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ON ARTICLES IN ***NHQ***

WITH A VIEW

TO PUBLICATION AS LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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John Lukacs

Concept and Symbol of Europe

Not only the concept but the very idea of "Europe" is much more recent than we are accustomed to think. Five hundred years ago, when men sailed from Europe to discover new continents, the words "Asia" and "Africa" were common usage ("America" and "Australia" would thereafter follow) but "Europe" was not current at all. The common word was "Christendom", and not only in Portugal or Spain or Rome. In 1496, King Henry VII of England gave a charter to John Cabot (Giovanni Caboto) to explore lands hitherto "unknown to all Christians"; in 1764 King George III commissioned John Byron to explore "lands hitherto unvisited by any European power." The adjective "European", referring to a particular inhabitant of a particular continent, appears in Western European languages only in the 17th century, in Eastern European languages much later. The eastern boundary of Europe (the Ural mountains and the Caucasus, that is "European" as against "Asian" Russia) was designated as late as 1833 by the German geographer Volger, in his *Handbuch der Geographie*. In sum, the very idea of Europe was a product of the Modern Age. And now that this entire era (in itself an incorrect term, since its limits—circa 1500–2000—are, for the first time, clearly visible to its historically-minded contemporaries) is passing, there are many reasons to keep this in mind.

Even more recent than the Modern Age's idea of Europe is the development of a European consciousness. With all their merits, its intellectual forerunners—Grotius, Sully, Kant, Voltaire, et al.—were utopian thinkers in that regard, without consequences to their ideas. The recognition that Europe is but a small peninsula of Asia, and overshadowed by the rise of great powers elsewhere in the world, begins to occur only in the early 20th century, in such differing thinkers as Paul Valéry and, perhaps, Oswald Spengler. After the Great War the desideratum for some kind of a united Europe began to spread. A symptom of this was Count Richard Coudenhove-Kalergi's "Pan-Europe" in 1923. This corresponded with the emerging ideas of such important thinkers as the Spaniards Madariaga

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and Unamuno, the German Count Hermann Keyserling, and others. It had, of course, support among thinkers in many other countries. During the 1920s sympathies for the Pan-European movement were expressed by important political personages such as Briand, Stresemann and Churchill. But much of this was washed away under the radical nationalisms of the 1930s, principally incarnated by Hitler. We must remember that to many nationalists—and not only in Germany—the adjective European and the denotation European were used pejoratively, being understood as cosmopolitan, anti-national, decadent forces. It was only after—and, to some extent, during—the Second World War that the depreciatory connotation of such terms fell into disuse.

During the Second World War the idea of a united Europe appeared on both of the warring sides. There are people even today who, recalling their comradeship in arms, mostly in the various formations of the *Waffen-SS,* fighting against the Russians, assert that in 1944 and 1945 they were defending "Europe" together; Hitler in 1945 is quoted in the *Bormann-Vermerke* as saying "I was Europe's last hope." Against this it should be pointed out that in 1940, when Hitler ruled most of Europe, in the ruling circles of the Third Reich there was no talk of "Europe" at all; that toward the end of the war propaganda for "a New Order in Europe" or Goebbels's "the West is in danger" was not more than a defensive ideological slogan, and that the "Europe" of the different National Socialists meant hardly anything more than their acceptance of a Europe under German domination, secured for themselves by German military might. On the other side—and this is perhaps insufficiently remembered by Mrs Thatcher—the capital of Free Europe was London (when the broadcasts of the BBC in every European language began with the first bar of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony.)

That the idea of a united Europe revived, stronger than before, after the war, is well-known. However, the purpose of this article is not a survey of that movement and the different steps taken towards the establishment of European institutions, from 1947 to 1992—except to point out some of their inherent contradictions, to which I shall come in a moment. Before that we must nevertheless state that in one very deep sense elements of being "European" existed even before that recognition had swum up to the surface of consciousness: in other words, that "European" is both newer and older than we think. This was expressed by Ortega y Gasset when he once wrote that *homo europeus* has not only been "democratic" and "liberal" but also "absolutist" and "feudal"—we may even add "Christian"—which he no longer is. "This does not mean that he does not in some way continue being all these things; he does so in the 'form of having been them.' " This is important to keep in mind. Perhaps especially now, when the danger for many non-European peoples (including Americans) resides in the historical condition that during the passing of the Modern Age they have fewer such inherent defenses than many Europeans have.

To this profound recognition we may add three, more obvious, conditions: that Europe is the only continent almost entirely within the temperate zone, the only continent without deserts; that it is the only continent inhabited almost entirely by the white race and its variants; and that the now emerging world civilization

(which is a unitary world civilization only on certain, though important, levels) is a civilization that had gone out from Europe to cover the world, and whose features—both good and bad—have survived the retreat of the European powers and of European colonization from the other continents.

The problem facing us is one that present and future historians of "Europe" may ignore only to their peril. This is the difference—and, more than often, the inconsistency—of the gradual establishment of the mostly economic and bureaucratic institutions of Europe on the one hand, and the ups and downs of the formations of a European consciousness of identity (inseparable from a true idea of Europe) during the last 45 years.

These two developments have not only been different but, at times, contradictory. The desire for some kind of Western European union or unity, especially among the young, was at its peak during the years immediately after the war. Thirty, forty, forty-five years later, and in view of 1992, institutions of a "united" Europe have been formed, step by step; yet it is appreciable that this youthful enthusiasm for a united Europe has considerably declined. It is telling that the desire—often inchoate and not truly thought out; but isn't that the condition of most desires?—to belong to "Europe" is most apparent among some of the intellectuals of the recently freed Eastern European peoples. The reason for this is simple. Those who are still outside, wish to belong; while those who are now inside those institutions are no longer much inspired by that fact. They take those institutions, that kind of "Europe", for granted. But there is more to that. The economic and bureaucratic (and the few, insufficiently political, because largely powerless) European institutions are not inspiring. They lack character and meaning. Whatever their material consequences, they fall short of a higher and historical ideal—and of a symbol, too, as we shall see.

The source of this shortcoming is that they represent but one form of an idea of Europe largely (though not completely) bereft of a European consciousness of identity. More precisely: they represent only one conception of internationalism. That is economic and progressive, materialist and abstract at the same time. For the very word "international" is a misnomer. It refers to institutions and to relationships connecting not nations but states. In reality, the usage of "international" and "supranational" mean inter-state and above-state. This is not merely a question of linguistic imprecision. It is insufficiently realistic. It is not only that while there may be something like an international language (a business language of American-English, now heavily infiltrated with computer terminology), there is no such thing as an international everyday or literary language (an international poem cannot exist: it would be an absurdity). On the mundane political level, too, it should be rather evident that International Socialism is largely a mirage; what we have is different variants of national socialisms. Both Marxists and capitalists have ignored this. Marx ignored the powerful attractions of nationalism in the age of the masses, and its appeal to the so-called working classes; he also confused the state with the nation, regarding them as synonymous, which they are not. The capitalists, believing

in the abstract myth of Economic Man, mistake the inter-state movements of capital as the supreme reality, deciding the everyday lives and desires of different peoples; they ignore that in the democratic age the economic transactions and the very material realities in human lives of men and women are dependent on what men and women believe and on what they think.

What has been (and what still may be) disastrous for Europe is not just the existence of different nations but the existence of nationalisms. For Europe the real alternative to nationalism is not some kind of a bureaucratic (and therefore largely materialist and abstract) internationalism, but a true internationalism that develops from the increasing knowledge and understanding—and, concequently, a growing cultural harmony—of its different nations. (The proper and desirable opposite of any xenophobia is not xenophilia but xenology.) Almost sixty years ago a debate between these two kinds of internationalism took place, on a high intellectual level. The French intellectual Julien Benda, in a celebrated book *(Le trahison des clercs)* denounced the perils latent within the existence of national cultures. He was answered by the great Dutch historian Johan Huizinga ("Meaning and purpose of the nations in a future Europe".) It is also telling that Huizinga foresaw Hitlerism, while Benda had not. On another level, Europeans ought to keep the Swiss, rather than the American, experience of union and expansion and internationalism in mind—even though it may be a sobering thought that it took more than 550 years from Wilhelm Tell until the Swiss achieved their own true national unity, their federal government and their own flag.

The flag is a symbol not of a nation but of a state. There is no (and for a long time there will be no) European Nation. But even though the existence of a nation precedes that of the existence of a state, the idea of some kind of a state (and, consequently, its symbol) will be there from the beginning. This is why the question of a European flag is more than an aesthetic consideration. It must be symbolic of something specific. That is why the present European flag is inadequate. It is inadequate because it hardly differs from the flag of NATO; it is inadequate, too, because its twelve stars arranged in a circle are uninspiring, and because they may have to be repositioned again and again when other European states become members. The flag of the European movement of the late 1940s, a green "E" on white, is more inspiring, more specific, and more apposite: among other things, because the essential feature in its design is a letter, a real, rather than an abstract, symbol. We may not go as far as Kierkegaard who said that numbers are the negation of truth, but the culture of Europe is inseparable from a culture of the letter—as indeed the Bible says: "In the beginning was the Word".

The idea of Europe does not merely require, it *depends* upon a defence of its culture; and this European culture is nothing else than the defence of a certain conception of human nature. This is why the composition of "Europe" must be inclusive as well as exclusive: inclusive of those nations whose political and civil structure presents that conception of human nature, and exclusive of those that do not—or do not yet present it.

For a long time we heard and read about the fatal conflict between the two German ideals, that of Goethe contrasted with that of Wagner, of "culture" versus "might", of the old Weimarian *Kleinstaaterei* versus a *Grossdeutsches Reich*. Perhaps that was the great German problem once. But history should teach us that human problems are seldom solved; instead, they are outgrown. Those once fatal alternatives no longer mean much. There is a united, homogeneous Germany now, and it is part of "Europe", in more than one way. But it is now Europe that must incarnate all of the virtues, without the vices, of *Kleinstaaterei*. We may now be at the threshold of a world historical development where, in the 21st century, the function of Europe within the world may—note that I write may, not will—resemble, on a larger scale, what Switzerland has been without Europe during much of the 20th century. We may be approaching an age perhaps devoid of great wars and of great revolutions (as Tocqueville had foreseen) but with plenty of new and grave problems, including new varieties of a migration of peoples, at a time when, perhaps even more than state or national power, culture, lifestyle and sobriety are not only aesthetic, intellectual, spiritual but tangible national assets. In part this is because—all superficial appearances to the contrary—at the end of the Modern Age we no longer live in a world of materialism, of an abstract (yes, abstract) philosophy that was workable in a time before ours. We live in a time of the increasing spiritualization of matter: of the increasing intrusion of mind into matter. Of this—of its promises and also of its dangers—Europe, and Germany at its centre, must be particularly aware, so too must there be an awareness of inherited qualities that they must not only recognize but represent.

COMING IN NHQ 125.

Democracy across the Negotiating Table

The Little Prince of All the Russians

Ádám Bodor: The Epidemic at Dobrin (short story)

Renouncing the Myths of Trianon

Light for the Economy?

Abacus and ICBM

Volume 33
Spring 1992

Count István Széchenyi in the early 1840s. Lithograph by Franz Eybl of his own oil painting. Picture Archives of the Hungarian National Museum.

Mihály Szegedy-Maszák

The Romantic Visionary as Statesman—István Széchenyi (1791–1860)

Lajos Kossuth, the leader of the Hungarian revolution of 1848, called him the greatest of all Hungarians. No higher tribute could be paid to a statesman by his chief political opponent.

The names of Széchenyi and Kossuth are often associated with two kinds of modernization. Kossuth wanted to give political independence to Hungary, Széchenyi's main goal was the prosperity and intellectual growth of his nation.

Born in 1791, Count István Széchenyi was brought up on the ideals of the eighteenth century. His father, Count Ferenc Széchényi (1754–1820), employed the most original thinker among the Hungarian Jacobins as secretary, made a plan for social reform in Hungary, and plotted against the Habsburgs after the death of Joseph II. To escape persecution, he became more cautious in his later life, but he never gave up the ideals of his youth. In 1802 he founded the National Library in Pest. The activity of his son can be viewed both as a reaction against, and as a continuation of, the paternal heritage, reminding us that Romanticism emerged as a manifestation of the internal crisis of the Enlightenment.

The young Széchenyi began as a handsome and brave Austrian officer who was highly decorated in the Napoleonic wars. He learned to speak about a dozen languages, travelled widely, became an avid reader of Montesquieu and Rousseau, and was eager to understand the traditions of countries as different as England and Turkey. His experience abroad persuaded him of the backwardness of his nation and he was soon converted to the cause of progress in his country. In 1825, in a speech in the Hungarian Upper House, he offered one year's income from his estates towards the expenses of establishing an Academy in Pest.

His double allegiance, the legacy of the Enlightenment and his affinity with Romanticism, is especially clear in *Hitel* (Credit, 1830), a book which Széchenyi published with the aim of furthering social reforms in his country. Some of its starting points, the attack on prejudice and the idea that government is based on a social contract, indicate its author's debt to the eighteenth century. Further-

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21 September 1791: Count István Széchenyi, the fifth child of Countess Júlia Festetics and Count Ferenc Széchényi, born in Vienna.

1801–1809: Studies with János Liebenberg (Lukányi), private tutor, and receives excellent marks at schools in Pest, Sopron and Szombathely.

April 1809: Together with his two elder brothers, joins the army fighting against Napoleon.

18 October 1813: One day before the battle of Leipzig, carries important despatches from Prince Schwarzenberg to Marshals Blücher and Bernadotte. Decorated for courage by both the Prussian king and the Russian emperor.

1815, 1816: Visits England, whose politics, economy and technological achievements he studies.

1818–1819: Starting from Italy, visits Greece, Turkey and Malta.

1821–1823: In the company of Baron Miklós Wesselényi, leader of the Liberal opposition, he travels in Transylvania, Germany, France, and England.

3 November 1825: In a speech to the Hungarian Upper House, offers one year's income of his estates towards the expenses of establishing a scholarly association ("Academy") in Pest.

1826–1828: Plays a major role in founding a club called "National Casino" for the upper class, with the purpose of initiating public discussions on current political and economic issues. At the same time, introduces horse racing in Hungary.

1830: Publication of his book *Hitel* (Credit). Believing that navigation of the Danube could improve commercial relations among European countries, visits the Balkans and commissions the engineer Pál Vásárhelyi to improve facilities in the defiles downstream from Belgrade.

more, the proposition that the criterion of social good is the happiness of the greatest number and a programme calling for a market economy, capitalist enterprise, and unlimited property rights could suggest an unqualified acceptance of Bentham's utilitarianism. The analogy is, however, only partial. Although there is a whole section in *Credit* which could be called almost a translation of various passages from Bentham's *The Book of Fallacies,* Széchenyi's work as a whole outlines a model of a desirable society which is different from Bentham's, his idea of a liberal democracy is in harmony with some of the most fundamental presuppositions of romanticism, those on an autonomous *Bildung* (education or culture) of the human personality.

Having called attention to the etymological structure of the Hungarian word for "credit"—*hitel*, based on *hit*, meaning "faith"—he used it not only in a literal, economic, but also in a metaphorical, moral sense. In his view, material growth was important only in so far as it made spiritual progress possible. Man was changeable and education a force able to produce a moral transformation and, as

1832: Arguing that the twin cities of Buda and Pest should be connected by a permanent bridge over the Danube, he negotiates with engineers in England towards realization of his plan.

1833: Because of censorship, *Stádium* (Course), containing his most radical programme for modernizing Hungary, is published not in Pest but in Leipzig.

1834: During his stay in England, has talks with statesmen, bankers, and engineers about the future of navigation on the Danube.

4 February 1836: Marries Countess Crescence Seilern, the widow of Count Károly Zichy.

1839: Construction of the first permanent bridge between Buda and Pest begins.

1841: Begins to criticize Lajos Kossuth in a series of books, articles, and public speeches.

1845–1847: Makes plans to connect the Adriatic with the Hungarian capital by a railway, and to start steam navigation on Lake Balaton and on the river Tisza.

23 March 1848: Becomes Minister of Public Transport in the revolutionary government.

7 September 1849: Is removed to an asylum at Döbling. Starts writing a series of works criticizing the Austrian government.

1859: His book *Ein Blick,* a satire on the Austrian government, published in London. His articles appear in *The Times*.

3 March 1860: His papers are seized by the Austrian police.
8 April 1860: Commits suicide.

such, constant changes in society. In accordance with the organic conception of *Bildung,* he called the spiritual independence of the individual the highest of values and argued that the distinguishing feature of a good society was its inclination to encourage individual self-knowledge and self-improvement.

In contrast to Bentham, Széchenyi had a deep historical sense and an awareness of different, sometimes even incompatible, local traditions. "For us black, and for the Chinese white is the colour of mourning," he wrote in *Credit,* reminding the reader that traditions were the manifestations of the historicity of human experience, and thus their validity was not a question of rationalistic reasoning. In view of the wide range of beliefs and mental habits, our obligation was unlimited tolerance towards others, "because only posterity can decide if you or I have got closer to the truth", he asserted in *Világ* (Light, 1831), the book that followed *Credit.*

Light was a response to the criticism formulated in *A Hitel című munka taglalatja* (The Analysis of "Credit", 1831), by Count József Dessewffy, a conservative aristocrat. Dessewffy compared the structure of Széchenyi's book to a

Twelve Laws

I. The advantages and disadvantages of credit shall affect everyone in equal measure.
Exposition. Everyone will be able to give as security his own property, i.e. his real or movable property. There shall be no difference whatsoever made between the parties to the agreement according to rank or standing, i.e., whether they are noblemen or commoners. Any issues between the signatories shall be judged and settled exclusively by a mercantile forum, or a civil court instituted for the purpose. These two credit courts—i.e., the mercantile forum and the civil court, there being no courts of appeal—will judge and decide any and every case according to the law explicated and interpreted literally in the severest manner.

II. The law of entailment *(jus aviticus)* shall be abolished once and for all.
Exposition. After the proclamation of this law, the seller or any of his progeny shall not, under any pretext whatsoever, be allowed to take back from the buyer or any of his heirs whatsoever property that he has sold outright with the knowledge of the parties concerned, nor shall he be allowed to annul the sale in perpetuity of the property in question.

III. Treasury claims arising out of death without progeny shall cease for ever.
Exposition. On the transference of any landed property, however, whether it be by sale, or by succession, or by last will and testament, or by gift, *etcetera,* one per cent of the legally assessed value of the property shall be paid to the treasury, and no-one shall come into his full property unless and until he has deposited the said *laudemium* to the government or show sufficient willingness to do so.

IV. Every person shall be able to possess real estate and goods and chattels in Hungary as their own property *(jus proprietatis).*
Exposition. Hungarian noblemen, however, shall possess free of charge every

labyrinth, called the reader's attention to gaps in its reasoning and criticized the author for confusing causes and consequences. Inconsistency is in fact a general characteristic of Széchenyi's romantic writing. *Light* is supposed to be a plan for a nation, yet the ultimate goal of human existence is defined in it as "inner silence", "the most unlimited form of spiritual independence", values that can belong to an individual rather than to a community.

There are at least two possible approaches to the achievement of Széchenyi. We can look on him as the founder of institutions of lasting value. His idea of constructing a permanent bridge between Pest and Buda testifies to his pragmatism–but also to the far-reaching ideological implications of his projects. On the one hand, he paved the way for the unity of the twin cities, on the other, he took the first step towards the abolition of feudalism, by introducing a toll to be paid in full by all users of the suspension bridge.

property except civil and colonial *(fundus),* whereas commoners shall pay, according to the quality of the land and its situation, a silver five, seven or ten crown piece, or shall exempt themselves of any further taxation by putting one twelfth of their lands under public tax.

V. Everyone shall be under the protection and authority of the law.
Exposition. The *partis primae nonus* as belonging necessarily to the dignity of every man shall be extended to the inhabitants of the entire country; and shall at the same time be purged of any abuses thereof. The procedures of the courts of justice shall be restricted to the shortest time possible.

VI. The commoners shall also elect county protectors for themselves.
Exposition. Every three years on the occasion of the re-election of officials in the county seat, the votes of each of the county villages will be sent to the County Hall; and thus the majority of the votes will appoint the *fiscalis* of the county.

VII. Everyone shall contribute to the domestic treasury and towards the expenses of the Diet.

VIII. The imposition of taxes on waters, roads and of internal revenues shall effect everyone equally and be put on the agenda of the Assembly.
Exposition. These shall be binding on everybody and those who under any pretext try to oppose them shall be arraigned as traitors and punished accordingly.

IX. Monopolies, guilds, trade restrictions and any other similar impediments to industry and competition shall be abolished in perpetuity.

X. Only such laws, decrees, orders, ordinances and sentences as are couched in the Hungarian language shall have mandatory power.

XI. All municipal legal authorities shall heed the Emperor's behest only through the mediation of the Governor General's Council.

XII. The sentencing as well as the deliberations of courts shall be held only in public.

from: *Stádium* (1831)

Yet it would be one-sided to define Széchenyi's importance in political or even historical terms. As a writer he was one of the major figures of Hungarian Romanticism. In his confessional writings he was a master of invention. He kept a few facts and spun a new story around them. He often made up a story to cover facts he could not accept.

The tension between the legacies of the eighteenth century and Romanticism is especially strong in *Light*. Széchenyi looks on prejudice as a *sine qua non* of interpretation, yet he also affirms the teleology of the Enlightenment and views prejudice as the enemy of progress. He is attracted by mysticism, but he advocates a pragmatic openness of mind. Characterized by a deep distrust of metaphysical systems and abstractions, he tends to consider the world as wide open, giving an instrumental definition of truth. For him beliefs are rules for action. Truth is not inherent in an idea but something that happens to it. The cult

of the autonomous individual is combined with historical relativism in his attitude. "I regard someone as having a respectable character only if he is ready to agree with A on certain occasions and with B on others. *He himself never changes:* sometimes A, sometimes B happens to share his opinion."

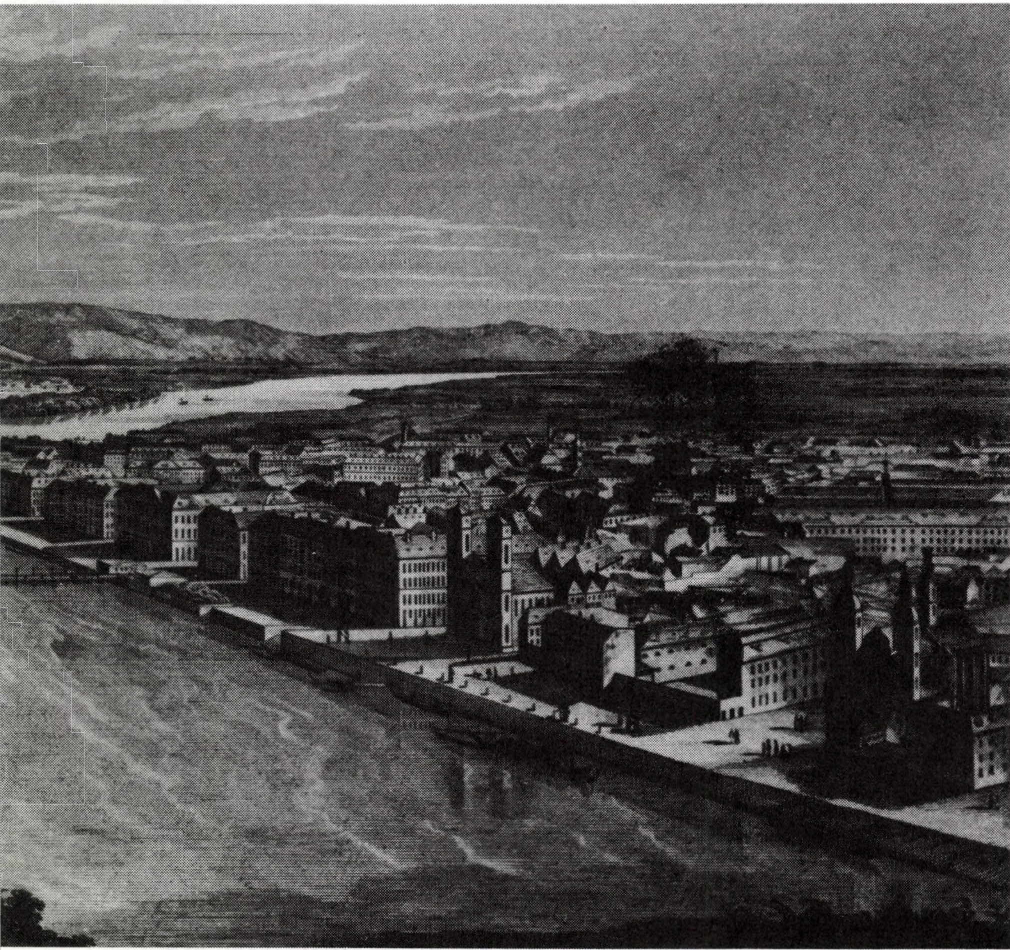
Industry, trade, and art were the chief components in his plan to modernize Hungary. The ultimate goals were happiness for the greatest possible number, intellectual superiority, and the development of the national character. Horse-racing, clubs, and theatre were meant to contribute to the creation of a public spirit. "People do not leave one country for another out of patriotism or because of some other emotion. Most tend to move to some place where they are happy

BÉLA SCHICHMAN

1832. A view of Buda and Pest, with the pontoon bridge linking them.

because of low prices, a wide range of entertainment, comforts, good society, etc. Because of this, all our ambition should be to make our twin cities attractive to foreigners and natives, scholars, merchants, artists, landowners, to those who love and hate society."

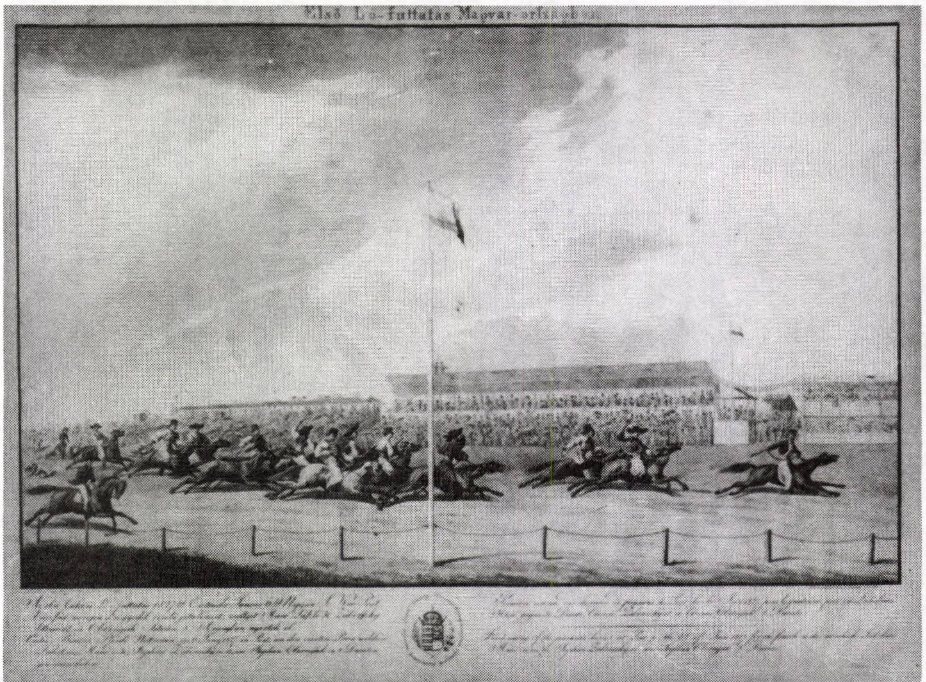
The observation that Hungarians are unable and unwilling to understand each other led Széchenyi not only to the creation of public institutions but also to severe criticism of his nation and country. "Who would stay in this country if he had talent to live in some other part of the world?" he asked, and he described Hungary as a country "in which people are silenced for years and even for generations, the most useful ideas are suppressed, and the most exciting achieve-



Engraved by Jakob Hyrtl . Picture Archives of the Hungarian National Museum.

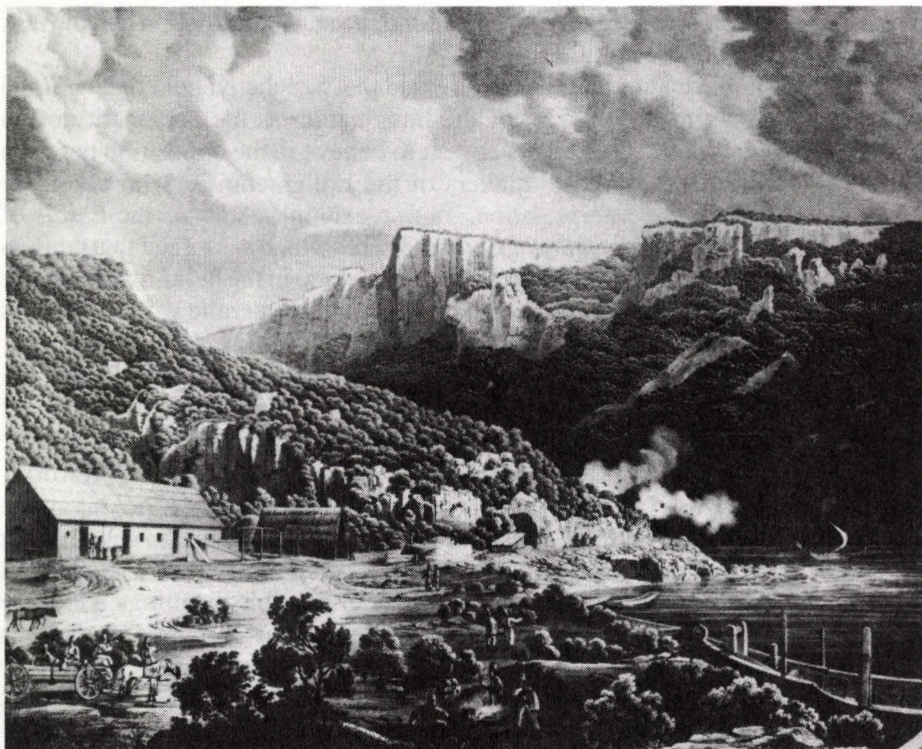
ments of scholarship are made inaccessible both to the intellect and to the soul. You must pretend to be ignorant and may speak only against your own conviction, in accordance with what others believe and with what others force you to believe."

This highly critical view of Hungary anticipated Széchenyi's most radical social programme, formulated in *Stádium* (Course), written in 1831 but published only in 1833 in Leipzig. Convinced that the Hungarian economy can improve only if the peasantry, the largest section of the population, could have property of their own, he aimed at the abolition of feudal privileges. In this respect his ideas were similar to those of Baron Miklós Wesselényi and Lajos Kossuth, the two leaders of the Hungarian Liberals. There was, however, one major issue on which Széchenyi disagreed with Kossuth. While the younger man insisted on Hungarian independence, the author of *Credit*, *Light* and *Course* looked upon the multi-ethnic Habsburg Monarchy, though far from ideal, as a necessary power which had the mission of defending Central Europe against German and Russian domination.



BÉLA SCHICHMAN

1827: The first race meeting in Pest. Coloured litograph by Antal Schmied after Johann Gottlieb Prestel (1804–1885) and Sándor Clarot (1796–1868). Picture Archives of the Hungarian National Museum.



BÉLA SCHICHMAN

1832: Charges exploding at the Iron Gates. Regulating the rivers Tisza and Danube was central to Széchenyi's proposals on transport. Lithograph by A. Munk. Picture Archives of the Hungarian National Museum.

Familiar with earlier sources from Montaigne to Madame de Stäel and from Montesquieu to the German Romantics, Széchenyi started as early as the 1810s to speculate about national character in his *journal intime,* written chiefly in German. Between 1831 and 1835 he devoted a book, *Hunnia,* to the subject. Echoing Schiller's distinction between the naive and the sentimental, he resorted to the familiar analogy between the phases of an individual's and those of a nation's life. Though admitting that a nation may lose certain factors of its identity during its evolution, he denied that nations would disappear in some distant future. Unlike some universalist thinkers of the Enlightenment, he did not envisage the disappearance of smaller ethnic or linguistic communities but advocated growing diversity as the necessary condition for human progress. The belief that progress was the result of education rather than of changing circumstances, implied for him that higher, that is, spiritual, values were tied up with the diversity of fully developed cultures. In *Hunnia* he went as far as adopting the Romantic view that language created meaning, and associated the diversity of customs and beliefs with that of languages. If there were no universal rules in language and culture, "the survival of even the smallest and most primitive

nation was of utmost importance" for mankind, because each nation had the task of developing a unique culture.

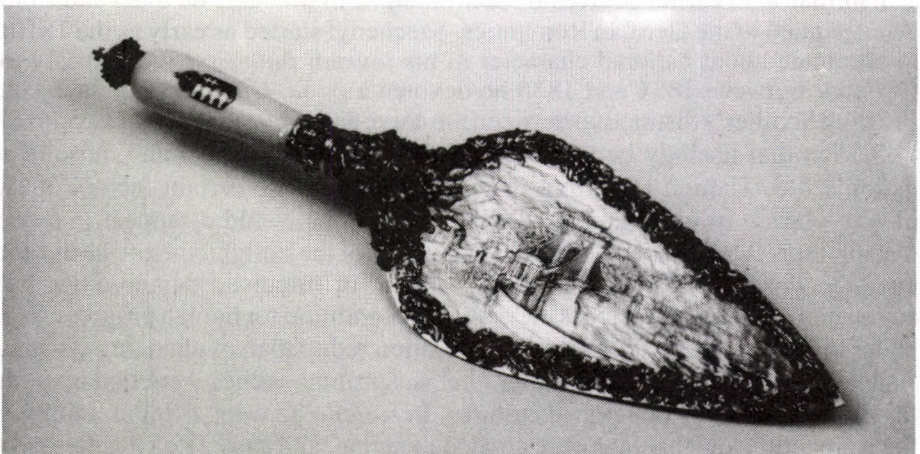
To avoid simplification, it must be stressed that Széchenyi held that national character was as much a product of the imagination as the personality of an individual. What is more, he did not appear to believe in the opposition between fact and fiction made by those thinkers of the Enlightenment who asked for objectivity in historical interpretation. Taking examples such as the *Essais* of Montaigne or the *Autobiography* of Benjamin Franklin, he assumed that confessions, the life stories of representative men, had a share in the building of nations. There are signs of such an awareness in his highly idiosyncratic works, chapters in the spiritual autobiography of a man divided against himself.

His diary, a *chef-d'oeuvre* of Hungarian Romanticism, not only reveals a character with a multiple identity, for whom institutions founded by himself became symbols of his own self, for whom dreams, hallucinations, fantastic visions were modes of self-knowledge; he also contradicts his published works. To take but a single example, *Hunnia,* a book which contains a violent attack upon the advocates of Latin as an international language, seems to suggest that its author had a language-oriented, traditionalist approach to culture and looked upon each vernacular as an inexhaustible array of possible meanings; yet there is an entry in his diary which shows a desire for a universal grammar that reminds us of the most ahistorical representatives of Enlightenment universalism.

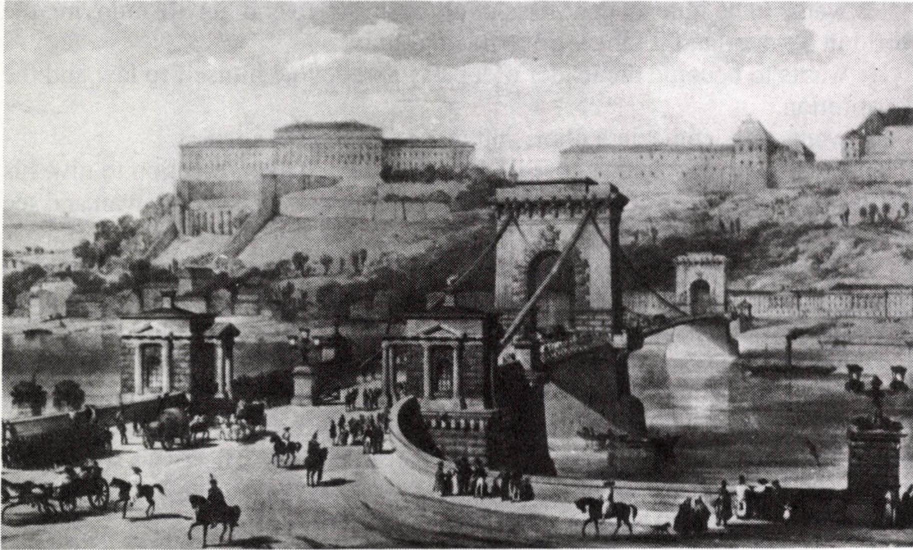
"The imperfections of language are the cause of the first harm, and the greatest waste of time in the world. (...)

"I feel that one day, a way will be found to write with numbers—so that in all concepts, the written word will forever stay mathematically the same." (18 June 1828.)

The reader of Széchenyi's works will often encounter alternative meanings, none of which are unambiguously apparent or real, and will be constantly invited to undermine his interpretations. This helps to explain the vast amount of secondary



1842: The trowel used for laying the foundation stone of the Chain Bridge, the first permanent bridge linking Buda and Pest. Hungarian National Museum.



The Chain Bridge. Coloured lithograph by C. Hawkins, based on the designs of William Tierney Clark. (1783–1852). Picture Archives of the Hungarian National Museum.

literature on Széchenyi; probably more has been written about him than on any other Hungarian statesman or writer, and the conclusions drawn are very different, in many cases quite contradictory.

Some of Széchenyi's self-contradictions could be explained by the fact that his whole political and cultural activity is marked by a Romantic notion of irony. In his case, as in that of Kierkegaard, the origin of individual consciousness was a passivity, an inner void. "What I really lack is to be clear in my mind *what I am to do"*, wrote Kierkegaard in 1835. A similar sense of aimlessness characterized the young Széchenyi twenty years earlier. "Do I yet have a path in life?" he asked in 1815. The starting point for him was existential freedom, the mood in the early parts of his diary was determined by that "infinitely exuberant freedom of subjectivity" which Kierkegaard identified with the source of Romantic irony. From 1814 until the early 20s, Széchenyi presented himself with living alternatives that demanded decisions. Viewing subjectivity as free, infinite, and negative, he wrote the following on 27 March 1821:

"Just what does Count S. want to be.

He wants to be a famous soldier, decorated with every medal, his picture in all the newspapers.

He wants to spend his life travelling, and end up an expatriate.

He wants to marry, be rid of business matters, and devote himself entirely to social life.

He wants to remain a bachelor, avoid society, and breed horses as a real recluse.

He wants to have a diplomatic career.

He wants to be independent, free of all business, to end his life enjoying the world in Switzerland, France, England, and Italy.

He wants to become the leader of a party and devote himself to law and the constitution.

He wants to become an author, and write verse and tragedies.

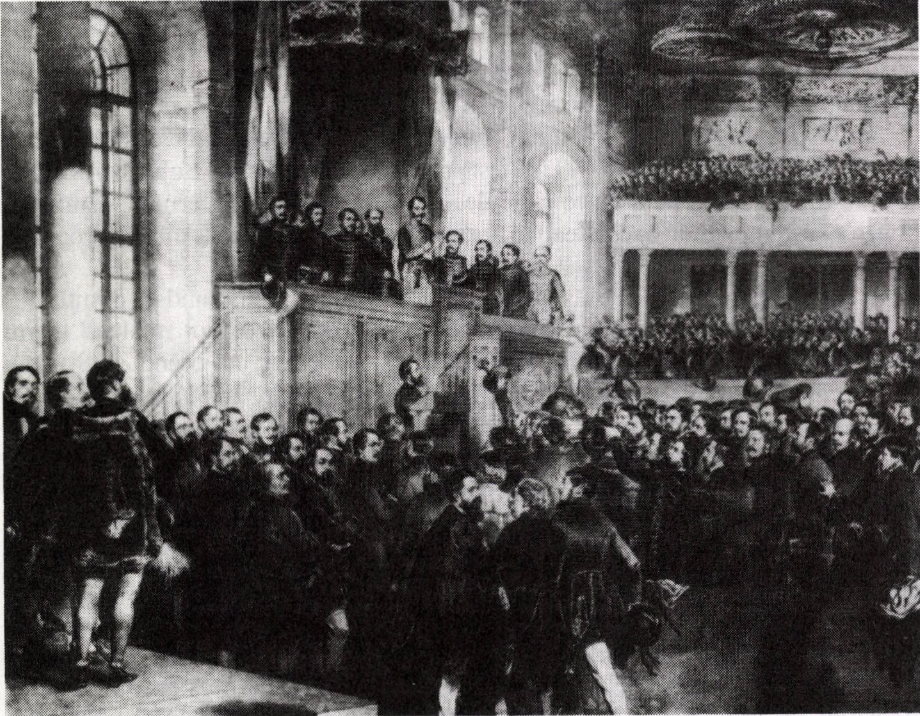
This lad is my age, and as he still does not know which direction to give his life, he is tackling each science which might affect it—we can only wait and see how far he will go in each field."

