "All things valueless / Shall henceforth cease / And Love shall incandesce / Like a fixed star." The last line in Csongor and Tünde, spoken also in the regions of the spirit, concludes that "Vigilant is love alone."

It may not be surprising that György Lukács, in an early work on the history of

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Tamás Koltai,
Editor of Színház, *a theatre monthly, is our regular theatre reviewer.*

drama, says: "Vörösmarty's *Csongor and Tünde* is the most living and perhaps the single truly organic Hungarian dramatic work." Yet, the play, which is beautiful Romantic poetry, has seldom succeeded in coming across convincingly on the stage. Like so many classical works it was assigned as a set text for uninterested schoolchildren, a museum artifact. Now, Budapest's New Theatre Company has turned in a production which cuts into the living artery of our time.

The work of the thirty-year-old nineteenth century poet has become a challenge for a student director, Eszter Novák, who took it as her diploma piece. Both poet and director are of the same age, an age when one is over the disappointments of "early youth", and the shocks of initial despair. It is an age when the unsettled mind feels inclined to take on the world. Vörösmarty sought an opportunity for human happiness in the infinity of the fairytale, at the triple fork of the road, in his Kingdom of the Night and his Land of the Fairies. To Eszter Novák the horizon of happiness is an empty site on the outskirts of the city. Center stage stands a dead tree, just as in *Waiting for Godot*. Csongor is your average teenager, a Prince of Dreams in a shabby suburb. Tünde is a skimpy girl; the three devils are the local tramps. The Merchant, the Prince, and the Scholar are Csongor's age, all with their own ideas on their future. Mirigy the Witch is an eccentric matchmaker out to charm our hero, using the lecherous Ledér.

The production lights up as a piece of sad poetry in the leaden dullness of daily drudgery. In a barren square, again reminiscent of Beckett, the grimy walls with their dead windows gradually take shape. As the play approaches its end, the setting in which happiness is dreamed after is bathed in light, and we can see where the dreams of happiness emanate from. The scene is depressing, albeit what has transpired is no more than Vörösmarty's cosmic pessimism meeting a slice of present-day reality. Many in the audience found the absence of the fairytale a disappointment, criticizing the director for infidelity toward the poet. In fact, all that happened is that the play and the performance live on together, ignoring the hundred and fifty years between them.

Although *Csongor and Tünde* has been occasionally performed abroad (two separate productions in Germany in the 1940s) it stood little chance of taking root outside of Hungary. In the first half of our century, only two Hungarian playwrights have managed to do so, Menyhért Lengyel and Ferenc Molnár. In the twenties and thirties their plays were staged all over Europe and America. Both were forced to flee from Hitler. Lengyel, who also wrote the libretto to the *The Miraculous Mandarin,* left Hungary in the 1930s, Molnár in 1940. Eventually they both settled in New York. Lengyel became a successful Hollywood scriptwriter who worked with Marlene Dietrich, Greta Garbo, and a number of German directors in the U.S., including Ernst Lubitsch. He later moved to Italy, where he died in 1974 at the age of ninety-four. Molnár, however, was unable to find his niche as an emigré. Although he continued to write, he was not once able to repeat the quality or success of his early plays. He died in New York in 1952.

Lengyel's *Typhoon*, written in 1909, was the first Hungarian play to be performed abroad. At home its reception vacillated between extremes, a reception that many of Lengyel's later works also met, being derided as journalism or sensationalism, and praised as metaphoric poetry. Lengyel himself did not think much of it, commenting in a letter, "This piece: an ex-

amination in technique and making money." The production in Budapest's Madách Chamber Theatre accords it higher esteem.

When the piece was written, Lengyel was twenty-nine years old and had run all the way to Berlin from a disappointing love affair. Across the street from his Berlin flat was a house teeming with exotic people—Japanese, come to study and perhaps conquer the West. Lengyel's imagination took wing: surely one of them had a German lover, a coquette, just like the one he himself left behind in Budapest. And the moment came when the Japanese, a brainy little fellow, could take no more, and he strangled the woman; his well-disciplined "clan" found a way of saving their man from the law, or rather from the judge's sentence. All in vain, for the demons in his soul held him fast. The Japanese, dutiful and submissive to his community, has become an individual with heart, feelings and pain—a quasi-European—who succumbs to his first love and his first murder, both changing his life for ever.