The general formations of a Romantic ironic consciousness make the world visions of Széchenyi and Kierkegaard comparable in a number of respects. Both had an aristocratic notion of personality, an organic view of *Bildung,* and a great contempt for philistine mediocrity. Neither knew the security of any established community. They understood themselves to be fundamentally different from others, and became authors through great inner suffering. They wished to defend an established order, yet always came into conflict with it. There was something similar even in their historical situations and the ways they reacted to them. Both belonged to small nations and criticized provinciality.

"I am the ultimate phase of the poetic temper on the way of becoming a sort of reformer." Kierkegaard's self-characterization can also be applied to his older Hungarian contemporary. Like Kierkegaard, he had literary ambitions—he composed verse in German and in Hungarian—but was also irritated by the passivity of artists. Consequently, he changed life into a trial, seeking self-inflicted punishments.

His whole life could be described in terms of an infinite polemic with conflicting forces, the narrow-minded conservatism of the Habsburg monarchy and Kossuth's struggle for the political independence of Hungary, cosmopolitanism and nationalism, economic radicalism and intellectual élitism, the ideas of the Enlightenment and Romanticism. Knowledge for him existed always in a condition of hypothetical and fragmented multiplicity. That is why most of his published books have a conspicuously non-systematic arrangement, and his personality found its most appropriate form of self-expression in a *journal intime,* which he started to keep in 1814 and went on writing until a few days before his death.

This work, published posthumously in seven volumes, is similar in its self-irony to the journals of certain German Romantics, or to the comparable works of Kierkegaard and Amiel. An ironic attitude to life does not allow for continuity. Széchenyi was fond of speaking of himself in the third person, and recorded fierce debates between his various selves. As he was constantly under the sway of changing moods, the most contrary feelings displaced each other in rapid succession in his diary. Obsessed with labyrinthine designs, he favoured long parentheses and dislocated structures. The fragmentariness of his text was further complicated by the use of various languages, he quoted conversations in the original (in most cases French, English, or Hungarian), his states of mind he expressed in German, and occasionally he quoted verse in Italian. All these factors contributed to the inconclusive character of his writing. Whenever he



BÉLA SCHICHMAN

1848: The opening of Parliament in the Vigadó of Pest on July 5th. Lithograph by József Borsos (1821–1883) and August Pettenkofen (1922–1889). Picture Archives of the Hungarian National Museum.

pursued an argument, it always tended towards self-cancellation, facetious and serious statements were inextricably woven together.

On many occassions he set himself the task of shocking his audience. He brought confusion in order to stimulate reflection. In the 1840s he started a campaign against Kossuth, at the risk of alienating all Liberals. While Kossuth's aim was to create bourgeois democracy with the help of the lesser nobility, Széchenyi regarded this class as provincial and sought to rely upon Vienna in his efforts to introduce reforms. When on November 27 1842 he opened a session of the Hungarian Academy, he harshly criticized the Hungarian Liberals. He reproached them for their nationalism and lack of tolerance for ethnic minorities.

Undeniably, he himself was a social reformer, but his sense of irony made it impossible for him to be the head of any political party, or join any organized opposition. Kierkegaard's characterization of the romantic ironist is again true of his growing isolation, "he stood ironically outside every relationship, and the law governing it was a perpetual attraction and revulsion. His connection with a particular individual was only momentary." This helps us to understand not only his reservations about the Liberal opposition but also his inconsistency towards the bourgeois revolution in 1848. His ironic stance, his lingering

between different attitudes can be observed in his account of his first impressions of the outbreak of the revolution.

"15th (March 1848). With my liver... disgraceful.—Today I see Hungary approaching total disintegration. I shall die soon.

"It all seems a bad dream to me! O holy Nemesis! A Pole and Kossuth set fire to the inflammable material!—The first perhaps an offspring of Sobiesky's... the second tortured and held up to ridicule.—Poor C [ount] Metternich.–Emperor Franz's system, which had to lead to absurdity... and the [words missing] caused your downfall!—

"what shall we do? We must support—Louis B[atthyány] and K[ossuth]!— All hate, antipathy, and ambi[tion] must be silent. I will not mislead them, whether to serve? That depends on my health.—Evening at Ferenc Z[ichy].—

"We have sold the country for two Louis!—Batthyány and Kossuth.—"

Eight days later Széchenyi became a member of the revolutionary government. By September, however, he lost his faith in a peaceful solution to the conflict between the Austrian Emperor and the Hungarians. Blaming himself for having started a political movement that would lead to violence and catastrophe, he moved to an asylum in Döbling, then a village close to Vienna. The curse of insanity acted as a shadow on Széchenyi's life. What makes his case different from other Romantics who showed mental instability is that, although he never recovered, he composed a series of important and lucid works in the last years of his life. His petitions reached Napoleon III and Lord Palmerston, his articles appeared in *The Times,* and his satirical pamphlet *Ein Blick* was published anonymously in London. In these works, as well as in the posthumously published *Nagy Magyar Szatíra* (A Great Hungarian Satire) he showed himself a highly imaginative pamphleteer. In January 1860 he began another work in German, *Disharmonie und Blindheit* (Discord and Blindness), in which he went as far as interpreting Kossuth's 1849 declaration of Hungarian independence as a desperate response to Austria's decision to modify the constitution of the Empire and grant no kind of autonomy to Hungary.

This work was left unfinished. By 1860 the Austrian police had realized the international consequences of Széchenyi's political activity. On March 3rd his papers were confiscated. Two weeks later he was informed by the authorities of their decision to take him to some other institution. "I cannot save myself," he wrote in his diary. On April 8th, early in the morning, he shot himself.

His suicide was taken by many as a final act of defiance. His confessional works are Romantic prose of European significance, and his activity as a whole can give constant inspiration to those whose aim is that the small nations of the troubled region of Central Europe should understand each other.

Hugh Maxton

In Piam Memoriam Ágnes Nemes Nagy (1922–1991)

From the Notebook of Akhenaton

And there is something I yet must do,
something to unwork agony.
Must form a god
to sit on high and, seeing, he shall see.

Desire no longer does.
I need a heaven of concrete.
Mount upon my shoulder, godling.
I'll help you up. Footsore at thy seat
rest on a few cherubim.
And I will clothe you, have no fear,
night shall not see you naked;
tie suffering round your neck
like a collar of blood come forth;
that shall be your nurturing hem:
I have loved your seed and growth—
Treasure as your granite heart this gem—
what I sought was the just truth.

Enough. Pronounce: it is good to be here,
and do your higher functions,
just sit and look forever through.
I can no longer postpone you.

My last meeting with Ágnes Nemes Nagy took place in the London Embassy of the Hungarian People's Republic late in 1988. A reading by several poets, including Nemes Nagy and István Vas, was to begin within a few minutes. The attendance was almost exclusively Hungarian, and the opportunity for a moment's conversation in English difficult to rely on. But somebody found an

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Hugh Maxton *is an Irish poet and essayist, translator of—besides Ágnes Nemes Nagy's—poems by Endre Ady and Sándor Weöres.*

empty stateroom, with a brown chandelier frowning onto the thick carpet. There we spoke briefly. She repeated her refusal of the previous summer. She was wearing black. The end was near, even then, so long ago.

The previous meeting had taken place at Gerbeaud's Café in Budapest in high summer. We had spoken several times on the telephone after my arrival from Ireland, and she had tacitly agreed to travel to Dublin the following year. Assurances had been offered. That a native Hungarian would be on hand throughout her stay. (Ágnes had an exaggerated notion of her deficiency in English.) That we would read together, original and translation in turn. (At that moment I was even uncertain whether a self-selecting committee at home would accept my proposal—yet to be made formally—of her name.) That she would be escorted everywhere if necessary. Even on the plane from London. If she would only agree to travel.

She was very ill, but spoke only of trouble with her teeth.

Then another telephone call summoned me to Gerbeaud's. Uneasy in the role of coercive would-be host, I knew that this was a change of mind, because Ádám Nádasdy was invited also to act as mediator. We sat inside away from the sun. Coffee for three was ordered, and duly arrived. Without the familiar drumlet of milk on the saucer. Ágnes insisted on commencing the business of paying, to prevent either Nádasdy or myself from doing so. Or perhaps, she did so simply to open the following conversation.

"No milk, nowadays?"

"No, madam."

"When Kádár had everything under control, we got milk with our coffee."

"Would you care to order milk in addition to your coffee, madam?"

"Certainly not, thank you. We have done without, before this; and we'll do without again."

This, or something close to it, was followed by the careful choice of notes, coins, and complaints about rising prices. The direction of the subsequent conversation was equally brisk and no-nonsense like, with glints of black humour and palpable kindness. It was quite impossible for her to travel. It had been foolish to say otherwise, but on the phone and in English... She appealed to Nádasdy who gave a good imitation of a man coming to the rescue. I had to understand that her English was no good, that it was quite impossible for her to travel, it had been foolish to say otherwise, but on the phone and in English...

The grounds upon which the invitation to Dublin had been offered were of course our collaboration on the translations brought together in *Between: Selected Poems of Ágnes Nemes Nagy* (1988). This project had begun years earlier in Mária Körössy's office in the Hungarian PEN Club, with the most meticulous word by word discussions of every line and every rhyme. Some of the resulting translations appeared in the *PEN Bulletin*. The practice of the Club at the time was to introduce a novice translator to a broad cross-section of contemporary Hungarian writing, but I had already singled out Nemes Nagy's work as uncannily familiar. Here was a sensibility haunted by beliefs necessarily,

yet painfully, relinquished. We in Ireland had experienced nothing commensurable to the upheavals of twentieth-century Hungary. Yet there was something immediately recognizable in the anguish of her intellectuality, the warmth of her distrust of emotion, the self-abnegation which could be mistaken for throw-away impatience with mere technical facility.

Helpful comments about the translations arrived from every side, about attitudes towards rhyme, about formal structure. I recall two particular conversations. One involved Ferenc Takács, whom I obliged to rack his unclear recollection of the Bible. I *knew* that the Akhenaton poems were finely tuned to almost inaudible echoes of the Old Testament prophets. But I only knew this on the Anglophone side of the gulf which is translation. The conversation was sustained through several days, and deep into several evenings. From discussions generally on the art of allusion, we progressed to the influence of Thomas Mann on Hungarian culture and on Nemes Nagy specifically. *Joseph and his Brothers* took us close to what we needed. Yet when we reached the excluded text, there was a frightening sense of breaking into a secret, violating a cell, opening a seal on the past:

Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then said I, Here am I; send me.

And he said, Go, and tell this people, Hear ye indeed, but understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive not.

Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert, and be healed.

Then said I, Lord, how long? And he answered, Until the cities be wasted without inhabitant, and the houses without man, and the land be utterly desolate.

And the Lord have removed men far away, and there be a great forsaking in the midst of the land.

But yet in it shall be a tenth, and it shall return, and shall be eaten: as a teil tree, and as an oak, whose substance is in them, when they cast their leaves: so the holy seed shall be the substance thereof. (Isaiah, 6, 8-13.)

There are traceable philological links between this passage and the fourth line of "From the Notebook of Akhenaton"—"seeing, he shall see"— quoted above. In addition, now that one had reached this abjured and maintained fidelity, the trees of Isaiah's prophecy may bear a resemblance to the many trees of Nemes Nagy's poetry. Just as a characteristic irony runs through the sequence of poems named after the heretic pharaoh, so too irony tempers the discovery of these biblical allusions or vestiges. It is absolutely the case that Nemes Nagy wrote without regard to a confessional dimension, either personal or "religious". The protestantism of her grandfather's generation lay wholly behind her, detached as she was detached, devastated as her generation had been devastated. As she quickly answered in response to a direct question, she was not a religious poet *in the believing sense*.

But the reverberation of Isaiah is true to the calamitous circumstances of her life—the war and German occupation, Stalinism and all the varieties of "post-

fascism" known to Hungarians. In not believing, she believed: she believed in not believing. The chiasmus, with its one ponderous clause and its one trivial, mimics a debt doubled in settlement. She knew no god, and of that god she might say (with the Anglican liturgy) that "his service is perfect freedom". It was a faith, hers, which my own wretched memory had resurrected, whereas its essence was unknownness.

The second conversation was more concentrated, more unrelieved and so more enlightening. The place was a restaurant on the corner of Heroes' Square and Népköztársaság útja—People's Republic Street, I retain the old name for a moment longer. Here, the then very young poet Júlia Lázár spent a long afternoon elucidating the formal structure of a poem by Nemes Nagy to which I had been giving an insufficient attention. The poem was "Eszmélet" (Consciousness), and the matters at issue included allusions to Attila József and Dante, the tonalities of the English words "land", "country" etc., and the possibilities (hazardous) of Tennyson and/or Robert Lowell offering some analogies for the resolution of particular rhythmic difficulties in the translation of the poem's existence as a form.

Here, in the otherwise deserted restaurant, one encountered a powerful sense of Nemes Nagy as a public presence. People knew her, young people knew. That I should know her accurately, without error, was a vitally important aspect of the maintenance of a public truthfulness. This went far beyond professional questions about translating: it was an aspect of the poet herself. Though the afternoon was exceptional for the level at which this instruction took place, I encountered the same attitude scores of times. One woman, who I met only once, told me she had once shared a flat with Nemes Nagy, long ago, in difficult circumstances. It was told with pride.

Such conversations altered oneself disturbingly, because they revealed of Nemes Nagy a unique, audacious, even imperious commitment to both an ironic mode of denial and a style of aesthetic truthfulness.

In published commentary, and more recently in conversation, she said that the Second World War was the most important event of her life. The point should be confirmed here and now lest the passage of time lead to a gross distortion of "Akhenaton" and the work which moves around that sequence. For readers casually acquainted with Hungary's history, the tanks of "The Night of Akhenaton" inevitably recall the Soviet tanks of 1956. That, lamentably, is the most enduring image which the country has registered in the world. I was left in no doubt, however, on that question. If there is an allegorical dimension to the Akhenaton poems, then the elements so related are pharaonic Egypt and fascist Europe. Within these, the reformer-king Akhenaton with his short-lived dream of an ethically stable monotheism must inevitably be read as a highly ironized self-portrait of the contemporary poet—articulate, farseeing, doomed, arrogant. The voice we discern in the opening extract or fragment "From the Notebook of Akhenaton" certainly possesses some qualities of an operatic performance—a duet in which a fiat from the ancient world is translated into the bureaucratic argot

of today, whereby the fidelity/fragility of the modern, disenfranchised poet is suddenly articulated—"what I have sought is the just truth."

I never had the temerity to suggest to Ágnes Nemes Nagy that this line somehow picks up on a philosophical tradition which stretches from Hegel to György Lukács. My timidity was partly based upon a very incomplete appreciation of the ironic orchestration of *all* those lines in "Akhenaton", not just the ones where a biblical or philosophical or literary allusion had been identified. But it was also firmly based on my experience of discussing recent Hungarian politics with her. In the early stages of Corvina Books's planning of *Between,* I went to visit Nemes Nagy in her flat near Déli Railway Station and the Vérmező, Budapest landmarks which recur in the poetry. I arrived alone in the late afternoon: we had drinks and coffee: none of the friends whom I usually relied on as interpreter was present. Balázs Lengyel was present but he tended to sit somewhat to one side of the conversation.

Ágnes wanted to know what it really was that had brought me into touch with Hungarian poetry. It could not—credibly—be poetry, *in a century like this!* I summarized as best I could the disparate incidents and influences which had resulted in my first going to Hungary—including recollection of newspaper photographs in 1956 (I was nine) of those Soviet tanks, and including also the chance discovery of Miklós Vajda's anthology of post-war Hungarian poetry.

But I went too far. I mentioned an interest I had as a literary historian in the work of György Lukács. This was received with all the evidence of a severely tested patience. Curiosity drove me onwards, and I told her that I had done research in the Lukács Archivum in Budapest, checking up on what modernist works of literature Lukács had actually read in English. Here she exhaled, and requested some details of the archives. There was this and that, this in German, that in English. And very, very little poetry, in any language. He wrote, I added unnecessarily, very little about poetry. Nemes Nagy responded, "A bald man selling hair-restorer."

In a sense the conversation got worse, or got better, depending on how you judge painful truthfulness. The name of József Révai came up—God knows how, because I knew nothing of the man—and this allowed the severely tested patience to relax, in imitation of a collapse. "Murderers, both of them." Nor was there to be the slightest suggestion that this was metaphor or hyperbole. "Murderers, both Lukács and Révai."

Of other occasions when either Zsófia Bán or Ágnes Enyedi came to meet Nemes Nagy with me, I recall nothing so frank. It was not caution or diplomacy before another Hungarian which conditioned her observations. Nor was it her genuine concern to meet new younger acquaintances and to establish a genuine reciprocity in conversation. Truth had its limited audience: I was the one to be illuminated: there was no need for a wider demonstrativeness on this point. At the reading in the London embassy, when I last saw her, a ferocious yet playful determination not to be taken in by the new mood in politics and cultural affairs informed her every movement. She rounded ironically on István Vas,

then turned (with what might have been thought the same gesture) on younger participants. It was all monoglot Magyar: perhaps only Sheryl Sutton and I were at a loss. She almost didn't read at the reading; but then contributed one of the late prose poems, contributed it as if in doing so she was rid of it. The leaves were falling from one of Isaiah's trees. There was even then an air of one disposing of her last effects, standing in black by her own monument.

As a translator of Ágnes Nemes Nagy, I have said before that I believe her central preoccupation was with the tragedy of survival. In "The Sleeping Form", the figure addressed is that of lover, muse and dead companion. More essentially, it is an eternally lost vision of form as such. The only confessional note I detected in a dozen conversations, related to the death of Borbála Porgesz, a close friend who died in a Nazi camp. The confession lay in the brute fact of another's, of all others', survival. If the Second World War was the most important event in Nemes Nagy's life, then the Kádárist period may be taken also as the existential necessity of her survival as a poet. It was, for a while, the historical destiny of that régime to "make the heart of this people fat". Not a contemptible destiny if, even as a remote consequence, a truer conversion shall occur, "as a teil tree and as an oak." She was so very far from being a laureate that the term withers under her gaze. Yet she indulged in no oppositional histrionics, cultivated no sly *modus vivendi*. Unmoved by the special pleadings of a Lukács, she did not lack her own personal aura of historical paradox. Talk of the dialectic nauseated her, yet she lived in some such pattern, believing and denying, writing and concealing.

There are celestial moments in the poetry, each of them tuned to a delicate and effective discordance. The end of "Terraced Landscape" offers one example. So does "Above the Object", the last poem in the Akhenaton sequence. Heaven is all very well for the single-minded. Once Ágnes leaned towards me in the PEN Club office to point out on the page how she had here conceded to literary fashion a modicum of scientific vocabulary, but how also she had deliberately got the number of chemical elements wrong. It is on the brow of each of these concessions and deceptions that we read (as however we may) a complementary declaration of faith.

Above the Object

For there is light above every object.
Like polar circles, the shining trees are decked.
Comes one by one a glowing skybound regiment,
in caps of light, the ninety-two elements,
bearing on each brow the image of each mode—
I believe in the resurrection of the body.

Dublin, October 1991.

Ágnes Nemes Nagy

Two Poems

Translated by Hugh Maxton

But to Watch

De nézni

But to watch, he said, watch as
soon as the drapes of smoke allow, through the briefest gap
in the trice between the smoke, the salt, the lye, the attacks
watch, you know, as you'd watch the cubest table
its surface and side seen at once

And act, you know, act; I unceasingly act,
my body acts out past and pulse;
and think, you know, my head's so odd
                    and uncompletable
I can't say why I love everything
                    spheroidal
eyeballs & skulls & globes, all such
                    bounded boundless things
though these be shredded spheres, coconuts
hairy with dying and claggy fibres

And watch from above, from below, from every angle
feel the object with some of my eyes
carve out the contours with them, wash and mangle
them as they open occlude open in an unsteady
                    surge
and the many slow glances quitting the objects
gigantic stares of dens in motionless
hidden stones and lakes
darting forth in splintered signals of light

These two poems are reprinted, by permission, from Between. Selected Poems of Ágnes Nemes Nagy. Translated by Hugh Maxton. *Corvina, Budapest—Dedalus, Dublin. 1988.*

Though nothing avails, he said, not these dispersed
and unnumberable eyes
though nothing avails, not the long rustling eyelashes
of the biosphere about me
the scabrous branches of the trees, the cedars,
engravements of the revolving seasons
night and day
rising and falling
above me
though nothing avails, but to watch, to watch

To watch, you know,
as a scar on a tree, he said, watches

The Sleeping Form

Az alvóhoz

Unknown and naked,
you rise from ash.
You are in the seventh room,
not dead, only sleeping.

Only sleeping, bed of whittles,
between the ashen walls,
the wrecked curtain gives the silence
huge motionless wings.

I do not move.
Only, like slowly tumbling sheaves,
only your visions in their courses
move, like black stars.

Wake, wake up. Uncover that shoulder.
Wounded or not. I will find you.
Talk that I may talk till death.
Speak, speak finally wherever
in your mute dream.

Adél Kálnay

This Side of the Curtain and Beyond

(Short story)

When my great grandmother, Dédi, had become so small that anyone coming into the room from the door beside the stove would have thought the room was empty because she couldn't be seen when when sitting in her favourite armchair, grandmother bent over her, stroked her head and shouted into her ear: You're economizing even now, mama, but don't you do it at our expense, or else! Dédi giggled like a child and allowed the crumbs to be swept from her lap and her mouth and hands to be wiped with a damp cloth. She was still chuckling when grandmother closed the windows, leaving only a crack open to the outside world, and took my hand to lead me out of the room. I followed her: I wouldn't have dared resist her firm grasp, but I did look back from the door. The narrow shaft of light cut the room in two; the dust particles playing in the light recalled the curtain of spray of a waterfall, and from behind it could be heard gradually fading laughter. This picture comes back to me very often: behind a curtain woven of light and dust is my great grandmother, and I can't see her, I just know she is there and will be always there, behind this and other curtains like it.

She'll die in her sleep, said my grandmother later at lunch, and I lowered my eyes in horror, ashamed to be witness to such a conversation. I considered death as something dreadful, and certainly not to be discussed between the soup and the stuffed cabbage. Never again could I be sent into that room on my own. From then on if anyone went in there I started to count ten, and I could almost hear the stifled cry, Oh dear, poor mama! I heard it exactly as it was to sound five years later, and I reckoned that if nothing happened by the time I reached ten, then she was still alive. But what was the good of this comfort, after all, the cry had been born, and from that day on it hovered in the room biding its time to come, waiting to be made audible. No one could understand what had happened to me. I don't know what's become of this child, said my grandmother, not long ago you couldn't drag her away from Dédi's side, and now...! She threw her arms wide and shrugged in annoyance. She was a hard woman, she liked to know and understand everything, she hated being left out of anything. It's no use asking her, she added, turning to me with an accusing look, and she was right, it was no use asking me because I didn't know the answer. Mother drew me onto her lap, she smoothed the hair off my forehead, held my chin between her two fingers and gently raised my head. When our eyes at last met she asked me if perhaps I was frightened of Dédi. I shook my head violently, and repeated again and again: no, no, no. And I really wasn't afraid of her; I was afraid of death, but that wasn't something I could say. Years later when we spoke about this, my grandmother just smiled, and shook her

head in disbelief: she could never get used to having such an idealistic grandchild, who didn't think as she did. I can't understand you at all, she said; we come into this life and no one is sorry about that, yet we're plagued by a whole series of tribulations and, lo, everyone is happy. When we depart, on the other hand, free at last from our sufferings, does one have to weep and wail? What kind of thinking is that? I'll tell you—she added now in an angry tone—it's a rotten, selfish kind of thinking! She let out a breath sharply in her rage and fanned herself briskly. I didn't know whether it was the heat or the selfish attitude she was shooing away. I really didn't mean to annoy her, I didn't understand what had got her so worked up. I looked at her huge figure, her fine, proud bearing. Your grandmother's an arrogant woman, people always used to say of her, but I didn't see her like that, I saw her rather as strong and brave, and I remembered how severely she had been criticized at her son's funeral, how people had whispered behind her back even months later. When she got to hear about it her expression darkened, and then she shrugged it off. Fools, that was her only word for those who had called her heartless and insensitive, and perhaps she spoke to them even less than before. I never thought she was heartless. I understood very clearly what she had said on the day of the funeral before we set out. Everyone expects me to blubber, so I must take a hold on myself because they'd never forget it if I would let slip that I'm glad. I'm glad that my long-suffering son is in a good place now, and what's good for him is good for me too. So I'll try to accompany him with a sorrowful face. I understood, but I couldn't accept it. Yes, people are selfish, if nothing else let there be an emotional advantage from another's existence, and if I mourn him, I'm mourning my loss. How strong a faith do I need to be able to see death as my grandmother? I would like to have questioned her further, but she wouldn't be drawn. Life is life, death is death, she said, and refused to talk any more. We drank our tea in silence. I stole glances at her face: she was gazing over my head somewhere into the distance, beyond the walls, the town, beyond the whole world. So I too was able to look with unseeing eyes beyond the curtain of dust and light in search of my great grandmother.

Finally we both stood up. Grandmother hugged me with ceremony; time hadn't managed to wither her huge stature. Come again, come more often, she urged, but I knew that she got on very well on her own, and that she was inviting me more for my sake than for hers. I looked back from the street: she was already back to work, heading for the garden; it was hard to believe we'd only just taken leave of each other. I saw on her whole being that she had already forgotten me, I saw in her gait and felt in the air all around her that I do not exist, that there is no one, just her and what she has to get done at that moment. I had no idea where she'd inherited the great strength and resolution with which she led her life. I didn't even know a man tougher than she was; true, living men were few and far between in our family, except in the minor roles. Extras, was how one of my aunts, an actress, described them, and she changed husbands every year.

She was carrying a heavy basket of some sort as far as I could see, probably a lot heavier than my great grandmother used to be in the old days, bacause she was stooping slightly and her walk was slower. She always carried my great

grandmother as if she were a light cushion or an armful of sweet-smelling hay. Effortlessly and jokingly; people carry small children the way she carried her mother. She never let anyone else do it for her; several times a day for many years she lifted her, carried her, sat her down, propped her up and straightened her, and never once did the tiniest sigh or complaint ever pass her lips. Others would have collapsed under the strain by now, my mother whispered to my aunt. I don't know why she does it. We're a big family, and any of us would gladly take over from her, but no. I overheard them, and I thought to myself, how stupid they were: it must be because she loves her so much. One day when we set out together to get cottage cheese and sour cream from the other side of the hill, I put the question to her: the reason you don't let anyone else carry Dédi is because you love her the best, isn't it? She looked at me as if she'd just realized that an elf or a dwarf was trotting along beside her in place of her grandchild, then she took a deep breath. I saw that she had a lot to say, and I also saw that she had second thoughts about it, and all she said was: It's my duty, and, with an assertive gesture, she put a stop to the thoughts welling up inside me too.

We continued without speaking. That sentence came with us down the path, sometimes getting in front of us, sometimes lagging behind, but it never faded, on the contrary, it became stronger. I didn't like that sentence, I didn't know what to do with it, it radiated cold, dry, hard winter cold which made me shiver, despite the pleasant early summer weather. My view on duty in general was that it was a boring, unnecessary thing, which one had to get over with as soon as possible, like a bitter medicine. From then on I watched my grandmother closely; I would like to have seen her as I saw her before our woodland conversation, but that sentence came all the way home with us and made a home in Dédi's room. I was astonished to see that although she really did take care of everything properly and very thoroughly, answering and asking questions even, the only thing was she didn't seem to be paying attention, or at least only partly; nothing escaped her notice, yet her attention was somewhere far away as well, and that seemed to be more important. I looked at my strong grandmother and I knew nothing about the source of her strength, nothing about her struggles and her ups and downs; I only got to know about all those things much later, when she too had gone beyond the curtain of light and dust along with the others, all those who had been chosen together for a drama lasting seventy to eighty years. On three occasions though I did manage to glimpse moments which bore out my suspicion that love was smouldering there in my grandmother's heart, however much she denied it. One of these I've already mentioned. You're economizing even now, mama, and although I had no idea what she was referring to, the tone, the caress and Dédi's rewarding laughter suggested a harmony which could only exist between the two of them, and drew a mysterious warm cover around them which excluded anyone else.

The next proof came on a cold winter afternoon. The setting sun had painted the twilight red; I was standing by the stove, putting my hands against the hot tiles now and again. Outside, the snow was crunching under someone's footsteps. Not long ago I too had been treading on the crunching snow, I had slipped and fallen

on my knees in my efforts to cope with the heavy iron sleigh. Dédi's room was unusually quiet. I was suddenly aware of how long I'd been listening to that great stillness. So I stole over to the door and peeped in through the finely cut glass. Dédi was asleep with her head on one side; she'd left her mouth open just wide enough to form a tiny word, her hands were clasped in her lap. My grandmother was sitting to the right of her, the book from which she used to read to her each day was still in her hands. Every time she got to the end of it she had to start again, because Dédi couldn't listen to any other story right through. She put down the book slowly, and went over to the general cupboard. I knew why she was going there: after Christmas every year we used to collect up the pine needles which had dropped from the tree and put them in a sack. She got out a good handful of them and took it to the stove. Dédi didn't have a tile stove in her room, instead she had a nice little "Bosnian" on short legs; its round plate glowed red from the fire, the open crack of the little air vent in its door allowed the hectic flames to flash out. I was very fond of that stove, it almost seemed to be alive; the fire crackled inside it; through its tiny slits the fire could send its romping flares of light into the room and they flickered on the walls and furniture, they slipped away only to come out again from the corners and under the bed.

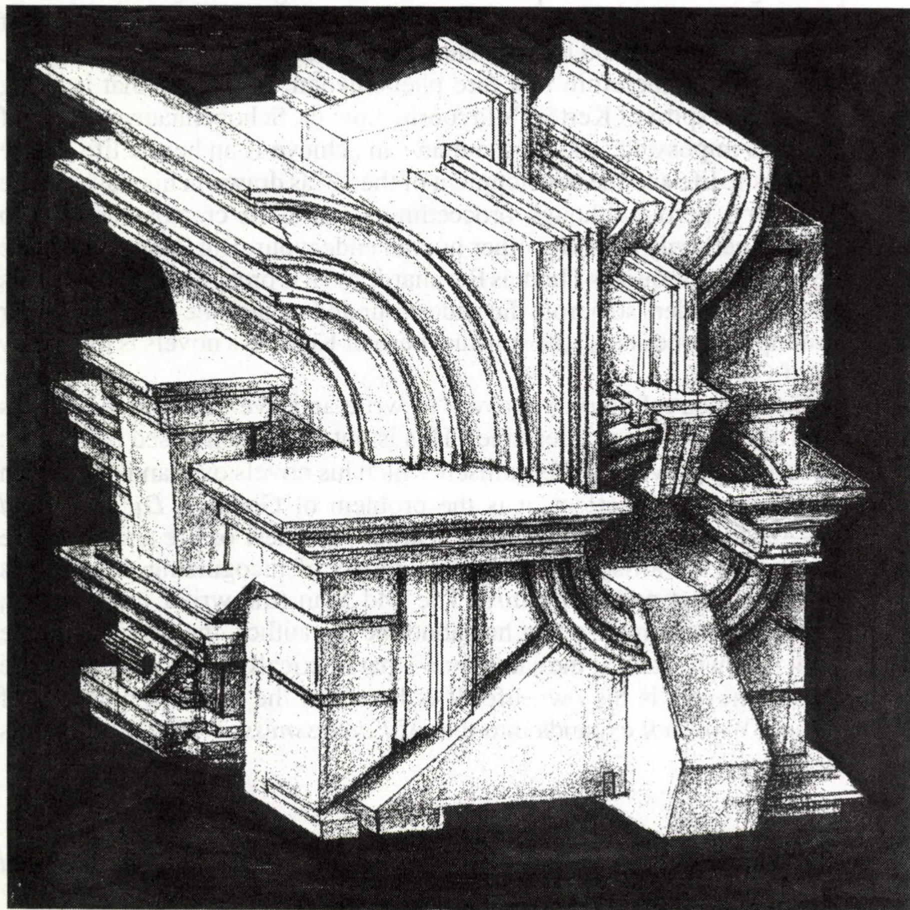
Grandmother scattered the needles over the burning hot round plate; they leaped up crackling and spinning, then fell, catching fire in a moment. Soon a pleasant smell of resin seeped out under the door; I took a deep breath of it, and I was just getting fed up with standing on tiptoe when, to my great astonishment, grandmother went over to the armchair. She watched the sleeping old woman for a while, then all of a sudden she knelt down, took hold of the clasped hands and bent her head over them.

I don't know how much time elapsed like this. I looked at them and didn't think of anything. The cheeky lights even ventured onto my grandmother's broad back; I stared at them until all the joints in my body grew numb with stretching.

The third occasion was not long before the last cry meant for Dédi was heard. I remember the trees were flowering, and everything was full of the smell of green. Dédi was sitting, well wrapped up, watching her daughter bending down not far away. Grandmother was drilling little holes for plants; she stood with her legs wide apart, working swiftly. I was crouching beside her, handing her the little green leaves from a small basket and watching enthralled at how quickly the young plants were put in their places. All at once Dédi spoke. Her voice sounded as if it was borne by the wind from far away: sometimes it trailed away, then grew louder again. I dreamt about your father, she said, and it was such a strange dream. I woke up, and ever since I've been wondering whether...well, whether I did what I did well, and I'm afraid, yes, afraid I'll be called to account for something, you know what I mean. She stopped and blinked in our direction. Without stopping what she was doing grandmother answered her in a loud voice, a bit too loud, but perhaps she wanted to be sure Dédi would hear it. You did everything well, mama, everything, understand! Just don't worry about it, you'll see anyway later on! There's nothing you could be called to account for. You, if anyone, mama, really did everything you could! By the end she was almost shouting, and

I could clearly see how charged with emotion she was. For a while there was silence, then I heard Dédi's windswept voice. You were a very good daughter to me, very good, you know that. Then my grandmother straightened up at last, letting her hands drop to her sides, and she said almost to herself: thank you, mama, and I saw that there were tears in her eyes. Dédi's face was shining with tears too. I looked at them and I felt once again that I was left out of something in which only they had a part, that I had been left out of their lives and I would have given anything to be as old as they were. I never considered what old age would bring, it just hurt, very badly, to think what youth deprived me of. Little crumbs of earth fell from my grandmother's hands, some of them onto the weak little plants. When a few weeks later my grandmother's earth-strewn hand swung over the open grave and the unmistakable noise beat an echo in my heart, I remembered those little plants, and there at last I managed to feel so sorry for them that I began to cry, and I thought I would never stop.

Translated by Elizabeth Szász



Zoltán András Bán

A Trilogy of Fatelessness

Sorstalanság (Fatelessness) (1975), *A kudarc* (Failure) (1988), *Kaddis a meg nem született gyermekért* (Kaddish for the Unborn Child), (1990)—bitter, depressing titles: and yet the oeuvre of Imre Kertész is morally inspirational. Here is a man who does his own thing with dignity and poise at a time when there is a crisis of values, with a self-torturing consistency and without being touched in the least by hysteria or by the fashions of the day, the charade of politics. One whose conviction is that there still exists in man "something indestructible" (*unzerstörbar*, to use Kafka's expression), and one who thinks that discovering this something is the writer's imperative. His self-designed life, whose solitariness does not derive from hurt or a defiant maverick attitude but the morality of his own choice: "to write and live the same novel" deserves the deepest respect.

We are witnesses therefore to a rare phenomenon: an oeuvre that is being constructed in the spirit of Kertész's favourite thinker, Schopenhauer. "A life of contentment is impossible: the most a man can achieve is an heroic life." I see Kertész's artistic life and the development of the "I" as drawn in his novels to be of this category: heroic although proceeding—just as its creator intends—to failure no less certainly than any other human endeavour. But "one must strive at least for failure," he quotes Thomas Bernhard, and it is precisely this awareness of failure which renders so heroic the endeavour and creates the foundations for artistic triumph. In one sense, the spiritual hero of Kertész's novels is the *happy* Sisyphus of Camus.

The artistic ethos referred to above ("to write and live the same novel") is simple and obvious—but is it feasible? This is not a question posed by a critic: it is the question put by the writer himself which his novels over and over again supply an answer to; in effect, it is the problem of Goethe's *Dichtung und Wahrheit*—and here I must again quote Kafka: "the view of life and of art are different even in the artist himself." The process of recognizing this truth is portrayed in the first part of *Failure*. The Old Man (the writer in the novel, Kertész himself) must realize that he cannot be the author, the subject and the recipient of his own art all at the same time—paradoxically least of all when the subject of his novels is his own life. It is here that the problem complex of *Dichtung und Wahrheit* expands into that of *Fatelessness*. This condition, this

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Imre Kertész *was born in 1929. The milestones of his life are given by the author himself: "I enjoy the privilege with some of my contemporaries that I can sum up my life story in a few dates: 1944, 1948, 1953, 1956." These dates are points of moment in the history of Hungary as well as in Kertész's biography. Thus 1944, Auschwitz, the end of the war, the return home and the helpless effort to find a place in post-war Budapest; 1948, "the great turning point", the arrival of total Stalinist dictatorship; 1953, the "thaw" with its signs of détente; 1956, the Hungarian Revolution and its suppression, the blood-soaked endgame of a season of hopes. Kertész continues: "I could supplement this with a few facts, personal remarks, anecdotes but what would be the point? They are all going to be books one of these days anyway..."*

And that is what has happened. The first novel, Sorstalanság *(Fatelessness, 1975), portrays the inferno of the concentration camps and the emptiness that followed the liberation through the account in the first person of an adolescent, György Köves; the second,* Kudarc *(Failure, 1988) deals with the circumstances in which* Fatelessness *was written, and the lack of success the novel had on publication, while its second part is a Kafkaesque depiction of the Stalinist fifties in Hungary with a protagonist who is also called Köves. (See* NHQ *115. Ed.'s note.) The latest novel,* Kaddis a meg nem született gyermekért *(Kaddish for the Unborn Child, 1990) is in the form of a philosophical monologue by a "survival artist", a writer-translator reflecting on the emptiness of the seventies. These three books constitute a triptych of fatelessness, reflecting Kertész's credo: "To write and live the same novel."*

1989—the beginnings of great changes and hopes in Hungary brought Kertész critical success, he received a government award and the greater attention paid to his work has led to his being regarded now by the general public as one of the major novelists of his generation.

Since Kaddish, *he has published a short novel* Az angol lobogó *(The British Flag) (1991), and at present he is working on a book to be called* Gályanapló *(Diary aboard the Galley).*

metaphorical idea, was the greatest innovation of the eponymous novel at the time it was published. The subject of the novel is the fact that Jews were deprived of a destiny. The millions herded into concentration camps and death camps have no sovereign right to decide and act. This is more than mere history: it is the core experience in Jewish life and, in Kertész's depiction it continues to determine their sense of life and thinking long after liberation. It is in this sense that the inmates of the death camps remain permanently captive. But the artist, as distinct from the private individual, has a destiny whether or not he seeks it out; his novel, like any other book, has its fate, even if the subject of the novel is the condition of fatelessness described above, and even if the writer is in one person the subject

and victim of this condition. The writer cannot "write his own writing" as Berg does, the mass murderer who is the protagonist of the second part of *Failure*. For—and this is the triumphant recognition of the Old Man/Köves/Kertész—the novel always mediates or conveys some message; if it fails to do so, it promptly ceases to be a novel. Berg is only familiar with the kind of writing which conveys nothing, and he goes along this road consistently, a course of life from which love is missing and at the end of which madness awaits Berg. It is in this way that Berg becomes the negative pole to the Old Man/Köves/Kertész writing *Fatelessness* or, to be more precise, one of its potentialities and its undisguised criticism. In contrast with Berg, the inconsistency of the novelist was the sole chance that the novel could ever be completed: "Yes, if I am consistent, I may never finish my novel." It is the contrast between fruitless, unproductive and madness-generating consistency and fertile, constructive inconsistency that is capable of creating works of art, the parallel lines of poetry and reality that seem so incapable of meeting. Yet, the positive pole to Berg is not the Old Man/Köves/Kertész but "inevitably" Goethe, whose opening sentences of *Dichtung und Wahrheit* are quoted in an essay-like digression. Kertész adds the following comment: "The genius, the great creative artist, descends to earth as a mythical hero. There is an unfilled place clamouring for him, his coming has been so overdue that the earth is almost groaning with desire."

Thus seen, *Failure* is Imre Kertész's own *Dichtung und Wahrheit,* the confessions of a man who thinks himself, and portrays himself, as deprived of a destiny. But it is a mediation, that is, a novel rather than an autobiography, which it is emphatically not, since a person who "has—temporarily—eluded his death and has lived his life irrevocably" can only have a novel, even though its subject is his own life. That life can only be portrayed or described through mediations, through fiction—hence the multiple alter-egos, hence "the novel of the novel", hence all the books mutually interpenetrating and interpreting each other, and hence the trilogy form.

Goethe's life can be a positive pole, for everything about it is so inevitable or necessary. The same could not be claimed of themselves by the Old Man or by Köves or by Kertész without a great degree of self-deception. That is how he can parody so well the opening sentences of *Dichtung und Wahrheit:* "Instead of the friendly faces of Jupiter and Venus, a party leader named Adolf Hitler looks at the writer with an extremely unfriendly expression on his face." Goethe's divinely decreed lot watched over by the gods, as opposed to the accidental life— "a life without destiny" of a grocer's son was Imre Kertész's most important perception on his own life and on the lot of the Hungarian Jews during the Second World War. That was the most radical, almost outrageously radical, intellectual novelty of his first novel. That novelty at the same time took issue with those novels treating so sentimentally of the Jewish lot, especially with Jorge Semprun's *The Great Journey*. The polemic touches upon a considerable problem, in Kertész's words, "whether violence can be conveyed aesthetically." He writes: "I must admit I have always been annoyed by the coupling of the notions encountered in certain novels." And he recalls Semprun's description of Ilse

Koch, the bestial blonde, remarking: "Our thoughts are still held in thrall by concepts that have the extent of conscience of a pigeon." That Nazi woman, "like a pasty-faced porker", was never—in Kertész's judgement—(much profounder than his Spanish fellow writer's) the heir of the great rebels against the moral order, one of the demonic heroes of history. She was merely a banal grafter in the murder trade, any sort of eminence was alien to her destiny, for she was no more than a possessed workaholic, insignificance incarnate, someone who can only be portrayed as a formula of "intellecutals' imaginings"—and cannot be conveyed in an abstract, that is, in an aesthetic way. She was therefore a figure without a destiny—just as her victims were. The lack of a destiny, shared by both murderer and victim, was the central idea of his first novel, a thought that ignored taboos and sentimental judgements. Nothing could be farther from the approach of Semprun, from the ideas of the left-winger full of bathos, than that he should have portrayed the inmates of the camps, the heroes of the resistance, his comrades, as a herd of people gathered accidentally together. Those people obviously were not really without a destiny. In their haversacks they had Georg Lukács's *Geschichte und Klassenbewusstsein,* perhaps also Wittgenstein's *Tractatus,* in their muscular hands they gripped a pistol, in their gaze the future and in their minds a minimum of doubts. Later they were to become the heroes of '68, not only in Paris but also, on the level of the imagination, in Budapest. Perhaps it was due to this condition of the world that Kertész's novel did not manage to reach his most likely potential audience and had no effect whatever at the time.

It can be seen therefore that lacking a destiny is doubly a central issue in Kertész's oeuvre: as a central thought and as the lot of a novel of that title. It is what the first part of *Failure* is about in the main. But on closer inspection, the division of the novel turns out to be arbitrary. True, the two parts have two different persons as their subjects: in the first it is the Old Man, a novelist, who writes the second part, the novel called *Failure;* in the second part it is Köves, the adult self of the adolescent we know from *Fatelessness*. In the first part the Old Man is alone, at best his conversations with his wife and mother, mostly of similar content, are being described; he is alone with his manuscripts and his thoughts. The subject of these thoughts and manuscripts are the novel *(Failure)* that he wrote earlier or the possibility of writing further novels. The time is the present, the place is the Budapest of today. The main character of the second part, Köves, arrives in the Budapest of presumably the fifties, coming from a distant place. But then a rather complex juggling with time begins: it transpires that Köves has already written the novel (it's *Fatelessness* again), the inevitability of whose composition he recognized, similarly to the Old Man of Part One, in the shorter stem of an L-shaped corridor. We learn this in the first pages of the second part, along with the fact that Köves's life has come to an impasse because of the writing of his novel and its rejection by a publisher. But at the end of Part Two Köves is once again in the shorter stem of the L-shaped corridor waiting, and the noise of the footsteps of an official passing him (or is it the marching of tens of thousands?)—these steps will rumble down the pages of *Fatelessness*—shocks

him into recognizing, as though it was his fate, the inevitability of writing a novel, "the only novel that it is possible for him to write." The meaning of this double recognition is that the Old Man/Köves/Kertész is taken prisoner, as it were from two *termini ad quem*, in the trap of writing *Fatelessness*. This way The Old Man and Köves, the writer and the fictional characters created by him become indentical by degree—and this is why it is arbitrary to separate the two parts. *Failure* is one single novel, written from two points of view, whose underlying formal innovation consists in making these two views gradually coalesce into one. The ultimate identification of writer and characters culminates in the closing sentences of the novel, when Köves picks up in the street an irregular shaped stone which we have seen among the Old Man's odds and ends: "He folds his shaking, benumbed fingers on it, and will surely grasp it in the moment of the last struggle when he topples lifeless from the chair in front of the filing cabinet." This piece of rock, if we are not mistaken, is a flint that snapped from the rock of Sisyphus to land in Budapest. But it could be also put like this: in this age of ours, completely devoid of myths, this flint is all that has remained of the huge rock. And the chair is naturally the same as that which the Old Man sat on penning his sentences about the characters. This is how the form invented by Kertész is fulfilled: "To write and live the same novel."

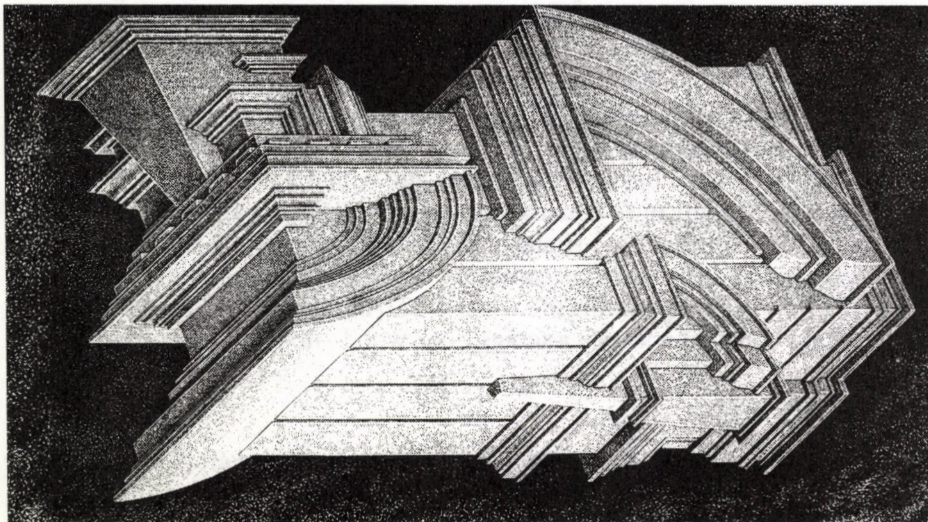
The main character of the latest novel *(Kaddish)* seems to be continuing the interior monologues of the Old Man of *Failure,* the writer-translator obsessively pottering with his filing cards or, more precisely, it seems as if it was one of the potential monologues of the Old Man. The two novels (to which, as we have seen, is joined the first, *Fatelessness,* as their starting point) rely as a quarry for ideas on the death camps and a successful (or unsuccessful) Hungarian writer's shameful existence and with the conveyance of the full sense of failure in the centre. The sequencing of the scenes and the stylistic devices used in the two novels are interwoven and carry on a kind of dialogue with each other, whose main subject remains being Jewish, or the problem of "being deprived of a destiny". This way the three novels constitute some kind of a trilogy, the trilogy of existential choice, the simultaneous choice of being a Jew and a writer, but the former only in the sense of being incapable of becoming assimilated: "I am willing to be a Jew only and exclusively from this one *single* point of view", Kertész declares emphatically.

After all this it can be asked whether Kertész's novels are Jewish? Of course not in an ethnographic sense but in the sense of whether these ideas could have come from someone who was not a Jew. If I put the question like this the answer is an unambiguous no. For the issue of being Jewish can only be a problem to a Jew (unfortunately, in more senses than one). A Jew's being is problematic from the moment of birth, not in itself but because it is (was and will be) turned into a problem by many different non-Jewish beings. And a Jewish being (like that of Kertész's, for example) which recognized itself as a *human being,* simply that is, not as a Jewish being, becomes even more problematical to itself: it is a kind of imposed existence; as absurd as a "bald woman in red dressing gown in front of

a looking glass." Kertész's Self, as drawn in the novel goes through all the stages of this realization and, finally, starting with Jewish being it reaches human being, from the Kaddish to the Amen that closes the novel, thereby cancelling the above question.

This being is one of continual reflection, and the agonized thinking continues ceaselessly. But what is the chosen form? Kertész makes his main character speak in circular monologues, as in a fugue (this is also alluded to by the book's epigraph taken from Paul Celan's *Death Fugue*), spinning further the main theme of the novel in ever richer and more complex ways, that is, the question of the unborn child; first, like this: "My being seen as your potentiality", and, later, as "Your non-being seen as the necessary and radical abolition of my being." This form with all its intricate detours, involutions and its inching forward, seemingly engulfed in the vortex of its own subordinate clauses, and yet by always rolling the thought forward exultantly, becomes a euphonious harmony by the end of the novel. The basic aesthetic judgement we have dropped from our vocabulary can be applied to Kertész's novel, namely, that it is a *fine and beautiful work* in the simplest sense of those terms, without being sentimental for a moment; every line radiates philosophical poetry. Imre Kertész is one of those few Hungarian writers in whose work the philosophical intonation sounds completely authentic and natural, in the idiom of his predecessors, Camus, Kafka and Thomas Bernhard.

"This is the last novel which I write in the spirit of bare existence", says Kertész in a diary entry about *Kaddish.* With the word Amen the trilogy of fatelessness, of existential choice, has been brought to a close. The eternal camp inmate of his own life and novels, the *survivor,* the bare existence, the finding of his own fateless fate, his own spiritual form of existence, the heroism of unhappiness, has come to the gate of liberty. I think that the man standing there and looking around a little anxiously will be the next protagonist in Imre Kertész's fiction.



Imre Kertész

Kaddish for the Unborn Child

"he calls out more darkly now stroke your strings then as smoke you will rise into air then a grave you will have in the clouds there one lies unconfined"
Paul Celan: Death Fugue

"No!" I said, promptly and instantly, without hesitation and virtually by instinct, for it has now become quite natural for our instincts to run counter to our instincts, for our counter-instincts to operate instead of, or even as, our instincts proper —I am being facetious, if this can be considered facetious at all, in other words if the miserable, naked truth can be considered facetious—as I go on to tell the philosopher approaching from the opposite direction, after both he and I have come to a stop in the dwindling, almost audibly panting, consumptive beech wood, or grove, or what you will: I must admit I am fallibly ignorant as regards trees, the only tree I can recognize upon sight is the pine on account of its needles, and the plane because I like plane-trees, and anything I like I can recognize, even today, even with my counter-instincts, though not with that thunderbolt-like, stomach-churning, urgent, electrifying, almost inspired recognition with which I recognize the things I hate. I don't know why everything always works differently with me or, rather, even if I do know it is easier to think that I don't. Because it could spare me a lot of explanations. But it seems it is impossible to shirk explanations, we are always explaining and accounting for ourselves, life itself, this unexplainable complex of phenomena and sensation, is always demanding explanations of us, our environment is always demanding explanations, and in the end we too demand explanations of ourselves, until we finally succeed in annihilating, in other words over-explaining, everything around us, including ourselves—I go on explaining to the philosopher with that irresistible compulsion to speak which I find so repulsive but which always overcomes me when I have nothing to say and which, I am afraid, derives from the same source as my over-abundant tipping in restaurants and taxis, sometimes taking the form of bribes to official and semi-official persons, or my excessive, inordinate politeness—inordinate to the point of self-denial, as if I were constantly pleading for my being, for this life. Dear God. All I did was to set out for a walk in the wood—even if it is only a scraggy oak wood—to be in the open air—even

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This is the opening of Kaddish a meg nem született gyermekért *(Kaddish for the Unborn Child).* Magvető, 1990. The epigraph is from *Poems of Paul Celan.* Translation by Michael Hamburger. Persea Books, New York, 1988.

if that air is somewhat the worse for wear—to clear my head and blow away the cobwebs, as the saying goes, a fine way of putting things until you consider the meaning of the words, for if you consider the meaning of the words it of course becomes quite obvious that they make no sense at all, just as there is no sense in my clearing my head to blow away the cobwebs as I am in fact extremely sensitive to draughts; here I spend —spent— my time, temporarily (and I will forgo the opportunity that word offers to digress) in these Hungarian hills, in a house, call it a holiday home, if you will, though it could as well pass as a place of employment (for I am always working, and it is not only the necessity of earning a living that compels me to work, for if I were not working, I would be existing, and if I were existing I do not know what that would compel me to do, and it is better that I do not know, though my cells, my guts surely suspect the reason why I am constantly, ceaselessly at work: while I am working, I am, who knows whether I would be if I did not work, so I take it seriously, and must take it seriously, for there are correlations of the most important kind in existence between my existence and my work, that is quite obvious), in a house therefore, at which I acquired the right to be accomodated at a nominal charge, and admittance into the illustrious company of intellectuals of my ilk, whom, try as I might, I cannot steer clear of, for this precise reason, not even by skulking noiselessly in my room, with only the muted tapping of my typewriter betraying the secret of my hiding-place, not even by scuttling along the corridors on tiptoes, for one has to eat, and at mealtimes I am surrounded by the merciless presence of my table companions, and one has to take a walk now and then, and at such times, massive and out of place, in a brown and beige checked, flat, peaked cap, loose-fitting raglan coat, whey-coloured, slitted eyes in his pasty, large, soft face, like kneaded and risen dough, appears Dr Obláth, the thinker, in the middle of the woods, approaching from the opposite direction. Philosophizing is his proper profession, as the appropriate page and heading of his identity papers will attest, namely that Dr Obláth is a philosopher, like Immanuel Kant or Baruch Spinoza or Heraclitus of Ephesus, as I am a writer and translator, and the only reason that I do not make myself appear even more ridiculous by lining up the alignable giants who were real writers—at times—real translators under the blazon of my craft is that I am ridiculous enough already with my occupation, for the activity of translating does after all vest my pursuits with the semblance of objectivity in the eyes of some—especially in the eyes of the authorities—and, though for different reasons of course, but in my eyes also—with some semblance perhaps of an occupation that can be documented.

"No!" shouted, howled something in me, promptly and instantly, when my wife (who ceased to be my wife a long time ago) first spoke of it —of you— and my whimper was only slowly appeased, yes, in effect, appeased only after many long years had passed into a melancholic *Weltschmerz*, like Wotan's thunderous rage after the farewell, until at last, as though arising out of the hazy mirage-like images drawn by the fading sound of the strings, looming slowly and maliciously, like some latent disease, the question was conceived, clearly defined and sharp, and that question was you or, more precisely, me, made questionable by you or,

even more precisely (and Dr Obláth was more or less in agreement with me upon this point): my existence, contemplated as a contingency of your existence, in other words, myself viewed as a murderer, if we want to go the whole length in our desire to be precise, to the point of absurdity, and with some self-torture even this is permissible, for, thank God, it is too late, and it will always be too late now, you do not exist, and I know I am perfectly safe after having wrecked, destroyed everything, primarily my ill-fated, short-lived marriage with that "No!"—as I go on to relate—as I related—to Dr Obláth, doctor of philosophy, with the dispassionateness that life could never teach me but which I can now practise with passable proficiency whenever it is absolutely necessary to do so. As it was now, for the thinker was drawing close, rapt in contemplation, as I could tell immediately from his slightly tilted head, upon which his cocky cap sat flatly, as though it were a jocular highwayman approaching, who had already downed a couple of drinks and was now debating whether to knock me down or content himself with a small ransom, but naturally, and I almost said unfortunately, Obláth was not debating this at all, a thinker is not in the habit of contemplating highway robbery or, if he does so, the question presents itself to him in the form of a grave philosophical problem, and the dirty work will be done by professionals, we have seen it happen, after all, though it is sheer arbitrariness, and even undue suspicion that made this come to my mind in relation to Dr Obláth of all people, since I know nothing about his past, and sincerely hope that he will not tell me about it. No, but he did surprise me with a question that was no less indiscreet, as if a highwayman were to ask me how much money I had in my pockets, for he began questioning me about my family circumstances, true, acquainting me with his by way of introduction, or an advance, postulating as it were that if I had the opportunity to learn everything about him, though I was not in the least interested, he could thereby claim the right to... but I will stop this disquisition, for I can feel the letters, the words carrying, sweeping me along, moreover sweeping me, in the wrong direction, towards moralizing paranoia, in which I unfortunately often catch myself these days, for reasons which are only too obvious to me (solitude, seclusion, voluntary exile), too obvious to alarm me, for, after all, it is I who am responsible for them, I who initiated them, thereby turning the first sod, as it were, to that much, much deeper ditch which I must dig, sod by sod, to the end in order to have something to engulf me, when the time comes (though perhaps I should not dig it in the ground, but in the air, where there is plenty of room—for in effect all Dr Obláth asked me, in all innocence, was whether I had children, though certainly with the brusque candour that characterizes thinkers, in other words tactlessly, and certainly at the worst possible time; but how could he have known that his question would, as it undeniably did, in some measure disquieten me. That I answered this question with that irresistible compulsion to speak which derives from my excessive, inordinate politeness, inordinate to the point of self-denial, a compulsion which I was repelled by all the while I was speaking, but despite my repulsion I told him:

"No!", I said, promptly and instantly, without hesitation and virtually by instinct, for it has now become quite natural for our instincts to run counter to our

instincts, for our counter-instincts to operate instead of, or even as, our instincts proper: yes, it was for this long, foolish, nonsensical speech, for my own, voluntary and unjustifiable self-abasement (though I can justify it with any number of reasons, some of which I have already listed, if I remember right) that I wanted to get my own back on Dr Obláth, that is on Dr Obláth, doctor of philosophy, by describing him as I did in the dying beech wood (or lime wood, if you like), though I do maintain that the flat checked cap, the loose-fitting raglan coat, like the whey-coloured, slitted eyes and the pasty, large soft face like kneaded and risen dough all fit the facts. The point is that all of it could have been set down differently, more objectively, more considerately, shall I say perhaps even with love, but I fear that this is the only way I can describe things, anything, now, with a pen dipped in sarcasm, mockingly, maybe even amusingly (though that is not for me to judge) but to a certain extent paralysed, as if someone were always knocking back my pen whenever it prepared to write down certain words, so that in the end my hand writes other words in their stead, words from which an affectionate description simply cannot, can never unfold, perhaps *because it is to be feared that there is no love in me* but—dear God!—whom could I love, and why? Yet Dr Obláth had spoken amiably, so much so that I committed to memory, permanently (I almost said perniciously), some of his most striking remarks, as they aroused my curiosity. He told me he was childless, had no one except an aging wife grappling with the problems of aging—if I understood him right, for the philosopher expressed himself more obscurely, I could even say more discreetly, leaving it to me to understand as much of it as I wished, and though I did not want to understand I nevertheless of course did understand. This matter of his being childless, continued Dr Obláth, never crossed his mind till recently, but recently quite often, it makes him ponder, like now, here on the forest path, so much so that he cannot help bringing it up, presumably because he too is getting old, and consequently certain possibilities, such as the possibility of becoming a father, are no longer possibilities, but impossibilities for him, and that it is only recently that he has begun to think of this often, to think of it, morever, he said, "as an omission". Here Dr Obláth stopped on the path, for in the meanwhile we had begun to walk, two social beings, two men in conversation on the leaf mould, two sad patches on a landscape painter's canvas, two patches that shake the probably nonexistent harmony of nature to its foundations, I just can't remember whether it was I who attached myself to Obláth as a companion, or whether he attached himself to me, to debate this would be vanity, yes, naturally it was me who attached himself to Dr Obláth, probably to shake him off, this way I could turn back at a time which suited me; here Dr Obláth stopped on the path and with a single, despondent movement tensed his leavened, in places puffily overbrimming face, by throwing back his head with its pert, cocky cap and fixing his eyes on the branch of a tree opposite, fastening it there like a pathetic, tattered article of clothing ready to oblige even in its state of destitution. And as we stood there thus, silently, I in Dr Obláth's field of attraction, Dr Obláth in the tree's, I suddenly had a premonition that I would shortly be made a witness to passages of confidence on the part of the thinker, and I was right, for when Dr

Obláth began to speak at last and said when he uses the term omission in relation to what happened or, rather, what did not happen he is not thinking of continuation, this somewhat abstract, but, let us admit, fundamentally satisfactory gratification in so far as the fulfilment—or, rather, and that's just the point—the un-fulfillment of his personal and supra personal task on this earth goes, in other words the extended and proliferated survival of his own self in his descendants, over and beyond subsistence, survival which (over and beyond subsistence) is, one may say, the transcendental, though at the same time the only too empirical, duty of man in relation to life in order not to feel incomplete, superfluous and, in the last analysis, impotent; and he is not thinking of the ominous perspective of an old age without support, no, what he is really afraid of is "emotional sclerosis", that is how he put it, those were the exact words Dr Obláth used as he set off once again along the forest path, seemingly towards our base the holiday home, but in point of fact, as I now realized, towards emotive sclerosis. And I accompanied him along this path, a loyal companion, duly moved by his moving words though without sharing his fear which, I fear (or, more precisely, I trust, nay, know for certain) is but momentary and as such is at all events sacred, steeped in eternity, as it were in a holy water stoop, for by the time it is realized, we shall no longer fear it, shall no longer remember that it was this that we once feared, for it shall have overpowered us, and we shall be sitting in it, up to our necks, it shall belong to us and we shall belong to it. For it is no more than a cutting of the spade for the trench, the grave I am digging in the air (for I shall be able to lie comfortably there) and because this is so I say, not to the thinker, just to myself, one need not fear emotional sclerosis but must accept it, if not outright welcome it, as one would welcome a hand reaching out to help one, for though it is undoubtedly towards the trench that it helps us, it helps us nevertheless, for, Mr Kappus, *this world is not directed against us, and though there be dangers, we must try to love them,* but, I interject, not to the thinker, not even to Mr Kappus, the lucky beggar who got so many letters from Rainer Maria Rilke, just to myself, that I have come to the point where I am unable to love anything but these dangers, and I think this is not quite as it should be, there is something false in this too, a false note which I hear incessantly, just as some conductors can immediately tell when the full orchestra is playing, that the cor anglais, due to a typographical error in the score, shall we say, is playing half a note too high. And I hear this false note not only in myself, but around me, in my limited, but also in my extensive, I might even say cosmic, environment, incessantly, as I do here, in the bosom of ill-willed nature, in the surroundings of sick oaks (or beeches), the fetid brook and the dirty-coloured sky glimmering through the consumptive foliage where, dear Mr Kappus, I cannot at all feel the afflatus of the thought that tells us to "create, procreate and generate", which thought would *of course be worthless without its incessant validation and realization in the world, would be invalid without the thousand-voiced consent reverberating from animals and objects...* Yes, because it was in vain that they discouraged us (and that is all I shall say upon this point), secretly, if we pay attention, properly and in silence, to our pulse and our nightmares, secretly, we do in effect—and it is only in this that I can hear the

thousand-voiced harmony reverberating from every thing and every being—we do still, resolutely, desire to live, limp and listless and sick as we are, yes, even, thus, even if we make such a poor job of it, even if it is so impossible for us to live… For this precise reason, and also so as not to be bogged down somehow in this sentimental mood in which, as, incidentally, in almost everything, or at least in everything in which I take part, I could clearly hear the false note struck by the English horn, I put to him the philosophical, though perhaps not at all profound question, very much in his line, why is it so? why this decrepitude? where and how did we make a mess of our rights? why is it so inexorably and completely impossible for us not to know what we know? and so on, as if I did not know what I know, but was driven by my irrepressible compulsion to speak, as though driven by some fear, some *horror vacui:* and the expression of a professional philosopher and professional average Hungarian intellectual from the central hills, of average means and average opinions, with average prospects, middle-aged and of medium height, settled back on Dr Obláth's face and the wrinkles of his cynical, happy smile totally engulfed his slitted eyes. Objectivity, nay, materiality returned at once into his voice, into this oiled voice so accustomed to evasion, into this in effect self-assured voice that had faltered for a moment only because of the menacing proximity of things full of life, and so we ambled homewards, two in effect well-dressed, well-fed, fit, middle-aged average intellectuals holding average opinions, two survivors (each in his own way), two still-living, two half-dead, and talked of things that can still be talked about between two intellectuals, totally superfluously. We discussed peacefully, bored, why it is impossible to be; that the mere continuance of life is in effect uncivilized, for, from a higher point of view, looked from a higher angle, it *should not be permitted to exist,* simply because what has happened again and again, content with that, it is more than cause enough, not to mention that more civilized minds have long since forbidden being to be. It was also said—of course I cannot remember every detail, for hundreds upon hundreds of conversations resounded, or rather echoed hollowly in this conversation that came about by chance and in confusion or from embarrassment, just as *a single creative thought is imbued with majesty and greatness by a thousand nights of love, reborn of oblivion*—I really cannot remember every detail, but I think we also raised the question of whether it is not possible that the whole, apparently nescient striving of existence towards existing is by no means the sign of an objective, impartial naivity, which of course it would be carrying matters too far and be in effect impossible—but just the opposite, a symptom that it can continue, if continue it must at all costs. And unless survival is successful, which of course cannot be except *on a higher level* (Dr Obláth), but of which, however, there is not even a faint sign (duet), what is apparent is just the opposite, namely a sinking into ignorance… Moreover, that conscious ignorance obviously contains syndromes of schizophrenia… And, moreover, that accordingly, the experience (me) and realization (Dr Obláth) of the state of the world towards which, incidentally, every state of the world always strives, is—for want of faith, culture and other festal means—nowadays solely *catastrophe*… And so on and so forth, we continued to sound the false cor

anglais, while the thin blue twilight haze descended upon the motionless, benumbed trees, in the depths of which, like a dense core, lay concealed the more solid mass of the holiday home, where a laid table and an evening meal was awaiting us, cutlery that would shortly clatter, glasses that would clink, and the anticipation of murmuring conversation, and from this simple fact arose the mournful sound of the false cor anglais, clearly, and it was just as clear to me, undeniably clear, that I had not turned back, finally, to get rid of Dr Obláth: spellbound, and constrained by my emptiness, disguised by my compulsion to speak and my pangs of conscience (disgust) felt who knows why but felt nevertheless, undoubtedly because of this emptiness, I had stayed with him so as not to hear, not to see and not to have to speak about what I should speak and perhaps, who knows, should even write about. Yes, and the night punished—or, perhaps, rewarded?—me for all these, bringing a sudden turn, an unexpected storm, peals of thunder and ominous flashes of lightning, long, zigzagging hieroglyphs that ploughed across the firmament to slowly fade and die: short, dry, clearly—or, at least for me, clearly-legible letters that all spelled

"No!", and it was I who uttered them all, for it has now become quite natural for my instincts to run counter to my instincts, for my counter-instincts to operate instead of, or even as, my instincts proper.

"No!", something in me screamed and howled promptly and instantly, and my whimper was only slowly appeased, after many long years had passed, into a subdued but obsessional pain until at last, looming slowly and maliciously, like some latent disease, the question was conceived, clearly defined and sharp—whether you would be a dark-eyed girl? with pale freckles spattered around your tiny nose? or a headstrong boy? with merry, hard eyes like grey-blue pebbles?—yes, my life, contemplated as a contingency of your existence. And that day I spent the whole night contemplating this question, now in the blinding light cast by thunderbolts, now in the dark with dazzled eyes that seemed to see the question flashing along the walls in the whimsical pauses of meteoric delirium, so I must look upon these sentences I am putting on paper now as though I had written them that night, though that night I was living rather than writing, living, that is, was torn by shooting pains, especially the pains of remembering (I also had half a bottle of brandy), perhaps I only wrote a few confused and jumbled words on the pages of the notebooks, exercise-books and pads that I always have about me, words which I was not able to reconstruct later, and if I was, could not understand, and then forgot completely, and it was many years later that that night came alive in me again, and many more years had to pass until at last I can now attempt to write down what I would have written down that night if I had written and if a single night were not too short, much too short, to write down what I would have written. But how could I have written it, that night was only the beginning, possibly not the first, but at all events only one of the first steps along the long road of true clearsightedness, that is, conscious self-elimination which will take who knows how long, a preliminary turning of the sod of the grave which I am—it is now quite obvious—digging for myself in the clouds. And this question—my life contemplated as a contingency of your existence—has proved to be a

good guide, yes, it is as though you were leading me, dragging me along this road with your little frail hand, along this road which in the last analysis cannot lead anywhere except perhaps to totally futile and irrevocable self-knowledge and upon which one can —what "can"? here even "must" expresses nothing—set off only after having cleared away the obstacles and obstructions looming in one's path, first and foremost clearing away, or I could even say uprooting, my average intellectual's existence, even if I am in fact using this attitude as a condom, as if I were a cautious promiscuous person moving in an AIDS-infested environment, more exactly as if I had been, for I have not been an average intellectual, nor even an intellectual, for a long time, I am nothing, *I was born a private person,* said J.W.G., I have remained a private survivor, says I, I am at best a translator, if I am and must be anything at all. As I did, in the end, in spite of threatening circumstances, radically remove from my path the shameful existence of the successful Hungarian writer though, as my wife (long since someone else's wife) said, you have every aptitude for it (which alarmed me a little at the time), she was not saying, said my wife, that I should give up my *artistic* or whatever principles, all she was saying, said my wife, is that I should not be *faint-hearted,* and the less I gave up (my *artistic* or whatever principles), the more I should strive to assert them, in other words myself, that is to succeed, said my wife, for everyone strives to succeed, even the greatest writers of the world, don't try to fool yourself, said my wife, if you don't want to succeed, why do you write at all? she asked, and that was undoubtedly a difficult question, but the time has not yet come for me to enlarge upon it; and the sad thing is that she probably saw right through me, was probably quite right, and I probably do have—did have—every aptitude for the shameful existence of a successful Hungarian writer, the visible *raffinements* of which I saw only too clearly, and the leading of which I really do—did—have every aptitude for, and if not, I can—could have—acquired it if I transpose—had transposed—my uncertainty and fear of existence into a single, blind, unrestrained, frantic and not even very imposing, but somewhat spectacular self-adoration, if I transform—had transformed—it into a moralizing paranoia and a continuous prosecution directed against others; what is more, and even more dangerous, I was even better disposed to lead the shameful existence of a not successful, even unsuccessful, Hungarian writer, and here once again I come up against my wife, proved right again, for once one is on the road to success, one either achieves it, or does not, *there is no third way,* and in truth, if in different ways, both alternatives are equally ignominious, consequently, as others escape into alcoholism, I for a while escaped into the objective stupor of translation... And so, as I remembered my wife's words, I was reminded of my wife, whom I have not thought of for a long time, whom in point of fact I never think about, not even when we run into each other, which is seldom, accidentally or on purpose, but perhaps more often on purpose and almost always on my former wife's initiative, who I suppose must feel some kind of distant, totally irrational remorse mixed with nostalgia in relation to me, as far as I can see, in so much as I can see anything, and at such times I think that the nostalgia she feels —if she feels it— is nostalgia for her own youth and the few short years that she squandered on me,

and her irrational remorse probably stems from her knowing herself to be in the right, a knowledge that is beyond doubt, and never questioned, and thus acquired without the necessary resistance, in other words, the knowledge that I never accused her of anything, but—dear God!—what could I, what could I have accused her of, except perhaps of wanting to live? And so, while thinking of her words, I thought of her too, thought of our whole failed and short-lived marriage, I thought of it and saw it laid out before me, as on an autopsy slab. And as I look upon the long cold corpse of my marriage, tenderly, with affection, at all events with cold objectivity, as in effect I like to look upon everything, then I must guard against forging cheap, dirty little victories for myself out of my wife's aforementioned words, words which I listened to, as a spouse, how shall I say, with irritation, without a doubt, but on this night of illumination, when I saw my marriage at such a distance from myself and understood it so little that my lack of comprehension at last made it appear totally simple and perfectly understandable, on this night of total illumination, then, I had to realize that it was *her instinct for life* that needed my success to help her forget the great failure that was her lot because of her birth; that hated, incomprehensible, unacceptable, absurd failure that I recognized at once and I could say instinctively the moment we met, though not as failure but rather like a halo, no, that would be exaggerating, like the shimmering frail shell of incarnation, the moment that, in a flat, at what one might call a social gathering, she suddenly detached herself from the chatterers, as from some ugly, shapeless, but perhaps still kin substance, since it breathed like living flesh and rippled, dilated and contracted spasmodically as though it were in labour; when she therefore as it were broke out of it and crossed a greenish-blue rug as though she were coming across the sea, leaving behind her the torn-open body of the dolphin, walking victoriously, though timidly towards me and I, as I say, at once and I could say instinctively thought: "What a beautiful Jewish girl!"... And it still happens sometimes, when we meet somewhere once in a while, almost without exception on my (ex) wife's initiative, and I watch her head, bent forward, her gleaming thick hair falling forward to frame her face as she writes prescriptions for me, one after the other, on a table in an espresso, tranquilisers, sleeping pills, stupefiers and sedatives so that I can hold out until I must and if I must, can see, hear and feel what I must see, hear and feel in a numb daze, for, and I have not yet said this, and why should I say it, since I know it, why do I pretend that these words concern anyone else but me, though of course they do, I write because I must write and when we write *we are engaged in a dialogue,* I read somewhere that while God existed we probably *engaged in a dialogue* with God, now that he no longer exists one probably *engages in a dialogue* with other people, or at best with oneself, that is one talks or mutters to oneself, as you prefer; in short, I have not yet mentioned that my wife (long since someone else's wife) is a doctor, not seriously, for I couldn't have borne that not even transitionally, just a dermatologist, though she takes that seriously, as, by the way, she does everything else too; yes, and while she is writing my prescriptions for this is how I exploit and turn to my advanage, deceitfully and perfidiously, our casual and totally innocent dates, sometimes I still think to myself: "What a beautiful Jewish

girl!" Oh, but how do I think it now, spiritlessly, compassionately, pitying myself, pitying her, everyone and everything, piteously, not at all the way, no, in no way like I thought then: "What a beautiful Jewish girl!": yes, this way, like I thought then, naturally and shamelessly, in a way that shot through my vital parts, as a rotter would think it, a macho man, a pogromist would think, like all the other shameless scoundrels who think such things: What a beautiful Jewish girl, What a beautiful Gypsy girl, What a stunning black girl, French woman, Woman in glasses, old man, What a Big-breasted woman, Big-bottomed woman, Small-breasted but Big-bottomed, What a Big-bottomed woman, and so on and so forth. What is more, and in case I did not know, it was explained to me that it is *not only* rotters, no way, female rotters also think precisely the same things, *precisely in this way,* though the other way round, which amounts to the same thing in the end, as I was taught the other day, in an espresso with aquarium lights where I was waiting for my—ex—wife and two women, two beautiful young women were talking at the table beside mine, and all of a sudden the world spun, but literally, and with a stomach-constricting feeling, like falling freely, flung me back into my distant childhood and an age-old obsession, the origin of which, how shall I put it, was an astonishing spectacle, a spectacle that caused a lifelong shock, and one with which, who knows why, who knows the transparent mysteries of the soul, and of those who know them, who hasn't tried to rid themselves of them, for they are not only repulsive, but also boring; with which spectacle, then, I later identified myself from time to time, so much so that, if not wholly realistically, to use this meaningless figure of speech, but still, I nevertheless sometimes felt that I was this spectacle, the way I saw it in that dusty and sultry village in the Great Hungarian Plain where I was sent on my holidays. Yes, and I lived there, for the first time among Jews, I mean among real Jews, not city Jews like we were, Jews from Budapest, in other words, not real Jews at all, of course not Christians either, just sort of non-Jewish Jews who do fast on *Yom Kippur,* at least until noon, Aunt this and Uncle that (I no longer remember in what way we were related, and why should I remember, they have long since dug their graves in the air, where they were sent up as smoke), they were real Jews, prayers in the morning, prayers in the evening, grace before meals, grace before drinking wine, fine people of course, of course intolerably boring for a small boy from the city, rich fatty food, goose and chalent and rich cakes. I think the war had already broken out, but *here* it was all peaceful and beautiful still, we merely practiced blackouts, Hungary was an island of peace in a Europe in flames,what happened in Germany, say, or Poland, or the Bohemian "protectorate" or in France or Croatia or Slovakia *could not happen here,* in other words, what had already happened everywhere around us and was continuing to happen could not happen here, no, not here; yes and one morning I unsuspectingly opened their bedroom door and screaming loudly, though not aloud, just inside, immediately turned out of the room, for a terrible spectacle had met my eyes, a spectacle that shocked me like an obscenity, a spectacle which I was totally unprepared for, considering my age: *a bald woman was sitting before the mirror in a red dressing gown.* And time had to pass before my frightened and muddled mind could

identify this woman with auntie whom I normally saw, as I did right after the event, with a strangely fine and stiff, but normal reddish-brown head of hair; I did not dare open my mouth after that, let alone ask questions, stoutly hoped that she had not noticed that I had seen her, I lived in the dark, dense atmosphere of secrecy and horror, auntie, with her bald, gleaming head like a shop-window dummy's, reminded me now of a corpse, now of some great fornicatress into which she was transformed at night in her bedroom, and it was only much later, and of course at home, that I dared raise the question as to whether I had really seen what I had seen, for I had begun to doubt it myself; and my father's laughing face did nothing to lay my fears as, I do not know why, but I felt this laughter to be frivolous, frivolous and destructive, though such words —since I was a child still— were not familiar to me, I simply found his laughter idiotic, beause he had not understood my fear, my repulsion, the first great, spectacular metamorphosis of my life; that instead of the familiar woman who was my relative there had been a bald woman sitting before the mirror in a red dressing gown, no, he did not grasp this monstrosity at all, instead made matters worse by familiarizing me with further monstrosities, most good-humouredly, it is true, explaining to me what I had seen, and I did not understand a single word of this explanation except for the unclean monstrosity of the facts or, rather, the sheer, mysterious and unfathomable factualness of the facts when he told me that our relatives were *Polish Jews*, and that *Polish Jewish* women shave their heads and wear wigs or *shaitls* for religious reasons, and later, when it was becoming more and more important that I was Jewish too, since, as it slowly became clear, this was generally equal to a death sentence, possibly simply to see this inconceivable and peculiar fact—namely, that I am Jewish—in its proper singularity, or at least in a more familiar light, I suddenly found myself thinking that I had at last understood who I am: *a bald woman sitting before the mirror in a red dressing gown.* This was quite evident, if not pleasant, and mostly not easily understandable, but in the last analysis undeniably defined my unpleasant and not easily understandable position to perfection, my proper place, if you like. Until, finally, it turned out that I had no need of it simply because I reconciled myself to the thought, that is to the thought of being Jewish, as I slowly reconcile myself to all the other unpleasant and mostly not easily understandable thoughts in turn with a kind of twilight peacefulness of course, knowing full well that these unpleasant and mostly not easily understandable thoughts will cease when I cease and until that happens, these thoughts are remarkably useful things, among them, in one of the front places, the idea of my Jewishness, naturally exclusively as an unpleasant and mostly not easily understandable fact which, moreover, is occasionally and to some extent perilous, even fatal but, at least for me (and I hope, no, I trust that *by no means* everyone agrees with me upon this, I believe there will be some who will take offence, no, I sincerely hope that they will downright detest me for it, especially the Jewish and non-Jewish philo- and anti-Semites), as I say, for me, it is useful, this is the only way I can make use of it, there is no other way: as an unpleasant and not easily understandable fact which is at times perilous, even fatal, and which we should perhaps, if only

because of its perilousness, *try to love,* as we know, though as far as I am concerned I can see no reason to do so, perhaps because I have long since stopped trying to live in harmony with people, with nature, or even with myself, furthermore, would look upon it as some kind of moral misery, some kind of revolting perversity, like an Oedipal relationship, or incest between an ugly brother and sister. Yes, and I was sitting in the espresso lit like an aquarium waiting for my—ex—wife, hoping for a great many prescriptions and not thinking about my unpleasant and mostly not easily understandable, moreover at times perilous, even fatal, existence while the two women talked at the table next to mine and I, almost automatically, began to listen as they were beautiful, the one more blondish, the other more brunette, and it made no difference that I had often and harshly been discouraged (and that is all I shall say upon this point), secretly, if I pay attention, properly and in silence, to my pulse and my nightmares, secretly, I do after all still like beautiful women with some kind of unwavering, unshakeable, I could say natural attraction which, though futilely attempting to appear banally comprehensible, is essentially mysterious, for it is almost independent of me, and as such is outrageous, and at any rate not as easily disposed of as my affection for plane trees for example, the trees which I love simply for their spreading, blotchy trunks, magnificent, fantastic branches and great, veined leaves that look like despondently drooping hands in the right season. And as soon as I joined their conversation, if only as a passive participant, the confidential, sultry whispering tone of which intimates a significant subject, I heard these words: "I'm not sure, but I don't think I could... not with a foreigner...a Negro, a Gypsy or an Arab..." Here the voice stopped, but I could feel she was just hesitating, my sense of rhythm told me that the sentence was unfinished, there was something still to come, and I was about to begin to fidget on my seat because of course I knew what must follow, I thought if she has to rack her brains for so long I'd best whisper it to her when she finally, grudgingly added: "...with a Jew", and then, suddenly, but totally unexpectedly, for I had been waiting for the word, watching for it, counting on it, demanding it almost, yet, suddenly, the world began to spin with a stomach-constricting feeling, as if in a free fall, and I thought if this woman looks at me now I will turn into *a bald woman in front of a mirror in a red dressing gown,* there is no escaping the curse, I thought, there is no escape, I thought, there is only one way out, I thought, if, I thought, I stand up right now from my seat and either beat up this woman, I thought, or fuck her. I'm sure there is no need to say I did neither, as I have so often not done so many things that I have thought, and often with reason, that I should do, and this was not even one of those categorical imperatives, for the infringement of which I had every right to shake my head, my emotion died out almost as soon as it was roused and besides, like stray shadows, foul but familiar thoughts were nearing—why should I try to convince this woman or myself, for I have long since been convinced of everything, I do what I have to do, though I do not know why I have to do it, but I still do it in the hope, in the knowledge, that the time will come when it will not be necessary to have to do it, and it will be permissible to stretch out in my comfortable resting-place, only after having had to work for it, of course,

only after having had a whistle shrilling at me telling me to dig a grave for myself and at present, though a lot of time has passed since then—dear God!—I am still at the digging stage. And then my wife arrived and I, ruffled feelings soothed, at once and if you like instinctively thought "What a beautiful Jewish girl!" as she crossed the greenish-blue carpet as though she were crossing the sea, walking victoriously, though timidly towards me, because she wanted to speak to me, as she had learned who I was, B., writer and translator, one of whose "pieces" she had read and wanted *absolutely* to discuss with me, said my (then future, now ex) wife, and she was very young then, fifteen years younger than me, though I was not really old at the time, though quite old enough, even then, as always. Yes, that is how I see her now, in the night, in my illuminating, lightning-crossed great night, and in the dark night closing in on me later, much later, yes: "I wonder why I spend my lonely nights dreaming of the song... and I am again with you", I whistled, surprised at my whistling at all, and the *Stardust Melody* at that, which we always used to whistle, though I never whistle anything but Gustav Mahler these days, exclusively Gustav Mahler, the Ninth Symphony. But I know that this is all beside the point, unless someone should by any chance be familiar with Gustav Mahler's Ninth Symphony, in which case they can reasonably and soundly judge my state of mind if they should be so inclined and discontent with direct communications on my part, from which the necessary conclusions can also be drawn. *When our love was new and each kiss a revelation...*

"No!", something shouts, howls within me, I do not want to remember, do not wish to dip, say, sponge fingers into tea-bag tea instead of a Madeleine that is not known even as something you can't get in this bleak wilderness, though of course I do want to remember, want to, do not want to, I have no choice, when I write I remember, I have to remember, though I do not know why I have to remember, obviously because of knowing, remembrance is knowledge, we live to remember our knowledge for we cannot forget what we know, don't be afraid, children, not because of some worthless "moral obligation", no, simply because *it is not in our power to forget,* we *cannot* forget, this is how we are made, we live to know and to remember, and we know and remember perhaps, or even probably, or even almost certainly, so that there might be someone to feel shame because of us, having created us, yes, it is for him that we remember, for him who either exists or does not exist, it makes no difference, he either is or isn't, it amounts to the same thing in the long run, the point is for us to remember, to know and remember so that someone—anyone—will feel shame because of us and perhaps for us. For, as far as I am concerned, if I were to begin, from my privileged, my hallowed or, even, I don't mind if we're going to use big words, so be it, from my hallowed, sanctified memories gas would seep, harsh guttural voices would rattle out: *Der springt noch auf!* at the black mass of humanity, and the Warsaw survivor's final *Sh'ma Yisrael* would whimper, then the world would crumble and collapse with a great bang... And then suprise would drizzle softly, daily remembered but something that must be kept hidden so to speak, surprise that well well, I did jump up after all, *ich sprang doch auf,* and what is more I am still here, though I do not know why, by chance, as I was born, I am an accomplice of my survival, as I was

of my birth, well, I will allow that there is a trace of ignominy in my survival, especially if we did everything that it was in our power to do in order to survive; but that is all it is, and no more, I refused to be duped by the general survival-gushing and chest-pounding bragging, dear God! *One is a little guilty in any event,* that is all, I survived, therefore I am, I thought, no, I did not think anything, I just was, quite simply, like a Survivor from Warsaw, like a left-over from Budapest who does not make a problem out of having been left, who does not feel that it is necessary to justify his continuance, that it is necessary to have a goal in order to continue, yes, to turn his survival into a victory, however quiet, discreet and intimate, but essentially the only authentic, the only possible victory, which would be the extended and proliferated survival of this remaining existence, in other words, of myself in my descendants—descendant—in you, would be—would have been—no, I did not think of it, I did not think that I should think of it until this night fell upon me, this all-illuminating and yet pitch-dark night, until the question loomed before me (or, rather, behind me, behind my long lived-out life, for thank God, it is too late now, and it will always be too late now), yes, the question—whether you would be a dark-eyed girl? with pale freckles spattered around your tiny nose? or a headstrong boy? with merry, hard eyes like grey-blue pebbles?—yes, my life, contemplated as a contingency of your existence, contemplated as we contemplate an object simply, sadly, without anger or hope.