Dezső Kosztolányi, the poet and critic, wrote of the play when it first opened more than eighty years ago that it was suffused with racial hatred. Not the author's, of course, but the Japanese's. There is a feeling of unwavering superiority behind their smiling, polite behaviour with which this group, kept together by a mysterious loyalty, destroys the alien scapegoat, a German lover of the murdered woman.

Under the direction of Péter Huszti, the Madách Chamber Theatre version is stylistically clean, producing a coherent atmosphere, with no trace of sensationalism. In particular, the interaction between the busy, zealous Japanese in their secret society is meticulously worked out. They communicate with perfectly straight faces, with a blinking of an eye, and gestures reduced to ritual. Their aim is to preserve their duty-bound group and save their fellow member from the law. They ruthlessly excommunicate and sentence to death anyone who displays individual weakness. The original play had the hero Tokemaro, who is unable to overcome his guilt and his love, die of unfulfilled passion. In this performance he is made to commit harakiri through the force of "superior" ideology that demands the casting out of those whom it rejects. The original is a more mystical solution than this more rational version; though unfaithful to the original, it is, however, not just acceptable but downright fruitful, since it directly follows from the play's basic concept.

The National Theatre gave us a Ferenc Molnár play previously unperformed in Hungary. With the Hungarian title of *Panoptikum,* it was written in New York in 1941. (It had various titles in English, including *The King's Nose*, *The Merciless Mrs Roy*, or *Ann Roy*, and *Not So Long Ago*.) Arthur Richman translated it for an American theatre as *Waxworks*, but the production never got to a premiere. It was first performed in German in 1949 in the Kleines Theater am Zoo in Frankfurt/Main, then in the Akademietheater in Vienna, and a year later in the Kammerspiele in Hamburg.

The King's Nose is the final play in Molnár's trilogy on the Habsburg era. The first two, *The Swan* and *Olympia*, earned much greater fame and are frequently performed. *Olympia* is also being played at present in Budapest's József Attila Theatre. Here Kovács, a captain of the Hussars, takes artful revenge on an Austrian Duchess for humiliating him. *The King's Nose* also has a cool aristocratic lady, Ann, the wife of Prince Rudolf Krohn-Leithen, the ambassador to Rome. Ann wants a divorce because she has fallen in love with Volsky, the architect in charge of renovating the building. Her husband accepts the

fact straight-faced, "My spirit flies high above the globe, I think not of individuals but continents and oceans. Individual persons are of no concern to me. I am of no concern to myself as a person. Only as one of the sensory organs of a sixty-five million strong state. I am an eye of an empire or, let's say, an ear. Or perhaps a nose." The irony directed at this aristocratic figure is obvious. But for Molnár that was not enough. It turns out that the architect is actually Captain Boganov, a Russian spy, whose superiors are becoming angry with him because he is not supplying them with information, naturally, being a gentleman in love. The embassy's butler, Semyonov, a spy in his own right, tries to get Volsky to steal at least one trivial document, perhaps a coded urine test. If he doesn't he will be unable to claim he is still spying, in which case his subordinate will have to obey the command to liquidate him. When all this comes out in the open, everyone turns out to be a spy or a counterspy, stealing military plans back and forth. In the end all is cleared up and their life of conceit returns to normal.

Even if *The King's Nose* lacks the inspiration of Molnár's earlier works, it is still full of wit and eloquence, with a plot and dialogue whose structure is frivolous and original. Dozens of similar plays were written in England and America in the 1950s and '60s. Sadly, the National Theatre production lacks the ease, grace and irony needed to make it work. Director Géza Bodolay gave dramatic effect only to the opening and closing scenes, where museum wax figures come alive, returning to wax at the end of the play. In the two hours in between, however, the audience gets neither innovative staging nor brilliant acting. Regrettably, this foreign-born infant of Ferenc Molnár has not found a home in the country of its author's birth.