Translated by Eszter Molnár

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КРУПНЕЙШИЙ В МИРЕ КОНЦЛАГЕРЬ СОЗДАННЫЙ В 1922 Г. КОММУНИСТАМИ НА СОЛОВЕЦКИХ ОСТРОВАХ

„ТОВ. СТАЛИН ВЫДВИНУЛ ИДЕЮ СОЗДАНИЯ БЕЛОМОРСКО-БАЛТИЙСКОГО КАНАЛА СИЛАМИ ЗАКЛЮЧЕННЫХ." Л. АВЕРБАХ.

Their first concentration camp, the largest in the world, was established by the communists in 1922, on Solovetzki Island.
"Comrade Stalin suggested that the labour of the inmates should be used in the construction of the White Sea–Baltic Canal." L. Auerbach.

Note: All captions by D. S. Baldaev

Ákos Kovács—Erzsébet Sztrés

From a Gulag Gaoler's Scrapbook

Major Dantsig Sergeyevich Baldaev Remembers

Dantsig Sergeyevich Baldaev is a retired Soviet detective who lives in Leningrad/St Petersburg. His family were well-to-do Buryat Mongols. His father, Sergey Petrovich Baldaev, enjoyed a high reputation as an ethnographer. Fifty-eight members of his clan fell victim to Soviet state terror.

In 1940 and 1941 Baldaev attended the Irkutsk Art College. He volunteered when war broke out. After demobilization he was directed to service with the Ministry of the Interior, where he stayed in their employment till 1981. He was a fireman, a prison guard, and a police officer. His last appointment before retirement was that of Major with the Leningrad Criminal Investigation Department.

In his spare time he compiled a slang dictionary containing ten thousand entries, and he also collected the tattoo designs used by prisoners. He always took a close interest in the conditions in which those in gaol lived.

We established contact with him in 1987 while working on *Tattooed Stalin*. (See *NHQ* 116). At the time he offered us a collection of sixty-three drawings and maps for publication in Hungary to which he had given the title *The Workaday World of Stalin's Gulag and the NKVD*.

"From the middle fifties I prepared sketches for my own use which I alone understood. I included everything in text and pictures that I had experienced myself, or what I was told by friends and relations about those terrible years. My wish was to give some idea to the next generation of the nature of Leninist-Stalinist Socialism-Communism. I wanted them to know the truth about those communist leaders who had led the nations towards a splendid future, over mountains of corpses and through seas of blood."

The interview we conducted with him by correspondence (of which selected passages are printed below), runs to a total of sixty-four pages. It went on between December 1988 and June 1990. Throughout we could not escape a funny feeling. After all, Baldaev had run with the hounds. He had not been one of the prisoners. In our letters, and personally, we asked him on several occasions how he saw his former self. He dodged the question every time.

We have been in close and friendly contact with Baldaev for some years. Any

Ákos Kovács *and* **Erzsébet Sztrés** *are currently at work on a book on the cultural anthropology of the criminal underworld in the Soviet Union.*

intention to be judgemental about this or that period of his life is therefore out of the question. At the same time, we cannot help observing that these drawings, and especially the captions, larded with spelling and grammatical errors as they are, somehow appear as a sort of spiritual compensation.

In a particularly memorable passage Baldaev refers to a notorious toast by Stalin in which he called the Soviet people the nuts and bolts of the state machinery. Baldaev feels offended by this humiliating metaphor, yet here again he is unwilling to face the fact that he, the son of an enemy of the people, was himself for many years a nut or bolt, indeed a screw, fitting ill or well into the Stalinist state machinery.

*

Your father was arrested as an enemy of the people in 1935. You, being the son of an enemy of the people, were placed in a children's home. Who were your companions there?

Children whose fathers, senior officers and their staff of the Special Far Eastern Red Army, had been arrested despite being innocent. Later, in our own way, we tried to get our own back on the NKVD officers who had arrested our parents. We kept on sending letters to their old addresses speaking of arms hidden in the loft or in the garden. Since letters were generally censored, the local NKVD people immediately started to look for the alleged arms caches. They, of course, dug up everything in vain.

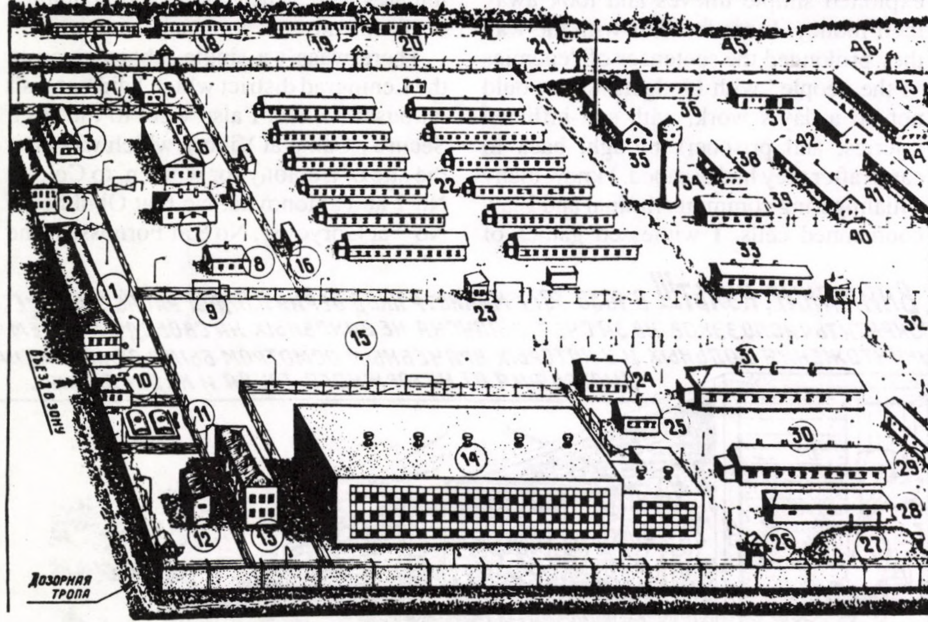
The charges against your father were dropped after two years, but he had to spend many more years in exile afterwards. Were you in any way handicapped by this family background later?

During the war, when a soldier, I was regularly paraded by a Smersh (military counterintelligence) officer, who addressed the most stupid questions to me. Was I satisfied with my commanders, was the food all right, was there enough tobacco, why didn't I drink my tot before battle, exchanging it for cigarettes and sugar instead? What did my father write? And the other relatives? Why was I so withdrawn, never sharing my views with my mates, and of course, with them? Wasn't I offended because I was not given any decorations? Was I engaged to any girl in the hinterland? A few years later, when I became a member of the NKVD, the hassling continued. I had to attend "preventive" conversations with my bosses in the personnel section. They asked me what I enjoyed most in Stalin's biography, and whether I had read *The Short History of the CPSU*? Do I keep a diary, who are my friends, what sort of people do I meet, do I know the *Internationale* off by heart, what is my opinion of American foreign policy, why won't I join the CPSU, why do I reject the offer of those who want to see me as a member of the vanguard of the Soviet nation, why did I refuse to paint a portrait of Lenin and of Stalin in oils? I was rejected every time when I applied for a place in an officers' training college. My file contained a note: "Service in the ranks only." I only ceased being suspected around 1956/57. Before that, starting with January 1943 and throughout, I was under a cloud.

Where and when did you get to know the world depicted in the drawings?

I was thoroughly familiar with the post-war camps since I was a member of the staff of the Prison Command. I was always interested in prisons and prison life, especially before the Second World War. That's why, wherever I went I always sought out old Gulag hands. I looked them up when I was sent out somewhere on business but also when on leave. They included GPU,

NKVD and MVD veterans, and I found out a great deal from them. Between 1948 and 1957 I worked in various types of prisons and camps and that was when I really became familiar with this world. I had seen multiply overcrowded cells, brutal interrogations, juvenile "enemies of the people" and the dependents of "enemies of the people", men and women after they had been interrogated with the help of "corpo-



A centre built for camp inmates by the NKVD-MVD (People's Commissariat for the Interior—Ministry for the Interior). This catered for 1,500 to 2,000 inmates. The camp centres of the concentration camps were an invention of genius of the communists. There the 'enemies of the people' were liquidated doing slave labour.

1. Camp H.Q.
2. MVD classrooms and mess
3. Invalids' section
4. Punishment and isolation cells
5. Morgue
6. Sick bay and kitchen
7. Pharmacy, P.O., censors
8. Shop
9. Passage
10. Checkpoint, "draw bridge", main gate
11. Store
12. Transformer
13. Skilled workers' building
14. Industrial area
15. Inmates' recreation hut
16. Ablutions
17. Hut for camp unit
18. Officers' hut
19. Barracks of the MVD paramilitary
20. Guards' garage
21. Guard dogs' kennels
22. Housing zone
23. Interior checkpoint
24. Library
25. Barracks for trustee inmates
26. Guard tower
27. Ice pit
28. Vegetable store
29. Food store
30. Inmates' mess
31. Club and radio centre
32. Sports ground
33. Seamstresses and cobblers
34. Water tower
35. Boiler house and laundry
36. Forge and turners' workshop
37. Garage
38. Joinery
39. Clothes store
40. Baths
41. Greenhouse
42. Firebrigade
43. Stables, courtyard
44. Pigsties
45. Rifle range
46. Inmates' burial ground

ral persuasion." Also condemned "traitors", handcuffed men and women suspended from rafters, and others who had put a noose around their own neck after a "humane" interrogation. I witnessed terrible brawls amongst the prisoners, and murders too. I knew gang leaders who viciously exploited simple thieves and took away their money. I was familiar with the way they prolonged the sentences of "enemies of the people" with bludgers who would not do a day's work, with self-inflicted injuries, and prisoners brought back to camp after they had escaped. I knew many a malingering common criminal and I saw condemned cells. I witnessed games of cards where the stake was food or clothing, and men being sodomized. Prisoners I knew died because of illness or the hard work they were forced to do. I witnessed mutinies in the camps and the way they were suppressed. I witnessed performances put on by prisoner actors, and how happy the inmates were when the news of Stalin's death spread.

There wasn't a single labour camp in the Leningrad district which I did not visit on business, and I also went to the High Security Camp at Viborg which was later the site of a colony for women, to Colony No 7 at Yablonovka, No 6 at Obukhovo, No 9 at Goryolov, No 8 at Fornossov, the

Attention, Cult of the Personality!!! In 1938-9 the Minister of the Interior Beria ordered that the number of inmates be reduced. This did not mean that the innocent were released, but the liquidation of the sick and of those whom a medical examination showed to be suffering from dystrophy due to forced labour and inadequate nutrition. In the Kolima camps of the Dalstroy the ill and the weak were taken to the baths, then, on the excuse of being issued with underwear, the naked and overheated inmates were forced onto sleighs drawn by tractors with the temperature at 50 degrees below freezing point. They were taken to the swamps where the bodies were dragged off with iron hooks. That is how the numbers of the condemned were reduced by several thousand.

prison hospital known as Gaaz, the special psychiatric prison hospital, prisons No 1 and 2, the Labour Camp for Juvenile Delinquents at Volodarsk and to Kolpino. Most of these places I called at more than once between 1948 and 1981. (D. S. Baldaev actually listed twenty-three prison camps.)

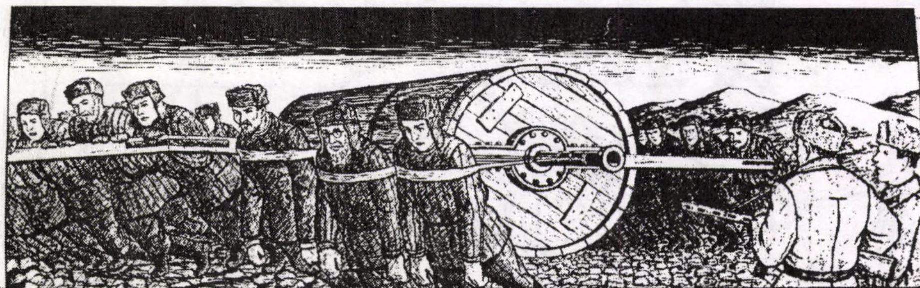
Isaak Levin, in an article published in the journal Kontinent (No 9, 1976) *pointed out that no single chart of the Gulag Archipelago could be both complete and accurate. As far as you know, how many camps were there in the Soviet Union?*

In 1956 I attended a lecture at the Prison Command in Leningrad. Major Inutkin, commandant of Prison No 1 and Counsellor Ivanov of the Prison Command took part. They said that in Stalin's time there were approximately five thousand Gulag facilities in the Soviet Union. Of these around seven hundred were prisons or transition prisons, the others, well over four thousand, were labour camps, colonies for juvenile delinquents and special planning offices.

You did in fact make drawings of a camp colony.

There prisoners worked within the confines of a camp, that is, the industrial zone was inside the perimeter fence. Watchtowers were, however, always outside, to give them a wider field of vision. Sometimes there were additional watchtowers next to the high security and the punishment compounds, and the food store. In many camps inmates worked outside the perimeter fence. The Leningrad Colony No 9 for instance, which is still a high security establishment, supplied labour to the Kirov Works. The guards were particularly careful when escorting prisoners over bridges, generally letting them cross, naturally under guard, in groups of twenty or thirty. As soon as they had all crossed, a rollcall was held. If anyone tried to escape by jumping off the bridge, he was shot without warning and the others had to lie down. Back in camp, every inmate was searched. Larger camps contained several control gates for prisoners, one for every three thousand inmates. The staff generally lived in a separate compound, known amongst inmates as "the dogs's village" or "the huts for the rubbish." At that time the camp inmates belonged to one of three groups: the "thieves", the "bitches" and the "peasants." The politicals were included with the latter. Barbed wire separated their compounds.

"Thieves" and "bitches" were at daggers drawn with each other, that's why "peas-



The construction of Gulag 502. The roller used to level the ground was made of wooden planks weighted with stones. There were well over four thousand years between the building of Cheops' pyramid and that of the "dead" railway line on the northern tundra which led through Sakhard, Nadin, Uregoy, Sidorovsk and Igorka and which, Stalinist absurdity that it was, later sank into the ground, but the methods and tools were the same: forced slave labour which cost the lives of many thousands of "enemies of the people" in the post-war years (1947-1953).

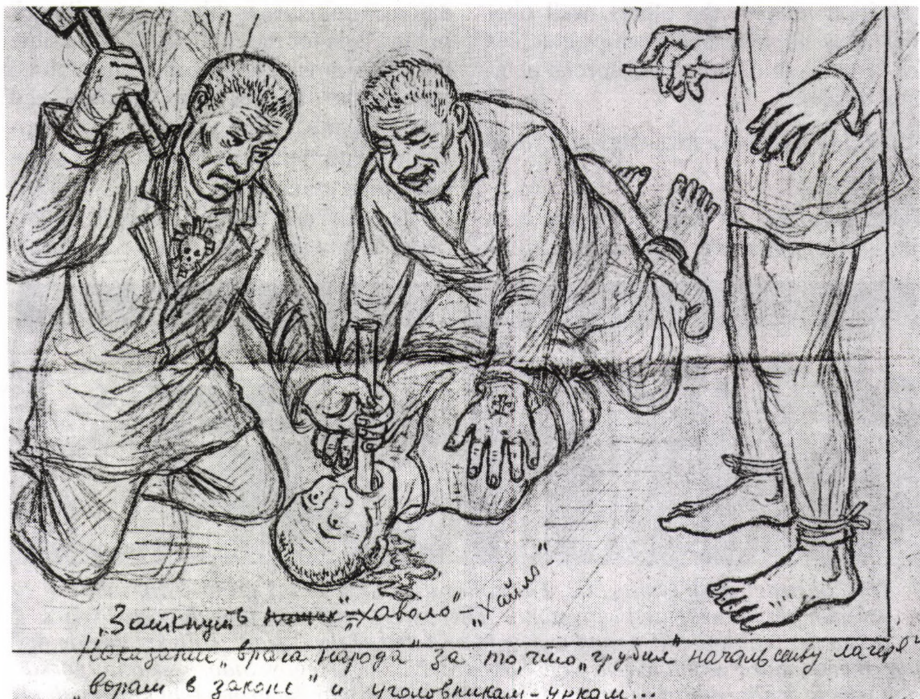
ants" were often placed between them, making their lives very difficult.

One of the drawings shows that self-defence groups, recruited amongst the prisoners, operated in the camps.

After 1945, on Beria's instructions, former MVD officers, and officers of other armed services amongst the common criminals, were recruited for this purpose. They were kept under observation for a year by the Operative Section and the camp command, and if they were judged to be "of strong constitution and ideologically sound", they were recruited by the Self-Defence Groups. They were generally housed in barracks outside the camp perimeter, given military rations, and issued with carbines and ammunition pouches—with fifteen cartridges at most. They wore no badges of rank, but were given army boots. Every day so served counted as three in their sentence. If they managed to stop an attempt to escape, their sentence was reduced by three years, short-sentence prisoners were released. The inmates were much more afraid of the Self-Defence lot than of the guards proper, since the former carried out regulations to the letter.

Much has been written about the privileged life of the "thieves", that they lived according to their own laws, and how severely they acted against all those who offended against them, or who wished to get out of that closed world.

The gang-leaders of the common criminals—perhaps in imitation of the Bolsheviks—applied a search and destroy policy to all those who offended against thieves' law, and dealt with them in kangaroo courts. Informers were often enough beheaded. The kangaroo courts, and the execution, took place at night when the guards were not around. At times like that the common criminals always ruled the roost.



Stuffed gizzard: a method of punishing enemies of the people for "cheeking" the camp authorities or the gangleaders of the thieves. (Sketch).

When Stalin abolished capital punishment in 1947, this, as it were, "freed" the common criminals. They began to butcher the Gulag staff, and even guards who were part of the armed services of the NKVD. They refused to work, and played cards for days on end, with the life of a guard as the stakes. They were not afraid of anything, since even the most terrible murders only meant an extra few years added to their sentence. The "enemies of the people" worked as hard as their strength allowed, and the common criminals lounged around the fire. The guards, of course, took no notice whatever.

If the common criminals were afraid of anybody it was the long-term "enemies of the people," since they had nothing much to lose. This was particularly true of the years after the war, when the "enemies of the people" created their own closed communities, called brigades, and were willing to kill, simply to restrain those common criminals who overshot the mark. But in the mid-fifties, not long after "the great cannibal" (Stalin) died, many of these political prisoners were amnestied.

Did you witness cannibalism by common criminals?

There was cannibalism at escapes, but not only there, also during the war, when food supplies broke down, especially in the Siberian and the northern camps. Not to mention Leningrad, during the siege. My colleague and friend at the Leningrad

The cannibals are caught red-handed.

Criminal Investigations Department, Ivan Alexeevich Egorov, told me about such horrors. He spent the whole siege in Leningrad and shot and killed six cannibals with his own hands. He was on patrol when a janitor approached him and said there was a smell of roast meat around the stairs. They quietly entered a flat. At the end of the corridor, in the bathroom, they caught the cannibals red-handed. Egorov shot a mother and son at close range. They found four bodies in the flat, three women and a boy of around seven or eight. There were three kegs there too, and in one of them they found chopped up legs, and other human remains, all in brine. There were two bucketfuls of human innards. A female head was on the chip-heater in the bathroom, another on a small table, with a log next to it, and a human leg and hatchet on top of that.

People found themselves in the camps after many cruel and humiliating interrogations. Their aim, generally, was to obtain some sort of confession.

In Leningrad those arrested were interrogated in the OGPU-NKVD building at 4 Liteyni Prospekt, what was known as the Great House, built in 1933. The KGB and the Criminal Investigation Command are still there. You couldn't get near it, it was guarded so closely. Between 1934 and 1940 the lights were on all night, every night. Interrogations all the time. The sound of shots in the cellars on the Ulica Voynov side was heard. Trucks rushed out through the shuttered gates in the direction of Sestrorek, an underground sewer led from the "workshop of death" to the Neva, taking the blood hosed off the cement floor. The sewer outfall was carefully guarded.

In one of your drawings you refer to the Third Degree. Expressions such as "hammering", "manicuring", "the meat grinder", "special treatment," and "chemical treatment" were used. Is that what you mean by Third Degree?

At the time interrogations had three degrees. The first included scaring people, threats, provocation, false accusations by witnesses who confronted them, and the demand that you sign the record of the interrogation. All that took place at the police station, as did the second degree, but by then you were punched and kicked and made to stand to attention for hours on end, motionless, facing the wall. Kicks to the crotch and the stomach were common.

The Third Degree started in 1937, in the "workshop of death", using various methods and instruments of torture, e. g., pincers, a vice or a soldering iron, clubs and rubber truncheons, imitating an execution, a blow-torch, or—in the case of high-rankig politicians—psychiatric drugs. People were tortured in the presence of relatives, wives,

In the years of the Personality Cult, at the time of Chief Public Prosecutor Vishinsky, a Zionist to the core [sic], brutal third degree methods of this sort were used to induce the victims to admit to being spies, etc.

1. Fists to punch people on the nose and in the crotch 2. Rubber truncheons and rubber hoses 3. Belts, to throttle with 4. Boots to massage ribs, stomachs, backs and other parts of the body 5. Pressing irons inside fine boots, small sand bags, etc. 6. Rubber bags for cutting off oxygen supply. 7. Drugs 8. Suspension 9. Bottle to be introduced in the vagina and the anus 10. The victim had to sit barebottomed on a pot, a rat was placed inside the pot and the pot was heated from below.

husbands, even small children. They were throttled with ropes, their nostrils, mouths and ears were distended and torn open. The hair on their head and their pubic hair was plucked. Rubber bags were pulled over their heads and they were scalded, wooden and metal rods were intruded in their anus and vagina. What happened depended on the mood of the torturers, their desire to innovate and try out new things. In the thirties and forties such methods were taught at NKVD courses, and practice was part of the instruction.

There were genuine executioners amongst them as well. I remember a certain Zhemov who was on the staff of the Ministry of the Interior in Leningrad up to 1954. He had become a hangman at the age of eighteen, in the early days of the October Revolution. As a member of the Cheka he hanged Czarist officers, Kronstadt mutineers, and later Mensheviks and Social Revolutionaries.

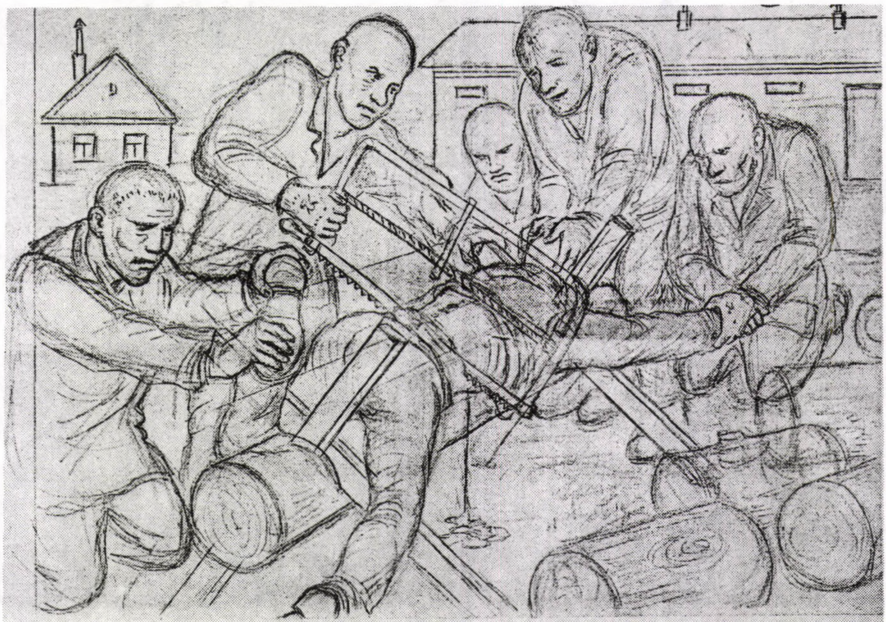
Working for the OGPU and the NKVD, he executed followers of Trotsky, Zinoviev, Bukharin and other "enemies of the people". It must have been in 1937 or 1938 that Zhemov, engaged on executing the staff of the command of the Leningrad Military District, saw a fine pair of chrome leather boots on one of the condemned and ordered him to take them off. The officer did so, but as Zhemov reached for them, he hit him hard in the face with one of the boots, and knocked out one of his eyes. Cyclops became Zhemov's new nickname. He was

Admit to everything! You wormed your way into the CPSU, you were appointed city and regional secretary, and you damaged our party from within. (Sketch).

not popular among his colleagues, having executed a number of them on the instructions of special control commissioners sent by the Moscow NKVD. They had been accused of lack of initiative in fighting the people's enemies, of carrying out their duties irresponsibly, of being left deviationists, too kind to spies, underminers and traitors, deviating from the Bolshevik platform, sympathizing with the enemies of the people, joining the Cheka with hostile intent, etc. Once, in 1953, young men in the MVD asked him how many death sentences he had carried out, that is, how many enemies of the people he had shot in the nape of the neck. Zhemov had gestured dismissively: "A few tens of thousand, you can't keep a note of all that."

Some of your drawings deal with the construction of the White Sea Canal and of the Baikal-Amur camps.

In the early thirties, when work on the latter started, tens of thousands of prisoners were directed there from the western regions of the country. Frankel, who was in charge of the construction, used to turn up by special train. He ordered that those who refused to work or otherwise offended against camp discipline, be taken to his carriage, and there he shot them himself, either from the platform, or through the window. After this revolver-practice, he descended from the train and looked over the victims to see whether he had hit them in the head or chest. Frankel was called "the implacable sword of David" by the arse-lickers amongst the guard. Beautiful young girl prisoners cooked for him and washed his clothes, bathed him and washed his back. Early on geologists found gold at the upper reaches of the Indirka, and two thousand prisoners were taken there. It soon turned out that the deposits were small and that the work did not pay for itself. To save the trouble of feeding the prisoners, or of transporting them back, they were all shot on the spot. All these memories were stirred



A thief who had 'snitched' is sawn in two after being sentenced by a kangaroo court.

up in me by the book *White Sea Canal,* edited by Maxim Gorky. In my opinion Gorky was no more than a 20th century Genghis Khan with a typewriter. He visited the White Sea Canal site accompanied by a hundred and thirty writers, and then sang praises of "the OGPU's wisdom and humanity."

There was no propaganda of that sort in connection with other camps, like Kolima, Magadan or Vanino. Why not?

There was no need. Pavlov, the commander of the region between 1938 and 1940, introduced an entirely new order. Security was tightened in every camp. More barbed wire, more searchlights and machine-guns in the towers. Pavlov raised working-hours to fourteen a day, later all rest-days were abolished. Prisoners who could not fulfill their quota received 400 gramms of bread, and soup without fat as their ration. Pavlov introduced dog patrols. The papers of civilian staff and the loads of trucks were carefully checked. The pay of camp commanders and guards was raised. In gold mines work went on even when the temperature was 60 centigrades below freezing point. In winter ice-breakeres from Vladivostok sailed ahead of the prisoner transports to ensure uninterrupted work. With higher approval Pavlov later ordered that inmates of the Northern and Southern Gulag, who did not fulfill their dargs, were to be condemned to death for sabotage under Article 38/14 of the Criminal Code. In 1938, Pavlov ordered that common criminals should be the foremen of gangs of "enemies of the people". This system was later introduced in every camp and NKVD prison, giving official sanction to the bestiality of the common criminals. "In

"I spied for Britain, France, America, Japan, Italy, Germany, and a few others". (Sketch).

the interest of production" political prisoners were raped and beheaded, their bellies were slit open, and hundreds were murdered in a bestial way. The roll of sick, weak, and "work dodging" inmates was handed to the Camp Troika by those in charge, which, again in terms of Article 38/14, pronounced sentence of death. According to estimates, 110 to 120,000 prisoners were "written off" in this manner during Pavlov's service in his post.

You illustrated several other methods of destruction, in addition to shooting.

Yes, I drew a number of sheets which all illustrate concrete, real events. Lapin, who worked for the Gulag, told me, for instance, that, in 1947, as commanded by Beria personally, five thousand Gulag inmates were embarked in two ships at the mouth of the Pechora, and both ships were scuttled. I discovered from an acquaintance that maimed and sick inmates were often embarked in ships in the thirties, at the Karlag and in other camps, with the difference that the ships were not scuttled. "The enemies of the people" were taken to islands in Lake Aral and left to their fate without food or water.

A Moscow Jew, one of the inmates, told me about the "without the last one" rule. Those who arrived last at a roll-call were

You piece of dirt, you were a kolkhoz foreman, you wanted to do damage by salting the sows' hay? Admit it you are an enemy! (Sketch).

shot in the head. As a result inmates did not get undressed at night, and rushed to the morning roll-call carrying their boots, only pulling them on, and doing up the laces, when standing in line.

When were the inmates kept in pits?

Victor Koygorodoev told me about that at the end of '47. He had told a joke about Stalin and was sentenced to ten years under Article 58/10. For a time he worked in a forest camp on the banks of the Kem. It owed its reputation to the fact that, in winter, inmates were "stored" in pits. The lucky ones lived in summer tents, with the temperature at forty to fifty below.

There was a warrant out for escapees for many years, and they almost always found them. It often enough happened that those caught escaping were shot on the spot. Ivan Vasilevich Makarov, who was arrested as an "enemy of the people" in Leningrad in 1938 and only released in 1956, told me that, according to a command issued by the Magadan Gulag, prisoners shot trying to escape were taken back to camp suspended from a rod to set an example. They were then exposed to public view. Summers the wind carried the smell of decomposing corpses far and wide, winters the bodies turned black and the snow covered them.

Mutiny was obviously one way of protesting. Did they ever succeed in obtaining concessions?

No, almost never. Mutinies, called *kipish* by the inmates, were always suppressed in the cruellest manner possible. My informants used to serve with Operative Units of

Recalcitrant 'enemies of the people' were impaled à la Turque following condemnation by the leading thieves of the camp, who constituted a kangaroo court. All this was done with the tacit agreement of the labour camp authorities. (Sketch).

the MVD and personally took part in the suppression of mutinies, for instance that at Kuzbaslag. Armoured vehicles were used just about every time, and those gunned down were also run over. In 1947, near Sverdlovsk, the mutineers destroyed the camp buildings and set fire to them, disarming and killing some of the guards. 900 mutineers were killed in the fighting, the others, around four thousand, escaped into the working zone, and there surrendered. Big mutinees took place in the Komi Autonomous Republic, in Eastern Siberia and in the Dalstroy. NKVD units commanded by General Maslenikov particularly distinguished themselves in suppressing these mutinees.

In practice there were only two ways of escaping the camps: either by volunteering for front-line service, or by committing suicide. Markovich, a NKVD veteran, told me about the former. He had escorted armed inmates, still wearing their dark-grey or black Gulag uniforms, all the way to White Russia or the Ukraine. They were locked up in goods trucks. Even I know of a fair few inmates who deliberately threw themselves onto the barbed wire to attract fire from the watch-towers. Sometimes two or three linked arms and moved towards the guards, to be mowed down. When the Tayshet-Usty-Kut railway line was built, inmates went beyond the line staked out by flags, and took no note of either warning calls or shots. Sometimes prisoners weakened by hunger lacked the strength to return to camp after work and just collapsed at the roadside. They were warned in vain to get back into line, they could not stand up again, so they were shot. The frozen corpses were taken back to camp the next day, and any clothing that could still be used was taken off them. A report was written, signed by the camp doctor, the Operative Officer, and the guard, and that was it. Everything was done according to the rule-book.

I read an article about the two hundred thousand men and women prisoners working in various colonies and camp units in the Ozoylag. As a work incentive all those men who completed a double darg were allowed across into the women's quarters for sex. The women with whom they coupled also had to complete a double darg. At the end of each working day everyone excitedly toted up what they had achieved in the "socialist work competition", every centimeter and gramme counted and was carefully recorded.

How many took part in this mass date?

A hundred men and a hundred women who were all good workers. After the evening meal and ablutions, the lucky lot fell in and were checked, lest an unworthy man had sneaked in amongst the best workers. Then a guard shouted: "If anyone steps out of line to the left or right I shall shoot without warning." Then came the long-awaited word of command: "To the women, quick march." A hundred hearts and throats joyously chanted "The Cossacks are on the move".

Meanwhile, I imagine, the women too were getting ready.

Indeed. As Alexey Marinat, the author of the article, wrote, the Loving Hundred were taken to a specially cleaned and tidied hut after the evening meal. Uniformed female warders guarded them, as well as the men, making sure that none but the selected were there. Those who had hung on to their finery were allowed to put on their prettiest clothes. They washed and combed their hair and, to calm down, lay down in their cots and, lacking either face-powder or scent, just examined their faces in a mirror and kept on adjusting their hair.

How were the couples made up?

When the long awaited moment arrived and the gate opened, the shiny-eyed men were counted in one by one by the female warders. Then the visitors were taken to the back door of the hut. That's where the

lady's choice took place. There and then, at the door, the women chose the men who were to their liking and, as is the custom when the ladies choose, took them by the hand and waist. After that no time was lost on sighs and shy looks, without any sense of shame they went ahead and performed for two hours, getting the reward their work deserved.

I too saw women inmates at work in the Irkutsk area, more precisely, the construction of the Tayshet-Usty-Kum railway line. They were mostly "enemies of the people", teachers, doctors, engineers, research workers, only a few of them had worked in agriculture or industry. There were women prisoners in the Ulan Ude glassworks as well, and indeed right along the Trans-Siberian Railway Line.

The mother of one of my friends, Zinaida Franzevna Belskaya, was taken away in December 1937, two weeks after her husband had been arrested. Though innocent, she spent twenty years in various camps. For years she was a doctor in various timber processing camps in the Irkutsk area, later in the health centre of the camps, and then in a prison hospital. University professors were the junior doctors in that hospital, and Zinaida first had the satus of cleaner, and then of a nurse. She always spoke of her great luck that an old aquaintance of her husband's managed to get her that hospital job.

Zinaida introduced me to two of her friends who did time in Komi Autonomous Republic camps as the wives of "enemies of the people." They spoke of the unbelievable working conditions, using handsaws on their knees to cut down trees, telling of falling trees that caused life-long injuries. No doctors attended those who suffered accidents. The half-dead women had to lie on the snow until the working day came to an end. A commission thoroughly examined every injury to a horse, but not a man. Belskaya died of lung-cancer in 1972.

There were many ways in which women were tortured. My colleague Ivanov, an inspector at Prison No 1 in Leningrad, said that they kept a special cell for really serious criminals where they also locked up the "enemy of the people" women. What happened there should never have seen the light of day, since those criminals were always executed following sentence by the "little troika". Then new common criminals were placed in the cell, they were given new women, and things started all over again.

I know of a similar case. When, in 1952, on leave, I visited the camp at Tayshet I was told of three gangs of women being taken back to camp after work. About 140 or 150 of them. The men returned from a construction job at the same time, 200 of them. Only the railway tracks separated them, and a long train was just passing. As soon as it did so the men and women, as if at a word of command, rushed at each other with open arms, unbuttoning, undressing on the move. They all stumbled into one wild embrace. The guards, around 15 or 20, in confusion, tried to separate them. Their commands of "fall-in" and warning shots were, however, ignored by the ecstatic couples. All they could do was to surround the couples and patiently await the end of the stormy love-making.

After about half an hour, having adjusted their clothing and got into line, they loudly called to each other: "What is your name dear?" "See you soon." "Which zone are you in, where can I write to?" "I want a child. What will we call him, what will be his patronymic?", etc. They blew kisses to each other, cried with joy, smiled, laughed, and were all very happy. Forty or fifty men had to do without a woman, but finally the women embraced them too. Those in charge of the guards were then severely punished for permitting "collective coupling."

The Gulag was prepared for the consequences. The pregnant women were placed in special colonies, called "nurseries", where they stayed till their babies turned two. Those were Stalin's grandchildren, later taken to children's homes. There was

a tremendous wailing and crying when they were taken from their mothers. The country was their Mother, and Stalin was their Father: it was they who later became Stalin's Eagles. It was almost a law of nature that, once grown up, they should end up in camps as real common criminals.

One of your drawings suggests that there was "culture" in the camps as well.

It was more or less a rule that the political authorities should run the culture section. Inmates who were professional actors, writers, painters, singers or acrobats worked there. Wall-newspapers were displayed in club premises and Lenin-rooms, and the inmates were organized in study groups. Performances were rehearsed with the guards. Every commander tried to obtain as many good artists of the highest reputation as possible. Like the magnates of old, they had their own court actors and court painters. If there were any clubs these had had to organize agitprop performances there, and the painters had to paint the portraits of the commanders.

The inmates were generally happy to take part in these cultural functions. I suppose they added a little colour to their lives.

According to Roy Medvedev, at least forty million people perished in the camps alone. Other estimates confirm this. If fourteen million people were held there at any one time, and there was an annual mortality rate of 8 per cent, then there was a complete turnover every twelve years. If this is repeated at least three or four times, we end up with forty to forty-two millions. Is that possible?

I too have heard this figure mentioned but I do not think it can be taken as final. People who spent time in the camps of Kolima, Kraslag, Dalstroy and the Komi Autonomous Republic (P. V. Grishchin, I. V. Makarov, V. Koygarodtzev, Nikolay Fomin) and all the others with whom I discussed the subject, all said that in their opinion 30-50 per cent died within the first five years of their sentence, and that between 1926 and 1956 close to fifty-two million perished.

One of your really interesting drawings is captioned "Triumph of the nuts and bolts". The ghost of Generalissimo Stalin appears to be hovering over the nuts and bolts.

During the war and immediately after it, Stalin apostrophied the Soviet people as a heroic people and a victorious people. But on July 25th 1945, when he gave a reception for all those who took part in the victory parade, he called us nuts and bolts in his toast. At that time the official press and the arse-lickers of the regime screamed from the house-tops that we, Soviet men and women, were the nuts and bolts of the powerful Soviet state machinery. I, personally, felt deeply offended. At the time of Stalinism you could do as you liked with these machine men, these slaves. You could destroy them, melt them down, and pour them into a new mould. That system was based on totally disregarding and humiliating men. It never tolerated what really makes a man or woman: individuality, thinking for oneself, pride. It did not tolerate anything like that since a man, in Stalin's own words, is nobody. Just nuts and bolts.

Robert F. Barsky

Poems

The Soldier on the Tarmac

The day's whirlwind of greys and blues,
flashes of unannounced
hues and ever more familiar shapes
—all but fading memory now—
sinks into the deeper shadow of night.
The man with the machine gun on the tarmac
(Though in his hands the gun appeared to be a toy)
was lying lies of preconception and days-gone-by.

The break of day announces streams of, well,
workers, chores and diesel trucks, crying children
in two-room flats, choked city streets and unconvincing black marketeers, homeless Gypsies, and cries for more reform, but also yellows, ochres, blues and greens, Hungarians dressed like tourists and they as if on display for the Hungarians.
I gaze back upon the tarmac and wonder
when he, that twenty-three year old near-
foreboding figure, last walked through these oft-
gay streets of Budapest.

A shot fired, the silence broken by the pain of
incision, the pain of invasion of the foreign,
unforgiving, hardened object. In the museum
atop the mountain they speak of floods
and bombs. In *The New Hungarian Quarterly*
they hint mysteriously at 1956. Yzabelle
and I eat sumptuously and wonder
whose shells, whose muskets, whose swords,
penetrated these great old buildings.

Robert F. Barsky *is a Canadian poet and editor of* Discours social/Social Discourse, *a magazine published in Montréal. He wrote these poems while on a visit to Hungary in 1988.*

The problem which the image presented by the man on the tarmac
is that he presented nothing but or beyond himself.
The people smiled and pushed their way past him,
their arms loaded down with sacks from—
Sachs' leaps into mind but that can't be right—
some English equivalent to an American copy of a British
department store, and we crept by looking anxious
and reservedly optimistic. His disgusted glare might
well be unreserved resentfulnes or—I hope not—
a sense of the whimsical bubbling up in the
old soldier in him.

The House Atop the Hill

The over-grown, seldom used pathway speaks to us
neglect, and splendour-filled days-gone by.
Communism has rooted itself between the carefully-laid stones,
and flourished in natural splendour and chaos.
The alleyway opposite of a once great, rooted place,
a mansion of inestimable richness (now divided to house six families)
is locked. But its iron-worked door frame
and carefully-wrought window-frames
(devoid of windows) no longer hide the
now crumbling
plaster-walled alleyway with its well-used
oddly-placed
carefully-sculpted
plaster icon.

The Large Women in the National Museum

We are followed, incessantly, by those who watch over the
history of Middle Europe. They have no story to tell
or if they have, refuse to recount it to us;
their story seems to be repressed behind the ropes,
where we are asked to stand and survey—but not to touch.
To observe the petrified objects, the faded maps
or gilded crowns, demands imagination;
to stand around and over the relic that sits in the chair
before us demands a sense of humour.
That hardened woman, sitting on the hard-wood chair
protects with dignity and attentiveness
but also ruthlessness and pride
a past represented by golden, jewel-studded crowns,
robes of leather, masks of stone
and diamond-encrusted religious icons.
We stare into the past, searching for an object-world,
and find instead the forbidden ancestors of this
grouchy old woman.
The sign beneath the icon says that
this good king united and maintained and
oppressed on odd days only,
that this bad one led the armies in from Turkey
and killed the good king's favourite dog.
And first child.
Bad king.
I walk through the long hallway asking
where Hungary was doing those 2000 battle-torn years,
and what is left of Magyar roots
in those newly built and well-lit
glass cages, or in scorn
of the large old woman who is now
breathing down our necks
and scolding us for wrongs we did not commit,
in the times when women wore the weight of men's
deathly urges.

Pál Závada

The Tray-Place in Kirov Street

(Fiction)

Traveller, I hailed you five years ago, though I did not then know it was you I was addressing, should you find yourself wandering around the neighbourhood of Dzerzhinsky or Turgenev Square and feel the pangs of hunger assail you, do not shun the tray-place in Kirov Street! And once you have peeped in, do not hurry on, I cautioned you, keeping my words of advice to myself in an unlined loose-leaved notebook, perhaps surmising that I would be wasting my breath, do not look any farther, for you can't do better!

You may try to get into the restaurant of a better class hotel, but what you'll find on the menu will not necessarily taste better than what you would get in Kirov Street, but will certainly cost you appreciably more. You may try out one of the more popular restaurants known for their special cuisine, but there you may have to wait as much as half an hour or an hour at the door, and the unruly rabble of which you yourself will form a part will be disciplined and drilled by a flat-hatted doorman who will, conversely, let in those who get there after you: ill-usage which you are untrained for! It is not certain, you would have interposed, if I had in fact submitted my admonishments to you, that a man is one of those monkeys of this circus who always wants to repeat those exercises which he has been taught to do. Didn't you catch the hidden irony of those words, I would have cried, nonplussed. Oh, but I did, you would have said, nodding.

And don't let the catering units bearing signs that spell KAFÉ fool you either: don't think that these are places where you can sprawl around having a coffee and a smoke! In most of them you have to queue up at the counter just as in any eating-place, the difference is that here you have to eat your food standing up at high-legged tables. And the fact that the *kafé* may have a marble floor, is stuccoed all round, perhaps with painted ceilings or walls, armed with bronze candelabra, wrought-iron wall-brackets and fake crystal chandeliers, will do nothing to improve the food and the service and will not alleviate the stench and the overcrowding. Alright, I'll be careful, you would have said reassuringly. Then there are the *pirochnayas,* I would have added, narrowing down the list, where they give you a cup of tea or white coffee with your *pirog,* but these are more like tea-shops, and not the kind of place where you can relax. On the

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Pál Závada *is a sociologist who has recently turned to writing fiction.*

contrary, you have to stand in line and wait your turn, elbowing your way laboriously to the counter, wolf it all down standing up, and leave as quickly as you can.

And never let the late hours find you without food, I appealed to you, especially if you should be in the vicinity of the Kiev Station! For you will find the restaurant of the Kievskaya Hotel closed, as I did, here is the date, on the 21st October 1985, and so made a note of the event the next morning, and by the time you find the refreshment room in that vast, turreted, glass-domed labyrinth, you will have to resign yourself to the army style of issuing of provisons: join the snaking queue in the glass-domed hall and in three-quarters of an hour you will receive a thick slice of cold sausage which the catering attendants snatch out of aluminium pots and slap into your hands together with the hunk of bread that goes with it. Once you have bolted down your supper, you can turn into the private room marked SODA WATER, where you can have a drink from a vending machine for the price of three kopecks. Alright, I imagine you urging, so if all of this is counter-indicated, what then...?

Stick to the place in Kirov Street, for your own good! Do not resist the invitation painted on the window-pane "Patronize Our Restaurant!"; do not allow the battered portal, bearing all the signs of a bustling trade: crumbling plaster, disintegrating stairs, make you mistrustful, do not be alarmed by the doleful grating of the door as it opens, the threshold worn down to the bone, the debris of the customers, the sea of cigarette butts, crumpled paper, ice-cream cones, banana skins and gobs. There will be no bananas when I go that way, you would have remarked.

Walk in, and take no notice of the stomach-churning, dense smell! Stand in line at the cloak-room counter but never fear: the arrangements here are quick, rigorous and precise, the duties of a cloak-room attendant cannot be fulfilled by someone who shilly-shallys. You will have to mark time at the trays and cutlery counter, unless you are an invalid, or took part in the battles of the Great Patriotic War, in which case you may go to the head of the queue. Take a plastic tray from the top of the pile and do not be surprized if it feels greasy to the touch. You want a knife, but don't let that bother you, knives are dangerous weapons that cannot be left lying about irresponsibly, that can lead to trouble. The sense of responsibility, the maturity of consciousness, and the system of social relations are all formed in dynamic interaction with the development of the productive forces of society. And there are no miracles. No miracles? I could not count on anything else you would have predicted, leaving my perplexed questions unanswered.

Once you are at the counter, do not speculate too long, don't try to decipher the illegibly typed menu, do not sniff, or ask questions, for you will be no wiser if you do, and, holding up the queue as you inevitably will, you will bring down the wrath of the entire technological process on yourself! Better to let it happen, you would have jeered, and it will grind you up with no trouble at all. Because you can never tell, I would have continued, turning a deaf ear to your remark, whether those varicose-veined, hefty women shovelling food with serving

spoons will laugh at you or abuse you if you ask them whether there is anything else to be had other than what you see. So grab hold of the nearest plate, put it on your tray and sidle along slowly after the others towards the cash register! Keep your elbows in, for you may be upended by those forging ahead, who might either knock your arm to make you stand aside, or grab you by the shoulder, if they are in a hurry. But if you were a woman, you would have interrupted, you would have had to jump aside long before any of this had happened, with your eyes downcast of course, though perhaps it is only down south that the averting of eyes is expected of us, you would have said, imagining the religious demarcation lines on a map.

In the meantime, you could peep into the kitchen, I said, drawing your attention to an experience that promises to make an exceptionally deep impression on you, and you will see that the situation is far worse inside than it is out there where you are standing and will soon be sitting down. To be sure, this mill of food is aging badly, the walls are peeling, the thick steam has saturated and eaten away every inch of it. Beneath the uncheckably crumbling plaster the entrails of the kitchen visibly hang loose: a broken battery of taps worked free of the wall, greasy drains, rust-chewed stove-pipes, boiler-tubes fatly swathed and shapeless with rags of insulating material, torn tin exhaust pipes, plugged ventilators. The tiled floor is cracked and broken, wet and slippery, black with greasy grime in the unfrequented areas (in the corners, niches, along the walls, beneath the stoves), no cleaning woman could take up the struggle now. And oh, the pots! So many identical, heavy aluminium pots, disreputable as to contents and appearance alike, soiled a brownish-black right up to the handles! And the enamelled sauce-pans, baking tins, cauldrons and containers of unrecognizable colour! Decrepit gas ranges, enormous blackened stoves! The dilapidated, plate-churning, rattling little dishwasher swimming in slop-water and beside it the clattering kitchen help. The women in their rubber boots and worn plastic aprons bustling around the stoves and the counter, with smears that look like vomit staining their bellies! This is familiarly disgusting, but not that dangerous, you would have said mysteriously, thinking it would be unnecessary and impossible to explain to me.

Have your money ready: you can expect to pay about one rouble for a plate of soup, a main course, a glass of stewed fruit and a slice of bread. Always have some change on you, and don't mistake the larger five kopeck piece for the smaller fifteen or twenty one! For that matter, always have the necessary words prepared when you do any shopping, for the shuffling of feet, stuttering and pointing at things may entail harsh reprimand! Never fear, life soon teaches you the language, you would have interrupted, it is amazing, the communication one is capable of, when the need arises!

When you have paid, seat yourself quickly in the first available place, if possible facing the mosaic wall at the end of the room. On the one hand, you can feast your eyes on this vividly-coloured work of art depicting a river bank, on the other, you can keep an eye on the second queue at the back counter, to catch

it when it grows shorter. For that is where they serve the beer. I don't like beer, you would have pointed out, neither do I, not that much, I would have explained, beer exemplifies something here, it is a symbol of something.

For this is the out-of-the-common speciality of the tray-place in Kirov Street: it is a place where you can sit over your beer. You must know that around here they have really taken up the fight against alcoholism, they do not merely wrestle with the input of drunkards but keep their finger on the pulse of alcohol output of the catering trade. The explanation is obvious: what would the country come to if people were to tipple all over the place? Think of all the absenteeism, the accidents, the illnesses and indolence, the family problems! So do not grumble if you find a queue half a street long at the shop when they begin to sell wine or vodka and do not be surprised that the barrows and kiosks where *kvass,* the thin beer made from fermented bread, is sold, are being liquidated; do not grumble if the waiter brings you only a Baikal soft drink to go with your lunch, and don't look obtuse when every kind of wine, beer and hard liquor is crossed out; appreciate it that you can get red wine in the pizzeria, champagne in the ice-cream parlour, and beer in certain restaurants, though only if you eat, and don't ask for anything else! You won't find vodka or brandy anywhere except in the bars of restaurants set up to fleece foreigners, for a multiple of the price you expect to pay. By May 1990, in Bokhara, not even there, you might have added, insolently precise in your forecast. And anyway, forget about vodka, mineral water'll be just as hard to come by, will have to be nicked off the restaurant tables by the bottle, though I'll nip over to the Intourist Hotel next to mine, foreseeing that I must lay up a supply of something to drink if I do not want to desiccate on the bed. What bed? I would have asked foolishly.

So bless your good fortune for having guided you to Kirov Street in the capital for there you can sit over your beer and stare into space. But first, spoon up your lukewarm cabbage soup, then try to dismember the pieces of meat swimming in mashed potatoes with your fork and spoon! You may use your hunk of bread and even your hands to accomplish this, no one will think you ill-mannered. But don't be scandalized either if the standards of etiquette are not observed opposite you, if a yokel in a suit and fancy shirt, tie shot with silver and a badge on his lapel, spits quietly on the floor over his glass of beer.

Do not ask for a knife except in the last resort, for this is a complicated business, even given good intentions. First of all, though you know it will be in vain, you will be sent to the cutlery basket, then to the lady standing sentry at the duty table, but your problem will be the least of her cares. Instead, you had best seek out the least surly-looking of those clearing the tables, and put your problem to her openly and candidly. A useful piece of advice at last, you would have said. The principle you have to start from is that the paltriest office business is more important than yours, you would have expounded, though perhaps not so pedantically, and anyone who can do nothing for you, either from conviction or from fear, is an official. So what one must do is to try to make them forget who they are, if only for a moment; it is not a bad idea to encourage them a little. As I shall have to encourage the housemaid, the doctor,

the woman at the air-ticket counter... And by then I would not even have tried to ask you who those people were. And if she takes pity on you, I would have continued, she will lend you her own knife, which she will take out of her apron pocket. It will be a notched plastic knife, serviceable for cutting all the same. Eat quickly, but take care with your aluminium fork, for it is liable to bend out of shape, and it will not be easy to straighten it, slippery as it will be with sauce (there are no paper napkins). Drink the juice of your stewed fruit, spoon the grapes out of the bottom of the glass, return the knife, and you can go and queue up again—for beer.

Here trade is not so brisk and smooth, as you can have boiled eggs, slices of cold sausage and even cake to go with your beer, and the act of calculation is not mechanized. The fat lady in this confidential post, her blonde hair done up in a bun at the nape of her neck, reels off the figures, sliding the beads back and forth on an abacus; besides serving you, weighing things, counting, taking money and giving change, moving crates and baking sheets and exchanging empty bottles for full ones, she has to size you up and decide whether you are eligible for beer and if so, for how much. She has to hold her ground against the horde of loud-mouthed, thirsty men and when she has had enough of them she simply states that she has run out, and goes to the back to pack crates. Her lunchbreak is between half past three and half past four, which she starts early and drags out, so do not dream of having a beer between three and five, and don't point at your watch either, for she will come out from behind her counter and under the pretext of cleaning will literally sweep you out together with your comrades in misfortune. Don't try to insist on being a customer, don't think it entitles you to anything, oh, you would have sighed at this point, staring into the distance, don't try to suggest that she was obliged to serve you for your money, don't forget that anyone working in catering is in some respects a public official.

Once the bottle of beer is happily in your hands, take a glass from the table beside the enormous samovar and sit yourself down if there is where. You are at leisure now, look around. Take a good look at the mosaic on the wall that calls to mind our vibrant age, gape at its size and do not pull faces. Deliberate whether it is better to stand in the fast food bar of the Moskva Hotel, facing that yellow-hazel-crimson coloured, marble-inlaid painting depicting the Bolshoi Theatre with the four rearing horses at the top and the scarlet lettering in the left-hand corner saying FOR PARENTS WITH SMALL CHILDREN AND INVALIDS ONLY. And then you will realize that there is nothing better than the tray-place in Kirov Street.

Look, you would have explained, I see what you mean, but this is the fourth time that you've pointed out that it's better not to run around all over the place because one can easily get into trouble. Let's admit it, that's how you see things, really. But then why go as far as Kirov Street at all? So I can be a stranger, and lie on my hotel bed until the time comes for me to go out and eat. But I shall be busy and going places, you would have said, looking me squarely in the eye. And

what do you expect to gain, I would have said, raising my voice, by setting out… Realization, encounters, enlightenment, you would have retorted, if you want to put it in words. But why there, I would have said obtusely, why there of all places? I told you, you would have said, I told you I would be going places, and, begging your pardon, I'm not going to stop at Kirov Street!

It's a fine, big eating place. Ten windows face the street, four of these are shop-window size. You can stare out through them at the shops opposite, at the mysterious office with its AGITPUNKT signboard, at the bustle in the street. Note the look of joyful recognition in the eyes of those peeping in from without as they behold your beer-bottle; you will see teenage girls deliberating over whether they should go in or not, and exasperated wives dragging husbands away from the window, and harassed shoppers with bags that attest to severe trials and hardfought battles. And admit that your are having a good time of it, being able to observe it all at leisure.

You can count the tables, for one: they are aligned two by two, and there are two rows of twelve such double tables, which means that a hundred and forty-four people can be seated at the same time. The chairs are comfortable, upholstered, though some are a bit on the grimy side. As are the table and the floor, but that is only natural, given that this is no museum, but the scene of active life. There are no tablecloths, but how else could the women who clear the tables daub at them, slapping their cloths around your plate, even reaching under your elbows? You can survey the splotched, mouldering walls and note that no expense has been spared on the other side of the counter, the walls there are panelled in red imitation leather. You can peep into the office right beside the duty table, the door is left wide open. You will find the manageress bowed over columns of figures on sheet-size forms and accounts, with a red-lettered sign above her head proclaiming the importance of the quality and efficiency of work.

Stage décor, you would have said, experience of surfaces. But everything that takes place, assumes shape, moves, speaks… People will appear on the stage, be patient, I would have promised. That's not what I had in mind, you would have said, averting your eyes, a naked stone can speak, a twig snapped in two can make me burst into tears.

Just go on drinking! You can stare into the doughy face of the young woman with the badly bleached hair sitting at the table next to yours, imagining that her peroxide hair probably feels like fibreglass, harsh to the touch; you will see that her lazy, mascara'd eyes move seldom and slowly in her face, that she is always sleepy, or so she complains to her husband, who is nervously rummaging about in his pockets, chewing on a matchstick. They use too much peroxide—you would have said from behind a flaring match from the corner of your mouth from which a cigarette dangles—on their heads.

No coffee? I imagined you asking naively, trying to guess what you'd miss most but, you'd better believe it, as the saying goes, this is not the place where there is no coffee. The place where there is no coffee is the coffee-shop. And that is where you will be annoyed to find, if you are a smoker, that you may not

smoke even in places where no food is served. NO SMOKING HERE, you will read on every wall, or simply: *NIE KURIT!* And there will be no exceptions to the rule, not even of the kind you experienced in the case of drink. It gives you food for thought, doesn't it, but you do not pick your nose, spit, fart and piss in public places either. Everyone must find an out-of-the way place for himself. Caught red-handed in the act, you will find SMOKING IS PROHIBITED! on the lavatory walls. That is why you will find the smokers milling on doorsteps, at the foot of staircases, in doorways and the entrances of shops, offices and underground stations, leaving a thick carpet of butts behind them. Don't think of coffee and cigarettes at your table in Kirov Street, concentrate on the beer that you were granted!

Well, apart from the beer, all those words would do very well, you would have said, and what I would say, you would have continued, as one who imagines, concentrate on what was granted you: your imagination, which will perhaps, for this reason, at this time, have the opportunity to become genuinely perceivable. I would have stared at you benumbed.

Imagine with passion, but do not desire too vehemently, you should have said, turning your face to me with this calm warning addressed more to yourself than to me. And I would immediately have thought that perhaps this was the time when you would like to sit on the highest rock at one of the corners of the world where you could be truly close, by yourself. Because then, though you were not aware of it, you already knew. For this reason, now that two weeks have gone by since I took you to the airport and, waiting for news of you, imagine conversations between the lines of old admonitions, I could attribute previsionary hints to you. For the future was in the air, around you, sometimes you even touched it with a word, like when someone has a word at the tip of his tongue but someone else beats them to uttering it. The voice on the phone saying, out of the blue, that here was the opportunity, the decision must be made immediately to set off for Bokhara in Uzbekistan to a sculptors' colony. And we had hardly time to repeat, almost unanimously, what it behoves to say on such occasions, that naturally, it would be a crime to miss such an opportunity, when, you said, whipping out your guide-books, the things one could do there, and in any case, you've been pining to go for so long, and so very much, and then you were gone.

Traveller, I read, leaving the airport behind me early that morning, taking out the spiral notebook again upon reaching home, perhaps because it was my only tangible experience of that country, but it isn't even the same country! But by that time I knew it was you it was addressed to.

Don't voice your feelings about the lack of music! Just think: do you really miss having Su-za-na, Su-za-na, Su-za-na, the refrain from the international hit, bawled into a microphone, in a popularly quickening rhythm, the violet-jacketed, silver-collared musicians beating time with flailing arms and stamping feet, old and young bobbing around the dance-floor, when the yellow patterned shirts with patches of sweat around the armpits and the cleft of the buttocks flashing out above slipped-down trousers rid themselves of encumbering

jackets, when knitted suits are loosened and unbuttoned skirts sheathing bouncing fat stomachs are held up only by jammed zippers? You'd do much better to hum to yourself!

And whistle, so as not to be afraid. To make the darkness disappear from each other's eyes, as we should have done on the last day. When we were unable to split off audible words from the stone block of silent speech. At last I, though only owing to a lack of discipline, succeeded. Putting a question to the silence and if this is the last time that we…? As it was with him that Saturday night, when all he said was that he was tired and that they were going home, and the look he gave us then was the last he bequeathed to us…? You are leaving, and we haven't even buried him yet. With you leaving, I thought, oh, we'll have so much time together, and how much time is needed by two men, friends, discussing a subject. Now these two, what are they, changes, self-pity made me say, are too much for me. But at least you…? I'll come, I'll be here, and I'll find you here, you looked in front of you. You sat there beside me and you were already on your way, not wanting me to follow your departing figure even with my eyes, but my eyes, whether I wished it or not, fell always, like a plunging weight, on the same spot: in the mind's eye the clean-shaven, bluish face, the darkly burning eye, the tall, spare body.

Always appear cheerful, though mysterious, and strike up a conversation—to whom would this suggestion be pleasing?—with the short-haired, hawk-eyed, sinewy-slender woman drinking beer by herself on the other side of the table. She is probably a gymnastics coach from Kiev accompanying her husband on a field-trip. *Komandirovka* is the key word to go the round of the shops in the capital. She will talk for hours, then want a breath of fresh air, and around ten o'clock at night will call her husband at the relatives' from the telephone booth on the corner, I haven't got another fifteen kopeck piece, Mitya, *don't shout!*, she will shout into the receiver. They're keeping my place in the queue, I have to hurry back, yes, for you! Italian shoes, what? Stupid, of course I've seen them, white, with little tassels, men's shoes, she says, taking them out of her bag and looking at them as she described her wares. And as she does so she can hardly suppress her excited giggles, of course it's closed, why, what did you think, we're waiting at the back, by the stock-room. I don't know, until morning, she hangs the receiver up and laughs stridently.

If all that I did not tell you in the end, I continued, causes you no surprise, do not be surprised by the unusual forms the marketing and procurement of goods will take either. Pay a visit to the theatre and you will see that in the foyer, where a single seller of sweets idled during the first interval, ladies in evening dress flocking out during the second interval will, with loud cries of RIBA, form an orderly queue in the space of seconds, for a white-coated, stentorian-voiced will be slapping large fish, wriggling like writhing young girls, bodies arched in a tight embrace, onto a hastily erected table from seeping crates, wrapping them in *Pravda*, and slipping them under the bare arms of the evening-dressed women.

The joy sprung upon them unexpectedly, ripples across the faces of the women with thrilling ecstasy, and will cause a slight flutter in the audience, writhing excitedly, during the third act.

No such surprises will ever await you in Kirov Street. And this will be the reason you will come to prefer the place, because it is reliable, predictable. Luckily, I did not impart this exasperating piece of information to you and will not do it now, for according to your schedule, you are now past your third *transit day* in the capital without having strayed into Kirov Street, which I did not call to your attention, though you were probably not more than an arm's length away from it at some time in your roamings, and have set off again, probably in a jerkily rocking flying bus accessible only by an iron ladder, to take advantage of the proximity of the heavens for a secret conversation, as I imagine you doing with your eyes closed, hands loosely folded in your lap, only to descend into the unpredictable Uzbek world that has so many surprises in store for you, which was presumably the precise reason why you were prepared to like it.

And despite the fact that it really is predictable from every angle, or perhaps for this very reason, do not go into the lavatory of this eating-place so close to your heart! Though you are certainly experienced in this field, so much so that you may justly believe life can hold no surprises for you, think of the water-closet in the first-class restaurant of Chistoprudni Boulevard with its bulging bowl, rickety pan and tumble-down door, lower the quality by a couple of notches and you will see before you the tray-place in Kirov Street from the rear. You don't have to try everything!

We would obviously have interpeted this cautionary admonition differently, but on the twenty-first day following your departure I learned that you agree with me in that it is not necessary to try out certain home-made narcotic pellets, kneaded from various, mysterious plants and fats and meant to be placed under the tongue. I spent those twenty days as though under water fighting decompression sickness, and it was either that they forgot to shake the rope to signal that I could come up or it was I who lost the faculty of rising, but I felt that I had been sitting down there for an eternity. Yet what were those twenty days compared to his hereafter, for those days began with the day of his burial, and what is caisson pressure compared to his, or whatever he has now. Or even compared to your time and estrangement during these days about which, after there had been no news of you for an immeasurable length of time, I learned from your first letter from Bokhara, which arrived on the twenty-first day. According to the date you wrote the letter on the day of and the day following the burial, enumerating the events happening until that time hour by hour; that is how I know that, following your arrival and the hasty hotel breakfast, you were suddenly herded into a bus, as though it were only a question of a short field trip, and after three hundred kilometres of vicissitudes, with no consideration for your unattendable menstruation smiting down upon you at the hundredth kilometre, you were called upon to choose a block in a "desperately beautiful" marble quarry, at the very moment we were looking down for the last time into the open

grave. We were just standing there, all of us, you included, on the brink of the abyss, you imagined yourself holding a book in your hands and reading from it: *"help us live, if in no other way than with the after-death, gentle guidance of Your hand, inimitable and due solely to the dead, to make us enter and traverse that certain labyrinth..."*

It was during these days that I began to converse with you on the empty left hand pages of the Kirov Street loose-leaf notebook, and after your letter arrived, my suspicions that you had gone to see the world but would be sorely tried along the way only grew stronger. Since you were unable to choose a block of marble, at which, you write, the powers that be knitted their brows, you would get a second chance in the granite quarry, but a statue must be at all costs, you finally realized, even if you have to scratch it out with your bare nails. What it amounts to is that I'm really going to have to carve something, you announce, alarmed. No loafing around when you've got a commission, the quarry is not a holiday resort, a train clacks as it moves into the distance.

Just think of what your duty is, I read in my Kirov Street notes, and which tasks you can pass over. If, excuse the expression, but let us suppose, that you were a sociologist, don't dream of besieging the offices of your sister institution for the expert discourses of your learned colleagues, for your efforts will prove fruitless. And for no other reason than the physical inaccessibility of the citadel of science. A rendezvous can take place only in the lower regions, in small rooms acclimatized to the smell of strangers, and only with negotiating parties previously conciliated with the official in charge of such meetings. If you should sneak up those forbidden stairs by eluding the vigilance of that official, and enter uninvited into those secret rooms, you will be hustled out in desperation, not only from the room, but from the corridor. So do not insist on established, institutional forms; rendezvous with colleagues who lay claim to your interest in out-of-sight doorways, in the depths of parks and other places! But perhaps it is best not to force professional contact, give yourself free scope, roam the city at your will! And you will come to acknowledge that if there is a place where it is worth your while to observe and converse, then the tray-place in Kirov Street is it. However, to do *without* all this—is also best done here.

According to your letter, your liberty in so far as what you can do and in the company of whom you can do it certainly promises to be restricted. From the first moments you were forced to join in, communicate, participate. You write about commisars, officials, delegated colleagues, pressing tasks, though, it is true, you do not grumble. But your eyes light up when, on your way back from the quarry, a brook and some vegetation break the bleakness of the desert, and you alight from the bus to visit a medresse. In the village, in front of the tea-shop men lounging on "beds" drink, play draughts, bolt pellets and spit. The next day you steal out and make off for the old part of Bokhara, and relate that you photographed the castle named Ark, before the gates of which the Emir publicly beheaded every tenth peasant after an uprising at the turn of the century. You enter a mosque where the faithful in prayer touch their brows to the carved-inlaid decorations on the wall as though they were reverently rendering homage to man-

made beauty, but the centuries-old fallen tree in the summer palace of the last Khan dates, as you write, from the period of uncertainty, remaining "plump and awkward" with its stuccoes and inlaid mirrors, with ornamentation meant to amaze. Then you embark upon the fate of women, beginning by saying that you yourself are walking around in baggy trousers, shirt buttoned up to the neck, and a scarf wound around your face and head, in the scorching sandstorms. You see only women working in the fields and villages along the road, and even in the cities the provision of food is always a woman's job. In the tea-shop fried chicken ironed flat is sold. You eat sashlik with a salad.

Stroll around a little in the Arbat, I read a paragraph on the right-hand side, turn in towards the back streets, basement stairs, storage-yard dens, caved-in cellars gaping beneath dilapidated houses, take a walk among the heaps of rubbish! Do not be alarmed if, at the fall of night, from the depths of deserted back-street alleys, a shawled figure with squealing brats in her wake scurries along at the foot of the wall like a nimble rat. Make sure you pass along the familiar street on your way, and take a good look at the potato-shaped old women slinking around the doorway of your eating-place, so muffled they appear neckless, backs bent beneath the weight of their swathing. You will see that they are real *kartoshkas,* whom the daily renewed aim, the potato-dream of hungry old grannies, has transformed into its own image. If you stop in the dark beside one of the bundles, bend down to one of its extremities and say: *Nu sto? Kak dyla?,* or something of the kind, or perhaps just lift your chin questioningly, *Hmmm?,* or, on second thoughts, don't say anything, don't ask questions, and if it is possible, *don't interview anyone!*

Your second letter has arrived, which, after reading it several times, I find rather strange. It begins by saying: "I have made the acquaintance of a bird, its name is *mynah* in Hindi, *skvarjets* in Uzbek", you dwell lengthily on its colouring, form and behaviour, the way its mate makes its appearance, and the way these two then throw and thrash to within an inch of its life a third bird with their beaks, which you watch them do from your window, horrified, through three pages. Then you turn your attention to a peculiar, thorny plant, the sole food for camels along the desert roads, and muse that the gray grass swaying on the tops of houses is like the soft tufts of hair on baby elephants' backs, and that here all domestic animals seem much smaller, as though parched and shrivelled by the wind. Then you hold forth on fashion, which is forever losing its value, about the wallowing in the tastelessness of a dream world of lace, about lambada blaring in the hotel, about the degradation of Arabian Nights-style ornamented costumes into pink nylon and lurid-coloured synthetics (spun rayon reigns in the citadel of silk). Finally you describe the local inhabitants as a population of "a thousand convalescents": the women in cashmere shawls and pyjamas adorned with roses peeping out from underneath quilted dressing-gowns, striped "bath-robes" on the men; the visitors of the sick, on the other hand, don their Sunday best, suits that won't button over bulging stomachs, white shirts... There more I read, the more suspicious it seems. Not a word about what happened to you and when, no full

schedule, no coming and going and running about, just leisurely staring-out-of-the-window meditations, breezy and playful revelations. And an oblique hint as to your having had to be careful, these last few days, in the restaurant and the lobby.

Better not to try to strike up acquantances elsewhere either! Especially not where you are staying, not in the restaurant of the Akademichesky Hotel, but you will risk it anyhow. Absurd, isn't it, that this is not addressed to you either. And since that time there must be a whole new range of risks that one can take, I expect you'd have plenty to say on the subject. No matter, let us continue! One evening, you'll go in and sit down, it'll be late and you'll be thinking at least you won't have to find your way back to the hotel this time, and that perhaps you'll find people to talk to. After all, you can't wander around gaping by yourself noon and night, you are abroad, seeing the world, how else are you to learn what is happening in these parts? That's right, how else, so you make up your mind and begin to draft the questions of interest after having ordered a vodka and having two women join you unexpectedly at your table, a blonde in a black dress and a brunette in red. They will not talk much, will exchange a grimace expressing boredom from time to time, you will ask them whether they know Kirov Street and they will shrug their shoulders and pout their rouged lips. Two or three young men will then join you at your table, you will dance with the brunette, then they will talk about foreign currency deals, one of the boys will be urged to corrupt his father, a deputy minister, by then they will all be rather drunk: When the blonde asks you to dance it will be almost closing time. As the last bars are played, the company will be preparing to leave, and will disappear by the time the dance is over, the blonde woman will bid you goodbye and hurry into the kitchen or the lavatory, while you reach for the bag you hung on the back of your chair, but will not find it anywhere. You will rush out into the street, wishing to question the stragglers, but they will only laugh at you. You run back into the restaurant, send for the director and yell: for by that time you will have begun to suspect that closing time came and went much too pat. You will bluster out threats, give the porter your room number and the order that they had better take the necessary steps to see that your property is returned, or else. Rotten accomplices! you will shout, thieves, you were in league with them! Believe it or not, those will be the words that will come to your mind in the language. Then you will go up to your room, come what may. You will be undressing when, without so much as a knock on the door, the entire restaurant staff will troop into your room, at least nine of them, three of whom will be women, who will immediately sit down beside you on the bed to comfort and soothe you: the bag has been found, the director will say, holding it out to you, check it, go on, take a look inside, one of the waitresses will coo in your ear, leaning back on the bed. Only the money will be missing from your wallet, but luckily there was not (will not be) too much in it, your papers will be there safe and sound, the bag was flung under the corner table, or so the story will go. Out of the question, you looked there, you'll tell them, but you will all know that it is all beside the point now, and they will begin to back out of the room. Two of the women will stay behind, slipping down into a recumbent position on the bed, both wearing identical, black fancy tights, their

breath stinking of drink, you will slip out from between them to open a window. Turn towards them unexpectedly and yell, asking whether they know who Kirov was, and they will leave at a run, terrified.

There has been no letter from you for six, eight, eleven days. I wrote to the address you gave on your first envelope but you gave no telephone number, and there has been no answer to my telegramme. I am not writing (why should I write a letter full of question marks to someone gone for three weeks?), only this is the loose-leaf notebook. What's happening? The radio says there is some shooting around there at some border or other, out of some national minority cause, but perhaps not too close. Blockade, curfew, or what?

I sit down to call all the telephone numbers in Moscow. The office ones are hopeless, but in the afternoon of the third day of telephoning someone suddenly picks up the receiver. It is the celebrated sculptor, and he immediately tells me what I cannot at once grasp, though I understand every word, that you are sitting there beside him in his flat. Who? You? Oh, a distant acquaintance sighs, but in your voice, here I am at last, like the sisters in Chekhov, you know, ah, Moscow...! If only, just once...! I don't understand anything, is that you? I gasp, short of breath, and shake the receiver, where are you? You've plenty of time left, haven't you, what's up?, I say. I'm going home tomorrow, you say, smartly and triumphantly. Good. Wow, that's great, I say. But... is there anything wrong? No, nothing, just... You'll begin to explain that there's no sculpture after all, and that getting away was a bit complicated, and ask me what's new at home. Come on, what's up, I say, nailing you, d'you hear? Nothing... I don't believe you, come on, tell me! I was just... nothing serious, I was sick, an intestinal infection, but I don't now want his telephone bill to... I called him!, I shout. I'm arriving on the afternoon plane tomorrow, you say, very rapidly, and it's been so ... well, it's been so long since... bye for now, you say, and hang up.

If you stay a while, back against the wall beside the crumbling staircase leading to the entrance—I insert, by way of a sequel to the old, unfinished text, continuing the sentences appendaged after five years on the right-hand side of the notebook these last few days—as darkness falls an old man will appear wearing a long, tattered coat. A matted, dirty grey beard down to his waist and a palm-sized wooden crucifix with the figure of Christ upon it, hand-carved (perhaps his own handiwork) hanging from his neck. *Aged beard.* You say the old dervishes stumbling hand in hand around the medresses are honest to God called thus; I'll ask you about it tomorrow. He stops in front of you, stares into your face, mumbles something. By that time you will be incapable of asking anything except whether he knows what the name of this street is. What, what, he will say, grabbing you by the hand and dragging you a couple of paces, just to the corner. *Kirova!* he will say, pointing at the street-sign, jerks the flat of his palm horizontally, with a cutting motion, in front of his neck, and with the same impetus jerks his thumb up to point at the sign above his head, indicating thereby how the person in question ended his life. But he will refuse to go into

details. Instead he will summon you to the lighted window of the tray-place, take the Holy Writ from beneath his shirt, hold it out to show you, but all you can make out from the top of the page is John, probably Revelations. At home you will try to find the passage the old man read out to you, increasingly louder and faster, accompanying his speech with more and more agitated, sweeping gestures, finishing with arms flug high, his voice loud and strident: "And I beheld and heard an angel flying through the midst of heaven, saying with a loud voice, 'Woe, woe, woe', to the inhabiters of the earth... and I saw a star fall from heaven unto the earth: and to him was given the key of the bottomless pit. And he opened the bottomless pit, and there arose a smoke out of the pit, as the smoke of a great furnace; and the sun and the air were darkened by reason of the smoke of the pit... And in those days shall men seek death, and shall not find it; and shall desire to die, and death shall flee from them..."

You are home again. You have told me everything. I would have touched you, if for no other reason then by way of identification, but you turned away at once and at first, on our way out of the waiting-room, tried to hide your arm, camouflaging it with rapid talk and laughter, but the dressing that slipped out from beneath your sleeve betrayed you. Ten days ago, you admitted later, you scalded your right arm so badly that the wound is still festering. Yes, it was all because you had to make tea all the time, after you came out of the hospital tea was the only liquid you were allowed to drink. Yes, you spent a week in hospital in Bokhara. And then you began, it was dawn by the time you had told of the spasms, the fever, the nausea, the thirst. The general, dooming, destructive indifference. The exceptional humaneness—this you spoke more readily of—of the housemaid who got you mineral water, and the doctor who pointed around the filthy barracks ashamedly, such is the situation in the city of the scholar Avicenna, he said with tears in his eyes, I cannot give you penicillin... You almost died, for, as I finally learned, what you had was cholera. Why did you have to... why wasn't I with you at least, I kept jumping up from the table. And not a telephone call or a telegram... You told me that on the first day, on your way back from the quarry, *that* day, I remembered, thinking of the wall and the labyrinth, you had sashlik with salad, perhaps it was the salad that was contaminated. But it could not have happened any other way, you said, I lay on the bed and chased flies off me first with one hand, then with the other, and I knew I was alone and had to imagine and want hard enough to get up and go home alone, by myself. I was alone in this, and that was fine. I would not give up what I lived through for anything, it has taught me things, I would be poorer without it, you argued, and the blood rushed to my head and the least I can say about the way I listened to you is that I did not understand. I read the New Testament, you said, shrugging your shoulders, and decided I was glad. Glad? I said, kicking the chair out from beneath me in astonishment. Glad about what? Well... About realizations, encounters... if here, in the cholera hospital, far from all of you, in the most out-of-the-way corner of the world, where nobody knows about me, then—here. How else can I explain it to you?