In the second half of this century, a single playwright succeeded in breaking the same language and geographic barriers Molnár and Lengyel did earlier—though less spectacularly. He was István Örkény, best known here for his short stories. (His *One-Minute Stories* have been translated into several languages.) Of his plays *The Tót Family* and, especially, *Catsplay* were moderately successful in Europe and the United States.

Catsplay was originally a novella, adapted for the stage in the early seventies. The theme is the correspondence between two sisters who live countries away. Their letters are presented in monologue, while the action comes to life on stage. The play premiered in the eastern Hungarian town of Szolnok with enormous success. Budapest's Vígszinház wasted no time in contracting Szolnok's young director, Gábor Székely, who has since become one of the best Hungarian directors and now heads the New Theatre in Budapest. In the Szolnok production, the three main parts for older actors were played by the leading actors of the day. In Budapest it was a roaring success and had several hundred performances. The play took off on a career abroad and on other Hungarian stages. Now, thirty-three years later, it has returned to the smaller venue of the Vígszinház, the Pesti Theatre.

The play's centred on Mrs. Orbán, a brusque and somewhat crude widow with a poetic streak. In spite of her sixty-five years, she is perfectly willing to live a sloppy and full life. She has trysts in coffeeshops, falls in love and is jealous, runs after a cat in the street in one slipper. She steals her landlady's evening gown and enthusiastically responds to a retired opera singer at a concert in a second-rate community centre. Over the years Mrs. Orbán has become a symbol for Hungarians: of the impossibility of a life in this

muddled, irrational, ground-floor country, a life that is yet impossible to be lived anywhere else. The alternative is personified by Mrs. Orbán's sister Giza, living with her businessman son in the exclusive and boring Bavarian town of Garmisch-Partenkirchen, paralyzed and in a wheelchair, isolated from the world and people. While Mrs. Orbán fights with the dairy woman, Giza looks after the family tomb. Passions are hot around Mrs. Orbán, Giza spends her listless days with all the response of a wax figure.

When the play was considered for revival, a major concern was that the new actors would never be able to replace the memory of the old performances. A further consideration was that the social and political changes in Hungary had perhaps erased the tension in the play. Would the contrast between Budapest and Garmish-Partenkirchen mean the same today as it did then? Are the two worlds still as much apart as they were years ago? The production answered these questions with a resounding affirmative. Pál Mácsai, the actor-director, who plays Tokeramo in *Typhoon* and Salieri in the Madách Theatre's revival of *Amadeus*, had previously staged the play some years ago in Veszprém. Mácsai now uses a lot more abstract elements. Mrs. Orbán's flat, for example, is indicated by a platform, a few pieces of furniture, and two free-standing walls. A nurse pushes Giza around in her wheelchair in an open space, the space that is filled in by the scenes described in the letters. The imagination expands the room and condenses the action into a single picture. There is place even for a vision; when Mrs. Orbán pictures her own funeral, it actually comes parading out of the closet.

Nóra Tábori as Mrs. Orbán gives the role a much broader scope than before, revealing the finer emotions behind a shrill and grotesque appearance. It is utterly credible that she has been in love with a beer-bellied opera singer all her life. Her coy way of sitting on her suitor's knee or of inquiring after his well-being in a voice throbbing with passion, comes through as shyly sentimental. Klári Tolnai is also able to convey the nuances of Giza. A delicate matron with snow-white hair, there is a sense of humour and gentleness in her. She is not an order-loving nag but a forgiving mother-figure who warns her reckless sister to avoid mischief. Mrs. Orbán's "catsplay" routine with her tenant, a frightened, mousy, little seamstress, becomes a long scene here. Mousey, squatting on top of a wardrobe and miaowing bitterly, knocks down a dusty hatbox, out of which pour a number of old photographs, and the two ladies come upon one which each of them has been interpreting in her own way. Giza suddenly tears it up, and with that gesture the play reverts from nostalgia and remembrances to the present.