Here's this notebook, I say, showing you my notes on the tray-place in Kirov Street later on, when you'll have told me that they did not want to let you come home, banged the table, saying you could not go anywhere without finishing a statue, would not even let you make a telephone call until at last, alleging ill-health and disability to work, you got permission to leave. I was sorry, I said, for not having given you the notebook before you left, but now I can see that... would you like me to read it to you anyway? No, you reply instantly. I'd rather read it myself. But I have read it, you add. And remind me that it was from this notebook that I copied out a couple of addresses for you before you left, and you flipped through it, found the text and, forgive the indiscretion, read it. Because of this, on your way to Bokhara, while still in Moscow, you tried to find Kirov Street. You did not succeed. But I've written in it since then, I say, holding the notebook out to you, and you begin to read the notes on the left-hand side, and then the part about the meeting with the old man.

I was walking around in Moscow, you say, looking up from the notebook, on the afternoon before we left for Bokhara. I went into a church, it was quite crowded, floating wicks were burning. I bought a candle and walked over to one of the pillars to light it. I was bending down when a bearded old man touched my shoulder and explained that I should not light my candle there, for that is where they light candles for the dead. That's all right, I said, but he said to come with him, and put my candle there, to celebrate a fortunate meeting, for this was the day for it. I did as he told me. Later I came out, the old man was standing in the doorway of the church, so I asked him whether he knew where Kirov Street was, because I had tried to find it earlier on, but had not been able to. He beckoned for me to follow him, we walked without speaking until we came to it, it was not far. I told the old man that I was looking for a restaurant but he just stared at me in astonishment. A self-service restaurant with ten windows and a door that creaks, I explained, several people stopped beside us but they all shook their heads, at a loss. A man needing a shave who kept scratching his chafed chest, tucking the tail of his shirt aside, grinned. An eating place? *Stalovaya,* munch-munch? he asked, making spooning movements with both hands, laughing. Eat, *yest,* he champed, smacking his lips, eat!

And then you tell me that you went on looking for it for a long time, searching in other steets, asking around, but in vain. You did not find the place to eat, nor anyone who had ever seen it or heard of it.

Perhaps it just wasted away, slowly, door-slamming winds coursing through its deserted rooms, until it vanished into the mist; or, perhaps, it rose up into the air unnoticed, unsteadily lurching because so laden with the weight of dreams, but be that as it may, the tray-place in Kirov Street is no more.

Károly Ravasz

Eastern Europe: Nationality and Ethnic Conflict

A civil war, the most acute form of nationality and ethnic conflict has broken out in Yugoslavia, the Warsaw Pact and Comecon have been disbanded, Russia lost its outer empire in Europe. After the Moscow coup d'état failed, as it was bound to, efforts have been made to hold parts of the inner empire together in the form of a loose confederation. In the states which have gained or regained their sovereignty new—until now partly hidden—nationality and ethnic conflicts have surfaced, from the Baltic to the Caucasus. Sadly, all these events have confirmed, and are confirming day after day the gravity of the problem I expounded on in an address I gave in London in March 1991. What I proposed has since been adopted and advocated by several organizations, including the Democratic Community of the Hungarians of the Vojvodina (Vajdasági Magyarok Demokratikus Közössége) in Yugoslavia.

The Helsinki Final Act froze the status quo in Europe or so the signatories imagined. Yet in Helsinki the Soviet Union, in fact, had wanted to buy the status quo in return for concessions, and create a framework for coexistence which would make it possible to cut back the arms race. It had no intention—or even idea—of seeing its empire—or to put it more politely, its alliance—in dissolution.

Neither, for that matter, did the western powers. They thought that stability in Europe had to be based on a balance of power involving NATO and the Warsaw Pact, and that mutual deterrence was the guarantee of peace. Several factors were ignored, of which the two most important ones were the failure of the economic system called communist or socialist, once most of the resources for extensive growth had been wasted, and the unwillingness of the nations of Central and Eastern Europe to live under Russian domination.

In the last three years, the combination of these factors had its effect and the status quo disappeared. But what has replaced or is going to replace it? NATO continues to exist, something that cannot be considered unreasonable in the face of the continuing existence of a huge Soviet army equipped with a large arsenal of nuclear weapons.

Some people expect a new European or transatlantic security system to grow out of NATO, others look forward to the strengthening of the security aspects of the CSCE process, or to some combination of the two. But in the meantime that part of Europe which is usually referred to as Eastern, but covers geographically both Eastern and part of Central Europe—in fact, the area that had been left out of the West European integration process— has reverted to the status quo

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ante, the situation which existed before the outbreak of the cold war.

A large number of nations live in this part of Europe in a number of countries, some of which are recognized as sovereign states and some form part of federations. The inhabitants of the latter may or may not be satisfied with the legal and political status of the state in which they live.

The borders of these states are the result of contingent events. They were drawn more or less arbitrarily, at the whim of the victors of a war or by foreign powers under the threat of war. The Versailles treaties following the Great War which provide the general pattern—though not necessarily the details—of the present map of Europe, were supposed to follow the principle of self-determination. However, the actual frontiers drawn at Versailles departed from this principle in two basic ways. First, in the absence of plebiscites, self-determination was fictitious (with the obvious exception of places where plebiscites were held). Second, the powers deliberately abandoned the principle of self-determination, for the sake of allegedly historic, strategic, economic or transport (e. g., not to cut a railway line) considerations, or for the sake of "natural" frontiers (e. g., rivers). As a result, in most places borders do not coincide with the dividing lines between nations.

In this context, the concept of "nation" itself requires definition. It is possible to argue without end whether the feeling of belonging to a nation is something natural and inborn, or whether it is a result of manipulation, or to what extent it is the one or the other. But the sentiment does exist and it does motivate people. Society usually condemns both its exaggerated form, when it appears in the shape of chauvinism, and its total absence. In healthy democratic societies, national feeling and loyalty to the state coincide and seldom give rise to conflicts. But in Eastern Europe, over the past half century, national feeling was artificially fomented in some places and at some times, and was suppressed on other occasions. As a result it is intensive throughout the region.

Among the numerous nations which live side by side, or rather intermingled, none has enjoyed—with the exception of Hungary—an uninterrupted national statehood over centuries. All were conquered and/or divided at one time or another, or emerged as united nation states only in this century. There have been attempts at creating artificial "nations" to which people were educated to be loyal. Such were the "Soviet", the "Yugoslav", or the "Czechoslovak" nations. Today it is clear that all these attempts have been failures: people are unable to identify with them. The nation with which they identity is Russian, or Ukrainian, or Estonian, or Croat, or Serb, or Slovak, or Bohemian, or even Moravian.

What is it then that makes people identify with a nation? In most cases it is a common language; yet there are cases where the common language has been lost and, at the other extreme, there are people identifying with the same nation although their mother tongue differs, or their dialects are so different as to be barely mutually comprehensible.

There is, of course, often the factor of common origin or descent. This in many cases is a myth, only substantiated by forgeries or misrepresentation of archival documents or of archaeological finds.

What is it then that binds a nation together? In Hungary at least the view shared by practically all shades of opinion, political and other, is that it is a common cultural heritage. There is also agreement that it is up to each individual to decide with which nation he or she identifies, to declare that he or she belongs to a nation and accepts the consequences—for better or worse. The Hungarian census form asks people to answer questions concerning their citizenship, native language, and nationality. These are three distinct categories, but it is

a fact of life that people classify themselves and others according to these categories. Citizenship is a legal category, and a person cannot change it at will, i.e., without meeting certain legal prescriptions. Native language is a fact, which cannot be changed, although it may be ambiguous in the case of bilingual children and it can be concealed or denied. But in declaring what nationality he or she belongs to, a person must have complete freedom of choice. Voluntary assimilation has to be accepted as a personal right. Conversely, enforced assimilation must be rejected as a grave injury to the individual.

All this seems clearcut. Why does it nevertheless cause problems and strife? In every country throughout the region under discussion, a majority nation exists alongside several minority nations. The term used to describe these latter is national minority, nationality, or ethnic group. It is obvious that only mutual tolerance of diversity can lead to these diverse groups living together in peace. Historians more or less agree that this tolerance existed in the distant past. Today the strongest psychological factor behind intolerance is mutual fear and suspicion. The last two hundred years saw the awakening of national consciousness throughout Europe, the rise of nationalism, the shifting of borders, the breaking up of countries and the assembly of new ones, the plantation of groups belonging to the majority or to the governing nation into regions or towns so as to change ethnic makeup, the forceful removal of minority groups from their ancestral soil or the creation of conditions for them which induce them to leave (to emigrate or to disperse) and, in the last fifty years, outright genocide. It is not the purpose of this paper to single out some nations for blame and exempt others. In every nation there have been black sheep and innocent victims, even if huge differences exist in the records. Bad conscience is as much the cause of anxiety today as past sufferings or inferiority complexes.

If we look at the history of the last two centuries it is impossible not to see that the strengthening of the state versus the individual went parallel with the persecution of minorities. Statist trends provided both the ideologies and the instruments. When the state achieved full control over the individual, any excesses could be—and often were—committed in the name of the state purporting to represent a class or a nation (or a race). Socialism of all brands (excluding, of course, that of the Social Democrats) produced the worst offenders, including even those who claimed to be "internationalist".

Statist measures included the closing of schools maintained by the minorities and their churches, exclusion of those belonging to a national minority from higher education, from official posts, from trades and professions. But the most powerful instrument was, of course, the confiscation and redistribution of land. Taking the land away from minorities and handing it to settlers belonging to the governing nation, or the dividing up of common lands among them, has been a practice followed throughout the region since the early 1920s. This was done in respect of both farms and housing. This was the main instrument for changing the relative proportions of nationalities, with the purpose of making unreasonable shifts of borders through conquest irreversible. The settlers who were brought in or induced to go to an unfamiliar environment have, of course, a feeling of insecurity, and are in most cases the most hostile to the indigenous population among whom they settled or whom they replaced. Every extremist party or organization can count on them, when it opposes the right of the minority (which is a minority statewide, but may still be the majority locally or in the area) to use its own language in official business (and, often, even in public or in private contacts), to have its own media, schools, keep up and pass on its cultural heritage, have equal rights to jobs.

Statist pressure has two purposes. One is to force or induce individuals and families belonging to a minority to abandon their national loyalties, to force their assimilation into the governing nation. The other one is to actually remove the minority, that is, the individuals and families belonging to it. The most extreme variant of this is to kill them, the milder to deport them, the still milder to force them by constant persecution and pestering to emigrate, and the mildest to induce them to move away.

In principle, it is possible to imagine also an enlightened statism which does not insist on the predominance of the governing or majority nation, but includes the minorities in government, recognizes their equality (both in theory and practice), grants them human, civil, and even collective minority rights. In reality there have been few examples of it. Statist policy involves the means of depriving minorities of the economic substance of their livelihood; there is always nationalistic pressure to employ these means for this purpose.

Hence, it is only a free economy—where the authorities have no right to interfere—and a free society, including free competition and equal access to land, that are the alternatives which can solve the nationality problems.

If the countries in the region do not move in this direction, the outlook is indeed dark: a "lebanonization" of large parts of Eastern Europe by populist nationalist movements, with the instability this creates for the whole of Europe, or indeed for the world.

What forms are these conflicts likely to take? There is the internal conflict between the majority nation which wants to impose its will on the minority—with the scarcely disguised wish to make it disappear and thereby create a homogeneous state—and the minority which wants to survive and maintain its national identity (on its ancestral land, or in a land where they have come—perhaps centuries ago, perhaps only in the recent past—as settlers, immigrants or refugees). Where there are no secessionist movements, this conflict is unlikely to degenerate into a civil war, but it has resulted, and can result in the future too, in atrocities. Then there is the external conflict between the state suppressing a minority and the state in which that minority nation constitutes the majority. It is natural for the minority to seek shelter and protection from its co-nationals in that other country, and for that country to feel a sense of responsibility towards its oppressed co-nationals. It is difficult to envisage an outright war between countries induced by gross violations of nationality rights, but it is easy to predict a poisoning of relations between them that would undermine security and cooperation in Europe.

This situation can and must be prevented precisely through the CSCE process. It is understandable that immediately after the Second World War, with the memory still fresh of German abuses of real or imagined injuries to German minorities as pretexts for aggression, the rights of national minorities were ignored, and there was even a recognition of the right of the "victorious" powers to remove national minorities from their territories. Unless these inhumanities are to be repeated, it is now time for the international community to codify the collective rights of minorities into international law. Just as individuals can sue their own governments in international courts if their human rights are violated, the right to maintain their national identity should be protected in the same way.

While it would be possible to redraw frontiers which would leave fewer minorities under foreign rule, this does not seem to be a viable—or even desirable—solution. It would be inhuman to remove settlers who—even if not necessarily in good faith—were frequently against their own will moved into lands which were taken from others. The patchwork of an ethnic map which has come about cannot

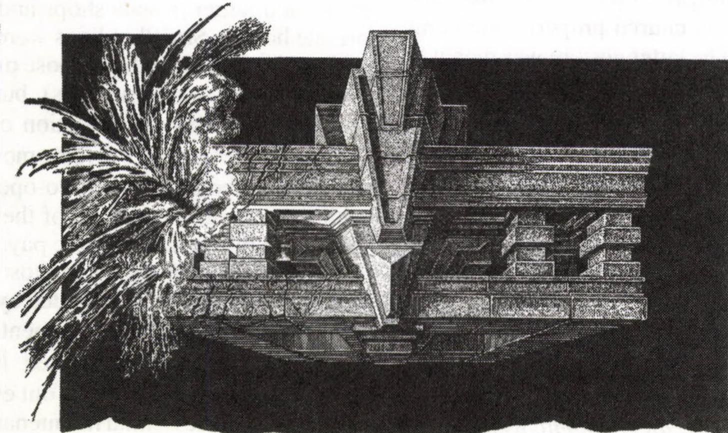
be unravelled in a humane way. It is not only nationalities or ethnic groups which can identify with a country in the neighbourhood that deserve protection; so too do those who have none, such as Jews or Gypsies, in as much as they consider themselves as members of a separate national or ethnic unit. (Their freedom of voluntary assimilation must also be recognized, just as that of others.)

It is the importance of borders between countries that needs to be brought to an end. This is mostly only possible between countries which do not practice statist policies, for a statist government usually wants to control persons and goods crossing its borders. People must, of course, be free to move across borders and be free to live where they choose. These are questions on which international agreements have to be reached—whether in a single Europe or a Europe of nation states.

There are other issues which will continue to fall within the internal jurisdiction of states, although this seems to be self-contradictory. For it is exactly the concept of the sovereign state that needs dismantling. It is the individual who should be sovereign, and decide what rights or competencies he wants to transfer to the local community, to the county, to the state, to the federation, to a confederation, to the United Nations or other global institutions. It is the sovereign individual who decides what language he wants to speak, with whom—co-nationals or others—he associates and for what purposes: including educational, cultural, literary, devotional, recreational, sporting, vocational, or to earn a living. A condition of this individual sovereignty is, of course, freedom from arbitrary taxation, the mother of all statist meddling.

In the meantime the fangs of conflicts between nationalities and ethnic groups can only be drawn gradually: by education and experience which overcome prejudice, fear of each other, and the feeling of insecurity, and lead to the tolerance of diversity, as well as to an appropriate sense of the importance of belonging to a nation and the pride in it—without hating or despising others. This will be a long road for Eastern Europe, especially in adverse economic conditions, when those who are different can always be blamed and turned into scapegoats.

This is not an optimistic note to finish on, but it is better to face the realities than to be taken by surprise. Nationality and ethnic conflicts are part of an Eastern Europe which has just emerged or is emerging from one kind of totalitarianism, faces many problems of transition, and on which the rest of Europe or of the North Atlantic community cannot simply turn their back without peril to themselves, even if they should prefer to do so.



Gergely Fahidy

Compensation à l'Hongroise

"Take a fat bourgeois or peasant. Deprive him of his works, shop, house, land or cattle. Grind him well in a labour camp—lacking that, a simple gaol will do. Amply season with personal files that determine his life, refuse passport applications and refuse admission to higher education to his children. Stew him in his own juice for about forty years. When he is finally reconciled to dying poor, flash the hope of justice in front of his eyes. When he starts to get used to the idea that he might get back what was taken from him long ago, punch him on the nose and in return for an apartment house centrally located, offer him a sum in compensation sufficient to buy a 10 ft by 10 ft bedsitter, and tell him that, due to the considerable social costs of compensation, inflation would erode his pension a little faster than up to now."

This recipe for compensation *à l'hongroise* reads like an exotic dish, but it leaves a bitter aftertaste. Before breaking up for a well-deserved 1991 summer recess, the Hungarian parliament managed to legislate on church property and compensation. The latter gesture was meant to satisfy rather large numbers of voters of mainly peasant origin, and was made in a way to ensure that the most painful consequences of those decisions will be felt only after the next general election.

That central authority should deprive people of their property was common in Hungary. In the 20th century alone, the Hungarian Soviet Republic of 1919 nationalized even small firms as well as what peasants received in the post-Great War land reform. After its fall, it was easy enough to annul legislation passed in those 133 days and return to the *status quo ante*. In the Second World War it was the turn of the Jews to have their property confiscated, then a large wave of nationalizations was triggered by the Soviet occupation and the collapse of the previous political regime. Large estates were distributed among landless peasants with promises of later compensation. Still in the coalition period of 1945-48, all banks, mines and major industries were taken over by the state which promised to compensate former owners.

After the communist takeover in 1949, a new phase of nationalization took place, engulfing medium and small owners as well as the old élite. By the year 1952, most townspeople were deprived of their property, including one-man chemist's shops and larger private shops and larger private homes. Smallholdings were rarely nationalized (e.g. for the purpose of establishing Soviet war cemeteries), but much was done by way of legislation or plain administrative measures to force most peasants to join the agricultural co-operatives with their animals and most of their land, getting, at the most, symbolic payment.

The hypocritical nature of most of this nationalization is well illustrated by a quotation from the 1952/4 government decree nationalizing privately owned houses: "Some landlords fail to carry out even the most urgent and essential maintenance. As

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a result, the conditions of the real estate making up a considerable proportion of the property of the nation is steadily deteriorating." Four decades after that decree a look at any street in Budapest will tell what state ownership has done to once splendid buildings.

Probably as a result of the "lesson" learnt in 1956, a 1957 regulation provided for reclaming nationalized houses with fewer than six rooms but took care to impose almost impossible conditions for even that token reprivatization. Meanwhile, the collectivization of land went on abated, with some discriminatory regulations against private owners remaining in force as late as the mid 1980s in some areas. No person of sound mind in those years would have dreamt of insisting on the compensation promised by most of the nationalization legislation. Anyone daring to do so would have risked prison in the 1950s and an examination by a psychiatrist in the more liberal years to come.

Some changes, albeit minor ones, occurred in the last years of the communist regime. Taking into consideration the needy state of former owners, the Ministry of Finance provided an advance on compensation for sixteen individuals as a kind of grant to a total of Ft 170,000—hardly more than Ft 10,000 (at the time $250) per person. The following year 50 individuals received a total of Ft 521,000. And by late May 1990, another 46 received Ft 497,000. The government of Miklós Németh, the last communist prime minister, considered compensating former owners of nationalized apartment blocks but there was no time to create any such scheme, as the general elections in Spring 1990 gave an overwhelming majority to the opposition.

Every opposition party's election manifesto featured an outline of their ideas on compensation for nationalized property, but none went into details. Only the Smallholders' Party (FKgP) advocated the actual return of nationalized property in full. All the other parties urged some or other middle-of-the-road limited or non-specified compensation, aimed at the fairest possible compensation at the least cost. None of the major parties at the time were interested in doing much more than assure those who suffered loss of their sympathy by providing some compensation.

The new political powers that be managed to avoid the problem of compensation until as late as the autumn of 1991: legislation on ownership and the economy in general were preceded by creating the foundations of the new political system. Meanwhile, however, interest groups of former nationalization victims became articulate. In some villages, people "re-occupied" their former lands *de facto* in the absence of *de jure* methods. Under pressure from the Smallholders' Party, the governing coalition created a compromise on the principles of compensation without reference to the parliamentary opposition. Next, the staff of the Ministry of Justice was asked to draft a bill in great haste, without even surveying the amount of property and the numbers of owners.

All this was basically the result of hard bargaining between the majority party MDF, desiring low-cost compensation, and the Smallholders, who originally favoured re-privatization. Non-peasant owners (who had their houses, shops, or works confiscated) would not get their property back and had to be content with a small amount of money in compensation. Peasants (or their offspring) who lost their land, were given a better deal. The Smallholders' Party bet their very existence on a single card: that peasants should be given the opportunity of getting back their originally confiscated land in full.

All this lacked precedent. No property-collectivizing regime lasting several decades had fallen before. The situation in Hungary faintly resembles that of Spain after Franco's death, but there a social order based on private property had con-

tinued under the Fascist dictatorship. "Pink rule" in Portugal was too brief to bring about any major change in ownership.

Any genuine similarities with Hungary can be found only in the surrounding former socialist countries, struggling for solutions to the problem either at the same rate as Hungary, or lagging behind her. Overall reprivatization is rejected almost everywhere, though in Czecho-Slovakia and Rumania some former owners may be given back their land and still standing buildings. Private ownership will probably dominate Rumanian agriculture and food and other supplies have improved somewhat owing to the appearance of re-privatized shops. Large factories and estates will not however be returned to their former owners, unlike the existing small shops and workshops that are state-run. A special problem here are ethnic minorities. In Czecho-Slovakia alone, millions of ethnic Germans and over a hundred thousand ethnic Hungarians were expelled after the Second World War. Only a handful of Sudeten Germans now live in Bohemia; their compensation will probably be arranged between governments, with no reprivatization. Of the ethnic Hungarians, only those who still live in Slovakia have the theoretic right to re-claim their land.

Prime Minister József Antall asked for a preliminary opinion of the Constitutional Court on the constitutionality of merely compensating one group of previous owners while returning the original property to another. "Returning" means full indemnity for "legally" inflicted damage (e.g. by confiscation or nationalization), But "compensation" is partial, in some cases only symbolic. He also wanted to know whether cooperative property may also be returned to individuals, and not only state property, (since agricultural cooperatives had been the main beneficiaries of collectivization).

By that time a large number of private suits had been brought before the Constitutional Court. They either requested that nationalization be declared unconstitutional, thereby paving the way for reclaiming old property, or sued the government for forty years of unconstitutional negligence. A number of governments had managed to "forget" their duty to compensate as provided by law. The Constitutional Court did the government a favour by declaring the state's negligence to be unconstitutional only at a time when the Bill of Compensation was ready to go before parliament. To help with legislation, however, the Prime Minister received a speedy answer to his questions.

The judgement pointed out that no aggrieved person has the right to claim compensation; consequently, the state is not obliged to provide it. Yet if the state decides to do so, significant discrimination may occur only for well justified social reasons. Therefore, said the judgement of the Constitutional Court in October 1990, it would be unconstitutional to return some people's property and only compensate others.

In the course of a long debate in Parliament, the opposition parties turned to that judgement when submitting alternative solutions. The most noteworthy was that of FIDESZ (Young Democrats) who suggested giving nothing to anybody except, perhaps, to extremely impoverished and aged former owners, although their needs should really be catered for by welfare services and not by compensation. They justified their view by the country's grave economic situation: any fair compensation would, according to some estimates, cost in the region of Ft 500bn ($8bn). The version finally passed is estimated to cost around Ft 100-150 bn. The Young Democrats' legal arguments were also against the principles of compensation, and could hardly be countered in themselves: the costs of current compensation or re-privatization would not be borne by the nationalizers of old but by innocent third parties who had purchased such property

since then; the whole of society would carry the costs, especially the young and middle-aged who had nothing to do with crimes committed 40-50 years ago. Compensating for long past nationalization, they argued, would give rise to social injustice of the same magnitude as nationalization itself had done.

The Free Democrats (SZDSZ) suggested methods that, in some repects were even more radical than the Smallholders. Instead of the expected pragmatic arguments against compensation, they argued that the whole nation should be compensated as almost everyone had suffered some loss under the previous regime. Thus everyone should receive government bonds worth about Ft 20,000. That was a never to be forgotten error on the part of a party which boasted the country's best economists. The proposal lacked common sense and is a far cry from liberal economic philosophy. In current economic circumstances their proposal aimed at speeding up privatization. It was regarded by many as a cheap play for popularity, made in the safe knowledge that parliament would reject it.

There was no agreement within the government coalition either. The Smallholders did their best for re-privatization and had considerable success initially, but they computed the losses of townspeople in a way that would compensate only a fraction of their actual losses. The value of nationalized dwellings and shops was established at Ft 800-2,000 per square metre, but today the cheapest housing costs in the region of Ft 16,000-18,000 per square metre, with as much as Ft 500,000 per square metre for the best-located commercial properties. Furthermore, the actual compensation would be calculated with the help of a sliding-scale and, instead of money, those entitled to compensation would receive compensation coupons only enabling them to buy shares from the stock of state-owned firms waiting to be denationalized. If somebody lost, say, a valuable centrally located piece of real estate, the sale of his compensation coupons would buy a small flat at most; someone else compensated for a family home or well-established chemist's shop would have received barely enough for a small bedsitter. On the other hand, the Smallholders did manage to win the right for peasants to buy cooperative land: the essence of the idea is that, beside the nominal value expresed in Forints, their copensation coupon would feature a "golden crown" (AK) value indicating the quality of their original landholding. This latter index would have enabled peasants to get lands of the same quality as they had lost. What is more, the sliding-scale did not apply to peasants.

The ruling coalition maintained its parliamentary discipline and rejected every single proposal submitted by the opposition. As their own political infighting problems died down, they ensured a comfortable majority for their own proposals. So far, there has been no overall and reliable survey of the collectivization and nationalization campaign of decades ago, yet the Compensation Bill went through parliament within a year of the general elections.

Then came a step unprecedented in the brief history of Hungary's new democracy. President Árpád Göncz did not sign the Bill but sent it, with some questions (according to rumour, drafted by most highly reputed lawyers), to the Constitutional Court for a preliminary opinion. Some of his anxieties were judged to be unfounded by that body which, however, declared a few basic points of the Bill to be unconstitutional.

The original version undertook to compensate only for property losses caused by legislation and decrees after June 8, 1949, the birthdate of the communist parliament held to be illegitimate. Other persons who suffered losses, e.g. shareholders of banks and major companies,

estate owners and the almost 200,000 expelled ethnic Germans, not to mention the many more Jews, would have had to be content with the promise that sometime in the future another Compensation Act will take care of them as well. The Constitutional Court rejected that measure but parliament easily parried it: instead of fixing a timetable, it made a list of future regulations and made a promise to pass new legislation on compensation for those who had suffered state-inflicted property losses between 1938-1949 by November 30 of this year.

Far more important was the criticism of the guardians of the Constitution on compensation for land losses and the idea of reprivatization that had stolen back into the package. The Court did not accept the use of a sliding-scale to begin at AK (Golden Crown) 1,000 which, using the AK1 - Ft, 1,000 multiplyer stipulated in the Bill, was worth Ft 1m where full compensation would have provided for a maximum of Ft 200,000 in losses of urban property. Nor did the Court accept the idea of direct compensation in land for those who had lost theirs, whereas others would have received only paper in the form of compensation coupons.

Parliament, in turn, succeeded in finding practical solutions that made sure that there would be no eating of cake but there would be no cake left either. They got rid of the bill's unconstitutional passages without actually changing the inherent injustices. The much debated act promises compensation to those who had suffered the kind of documentable property losses stipulated in the appendix as a result of legislation carried through after the summer of 1949. In case the original owner has died, title goes to his/her direct descendants; where there are no such descendants, title goes to the spouse, provided they were married at the time of nationalization and remained married until the original owner's death. Brothers, sisters, and collateral relatives are not entitled to compensation.

In principle, compensation is to be extended to those who have become naturalized in other countries since nationalization. Yet, the act is loosely worded in their case, as it stipulates that those whose claims have been settled by inter-governmental treaties are excluded. The situation of Hungarian citizens of Australia, Israel or most South American states is clear as there is no valid treaty with them on property, and thus they are entitled to compensation. But the situation is different for the probably several hundred thousand Hungarians who are citizens of the U.S., Canada, Britain and a dozen other countries. On the basis of agreements with those countries, Hungary paid lump-sum compensation to those states, though I do not know of more than a handful of ex-Hungarian citizens who actually received even a pittance out of that money. It will only be after the first few inevitable lawsuits that we will know whether all the former victims of nationalization who live in those countries will be excluded from compensation, or only those who actually received some of the Hungarian money.

Since the quantity of the damage done half a century ago is almost impossible to establish today, the law stipulates lump sum compensation (see chart). Claimants will receive compensation coupons which they can use in the buying of shares in state-run companies, real estate or land; in the latter case they must undertake to continue to cultivate the land. Those who lost their land may use their compensation coupons to buy land from either the co-operative using the land they once owned or from that operating in their own locality. Those who lost any other kind of property and are now residents of towns can only buy state-owned land.

Those undertaking to cultivate their land who are ready to be registered as agricultural entrepreneurs may count on further aid from the state: their compensation coupons may be supplemented by vouchers issued by the agricultural authorities, bal-

The first steps

Post offices began selling application forms for compensation claims from August 11, 1991. These were to be submitted before midnight on December 15th. Claims arriving after the deadline were to be rejected out of hand by the territorial compensation bureaus.

Claims submitted without documents proving the applicant's title were returned with an order to do so. Former ownership and nationalization or other forms of state-inflicted loss may be documented by family papers, land registry offices or state archives. Under Hungarian rules of evidence, witnesses may also be used to prove title.

The municipal (and Budapest metropolitan) compensation bureaus will have 6 months to settle claims following the deadline of November 8. In individual cases a bureau manager may extend the time of settlement by another 3 months. Thus those entitled to compensation will not receive their coupons before next spring. Claims must be submitted to the municipal compensation bureau in the territory of which the confiscated property lies. The settlement of claims submitted by citizens of foreign countries will be exclusively carried out by the Budapest metropolitan bureau.

COMPUTING DAMAGES.

Compensation may not exceed the value of Ft 5m per property or per compensee.

LUMP DAMAGES
Home, business, shop

Location	Ft/m²	No. of employees	Ft
Budapest*		0-2	150,000
Class A rent	2,000	3-5	500,000
Class B rent	1,500	6-10	700,000
Class C rent	1,000	11-20	1,000,000
Town**	800	21-50	1,700,000
Other	500	51-100	2,500,000
Empty downtown plot	200	over 100	5,000,000

* Class C rent is 100 per cent, B is 110 per cent and A is 125 per cent.
** As per present location

SLIDING SCALE OF COMPENSATION, IF THE COMPUTED LOSS IS Ft

0—200,000		100 per cent
200,000—300,000	200,000 + 50 per cent of the sum over	200,000
300,000—500,000	250,000 + 30 per cent of the sum over	300,000
over 500,000	310,000 + 10 per cent ofthe sum over	500,000

ancing the difference between compensation cut by the use of the sliding-scale chart and the value of their actual loss up to Ft 1m. Thus if, somebody was forced to give up 15 hectares of land worth an average of AK20 his computed loss is Ft 300,000. For the first Ft 200,000 he will be fully compensated but for the remaining Ft 100,000 he will receive compensation coupons worth only Ft 50,000: the total of his coupons will be Ft 250,000. If he undertakes to become an agricultural entrepreneur, he will receive government vouchers worth another Ft 50,000. This

was how parliament fended off the judgement of the Constitutional Court, by actually raising the upper-limit of full compensation from Ft 200,000 to Ft lm. Prospective entrepreneurs may participate in land auctions with their compensation coupons and vouchers, bidding the sums they are willing to pay for one AK unit.

Those who take the government vouchers but do not keep their side of the agreement (by failing to cultivate land or trying to sell it) will have to return the aid plus an annual interest of 20 per cent. Similarly, those who do not cultivate the land received in compensation will have it (re)nationalized without compensation.

Those who do not succeed in getting land or do not wish to do so may sell their compensation coupons (which will be listed by the Budapest stock exchange) or spend them on buying shares in privatized state property. The annual interest on the compensation coupons will be only 75 per cent of the prime rate, that is, about 15-16 per cent, which they will yield for 5 years. According to some economists, a 5-year bond yielding 15 per cent in interest is not worth more than a quarter of its nominal value, even though, unlike in the case of compensation coupons, the nominal value of such bonds will actually be paid out after they expire. Compared to bonds, compensation coupons will be less attractive to the market, so brokers think they will move in the range of 10-20 per cent of their nominal value on a market where there is no gross manipulation. Naturally, it might be more advantageous to sell those coupons even on such a depressed market than to use them during the privatization of state-owned firms: it is to be feared that the "compensation coupon demand" for unattractive government-issued stock will be so high that even the average market value of the securities thus purchasable will fail to rise over 10-20 per cent of the nominal value of the compensation coupons.

The Compensation Act has two other goals. On the one hand, it is intended to provide legal security for foreign investors, reassuring them that no one, not even the original owners, will be able to question the ownership of state-owned real estate or works purchased by foreign investors. On the other hand, the aim is to give a boost to the middle class of old, providing an economically strong base of citizens grateful to the "compensating" ruling parties. Encouraging foreign investors is urgent and important. That goal is well served by the now valid Compensation Act even though there are many rumours that some advocates of re-privatization will seek justice from international courts. A few firms with an established name turned into joint companies will certainly be haunted by their past for a long time. The descendants of the Ganz, Goldberger, Weiss and other families still carry some weight, albeit not on the prewar level, in the international business world and sooner or later they will submit their claims to the new owners of their family firms. Although they may not reclaim ownership, a lack of agreement on using their names or providing some kind of compensation, may easily brand the new owners as receivers of stolen goods from the thief of old, the Hungarian state.

When it comes to the reborn middle class, this compensation will provide a real chance of getting rich to only the most wide-awake and luckiest of the new owners and to a narrow circle of managers and entrepreneurs who know the ropes: the very people who founded their enterprises in the Kádár era, often by exploiting their political contacts. A few tens of thousands, at most one or two hundred thousand Forints in compensation coupons, will only help to slow down the economic decline of the majority of Hungarians today. To speak of a reborn middle-class is a well-meant daydream at best.

Péter Kende

What if Fifty-Six Had Succeeded?

As we know, it did not, and that is why, at first hearing, the question "what would have happened if..." sounds like a prelude to pointless talk, to a sterile charade. Or to an attempt at self-justification embellishing lost chances *ex post facto,* nostalgic glorification on the part of those whose fate was linked with the crushed revolution.

But is it really a sterile effort, now that the time of revival has come, to meditate upon what would have happened if fifty-six had been a victory after all? To begin with, is the supposition itself an historical absurdity?

I was never one of those who thought of the defeat of the revolution as inevitable, as the only possible outcome to the situation. That, in 1956, the Soviet Union did not allow Hungary to reorganize from within and to withdraw from the socialist camp, does not imply that it could not have tolerated one or the other or even both. Until 1989 the above proposition had a purely logical validity, but in the last two years it has actually been verified by the Soviet Union's withdrawal from Central Europe. By taking this decision Moscow ran, in terms of mere power and prestige, just as much risk as it did in 1956. "It could not afford it" but it did all the same. Had that step become "inevitable"? But, if so, why in 1989? Why not in 1981 or 1968 or 1956? What allows us to say that what was inevitable or at least practicable in 1989 would have been impossible in 1956 (or in 1968 and 1981)? Nothing.

It was not in the eighties but in 1953 that the crisis of the Soviet empire started, and Stalin's immediate successors knew this better than the rest of us. East Germany's release from Soviet bondage and its unification with West Germany—in return for neutralization—were broached by Beria, who raised the issue during his visit to Belgrade after Stalin's death. In the last few days of October 1956 the Moscow leadership, under the pressure of the crises in Poland and Hungary, understood and stated publicly that relations among states within the camp were in need of radical reform. Khrushchev personally

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suggested that the status of Hungary might be made similar to that of Finland. There is a general consensus among historians of 1956, when it came to action against the rebellious Hungarians, Moscow vacillated for seven or eight days, and only at the end of October did they decide in favour of a new armed intervention. But the background of this decision—as that of most political decisions— was subjective judgement and not objective necessity, and there is no historical or logical argument to show that the Soviet leaders could not have decided otherwise.

What direct and what remoter consequences would have ensued if Khrushchev and companions had persisted in their disposition of late October and had given—on certain conditions— free rein to Imre Nagy's programme of renewal and adjustment?

The first and most obvious consequence would have been the saving of many thousands of lives. This number includes those who fell in the fighting that followed the 4th of November, and those who perished or were maimed in the years of reprisal (1957-1963), as well as other casualties. There was also the loss of energy and the brain drain suffered by the country thanks to those who went into exile after 1956. There is a likelihood that in the case of a — relative— victory in 1956, Hungary's demographic equilibrium would not have been exactly what it was after the defeat. The "many thousands" can thus mean even hundreds of thousands, but there is no sense in trying to cite a figure.

But let us venture a step forwards and take stock of the possible external and internal effects. Let us begin with the imperial ones.

If, consolidating on the basis of the revolution, Hungary had gained a Finnish type of limited sovereignty suited to its situation, the first indirect beneficiary would have been Poland, which—looking to Hungary and Yugoslavia—might even on her own have repudiated the status of one-sided dependence. In such favourable circumstances of Soviet compliance, the Prague Spring may possibly have occurred ten years earlier, and if Moscow had accepted that as well, and even made good use of it to its own advantage, then the end of the Cold War and the unification of Germany would have come twenty-five to thirty years before Gorbachev! With a very substantial difference from 1989: the Soviet economy would still possess reserves, and the leaders of the empire would not have stood on the edge of the abyss while negotiating with the West. Such a Soviet system would be a more viable party in competing with the world powers.

Are these ridiculous fantasies? Of course, the formula is fictitious, but its possibility in principle is substantiated by a fact: Khrushchev's de-Stalinization programme was formulated in 1955-56; after Molotov's removal in 1957 it was taken out of store again—though not in Hungary. It was at that time that political prisoners and concentration camp inmates began to be released and Soviet intellectual life was touched by the first breeze of freedom. A reformist generation came on the scene, from which Gorbachev's technocrats and most reliable supporters were to emerge thirty years later (but which was forced to hibernate for two decades after Khrushchev's removal). Since there was a direct

connection between the suppression of the Hungarian revolution and Khrushchev's fall, one may hazard the guess that the actual outcome of 1956 was bound to seal the fate of the Soviet empire, and conversely, "if, fifty-six had succeeded" it would in the long run have improved the Soviet empire's chances of development and survival.

This train of thought has already climbed steep slopes, but the steepest question to answer is what consequences would a victorious Hungary have had to face?

The answer is made difficult by the well-known circumstance: that, up to the 4th of November, the revolution had no clear programme and that after that date every programme bore the mark of the Soviet presence, more precisely of the circumstance that the rearguard of the revolution—workers' councils, writers, the non-communist political groups asking India to mediate—sought a compromise between Soviet socialism and Hungarian national aims. This was reflected more clearly by István Bibó's proposals than by any other contemporary plan. If therefore the Hungarian revolution's future were to be deduced from these documents, this future (that was never to be) would be approached on the basis of defeat rather than victory.

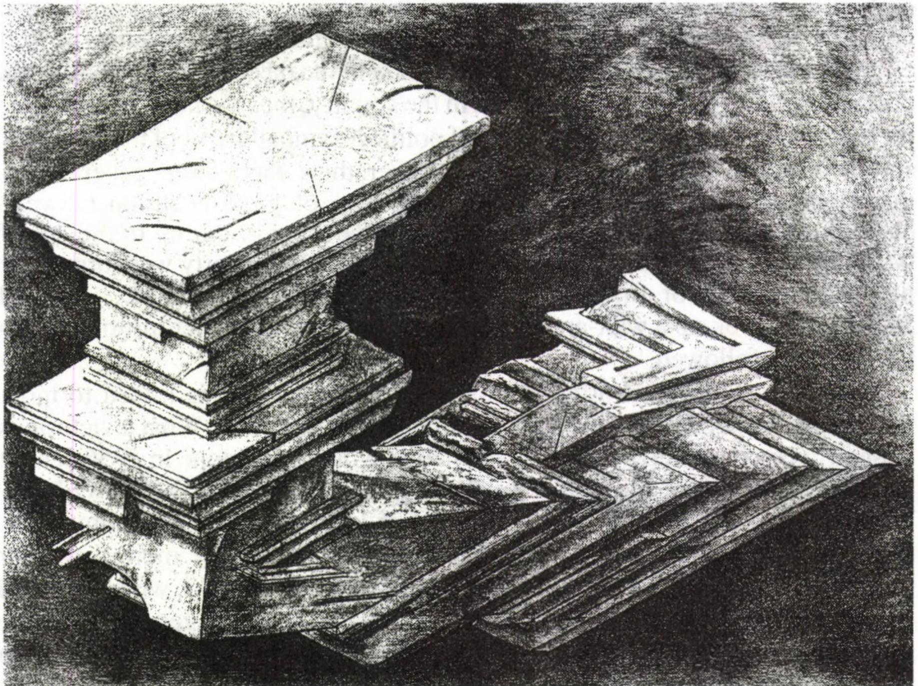
Another option is to start from the dynamics of the victorious stage of the revolution, i.e. the days preceding the 4th of November, and to experiment with the extrapolation of the curve obtained in this way. This, however, would leave out of account those political forces which began to organize themselves in the early days of November and later quit the scene or appeared with a different orchestration. It would virtually disregard the majority of political groupings, among them the followers of the Prince Primate or the reform socialists as well as the Peasant Party and the Social Democrats. In the days of the revolution, no political public opinion poll was taken in the country, thus we have no authentic picture either of the actual distribution of political sympathies or of the continual shift in opinions. In the early days of November, there was a rather general view that Hungary was heading for an Austrian type of great coalition between clerical populists and left social democrats *(schwarz-rot)* but up to the 4th of November nothing definite had come of that, no Catholic Party was formed. In his radio address of the 3rd of November, the Prince Primate, Cardinal Mindszenty, took up a wait-and-see position, meaning to gather information in the days that followed.

There is a third point offering guidance as well, which is linked to more reliable facts than the two previous, and this is the year 1989. What a victorious or semi-victorious Hungarian political nation would have done in 1956 cannot be told. That book of the past remains illegible. On the other hand, we know how Hungary came to life and voted after the next collapse of communism. Post-1989 Hungarian society, however, has been shaped by more than four decades of socialism, as against the Hungarian society of 1956, which had still direct contact with pre-war and war-time Hungary. Moreover, in 1956 the industrial working class was both more numerous and more important than three decades later. The two events can nevertheless be compared, the more so

as the first, instinctive, gesture of 1989 was the repetition of the revolutionary demands of 1956.

I hear the objection: "What has remained of 1956's programme for today?" And what would have remained for 1958, if by chance the revolution had been victorious? Indeed, do we have the right to conceive the programme of 1956 as a united message, when wills were divided and diverging at the time and were united only in the demand that the nation regain its independence. The consequences of this postulate, negative by nature, have been interpreted by everyone in their own fashion.

Somehow the same story was repeated in 1989-90, too. There was a common negative postulate, to escape communism and get rid of the Russians. By 1989 the method was clear and practically beyond dispute: "Democracy and a market economy." (In 1956 this would have given rise to dispute, the socialism of workers' self-management, that particular "third way", had not been tried yet and appealed to many.) The fact is that democracy is of several kinds and a market economy divides society into competing and rivalling groups. The resulting party struggles could not have been avoided after 1956 either. This is why the analogy of 1989 is illuminating. "And if fifty-six had been victorious after all?" Well, then we would have reached 1991 earlier.



János Makkay

Gordon Childe (1892-1957) and Hungary

A Centenary Tribute

English readers no doubt need no introduction to Gordon Childe, despite Colin Renfrew referring to him as a great Australian archaeologist. He went to Edinburgh University in 1927 to take up the newly founded Abercromby Chair of Prehistoric Archaeology; in 1946 he was appointed Director of the Institute of Archaeology in the University of London, where he worked until his retirement in 1956.

He had studied Greek, Latin and Philosophy at the University of Sydney. In 1914, he secured a graduate scholarship which took him to Queen's College, Oxford, where John Beazley was his tutor in classical archaeology. He was also influenced by Sir Arthur Evans and Sir John Myers. In 1916, probably to avoid conscription, he returned to Australia and, active in left-wing politics, joined the Australian Union for Democratic Control; for a time in 1919 he was Private Secretary to Premier John Storey of New South Wales. After Storey's death that year, Childe found himself unemployed and returned to Britain and chose to be an archaeologist. Influenced as he was by Evans and Myers, he became, as a matter of course, a keen supporter of the view that, since the early Neolithic Age, the Middle East had been the sole cradle of inventions which had made their slow way to Europe through cultural diffusion, migration or invasion. Childe, however, discovered that, in pursuit of those inventions, West European archaeologists concentrated on either the routes across the Aegean and Italy or on the effects in their own homelands. Thus Childe decided to seek a more logical, shorter and, until then, undetected path on the possible map of diffusional streams: the inter-connections along the Rhine and Danube valleys. As the Rhine area was already relatively well mapped archaeologically, he turned his attention to the northern Balkans and the Carpathian Basin—the Danube valley—and started studying its Neolithic, Copper and Bronze Ages,[1] under the unified culture and civilization called Danubian. Naturally, Hungary, which was the initial location, remained the pivot for his research. Rather unfortunately, this crucial part of his work did not receive appropriate treatment in the three biographies published so far.[2] This article aims to rectify these lacunae.

Childe was mainly able to rely on what local research tradition had produced on the Neolithic painted pottery of Eastern Europe (most digging up to then had taken place at sites in the Ukraine, Moldavia, Transylvania and, to a lesser extent, in Moravia. For some reason, less attention was attracted by Mór Wosinszky's excavations at Lengyel in Tolna county, Hungary, which were neither less important, nor carried out in a less scholarly manner than the others). Such findings Childe

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János Makkay *is an archaeologist of the Early Bronze Age.*

studied in Cracow and Vienna in 1922 or 1923. We have no information on his visiting Hungary at that time, though the possibility cannot be excluded. Nevertheless, one of his letters shows that he was not able to visit Sepsiszentgyörgy (Sfintu Gheorge) in Transylvania, one of the most important centres of painted pottery, although he had intended to.[3] This is what caused him to write six letters between October 24, 1923 and December 1, 1924 to the curator of the Székely Múzeum at Sepsiszentgyörgy, Ferenc László, an archaeologist, (1873-1925) who had been working at the painted pottery site of Erősd (Ariusd) since 1907), and of whom Childe knew that he was Hungarian, though no longer a citizen of Hungary, and to László's successor, Vilmos Csutak. From the letters it is clear that Childe was aware of the consequences of the peace treaty drawn up at Trianon, yet he retained the Hungarian spelling of place names. His note to a later publication shows that he did it deliberately. *"Throughout this article Hungary means the area comprised under that name prior to 1918 and the Hungarian names have been retained."*[4] As that short article was published in 1926, after his plans on excavating in Transylvania had fallen through, this might have been his way of exacting a small revenge.

The first of Childe's six surviving letters[5] is written in German, the other five are handwritten in English. He mailed, however, slightly different German versions with three of them. All but one were written at his London club of the time which was, according to the heading of the first, *"1917 Club, 4-5 Gerrard Street, W.1. One minute from Leicester Sq. Station."* The close of the letter features the following German text: *"Bedauerlich kann ich Magyarisch nicht schreiben (und nur mühsam lesen)."* (Unfortunately I cannot write Magyar and only read it with difficulty.) In these letters Childe asked Ferenc László for data (on his Erősd digging and findings) for a major article he was preparing,[6] and suggested conducting joint excavations at Erősd under the leadership of Ferenc László, whom he held in high regard. In one of these letters, dated September 24, 1924, he wrote, *"We are much interested in the excavations which have been conducted with such skill and patience by Dr László at Erősd. I am informed that owing to your separation from Hungary the work has had to be stopped for lack of funds. Now I am wondering whether, if a museum here were to put up the money, your museum and Dr László would be willing to carry on the work on the same terms as formerly i.e., to share the product equally with us. The Director of the Cambridge University Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology authorises me to state that he is prepared to spend sixty pounds 60 stg. in supporting the excavation of the site. He would of course expect in return a fair and equal share of the material found, especially vases, figurines and pintaredas... I do not know whether the Rumanian laws would allow us to take anything out of their country. Perhaps you would kindly let me have your views on these questions? We read German, French and Italian quite as easily as English."*[7] (This disturbing multitude of Central European languages accompanied Childe throughout his Danube project.) Only in the German version of the letter that was mailed at the same time does Childe mention that, as far as he knows, the National Museum of Hungary (in Budapest) supported the earlier (pre-war) excavations at Erősd for a half share of the finds. (In actual fact, Ferenc László sent only a selection, according to the inventory of the National Museum of Hungary.) Though Vilmos Csutak answered the offer on October 21, 1924, his letter obviously took over a month to get to London. As Childe probably counted on such a delay, he repeated his offer in the identical German and English letters dated November 21:[8] *"Some time back I addressed a letter to you on behalf of my friend Mr Louis Clarke,*

Curator of the University Museum, Cambridge. That Museum is anxious to obtain specimens of Transylvanian painted pottery. Now I am aware that Dr László had been carrying out most important and scientific excavations at Erősd supported by the Hungarian National Museum at Buda Pest. I believe the proceeds were shared equally between the Sepsiszentgyörgy Museum and that of Buda Pest, but that, owing to the separation from Hungary, work at Erősd had to be abandoned. Now the suggestion was that Cambridge should provide 60 pounds stg for further excavations at the site in return for a half share of the finds—ceramic, painted plaster, implements etc.—on the same terms as had previously been given to Buda Pest."

The name of Louis Clarke, who would later participate in the excavations at Tószeg, Hungary, is mentioned for the first time in this letter. The joint excavation planned for 1925 was, however, postponed, as the Rumanian Ministry of Education, at the suggestion of Vasile Parvan, Secretary-General of the Rumanian Academy, put up Lei 50,000 for an excavation at the site to be conducted by Ferenc László alone (the new regime probably wished to be as generous as the old one had been). László did, indeed, take up the offer. Thus the plan of a joint Cambridge—László excavation was postponed to 1926 and finally foundered with the sudden death of Ferenc László on September 16, 1925. All that remained for Childe to do with the Erősd project was to write a very appreciative obituary of Ferenc László[9] and later an important article "Erősd and Dimini (a late Neolithic site in Thessaly)"[10]. Meanwhile, he visited Sepsiszentgyörgy on April 12-13, 1926, but by then all he could see was the Erősd painted pottery.

That Childe may have been in Hungary in 1923-1924 is an open question. What we know for certain is that he made two visits to Hungary before 1929. In the spring of 1926 *"he took advantage of the massive post-war inflation in Eastern Europe to travel along the Danube; ... and in the company of C. Daryll Forde [who was a pupil of Elliot Smith and had written a book proclaiming the Egyptian origins of all things],[11] travelled for six weeks in Yugoslavia, Rumania and Hungary, gathering fresh data and checking personally the stratigraphy of important sites. ...Taking advantage of the inflated currencies of the region, they were able to move about in a large American car driven by an emigré Russian general."*[12]

Professor János Banner, an archaeologist at Szeged and later Budapest university, Childe's most important Hungarian colleague and friend saw Childe's 1926 visit as being *"rich in new data totally unknown abroad and had a general informative character; it brought to light a large number of important finds excavated years before but unpublished, hardly known even here."*[13] That is certainly true; in that spring Childe went to Debrecen (where some thirty years later he would receive an honorary doctorate from the university) and met Lajos Zoltai, a local historian, and saw the Hajdúsámson hoard, which has gained worldwide renown since then. Excavated in 1907, it consists of a sword and twelve axes, all bronze. The sword was lying flat under 75 cm of clean sand, pointing south; the axes were arranged across the blade with their butts to the east. The regular arrangement suggests that the weapons thus buried constituted a votive offering, probably to gods or demons. At that time (1908) Zoltai published a short article on these objects, which had been buried around the 14th century B. C.

A set of such beauty is a rarity in Europe, though there are scattered pieces all the way from Scandinavia to Mycenaean Greece. Childe immediately recognized the importance of the find but, a true scholar, he was extremely fair: he persuaded Lajos Zoltai to publish them in one of the most important scholarly periodicals in the English speaking world. His

name appears only under a short commentary but it must have been Childe himself who inspired the text. The style suggests that the English is his.[14] As far as we know, this is the first article published by a Hungarian scholar in a British archaeological periodical.

In 1926 Childe was not able to visit the Tószeg excavations which were discontinued at the time. Obviously, however, this was when he agreed with the National Museum of Hungary on conducting joint excavations at the famous Tószeg site in compensation for the aborted Erősd digging: instead of that Neolithic site, here was a Bronze Age one. Tószeg is near Szolnok, on the edge of the river Tisza's flood basin. The site itself, Laposhalom (sometimes referred to as Loposhalom in archaeological writings) had been known throughout Europe since the second half of the previous century. There had been a visit to it organized for the participants of the 8th International Congress of Archaeology in Budapest in 1876 and, as the custom of that age required, each of the most important guests received a small Tószeg pot. Some of them are still on display in major museums. Childe was perfectly aware of the site's outstanding importance, so Cambridge money (we do not know the exact sum) was spent on this joint excavation with the National Museum of Hungary. The excavations began in May 1927 with two Hungarian participants—and how many Englishmen? Well, German, the lingua franca, was again responsible for some mix-up. According to the final report published decades later, there were three prehistorians from England excavating at Tószeg in 1927: Childe himself, C.L. Clarke and "F.S.A. Keeper".[15] Childe's short report, however, appeared in 1927 and not thirty years later, and cleared up the identity of the mysterious third British participant: *"In May of the present year* (i.e., of 1927) *a joint expedition from the Hungarian National Museum and the Cambridge University Museum of Archaeology and Ethnography under Dr. L. Marton, Dr. F. Tompa, of the Hungarian National Museum, Louis C.G. Clarke, F.S.A., Keeper of the Cambridge University Museum, and the present author* (i.e. Childe) *has been completing the record."*[16] Mr. Clarke, Fellow of the Society of Antiquarians, was, of course, Keeper of the Cambridge Museum.

Clarke was probably less satisfied with the excavation than Childe, since the share of the finds of the Cambridge University Museum was less than half, yet Childe's satisfaction is best demonstrated by his reporting on the expedition even in a French periodical.[17] That gesture, in those circumstances, was surely an attempt to curry favour in Hungary. Another proof of his satisfaction is the large number of references to Tószeg in his enormous volume *The Danube in Prehistory,* which appeared in 1929. We are justified in assuming that Hungary's prehistoric archaeology received an international reputation mainly through Childe's works in those hard postwar years.

In the 1930s Childe's attention gradually turned to matters of theory, Scotland and the Middle East. Even then he did not ignore Hungary, as his short but important article "Hungary in Prehistory", published in this magazine's predecessor, *The Hungarian Quarterly,* shows.[18] That article may have something to do with the appearance of Childe's major study on the chronological relationships between the old civilizations of the Middle East and Europe.[19]

In that very important article, usually ignored by advocates of the New Archaeology, Hungarian finds and data received stressed treatment. Preparations for the international archaeological congress to be held in Hungary in 1940 were at an advanced stage by that time. After the Great War, the old congress system (under which

the 1876 congress had been held in Budapest) was re-organized as late as in 1931. After London (1932) and Oslo (1936), the third congress was to have taken place in Hungary in 1940, and this was mainly due to Childe's lobbying. Unfortunately, the outbreak of a new world war prevented it taking place.

There remained, however, a never published 26-page German manuscript typed by Childe himself, *"Bronzezeitliche Kulturgruppen der Ungarischen Tiefebene und ihre zeitliche Gliederung."*[20] Most probaly it was written as a lecture to be read at the projected 1940 Budapest congress; he sent it either to Ferenc Tompa (chairman-elect of the congress) or András Alföldi (editor of *Archaeológiai Értesítő*, the only Hungarian specialist periodical of that time). In the troubles of the war, the manuscript was forgotten. Nevertheless, the congress to be held in Budapest was not forgotten. As János Banner wrote much later, *"The Budapest congress could have been held in 1949 in view of the unanimous decision passed in Oslo (1936). We held a preparatory committee meeting in June 1948, in Copenhagen where ...old ties were successfully re-established with the help of old friends. Owing to some hurdles, alas, the congress was not held after all, even though Budapest, having cleared up the debris of the war that had torn Europe apart and well on the road to recovery, could have housed it..."*[21]

In the year 1958, "some hurdles" was a very tactful expression of the fact that Rákosi's communist regime was against such a meeting. They could not have objected to Childe himself, who had made his way to Moscow on June 15, 1945, immediately after the victory, to take part in the 220th anniversary celebrations of the Academy of Sciences. As two of his letters to Banner show, Childe was astounded and saddened to receive news of the 1949 congress being blocked: *"The Members of the International Congress of Prehistoric and Protohistoric Sciences were particularly delighted in Oslo, 1936, to receive an invitation to hold the next Congress in Hungary, 1940; for all European archaeologists know the great wealth of prehistoric antiquities that have been collected in Hungary and appreciate the leading role that Hungary played in the Development of Civilization throughout Europe in prehistoric and early historic times. We knew, too, something of the fruitful excavations and researches that had been conducted by Hungarian prehistorians during the preceding ten years. The war of 1939-1945 prevented the assembly of the Congress, but it is known that even during the war years our colleagues in Hungary were able to continue those fruitful researches to which I have referred. It is, therefore, with the highest expectations that prehistorians even in the remotest parts of Europe have welcomed the renewal of the invitation for 1949."*[22] *"As to the Congress I and my colleagues are terribly disappointed that it will not take place..."*[23] There is no need to emphasize how important such an international scholarly meeting would have been for Hungary, one of the vanquished of the Second World War.

Childe was thus unable to read his lecture even in 1949. Personally he was far from non grata in Eastern Europe, he visited Czechoslovakia in 1949 and the Soviet Union in 1953, but it was not until 1955 that he returned to Hungary. As he jokingly remarked, it would have been interesting to drive around the place chauffeured by a Russian general.

As a small compensation for the congress postponed in 1940 and banned in 1949, the Hungarian Academy of Sciences and the National Museum organized a smaller international conference in October 1955. It was attended by seven or so prehistorians from abroad, including such notables as P.P. Yefimenko and M.I. Atamonov from the Soviet Union, V.

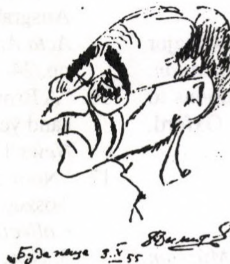
Unverzagt (one of the Honorary Aryans allowed to live by Hitler) from Berlin and, of course, Childe. By that time even he had probably forgotten his 1940 manuscript (or if he had not, no copies were found as Tompa was killed in the last days of the siege of Budapest and Alföldi went into exile to the West the year before the communist takeover), so he chose to read a shorter paper dealing with the Bronze Age in Hungary: "Notes on the Chronology of the Hungarian Bronze Age".[24] This is one of the last articles he ever wrote and an inportant one, as the author already allows some inventions to have possibly taken place in Europe, in the Hungarian Bronze Age, as opposed to the 'ex oriente lux' thesis' postulations.

Unfortunately, only the Hungarian translation of his address has survived. Translated back, it says, *"I am bringing our British prehistorian friends' greetings to the Budapest archaeology congress. It is a great honour for me to be the only representative of British research archaeologists and the bearer of their best wishes. Even in Lajos Kossuth's time there were close links between the sons of Hungary and Britain; British prehistorians have always followed Hungarian research with keen interest. As Mr Bohm also said, Hungary indeed has a central role in the development of Europe. Here were the crossroads of the nations coming from east, north, northwest and west and, in consequence, independent forms of culture developed here. It is therefore understandable that there is in Britain a keen interest in research going on in Hungary, the results of which are known to us thanks to your archaeological periodical. Before the war I had the opportunity to make the acquaintance of several Hungarian scholars: Lajos Marton, Ferenc Tompa and others. We are well aware of the great drive and systematic nature of Hungary's work in archaeological research, and we eagerly await the latest results, so very important to us as well. Speaking also on behalf of my friends in Britain, I wish you the best of luck in achieving these results."*[25]

By all accounts Childe enjoyed his last visit to Hungary. László Vértes drew a cartoon of him and other conference participants in hearty discussion over wine at the reception given by the National Museum. János Banner escorted Childe to Hódmezővásárhely to let him, at long last, see the finds that he would refer to no less than nineteen times in the 6th (1957) edition of his *The Dawn of European Civilization.* He enjoyed warm hospitality from Miklós Galyasi, who had created a museum out of the Vásárhely archaeological collection (and who would be fired from the director's chair by the Kádár regime with the remark, "That chap is too Parisian for a Vásárhely man, and too Jewish for a peasant").

After this pleasant visit, Childe was naturally shocked by 1956, even though *"The impact of even such a tragic event as the Soviet invasion of Hungary in 1956, however much it dismayed him about Soviet foreign policy and however sorry he felt for the Hungarian people ... was lessened by the fact that it seemed not unlike Britain's behaviour during the Suez crisis."*[26]

Let the story of Childe's Hungarian connections end with an anecdote. In his autobiography, *Some Small Harvest,* Glyn Daniel, Disney Professor of Archaeology at Cambridge from 1974 to 1981, recalls a 1962 trip to Hungary: *"We very much enjoyed our days in Budapest. ...We were specially befriended by Mademoiselle Mozsolics of the National Museum. She was a most entertaining person and an excellent raconteur. She told us of how Gordon Childe was given an honorary degree by the University of Debrecen; the only professor there who could speak English carefully prepared a speech; Childe himself carefully prepared a speech in Magyar. The speeches were*



László Vértes's caricatures of some participants at the 1955 Congress: clockwise from top left Childe, W. Unverzagt (Berlin), Holger Abraham (Stockholm), D. P. Dimitrov (Sofia) and László Vértes himself. The originals have been lost; these are reproduced from the satirical weekly Ludas Matyi *of October 13, 1955.*

delivered and were incomprehensible to all: a neighbour of Mozsolics turned to her and said, 'I wonder why both speakers decided to give their addresses in bad German?' "[27]

Amalia Mozsolics remembers Childe remarking upon that welcoming address 'I would never have thought Hungarian was so similar to English, indeed I wonder why I can't understand it.' "

NOTES

1 B. Trigger: *Gordon Childe*. London, 1980, pp. 9, 32, 35-36.

2 Trigger 1980; Sally Green: *Prehistorian: a Biography of V. Gordon Childe*. Moonraker Press, 1981, 200 pp; Barbara McNairn: *The Method and Theory of V. Gordon Childe*. Edinburgh, 1980, 184 pp.

3 Attila László: "Correspondence of Ferenc László with V. Gordon Childe.", in *Tanulmányok és Közlemények,* Sepsiszentgyörgy (Sfintu Gheorghe), 1973, pp. 189.

4 See note 14.

5 Attila László pp. 189-196.

6 The planned article became two major books: *The Dawn of European Civlization*. London, Kegan Paul, 1925, 6 editions to 1957. *The Danube in Prehistory*. Oxford, 1929.

7 Attila László pp. 193.

8 *Op. cit.* pp. 194-195.

9 *MAN* 25, 1925, No. 110, p. 179.

10 *Emlékkönyv a Székely Nemzeti Múzeum ötvenéves jubileumára*. Sepsiszentgyörgy, 1929, pp. 338-350.

11 Glyn Daniel: *Some Small Harvest*. London 1986, p. 413.

12 Trigger p. 36 and pp. 57.

13 J. Banner, in *Archaeológiai Értesítő* 85, 1958, p. 57. Here Banner reports on the Hungarian editions of Childe's books, a field rich in speculation. According to Banner, the Hungarian translation of *Man Makes Himself,* London, Watts, 1936(1) - 1951(6) was made on the basis of the first edition but was not published. That is an error, as a short version was in fact published: *Fejlődés a természetben és a társadalomban*. Budapest, 1937, Kronos Books, 31 p. Banner knows of a new translation in 1949: though the book was already set, publication was stopped. Finally, a new translation of the 1965 4th British edition was published in 1968: *Az ember önmaga alkotója*. Budapest, Kossuth. *The Story of Tools*. Cobbett Press, London, 1944 (*A szerszámok története*. Budapest, Szikra, 1949.) Banner considers the translation bad. *What Happened in History*. Penguin Books, several editions and reprints since 1942.: *A civilizáció bölcsője*. Gondolat Press, 1959, after the 1949 reprint.; *The Prehistory of European Society*. Penguin Books, 1958: *Az európai társadalom őstörténete*. Gondolat Press, 1962.

14 Lajos Zoltai: "Two Bronze Heads from Hajdúsámson, near Debreczen, with a note by V. Gordon Childe." *MAN* 26:8, Nos. 84-99, August 1926, pp. 129-132.

15 J. Banner—I. Bóna—L. Marton: "Die Ausgrabungen von L. Marton in Tószeg." *Acta Archaeologica Hungarica* 19, 1957, pp. 24-25.

16 "A Bronze Age village in Hungary: a thousand years of prehistory". *The Ill. London News* 171:4614, Sept. 24, 1927, p. 198.

17 "Nouvelles fouilles au Laposhalom pres Tószeg" (Hongrie). *Revue des Musées at Collections Archaeologiques* (Dijon), vol. 3, Nos. 10 and 13, 1928, pp. 7-9.

18 *The Hungarian Quarterly* 1938, pp. 526-531.

19 "The Orient and Europe". *American Journal of Archaeology* 44, 1939, pp. 10-16. Cf. J. Makkay: "V.G. Childe on chronological correlations between the Orient and Europe," in *Varia Archaeologica Hungarica* 2, 1989, pp. 177-181.

20 The manuscript is in the author's collection.

21 J. Banner in *Archaeológiai Értesítő* 86, 1959, p. 89.

22 Childe's letter, London, April 12, 1948, to Banner, Cf. J. Banner in *Acta Archaeologica Hungarica* 8, 1957, pp. 319-323.

23 Childe's letter, London, January 25, 1949, to Banner. Ibid.

24 *Acta Archaeologica Hungarica* 7, 1956, pp. 291-299.

25 Hung. Nat. Museum, Archives, 82. R.II., pp. 32-33.

26 Trigger p. 167.

27 Daniel pp. 311-312.

OPINION

Ferenc Miszlivetz

The Strange Death of Liberalism

A Conversation with Immanuel Wallerstein

In an interview ten years ago you saw the 1990s as a very important decade, in which a great deal would be clarified concerning the future development of the world system. I would like to ask you how you see the changes of these past ten years in Eastern Europe or, if you prefer, the changes over the last twenty years.

I have a vision of what happened in Eastern Europe which is not that of most people—either those in East Central Europe or the rest of the world. First, the rapidity and ease of the transformation or collapse of communism was made possible by Gorbachev's fundamental change of policy. Of course, others have argued this. But, in my view, Gorbachev's fundamental change of policy was the consequence of U.S. weakness rather than U.S. strength. This is the first of my unusual points of view. The second is that the collapse of communism is far from being the triumph of liberalism, but rather represents the collapse of liberalism as an ideology. Let me try and explain both. The first is a view about a middle-run reality and the second a long-term reality.

The middle-run reality is that, after 1945, the U.S. was the hegemonic power of the world system. It was the strongest country economically, politically, militarily and even culturally. It more or less dominated the world for 25 or 30 years in terms of its ability to achieve what it wished. In this situation, its relationship to the Soviet Union was not one of real conflict but of stylized, fake conflict in the sense that the Yalta "deal" really was a "deal". The deal was basically that the U.S. and the Soviet Union agreed that under no circumstances would there be violence in Europe. The Soviet Union would have an area which was politically its own and would not expect any kind of economic aid in reconstruction, while the U.S. went about reconstructing Western Europe and Japan. This part of the deal is usually forgotten.

Do you consider that this Yalta deal was violated—because East Europeans think it was. I am thinking, say, of Ferenc Fehér's article on the long revolution against the Yalta system.

Well, it depends what you mean by violated. If you assume that it was ever to mean free elections in Eastern Europe, then of course it was violated. But I do not think it ever meant this.

What about violence? You said that the deal was that there should be no violence.

I meant interstate violence.

Well, even that is questionable as far as Hungary or Czechoslovakia are concerned.

No, I think from 1945 to 1990 we have a period of exceptional interstate peace. The boundaries and the borders are absolutely

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sealed and troops do not cross them. That was the arrangement and it was respected at all points and time.

You don't consider 1956 or 1968 as a breach?

No, it was exactly part of the deal. 1956 and 1968 are part of the deal. The deal was that the Soviet Union would take care of any problems it might have within its own territories and the U.S. would not intervene. There was plenty of rhetoric, but the U.S. did not move in 1953, 1956, 1968, 1980 or 1981 (in Poland). At none of these points in time did the U.S. make a single move. Quite to the contrary—the U.S. made it very clear to the Soviet Union and the world that the U.S. would not move. It was part of the deal. And what the U.S. got for it was that the Soviets kept order in that area of the world. So, in that sense, I consider the Soviet Union to be a sub-imperialist power of the U.S. for 45 years, keeping order in its part of the world.

Now, Yalta was a deal about Europe. This will take us away from Eastern Europe, but the disorder in the world during this period was not because of the Soviet Union or the U.S. but rather because of the Third World. It was not discussed in Yalta and assumed to be weak. But they would not respect this order and created a great fuss. This is another story.

From the late 1960s on, U.S. power began to be undermined. This was due first to the natural economic rise of Western Europe and Japan, which made the U.S. incredibly less competitive. Second, there were the transformations in the Third World and the long stagnation in the world economy as a whole which made the U.S. increasingly even less competitive. Finally, it had to engage in military Keynesianism throughout the 1980s and got into an enormous debt situation. All of this was part of the relative decline of the U.S. And once the U.S. began to decline, the Soviet Union could no longer count on it to maintain this kind of tension which was the basis of Soviet power both inside the country and in Eastern Europe. I see Gorbachev as having figured this out by 1985 and saying "I've got to save the pieces for Russia (or the Soviet Union, whichever phrase you wish to use) as a state and a power in the world". I see him as having said to himself that he had to do three things. First, he needed to liquidate the costs of the cold war—for it was economically impossible. He planned to do this by forcing the U.S. into a disarmament agreement which basically he did by unilaterally taking steps that the U.S. had to match. Second, he said to himself that he was no longer getting anything out of the East European empire: "I get nothing economically, it is now a big political burden so let's get rid of it and allow them to do what they want." Of course, he preferred certain things rather than others.

But there was in fact a decline in Soviet power, wasn't there?

Of course. But Soviet power had been based to a great extent on that of the U.S. Finally, the third thing Gorbachev realized was that he needed internal reorganization. Therefore, what changed in the late 1980s was not the desires of the people in Hungary, Czecho-Slovakia, Poland and Bulgaria to overthrow the communists or to get rid of the Russians as a sort of imperialist neighbour. They had that in the 1950s and 1960s. What changed was not the desires of East Europeans but rather their political possibilities. Gorbachev said he would not send in troops and at that point the local communist parties had no strength and collapsed. This is what he was trying to explain to people like Honecker and Jakes. They were too dense to understand. The Hungarian communists were a little more intelligent about this, as were the Polish communists.

So, to sum up, I see the sequence as first the decline in U.S. power, Gorbachev's reaction to the U.S. decline and therefore the ability of the countries of East and

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Central Europe. Now that is a relatively short sequence, taking us from 1945 to 1990—the rise of the U.S., the decline of the U.S. and its consequences. The rise, then, involved the Yalta agreement while the decline involved the end of Yalta.

But when you look at this from a longer point of view, from the point of view of the world system since the French Revolution, I want to argue that the collapse of communism and the death of Marxist-Leninism as an ideology is in fact the collapse of liberalism. This is true despite the fact that everybody in East Central Europe speaks the language of liberalism and the market, etc. But this is to misunderstand what liberalism is. Liberalism is not the operation of a relatively freer market. The market never disappeared in the actual calculations in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. That is another long story. But obviously the market is freed from a number of constraints. There is now private ownership of the means of production and outside investors have the ability to invest (up to a point). But that is not liberalism. Liberalism is an ideology born out of the French Revolution and modernity which had a *Weltanschauung* that political change is normal because we live in a world of progress. Liberalism was the ideology which said that we have to manage normal change in order to make it as rational as possible. It is a good thing. We accept it and have to move it along by our rational decision-making process. Freeing the market from various constraints was often seen, but not always, as part of this rationality, so liberalism tended to be for freer markets. I do not know how much English history is really known in Hungary, but I would remind you that in the 1840s one of the great issues of English history was the Corn Laws. This is always presented, correctly, as a removal of various protectionist constraints and therefore a freeing of the market. But the very same people who supported and put through the abolition of the Corn Laws were also the people who put through the first factory acts. These were restrictions on the rights of owners of factories so that they couldn't employ people for more than x number of hours, etc. The social legislation was also liberalism because it was part of the rational control of the process of change.

Liberalism now became the central ideology of the world system. It had on its flanks conservatives who wanted to slow things down as much as possible and socialists who wanted to speed things up as much as possible. In point of fact, my basic thesis is that 19th century liberalism had a programme—to integrate the working classes in society in order to make possible rational change without disruption. This programme had two parts. The first was to give them eventually the vote and the second was to give them part of the surplus value. In both cases, the idea was to do it in such a way that they would

not want to change the system fundamentally but would rather legitimate it and accept it, having received part of the pie. The irony is that, historically, this liberal programme was not implemented by the liberals but by a combination of sophisticated conservatives who realized that it made sense and the demands socialists put forward in militant form by parties, trade unions, etc. They, in fact, turned to the state for just these kinds of reforms. By 1914 they had more or less achieved the basic framework.

At that point, we come to the 20th century and we have the new form of liberalism which is Woodrow Wilson. This was an attempt to do the same thing on a world scale, i.e., no longer just in Western Europe but to incorporate the working classes of the rest of the world. At that time, this included those of East and Central Europe. His programme was the self-determination of nations which is the logical parallel of suffrage on the world scene. Then Roosevelt came along in the Second World War, proclaiming economic development for all countries which is the logical parallel of the welfare state on the world level.

May I interrupt you here and go back to 1918? At the end of the Great War, the collapse of the Habsburg empire basically offered two opportunities. The first was to create new nation states to replace the empire. The other, more appealing to Wilson, was to create a democratic federation or confederation. The Czech nationalist politicians convinced Wilson and his advisors to opt for the creation of nation states. This was, of course, absolute nonsense from the beginning.

Someone said that Wilson's programme of the self-determination of nations is logically nonsense, for in order to have nations self-determine, somebody has to determine in advance which are the nations.

So, from the beginning, there was confusion as to what the list of nations were which would have self-determination. Wilson does not have a real position on that. It is a matter of indifference to him whether the nation is Czechia, Czechoslovakia or Danubia. What he said was that there should be a state which should be a member of the League of Nations and therefore independent and have the equal rights of others—as if to say that whichever solution you people figure out (may it be Czechia, Czechoslovakia or Danubia) is OK with me as long as it did not disrupt things too much.

But it did. This option had to sound irrational—Yugoslavia is as nonsensical a nation state as Czecho-Slovakia. It never became an integrated nation.

Well, perhaps. But notice that this not only happened in East Central Europe but also in Asia, Africa, and the Middle East. That is to say that as of 1914 there would have been no historian or social scientist who could have predicted with accuracy the boundaries of the member states and nations. In some cases the boundaries were defined very narrowly and tightly in terms of lingustic frontiers and in some places not. But this is unimportant for the theory of self-determining nations. The important thing is that they should be sovereign states in a family of sovereign states which is the world system. The actual boundaries were a function of power politics at the moment of decision-making. Various great powers sometimes got into the game because for one reason or another they preferred to see Yugoslavia united than to have Serbia, Slovenia and Croatia separated. Or maybe one of them preferred this and one did not but the one who did had slightly more power. Locally, it might be that in the case of Czechoslovakia the Czechs were basically able to convince the Slovaks to go along with it but then, twenty years down the line, the Slovaks became unhappy with that. Those were momentary decisions but they created a state structure. And note that once the

boundaries were created there was enormous pressure to keep them. We still see that today. Nobody wants to see these boundaries reshaped or refashioned precisely because they are all irrational in some sense.

What about some of these societies, these nationalist groupings?

No, when I said nobody, I meant that nobody who is powerful in the world system wants to see the boundaries reorganized because once you open the issue there is no end to it.

East Europeans are a little sensitive at being taken for nobodies. Right now, after 1989, we in Eastern Europe are living in a vacuum, at least in terms of security. Now we have to live with the consequences of the Wilsonian decision, which sounded profoundly liberal and democratic.

That is perfectly correct but I seize upon your use of "vacuum of security". The vacuum of security is because of the collapse of the Soviet Union. They enforced the boundaries. Nobody made a fuss about the boundaries in the 1950s or 1960s. It was not permitted. If I look ahead five to ten years, I suspect that the vacuum is going to be filled by Western Europe. Quite aside from Eastern Europe, I anticipate the emergence of a West European military structure. Mitterand is pushing for it hard now, Kohl really wants it and I think that within five years we will see it. We will have a West European military organization. And I suspect they will replace the Soviets and become the ones to control the boundaries.

But, in the meantime, you've got five years and you are correct that anything can happen. Yugoslavia could fall apart tomorrow. If it falls apart, Czecho-Slovakia may not stay together. But if Czecho-Slovakia does not stay together, then Hungary and Rumania may start fighting over Transylvania. And if this happens then the Rumanians may begin to fight about Moldavia, that is Bessarabia. This is, of course, what Western Europe and the U.S. do not want. They are going to try in every way to stop it and they have no other way of stopping it than to keep the boundaries as they are now. Because once you open them up, there is no rational readjustment. In other words, if it all falls apart in the next five years, I do not know how or whether it will be put together again. But if it doesn't fall apart in the next few years, those boundaries are going to be encrusted.

What about some sort of forum for East European reconciliation?

If you ask me now to predict what will happen, I think that Western Europe will move in as the military guarantor of the boundaries and will try to keep East Central Europeans happy by involving them in the outer ring of their economic arrangements. In effect, this would be offering a carrot and a stick. The stick will be their threat to move troops in if they tried anything and the carrot being the economic rewards East Central Europeans would get if they are "good boys". Therefore, in the year 2000, you have 9 chances out of 10 that the boundaries will be identical to now. But I agree that we are in a relatively rare moment where the question has been reopened, making the disintegration of a whole set of boundaries possible. If this were to occur, I do not know what would happen. I cannot begin to imagine what kinds of boundaries would come out. That would almost be a question of the relative force of Hungarians, Rumanians, Slovenians, etc. And this is a very hard thing to measure.

But this is why there are all these dreams of regrouping or having some kind of Central European integration—of Czecho-Slovakia, Hungary, Poland and, perhaps later, Yugoslavia and Rumania.

Let me say this—if there were a realignment of the boundaries, half of the people

would be happy and half miserable as a result. I do not see a situation where, if you realign boundaries, 100 per cent of the people of the region would be happy.

I agree but what if Eastern Europe realizes what Western has already realized—that the importance of boundaries has declined as has the absolute sovereignty of individual nation states?

Weak countries do not federate.

Well, this is true. And this is why we need substantial Western aid.

First of all, I do not think you are going to get very substantial Western aid. Second, I do not think that anyone in the West, neither the U.S. nor Western Europe, is particularly attracted to the idea of a federation of East Central European states. This is true even if it were politically possible.

Why not? They do not want a stronger partner?

Exactly. It is the same reason they don't want a confederation of the Arab world or of Latin America.

Yes, this is what I have noticed. And this is why I am pushing it.

You are reacting in the same way that political figures have reacted in other parts of the world. You are saying that were we to create a unified structure, we would be geopolitically much stronger and therefore have more bargaining power in the economic realm. All of this is true. But you are asking me to predict likelihoods and I say that the likelihood of your being able to achieve that is rather low. You are simply not strong enough to achieve it.

Shall we go back to the development of liberalism?

Yes. So, liberalism took its 20th century version by trying to expand the idea of incorporating the working classes of the industrialized countries into the system to include the working classes and peasantries of the world into the system. This was Wilsonianism and Rooseveltism. Against that stood Leninism, which was the recreation of a true socialism that could not be integrated into the system but was truly against the system—i.e. the Third International, etc. Let us look at what happened. As we all know, what happened was that the Russian Revolution was not immediately followed by other revolutions, most notably the German revolution. The Russians drew two lessons from that. One was the notion of socialism in one country which was transformed over time into the idea that Russia was a state like any other state, had rights within the world system and demanded these rights. This has been something systematic in Soviet foreign policy from Lenin through Stalin through Khrushchev through Brezhnev to Gorbachev. Indeed, one might say that it is only with Gorbachev that they will finally achieve this objective. But it is no longer a revolutionary objective.

As for the second thing, the Soviets concluded, I give great significance to the Congress of Baku where Lenin brought together what we now call the movements of national liberation, largely from Asia and Africa, and proposed a big alliance of all of these movements and the European working class. This meant that he had to have a programme which would appeal to these people. Of course, this was anti-imperialism. It turns out that anti-imperialism, when you look at it in practice, is simply a more militant sounding version of the Wilsonian self-determination of nations. That is, basically what these movements tried to do was to overthrow colonial regimes and establish sovereign states.

Once these states were established, what did these new governments do? Whether they called themselves communist or nationalist, they engaged in the economic development of their countries. Sometimes they called this socialist develop-

ment but it was basically economic development, i.e., they built steel mills and attempted to do other things to improve the economy. They sought to catch up with the Western World. They also expected a certain kind of aid to come from the West to help them, which was termed technical assistance or development aid. This was, of course, a form of the welfare state on the world level.