Another well-known man of the theatre, Péter Halász, has recently made his comeback on the Hungarian stage. In the early seventies, he was engaged in avant-garde theatre in Budapest; and when he was labelled as subversive and state-run halls were denied him, he went on to do productions in apartments all over town. Only a narrow circle of intellectuals, artists, and dissidents got to attend these "clandestine performances." Tired of harrassment, the troup emigrated in 1974, and soon made a name for itself as New York's Squat Theater. Later they split up and Halász's team continued to work under the name of Love Theater. With the political thaw, the company came on some visits to Budapest; in the early nineties Halász directed a few plays of his own here, including *The Chinese* and *Ambition* in the Katona József Theatre. Recently he

experimented with something new: within twenty-four hours he wrote, rehearsed and performed plays inspired by clippings from the daily *Népszabadság*—four times a week, for two months.

The spark came from the observation that there is a contradiction in the fact of theatre enshrining lasting values and becoming outdated at the same time. In a sense no performance can ever be repeated. No matter how well it is rehearsed, how well each move is mastered, the nuances will differ with every evening. The work of the actors cannot be reproduced completely, intonations and gestures cannot be recorded mechanically. There is always a chance that something unexpected might happen. An actor's mood or the reaction of the audience, a laugh at an unexpected moment or a misplaced prop can affect the course of a performance. This is precisely what makes live performance captivating and the factors involved have to be considered as organic to the overall production. Directors will often make changes in the staging simply to avoid a production's becoming rigid. They realize the paradox behind the striving for a definite yet flexible production, welcoming its advantages as compared to canned genres, like film. But they suffer the tensions of constant uncertainty. It is a paradox that can never be resolved. Peter Brook once said that a production should really be performed only once. After all Shakespeare wrote his plays at the very venue they were performed, incorporating the company and the conditions he had to work with.

Halász has attempted to do something along that line. Like Shakespeare, who used contemporary history, chronicles, or Plutarch (just then translated by North) as his source, Halász turned to the daily papers. Initially, Shakespeare was not out to write his plays for posterity but to provide entertainment for the audience at hand; only later, after many performances, did he publish a written text. Halász and his company did not let it come to that; his productions were literally one-night stands. After the performance, they would select the newspaper article that was to be the theme of the next day's production, that very night they wrote their script, in the morning they rehearsed and the evening saw the premiere. And straight into the waste paper basket it went. Then came the next one.

It was not improvisation. Neither was it journalism. They did not stage news, and they did not make stories out of a day's event. Nor were they out to create sensation. What they looked for was the mythological element in the everyday. Someone's death inspired musing over the meaning of life. The unveiling of a statue offered an opportunity to probe into our historical awareness. The genres ranged from Beckett's absurd to polemic pieces, from cabaret to tragicomedy, from literary evenings to a melange. The result was a perfectly formed team where everyone was writer, director and actor at once; their interdependence gave the members of the team an unexpected ease and elegance. The theatre became a loose play, there was no need to worry about becoming hackneyed or routine. The audience often found itself wishing for the moment to linger, as Faust did. But the moment was already gone. What it left behind was theatre. ❧

"Thus at the starting line were the private businessmen of the previous decade and the young managers in the large state firms who yearned for independence. The first group had experience behind them, the major content of their intellectual luggage. They knew the ways and means of doing business in socialism, knew the main commandments: never argue with those in authority, never make political comments, keep a low profile to the extent of being practically invisible, offer personal services to authority and hope for personal favours in exchange. One must not think of large-scale corruption, of large amounts of money changing hands. Most of the time, it was sufficient to provide prompt or extra service, or special commodities of a better than usual quality. There were, of course, also other types of help, more easily expressed in figures..."

From: *The Business of Business. The New Entrepreneurs in the Making,* by György Marosán, p. 72.

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