So, after the Second World War, you have the U.S. talking about the economic development of the Third World, and the Soviet Union speaking of socialist development of the Third World, while in practice there was not much difference in terms of their objectives. Hence, I see Leninism as having started as a militant socialism and ending up as an only mildly different version of liberalism on a world scale. And indeed, in some sense it was even the ultimate justification of liberalism. The Soviet line itself helped to preserve the liberal myth. This is because the Soviet line was always that the countries of the Third World wouldn't develop if they listened to the U.S. even if they were quite militant about it because the U.S. simply would not do enough. In order to do enough, you have to do it the way we are doing it, i.e., our particular version is the only version which will really allow countries to develop. Of course, the Soviet Union was put forth as the model—they built this enormous industry and achieved whatever they claimed to have achieved, etc. So in the 1970s and 1980s, when one Third World government after another economically collapsed in various ways through debt mechanisms and had to engage in structural readjustment with the IMF, the Soviets could just say that none of them had done things in the correct way. The correct way was their way.

Of course, what happens by the late 1980s is that the Soviet Union collapses too, in the very same way and just as dramatically as any country in the Third World. Suddenly, everyone began to ask where all of this great economic development was, not only in Eastern Europe but also in Russia. These are terribly backward economic situations where the living standard is disgracefully low, etc. And they now ask for help and aid form the World Bank the way anyone else would.

Imagine what this does in the social psychology of the world system. The last militant hope of the national development ideology has collapsed. Even if you do it in their militant form, it does not work. But the liberals world-wide or in the U.S. were promising in the 1940s, 50s and 60s that if you sensibly, rationally engage in the programme we put forward, you will develop economically. In that sense, the Soviet version was their justification. It was their shield against the disillusionment. That shield has now disappeared. The peoples of East Central Europe as well as those of Asia, Africa and Latin America are facing a reality that national development is not going to happen within the structure of the system. That undermines liberalism, not communism. Communism is dead. Liberalism is undermined because it is a promise and if people do not think it can be fulfilled over the long run, they are not going to sit quietly. So, I see 1989 as the collapse of libaralism.

You yourself talk about how fast the disillusionment has set in. Of course it has. The fact that you adopt all of the recommendations of Jeffrey Sacks will not mean that Hungary will look like Denmark within five years. It cannot mean that. There is no way that Hungary is going to look like Denmark, because all of the countries of the world cannot look like Denmark within the framework of the system we have. The system we have is radically inegalitarian and depends on that. The reason Denmark looks so good is that there is an enormous worldwide transfer of surplus value from the outer ring of the world periphery into the core of which Denmark, for various historical reasons, is a part of.

What do you see coming?

There is a middle run and a long run. I said in the middle run, there is a decline in U.S. power and in the longer run the decline in liberalism.

Does this mean that liberalism is finished or only in decline for the moment?

I think that it was undisputed for 200 years because people believed in its promise. Even if they didn't get the reward immediately, they expected to get it down the line. This is basically what kept the people of the world relatively quiet. But this ability to keep people relatively quiet because the expectation that things would somehow improve over time is gone.

So now I have to speak about what will come both in the middle and longer run. In the middle run, with the decline of the U.S. we will see what has happened many times before—we will get new loci of economic power. At this point, we already have three loci of economic power. These are Western Europe, Japan and the U.S. They are each relatively strong and none of the three is very much stronger than the others. I think we are going to have a new expansion of the world economy in five or ten years from now, i.e., a new boom. These three loci are going to compete with each to attempt to get the largest part of the pie. My own vision is that when three roughly equal units try to compete in such a situation, they tend to reduce to two in order to win. The two that I see moving together are Japan and the U.S., coming together economically and in some kind of arrangement so as to compete with Western Europe. That is the story of the next 20-30 years.

Once we have these two loci in place they will each try to incorporate various areas into a kind of economic zone. I see China as being the priority for Japan and the U.S. and Russia for Western Europe. In each of these cases, we have enormous countries and relatively undeveloped markets from the point of view of the capitalist world economy. And these markets have an incredible demand. So if you incorporate them, you create a market for an expanded world production. I think that the geopolitics will follow from this.

If you move towards the incorporation of Russia, it may be Russia under Gorbachev or Yeltsin, for it does not matter as long as it is a stable structure to be pulled in economically, then Eastern and Central Europe are in-between geographically. If the arrrangement gets worked out between Russia and Western Europe, they of course have to do something for the people in between. That is, they have to do something physically, politically, economically, etc. That is what I was talking about before in terms of the security arrangements. Economically, the situation will be one where East Central Eurpeans will be second-class citizens in a booming Europe. That may be a lot better than being in Paraguay or Bolivia. But I must emphasize that it will not be the same as being in Denmark.

So, I see this going on for the next 20-30 years. I think that Japan and the U.S. may do a little better than Western Europe, but they will both be strong and compete with each other. What will happen is that the true South, i.e., Africa, South Asia and large parts of the Americas will be more or less left out of this picture. They will not be needed in the same way as, in the post-1945 picture, Eastern Europe and Russia were not needed economically in order to allow the expansion that occurred. This will take us into another subject, but I think there will be a great political reaction to this in the South.

Now, in the longer run, the decline of liberalism creates even greater problems. If it really fully enters into the consciousness of people in Africa, South Asia and Eastern Europe that economic development is not a serious prospect, they are then going to have to look for new kinds of ideologies to sustain them.

What is going to replace liberalism? Is there a new ideology on the horizon?

One of the things is that liberalism, as part of its ideology, said that the key actor was the individual. In some sense everyone bought into this ideology which makes sense if you believe that progress is inevitable and that the individual can move rationally to support this inevitable progression. But if you now do not believe that progress is inevitable, you are living in the possibility of disintegration as being normal rather than progress. If that becomes the prevailing *Weltanschauung*, and I suspect it will in the 21st century, as disintegration becomes the normal phenomenon, people will look to protect themselves against it. Logically, then, the group rather than the individual becomes the actor, because you cannot protect yourself as an individual in a disintegrating world. But I leave the notion of "group" vague because there are all kinds of possible groups. Groups can be ethnic groups, gender groups, people with similar outlooks on life, intellectuals, ecologists. They can also be the powerful of the world. It is not accidental that in the last 10-15 years, we have had a sudden upsurge in political and intellectual interest in a thing called group identity. Everybody is now talking about group identity. At this conference here, we were talking about inclusion and exclusion. But of what? Basically of groups.

When groups organize, there are basically only two types of ideologies they can put forward. One possible ideology is what I call "the survival of the fittest". We organize in effect to fight with other groups and to win by being the strong rather than the weak ones. Of course, fascism was an early form of that but it can take many forms. And it is a real possibility that groups will organize on that basis. Incidentally, we call it fascism when dealing with groups which are relatively weak in world terms but try to impose themselves by the use of force in various regions. If you are really strong in world terms, the way you impose yourself as a group is through meritocracy. We see this being reinforced right now in the U.S. and Western Europe. You claim that favouritism to groups is illegitimate. This turns out to be the right of people who are already strong and therefore have access to the educational system, etc., to perform the best in various formal tests and to retain the relative power that that gives them. I see this also as the survival of the fittest dressed in very liberal, universalist garb. So this is one ideology—the survival of the fittest which says that if you do not make it it is because you are weak and it is your fault.

Neo-Darwinism?

Neo-Darwinism is a perfectly reasonable label to put on it. And it will be one contesting ideology of the next 50-100 years. The other contesting ideology will be egalitarianism but phrased in group rather than individualist terms. It will contain the notion that all groups have a right to a relative place in the sun and a share in world services on earth. But groups themselves are complicated. They are not clearly separate structures because all individuals are in multiple groups and all groups contain subgroups by definiton. If you have a group of Croats, you also have male Croats and female Croats and the female Croats could be part of the women's group. You also have intellectual Croats and worker Croats, with the intellectuals part of a grouping of intellectuals. There may also be people of two religions, etc.

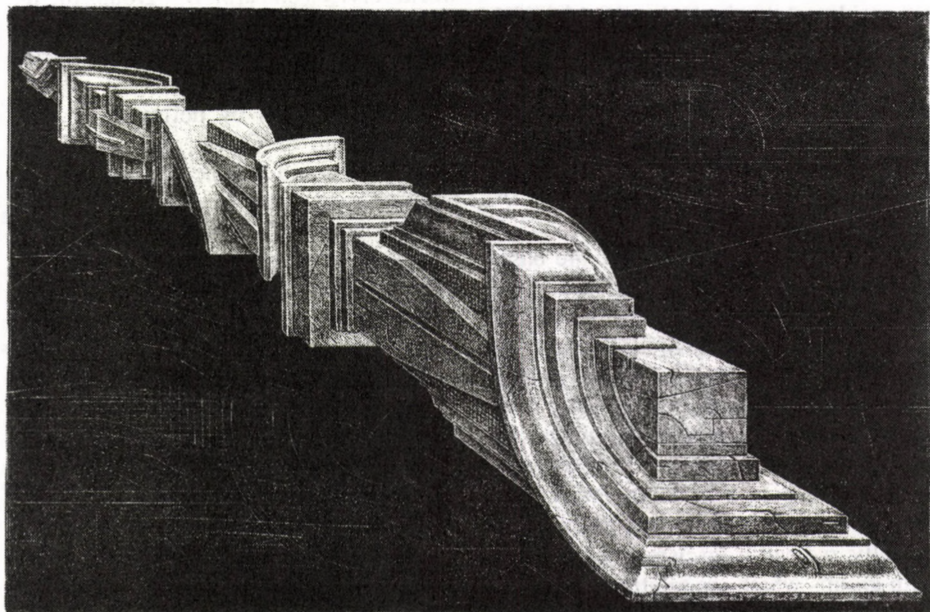
So a group from an egalitarian point of view can never be a closed phenomenon. Therefore, it has to be internally democratic. That is very important for it is the main difference between the groups who have the ideology of the survival of the fittest, which is a kind of militarist ideology. They insist upon great uniformity and cohesion within the group. But if you

want to pursue an egalitarian form of group ideology with the legitimacy of all groups realizing their achievements, then each group must also recognize that its members belong to several groups and that internal group structure has to be relatively open and democratic, both organizationally and intellectually.

That is not easy to achieve and I do not guarantee that the egalitarian ideology will win out. What I say is that we will no longer be competing between conservatives, liberals and socialists who are all talking about managing normal change. Instead, we will be talking about survival of the fittest groups versus egalitarian groups, speaking about managing a disintegrating world system and replacing it with something new. Obviously, we shall see which direction it will go. But this will be what will be occurring over the next 50-100 years, not only in East Central Europe but everywhere.

That sounds like a theoretical step towards a sociology of groups.

Well, everything in its context. We are living in a historical system which I call the capitalist world economy. The 19th and 20th centuries were in a sense the high point of this system as a system. It was natural that it developed a *Weltanschauung* that was appropriate to it—the fact that the system was a good system and that its advantages would be seen by everyone eventually if not immediately. This is the theory of progress. I do not think we have time to talk about the factors which structurally make it impossible for the capitalist world economy to survive very long. But if I can just assume this for a moment, given that it is in a structural crisis it can no longer have the *Weltanschauung* of inevitable progress. This is what I mean when I talk of the *Weltanschauung* of disintegration of the system. And now the groups come forward within that framework as the actors which can play a role. They will develop appropriate ideologies. Where we come out of this in the year 2100 or 2050 is a very open question.



Carl Tighe

Underground

A Memoir

I got a call from the nursing home. The sister seemed to know who I was. She said "Ágnes is asking for you".

Ágnes recognised me immediately. The sister said Ágnes was having a good day today. I sat by the bed. She took me by the hand. She wanted to talk.

"How is Tamás?"

"Tamás?"

"Yes, have you seen him?"

"Ágnes… Tamás is dead. Surely you remember."

"Dead? My Tamás dead?"

"Ágnes, don't make it hard. You remember. You must. Tamás killed himself."

"When?"

"Last week."

I first met Ágnes and Tamás in November 1956. I was a little boy of ten years at that time. My mother was a volunteer for the St John's Ambulance and she had taken me with her one day. We went to a Church Hall somewhere in South London. I did not understand what I saw that day, but I have a vivid memory. When we entered the hall we were hit by the stench of old sweat. People lay on the floor or on tables and benches. They appeared to be dressed in muddy rags. We walked to the centre of the room. One or two people nodded to us. Mostly they were sleeping. Somebody snored, another talked in his sleep. A baby cried. Two women approached my mother rather hesitantly. Their eyes were red rimmed. One said: "Old man die. You come." My mother quickly gave me a box of matches and told me to find the kitchen and to boil water. On my way to the kitchen I tripped over a length of bloody bandage.

That night my mother cried. She apologized for having taken me, saying she had no idea what to expect. I was intrigued rather than shocked. I wanted to go again. Kids are far more adaptable than adults, they accept things and just get

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on with it. Adults feel that when their personal world is shattered there is no longer a way forward for humanity as a whole. Kids don't invest so much in style I suppose.

I wasn't allowed to visit the Church Hall again, but a few weeks later my mother invited Tamás and Ágnes to dinner. They looked very strange, very foreign, in their blue quilted jackets, big felt boots and berets. They were still living at the Church Hall. I can't remember what we ate. It can't have been anything special—rationing had finished not so very long ago. Perhaps we had an orange between the four of us for afters, but I doubt it. Whatever it was my mother cooked, they ate everything. I remember the clean plates and the quiet determination of their eating. Their English was minimal, but they got by with a lot of smiles and nods. Goodwill. My mother said that if they were to stay in Britain they would need to learn the language. When they understood, finally, they pulled faces to show reluctant acceptance. My mother agreed to help them find a tutor. Ágnes helped to wash the dishes, Tamás kissed my mother's hand.

I had known them for so long I took them for granted. I knew they were from Hungary and that they arrived here as a result of 1956, but it was only when I visited Ágnes in hospital that I was prompted to ask about their past.

"It was not possible to stand to one side. You felt you had to do something. Tamás and I had known each other since school days. We were told that we were too young to fight—it wasn't true, we were graduates, but that's what they said. So we were told to carry ammunition boxes. Everywhere you could hear the shooting and the roar of tank engines. Deafening. It was so confusing. You could not think with such a noise. One day Tamás and I were carrying a large ammunition box between the two of us. They sent us off towards a particular building. But before we got there somebody started shooting at us. We ran through a doorway and waited.

"We were in a small church. The roof had been destroyed and there was a huge pile of smashed tiles and smoking wood in the central aisle. We thought we could find a back way out. We were hauling this box across the rubble when we noticed a priest sweeping the altar with a twig broom. We watched him for a while, and then Tamás said: 'We might not have another opportunity. We should ask him to marry us.' Tamás was a sex-beast in those days—my God, he was insatiable. Once I remember we took shelter in a building while a convoy of Russian tanks drove past. I was so terrified I didn't notice he had his hand up my vest until the convoy had gone. There should have been a lot of paperwork to accompany the marriage ceremony but, as Tamás pointed out, we could say that the documents had been destroyed in the fighting. The priest was still a little reluctant, but Tamás said, 'Father, tonight, be assured, we are going to do it. You wouldn't want that outside the bonds of matrimony, would you? So why not marry us?' The priest thought about this, then he said to Tamás: 'You're Jewish, aren't you?' Tamás just smiled and shrugged. The priest fetched a little old lady in black who was his housekeeper and a boiler-man in a blue overall, and they were our witnesses.

"Afterwards I said that we should continue on our way with the ammunition, but the priest said: 'The Kilián barracks are surrounded. Only a few pockets of resistance are left. It was on the radio. Never mind the box, save yourselves.' So we made our way home, grabbed a knapsack and a few things and started to walk. We headed for the Austrian border. We walked for nearly a week, dodging Soviet patrols, and when we reached the border a Hungarian soldier directed us to a secluded wood, away from the Soviet troops. We waded a stream and found a notice saying this is Austria. We entered a village: a dog barked at us and then a farmer came and took us to his barn. We fell into the hay and slept for 48 hours. When we woke the farmer gave us milk and bread and apples. Tamás was afraid that the Russians would cross the border to get us—by this time we were totally paranoid—so we started walking again. Eventually we reached a Red Cross station and found three buses: one was destined for Paris, another for London, a third for Canada. We chose the London bus simply because it was the nearest. They didn't ask for passports or documents when we reached Dover, they didn't even ask our names."

Tamás had told me of his first impressions: women in uniforms—WRVS—and hot sweet tea with condensed milk in thick mugs, the dubious triangular perfection of the thinly sliced white bread and margarine. Tamás had been an artist of sorts back in Hungary. His world was that of the salons and the cafés, the galleries and workshops. His currency was that of reputation, his gossip was who was riding high, who was a coming talent, who was in decline. He had a fund of stories to tell about ageing male artists marrying young girl models—all of them drawn from personal observation. His life style was not favoured by the Party. They looked on the cosmopolitan intellectual, the rootless urbanites, with suspicion. Tamás was not the boorish philistine we associate with British trade union leaders: he had been a socialist of a kind rarely seen in the west—middle class, sophisticated, well educated, subtle, idealistic.

Tamás had opened his own gallery exhibiting contemporary avant-garde art work. Tamás was a string-puller, a connections man, a man who always knew somebody, who always had a little debt to collect from those around him. Tamás's philosophy was to be generous with everyone, to leave everyone owing him a favour. You never know when you will need that favour returned, he used to laugh, and it is better to be owed than to owe. In that sense Tamás was very calculating, very Central European. Even if he did not know what was going on, he made a point of behaving as if he did. We mistook his cynicism and confusion for deep worldly wisdom. In fact, we came to realize over the years that he knew no more than we did about human motivation. He was just better at dressing it up.

Ágnes had been a dancer with the state opera company. In 1956 she had only recently graduated, but even then she had begun to worry about her declining years, about the possibility of arthritis. She did not want to set up an inevitably crummy little School of Dance. Instead she decided she wanted to do

social work and that she needed some sort of academic qualification. Slowly, with great patience, Tamás and Ágnes had pieced together a new life in Britain. Tamás had obtained financial support for his own gallery, and Ágnes had given dance classes at the local college. They saved furiously—first to finance Ágnes in a psychology degree, then to send their son, Ethan—so named because they felt the 'th' sound, though neither of them could pronounce it correctly, was very English—to a private school. When Ethan made it to Cambridge, Ágnes decided that she wanted to do a research degree, but before she could start research she needed to supplement her first degree with another in sociology. Tamás shrugged, chucked her under the chin and agreed to find the money.

I often wondered why it was that Tamás agreed—they were comfortable by now, but he was not made of money. At the time I could only think that it was to ease Ágnes through increasingly frequent and massive bouts of depression. Tamás's life cannot have been easy. Ethan was away at university but Tamás's mother, upon retiring from work, had been allowed to leave Hungary and had arrived with a suitcase crammed to bursting with Hungarian sausages and preserves—most of which she proceeded to cram into her little Tamás. I remember visiting their house once. Tamás's mother had cooked a goose. Tamás sat with a plate piled high, looking mournful as his mother exhorted him to eat and eat. Tamás was already massively overweight, but could not say no to his mother. My arrival was a gift from the gods. 'You must taste this excellent goose', he cried, ran with his plate to the kitchen and forked huge pieces of goose from his plate into a sandwich for me. The meat was delicious. It simply melted in my mouth. But Tamás was caught between these women. His only possibility was to spend more and more time away from home 'on business'. Only later did I discover quite by accident that Tamás had a lady business associate. Her name was Agness—at least Tamás was consistent.

By the time I realized that Tamás was into an extra marital affair I was also aware that there were reasons for this—that does not mean that the explanations justified it, merely that it became understandable. Tamás was never less than charming, courteous and considerate to Ágnes in public. There was no row between them, and there was, Tamás assured me, no reason for them to split up. Ágnes had simply become impossible to live with for long stretches of time, and, unlike Tamás, she had lost interest in her 'marital life'. These were things she herself acknowledged. Her depressions had developed into a dithering, aimless, listless state of permanent confusion. One day Tamás came home and found her wandering around in the garden naked. She had no idea why she was there or what she was doing. Sometimes he would find her taking pots and pans from one room to another. One day she spent nearly six hours scrubbing the wash basin. Once she got up from the table, climbed over the settee, and started feeling her way along the sitting room wall saying that she had lost the door. Another time a policeman brought her home saying that she was a little confused—she had been found wandering by the railway station in her nightie. Tamás spent a fortune trying to get her illness diagnosed. Eventually, when

they were told that it was Parkinson's disease,Tamás was so delighted that her problems had a name that he threw a massive party. Agness came to the party.

When the London art dealers sensed that with Glasnost and Perestroika there might be rich pickings to be had in Eastern Europe, it was to people like Ethan, who though he had never visited Hungary was fluent in the language, that they turned. He was asked by a small consortium of dealers to go to Hungary and see what exactly was available. I had always thought Ethan was a funny fish. When he left school he had gone up to Cambridge, and after that had moved very smoothly into valuing paintings for one of the big London auctioneers. I don't know what his qualifications were, but his employers seemed to be pleased with him. Possibly his father had helped a little.

Ethan's decision to go to Hungary threw Tamás and Ágnes into turmoil. They were against the idea. They had not been back since their escape—indeed, they had been so scared that the Hungarian secret service would find them even in Britain, that they had changed the family name to Shakespeare. Apart from Smith and Winston Churchill, Ágnes explained, it was the only English name they had known. Tamás and Ágnes were convinced that as soon as Ethan arrived at Budapest airport he would be arrested and held until his parents surrendered themselves as enemies of the state. Ethan was coached meticulously about who he could speak Hungarian to, lest somehow he should give away his own identity and that of his parents. Tamás and Ágnes did not seem to realize that a lot had changed in Hungary since 1956. They still imagined the grim Stalinist world of their youth. They could not imagine the altogether more relaxed system that had developed in the late 1960s, or the booming economy of the mid 1970s. Glasnost and Perestroika had not penetrated their image of the homeland.

There was something Tamás asked Ethan to do for him. When he was a young man, Tamás had considered himself something of a genius and had recorded his thoughts in a diary. It was, he said, a kind of statement of the principles by which he had lived his life. In that diary were his deepest thoughts and his most intimate feelings recorded right up to the day before he decided to escape to Austria. Tamás had given the diary to his brother Péter for safe keeping, and now he asked Ethan to recover the diary for him. 'Read the diary. I have nothing to hide. See for yourself how it was for us. Read it. It is my youth, my testament.' Ethan, intrigued, agreed: it would be the first time he had ever met his uncle Péter.

Ethan Shakespeare went off to Hungary in 1989, just before the communist party collapsed. The first we knew of any problem was a phone call to Tamás from Ethan's employer. He said they had heard nothing from Ethan for nearly three weeks. Tamás said that he had not heard anything either, except for a letter from Uncle Péter saying that he had given 'the boy' a package for Tamás—which, Tamás assumed, meant that he had handed over the diary. There was a silence. Three weeks went by. Tamás and Ágnes became increasingly distraught. Finally a package arrived from Hungary. Tamás opened it to

find his diary—two battered blue cloth-covered notebooks. A piece of paper fluttered to the floor. It was a postcard with a picture of the Gellért Hotel in Budapest, and on the back was written, in Ethan's hand: 'Bastards Bastards Bastards'. Ágnes aked: 'What does it mean?' Tamás, his jaw sagging, shrugged and made small helpless circular movements with his hands.

It was the diary, Tamás told me, that caused all the problems. Tamás had re-read it to discover that it was not the political and artistic testament he had remembered, but a tawdry childish scrawl recording his adolescent lusts and first, almost random political actions. Worse, it recorded his youthful support for the communists, then his growing disillusionment. There were long passages which recorded Tamás's dreams of a humane socialist Hungary—the latest of these was dated a few days after the 1956 uprising broke out.

Ethan did not come back. Uncle Péter, it seems, had talked about Tamás's dream of a socialist Hungary, and Ethan had found that dream in Tamás's diary: Tamás and Ágnes had been fighting in 1956, not against socialism, but for socialism. Uncle Péter told Tamás of Ethan's surprise at learning this. At first Ethan had thought he was being told that his father had been a secret policeman, but slowly uncle Péter had made him understand that many of the insurgents, like Tamás, had fought against the Soviets so that Hungary might find its own road to Socialism. Ethan had never heard of Tito.

Ethan had found all this impossible to imagine, impossible to square with his father's business initiative, his conservative life style, his anti-communist stance in Britain. Ethan, I should point out, had taken these aspects of his father's character and developed them a lot further. At Cambridge he had courted the right-wing of the student Conservative Party, had even given speeches at which he had expressed anti-Irish, anti-Gypsy and anti-Semitic sentiments. Ethan had begun seeing the daughter of the local conservative MP—a man noted for the strength of his free market and racist opinions. Ethan, it seems, had come to consciousness under a misunderstanding of eastern bureaucratic despotism for something else, had altogether misread their humane conservatism.

Between Tamás and Ágnes's experience and Ethan's language something had gone adrift. For him the alternatives were clear: either Conservatism or Communism. For his parents the choices were not so clear. For Ethan the absolutes were left and right. For Tamás and Ágnes the problem was how to find space for the individual within this system of values, how to make a political philosophy born of the deepest humanitarian concern workable in an economic system that had never seen the industrial revolution and which had not been supplanted but merely passed by the technological revolutions of the western world. For Tamás and Ágnes, left and right were but points, intersections, in a vast kaleidoscope of possible human activity. Ethan had, I think, mistaken the bitterness of his parents' exile for the hatred of opposition to socialism. He had transposed their Central European intellectual resistance to a British context and had come up with a map where the reference points were substantially skewed from the contours.

Tamás overcame his fear of the Hungarian secret police and went back to Budapest to search for his son. He was surprised to find that they had some information. Ethan had literally gone underground. The very week that the communist government announced its review of the events of 1956—it was no longer considered to be a rebellion, but rather a popular uprising—Tamás sat with a Hungarian policeman of his own age and watched a video casette taken secretly at Deák tér underground station. Tamás watched a group of young men lay out a blanket beside the escalator. On the blanket they placed for sale a series of books and pamphlets. All forbidden or unauthorized publications, the policeman explained. Tamás recognized Ethan as one of the young men selling the books. 'Is he arrested?' Tamás asked. 'No', the policeman replied. 'We don't want to arrest him. The communist government has only a few weeks left at most. Everybody knows that. Soon there will be a democratic government, then I think your son will have problems with the law. Some of his publications, you see are... well... unsavoury. I think we'll leave him to a democratic government to sort out. If we moved against him now it would just make us out to be monsters and give greater credence to the rubbish he and his kind are peddling.'

Tamás remained in Hungary for nearly a month, asking questions, showing photographs. Nothing. He even asked among the Hungarian women from Transylvania who thronged the railway and underground stations, selling embroidered tablecloths and sheepskin jackets, but they had nothing to tell him. He came home grey and hollow eyed. It is difficult to say how Ágnes reacted to all this. She was very ill by this stage and only rarely visited reality. On his return further bad news met him. Agness told him that she would not be seeing him again, she was going to marry a lecturer in psychology.

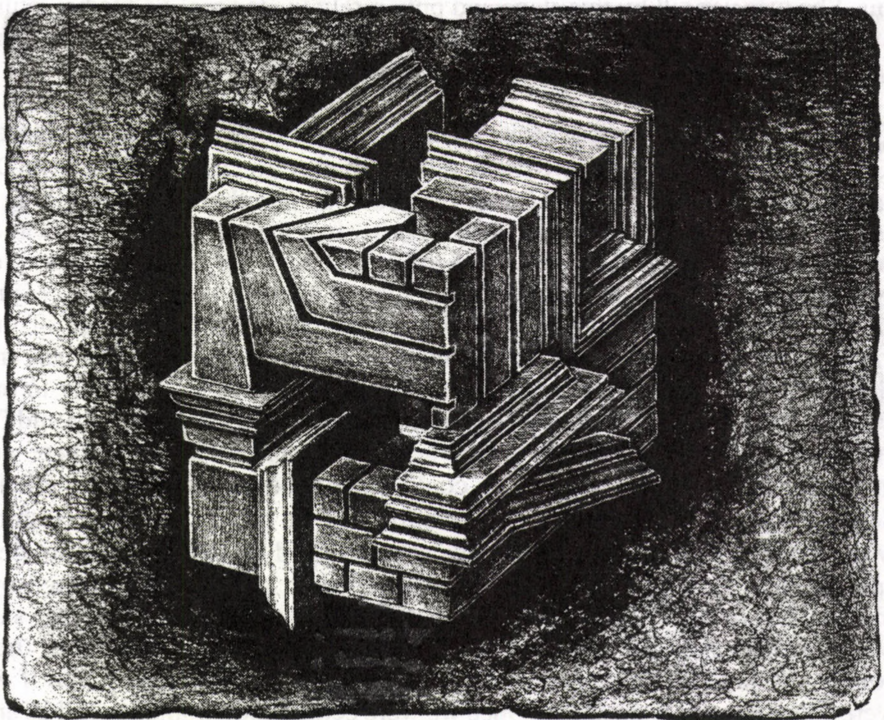
Some time after he came back, Tamás was visited by a Hungarian woman called Éva. She was in Britain raising money for the Rumanian AIDS babies. She said she had met Ethan the previous month. 'We were taking a convoy of food and medicine across the border into Rumania—our idea was to help the Hungarians in Transylvania because although they started the revolution in Rumania, the Rumanians turned against them. It was in January, just after the Rumanian revolution. Ethan volunteered to help drive one of our lorries. It was an international relief convoy—there were Swiss and Italians and Germans and French. The Rumanian border guards came immediately to our truck and said we had to take the Hungarian flag down. Everyone else could fly their national flag on the bonnet of the truck but we were not allowed. There was indescribable chaos: at night you could hear shooting; everyone said the Securitate were staging a counter revolution, but we never saw them. Nothing was certain. Every couple of miles we were stopped by road blocks. Soldiers and villagers would come out and threaten us with guns. They searched our trucks. They made us line up. When they realized we were Hungarians they said we wanted to help the Securitate. They said we wanted to take over their country. It happened every time. If we argued it made them angry, but if we were silent it made them angry. Once we were certain they wanted to kill us and

we ran to the other trucks—the French or German—and they smashed a way through the barriers with the mob howling and screaming in the road behind us. A little later, when we slowed down and counted heads we realized that Ethan was not with us. We reported everything to the Rumanian police, told them the name of the village. But we haven't heard anything. Maybe he's OK. Maybe he got away. Mybe he's hiding.'

Ethan went to Hungary in February 1989. The last news of him dated from January 1990. His father waited until Christmas 1990—when the 'Free World' was celebrating the first anniversary of the collapse of Communism—and then had Ágnes taken into care at a private nursing home. Tamás took a bottle of whisky and a jar of sleeping tablets prescribed for Ágnes. He drove to the village of Rhossili in South Wales, sought out a secluded corner of the windy cliff top and killed himself. It was several days before the body was discovered.

I visited Ágnes in the nursing home. She talked about 1956. Her distant memories were sharp and clear. She was having a good day, the nurse said. She did not seem to be aware that Tamás was dead, though she had been told.

Budapest, December 1990.



CLOSE-UP

Károly Bari

Gypsy Story Telling

Oral folk epics are sources of autonomous Gypsy folklore. These texts comprise a variety of genres. The mythological thinking of the Gypsies connects supernatural images and ordinary experience in a way that creates compositionally unique plots and motifs, revealing a world of primordial colours and archaic notions.

The Gypsies have retained customs rooted in a nomadic past and moral attitudes that differ from those of their surroundings. Their folk texts reflect a mythopoetic attitude. A vital folk-narrative is the vehicle for this multilaminated and archaic whole. At the same time, however, it is also a continuous revelation for future generations. Word of mouth reinforces the magical-mythical features at each recitation, and the improvisational nature incorporates individual associations and rational recognitions into the communal traditions of story telling. Because of this characteristic feature, folklore can be interpreted as one of the means of transmitting knowledge from generation to generation within closed ethnic groups.

The Gypsies' story telling, unlike that of most peoples with whom they live, are not related to collective work events (spinning, goose-plucking, cornhusking, etc.) Since they have never owned land, they have never been involved in any sort of cultivation. Their position on the fringe of society, their deprived living conditions related to their outcast status, and their traditions preserved by isolated backwardness, have created the indigenous functions of the folktale. The most prominent of these is professional story telling, the fulfilling of the expectations of Gypsy communal behaviour (since a knowledge of tales is a mark of learnedness within the community) and, the most particular of all, ritual death watch story telling.

The continuity and organic functioning of the cultures of Gypsies, in an alien linguistic environment, depended to a large measure on their elders, who were very much aware of the ethnic specifics of the spiritual tradition, and especially on their interpretations, which have enriched oral tradition with individual invention and experience.

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Among the Vlach Gypsies the clan *(fricija)* always honoured the old to whom they were related by blood. They took care of them and expected them to pass on tradition and their own experience. They were asked for their opinions. Up to the middle of the century, when the Gypsies were still nomads, the elders, with their numerous skills, were of vital importance to the wandering tribes, due to their comprehensive local knowledge, their links with members of other tribes, and their skill in outwitting the prejudiced authorities. The elders, who usually spoke several languages, mediated the intentions of the caravan to the local magistrates when they wanted to stay for a number of days in the fields of a village. The memory of these far from light duties is preserved in an ancient folk proverb: *De patyiv le phurenge, ke v ande ty astál vorbin angle pure.* (Honour the old for they speak to people in your interest also.)

The importance of the involvement of the elders can be observed not only in the operation of tribal relations but also in making a living through primitive forms of commerce.

Since the Gypsies never acquired farming skills such as fodder production and the agricultural cultivation necessary for animal husbandry, husbandry itself never progressed among them either. The horse-trader *(lovari)* families, who moved from fair to fair trying to sell as quickly as possible the horses they had bought, preferably making a profit through the practice of "preparing" animals for re-sale, do not fit into what one means by traditional village animal husbandry. The artful practies of preparing horses for sale—sometimes in a really bad, wind-broken, condition—using all sorts of trickery were passed on from father to son. It must be noted, however, that the Vlach Gypsies knew a great deal about horses, and for their own use—after considering colour, withers, gait, and breathing and thoroughly examining the lymphatic glands, teeth and hoofs—they chose only healthy, sound animals.

The passing on of customs and beliefs related to trading, such as skills in what is almost a folk-genre of bargaining: "dressing up" and the "belittling" and the information needed for daily necessities—as with all archaic people—was also the duty of the old among the Gypsies. The horse-traders at the fair taught their children the tricks of their trade with the same care that the well-digging and tinker Gypsies wandering from village to village took, or the *kasornyázó* and fortune-telling Gypsy women who were pedlars. In the face of adverse natural and social circumstances, every kind of knowledge was vital for survival in adverse and humiliating circumstances. The harrassed Gypsies passed down their experience in the form of laws helped to make life easier for those who came after them.

The elders not only passed on survival skills but also the culture of Gypsies that had travelled for centuries in caravans. Their creation myths concerning the origins of things, of men, plants and animals, were passed on as well, myths that explained natural phenomena and human relations, that organized the perceived and imagined world, which guided behaviour and archaic attitudes. Besides the myths of origin spread by word of mouth, paradoxical epics, tales rooted in myths and beliefs, were also transmitted orally. Their narration outside the community could also, on occasion, be a source of income.

Country fairs were a suitable venue for the professional story teller, where a ring of curious onlookers promptly formed around him. On those occasions usually short, funny and crude stories were told. According to folk memory, the story tellers' hats that were placed on the ground never remained empty. The *kermesses* and pilgrimages to places famous for the visions vouchsafed were also places where story tellers could make good money. In most cases, the processions of the faithful arrived form distant places the day before, so after sunset, gathered around camp fires, people liked to listen to legends about God's powers of creation and His might that passed all understanding. The sporadic diffusion of certain types of text can be explained by such exceptional situations.

The end to free travelling and the compulsory settlement of the Gypsies resulted in the devaluation of handicrafts that had provided relative security during their wanderings. This change forced some people to acquire skills more appropriate to the new conditions (adobe-making, basket-weaving, playing music), but for most of the tribes it meant poverty and living outside the law, on any kind of charity that was available or was offered to them. There were occasional cases when the estate stewards hired story tellers, articulate Gypsies, and paid them solely to entertain day-labourers and seasonal workers. Skilled story tellers built up a reputation and often had a faithful public that regularly attended their performances *"Avile ka leszte le gaveszke gasze: De, phen, mo bre, paramicse! O jek anlasz lezske xamashko, o kaver anlasz leszke ratyije, o trito anlasz leszke duhano, hogy numa the phenel paramicsi. No apoj phenlasz. Me pale cinyi szomasz, apoj besesz kothe pasa mure paposzke punre haj hallgatoziasz, hogy szar phenel. Lesztar szittyilom kede paramicse."* (The Hungarians from the village came to visit him: Well, uncle, tell us a tale! One brought him food, the other brought brandy, the third brought tobacco, just to make him tell a tale. Well, he told them a tale then. I was a little boy, so I sat at the feet of my grandfather and eavesdropped on the way he told them. I learnt these tales from him.)

The practice of telling stories for money and food was also common elsewhere. For example, at the beginning of this century, the wandering Russian *brodjagas* still used to make a living telling stories.

As distinct from the practice of story telling as a service, the telling of tales within the family circle was always associated with superstitious beliefs and ritual elements amongst Gypsies. This is still true.

In archaic communities the telling of tales always begins with an invocation: a prayer for the blessing and grace of the possessor of celestial powers. *"T al amenge astyira katar o Szunto Del pe kadi szuntyo ratyi! T asz aldime haj baxtale, romale! Kadi szunto ratyi te n avilo, csi kadi paramicsa cs avilo!"* (Let the grace of the Holy Lord be with us on this holy night! May we Gypsies be lucky! Had it not been for this holy night this tale would never have been told!)

The custom of the invocation of the Holy Lord—according to traditional folk beliefs—serves the purpose of protecting listeners from the malevolence

of the invoked other world. The hope was to protect the household from the mischief of intriguing supernatural creatures and evil-minded demons that spread illness, bad luck and death. The same superstition is expressed in another precaution. If somebody enters the room in the middle of a story, the prescribed warding off exclamation is *"nas, nas!"* or its phonetic variant *"nos, nos!"* ("Go away, go away!") Sometimes even the audience participates in uttering this invocation, to which they attribute protective power. Among certain Gypsies the audience sometimes cry out *"los, los!"* ("joy, joy!") intending to invoke a benevolent allegorical figure, the personification of joy, that might bring relief for the woes and sufferings caused by evil powers.

According to Mezőszentgyörgy data, one must not tell a story before setting out to a fair. By uttering the names of evil creatures, they are brought to life, follow the story teller to the fair, bring him had luck in his business and make poverty and sickness his fortune.

Despite the abundance of pessimism and sometimes irrational prohibitions, the legacy of the Gypsy oral tradition is continuous and intensive even today. It is the common belief of the Gypsies that those who travel much are gifted story tellers. To those who live a dull routine life in a closed community, travellers' tales and meeting other people has something of a romantic character: *"vi voy the vi voj phirdax aba bithanal ende them, ende kude zsenen but paramicse"* (that man and woman, they have travelled everywhere in this country, that is why they know so many tales).

The greater part of the tales of the Hungarian Gypsies are magical stories full of adventures and fantasies. Since the folk fiction texts are not embellished linguistically and are concise, the Vlach Gypsy story tellers counteract this by expressive gestures and mimicry, changing their voice for the different characters. It is common for the length of a tale to be determined by the audience and, if attention does not flag, a combination of tales, a chain of plots is performed on consecutive nights. It is always important for the story teller to create personal contact with his audience through his comments and remarks. This gives emphasis to the entertainment function of story telling, while not weakening the didactic function.

In the traditional Gypsy communities the telling of tales in the family circle always ends with the asking for a blessing and good wishes: *"O Del te feril tume! Miloszajlasz pe lende o Szunto Del, t avel maj misto le Devlesztar v amenge! T asz baxtale! Asen Devlesza!"* (May the Lord protect you! The Holy Lord feels pity for them, so may the Lord turn our lives for the better! May we be lucky! Stay close to our Lord!)

The oral Gypsy tradition includes children's tales as well, but the young are always present at the conversation and story telling of the adults and listen attentively to tales and stories. The only exception here is the deathwatches. It is a Gypsy custom that certain subjects (slaying a dragon, the deliverance of kidnapped heavenly bodies or princesses) and realistic episodes connected with their way of life (getting a wife, wives, wedding feasts, trading horses) are acted out by Gypsy children, with improvised dialogue. These improvised dramati-

zations not only provide opportunities for passing on and strenghening ethnic cultural ties, but also prepare the children for their future gender-roles and imitate and practice accepted male or female behaviour patterns. The dialogues of the more popular, more frequently told tales have become set to some degree and part of the folk heritage and are rooted in ancient rites of passage. These children's games refer back to the vanished practice of identifying with the heroes of the mythic-fabulous world.

Archaic perception looks on a knowledge of tales as a respected mark of talent. Renowned, articulate narrators—just as outstanding singers and dancers—are highly thought of and their performance at social events are attended with special respect.

Members of the same clan often pay calls on each other. These family gatherings were accompanied by formal and ritual speeches and ceremonial homage. Participation at the feast, in the conversation and the demonstration of individual talent is, so to speak, compulsory. Almost everybody, whatever their age, volunteers to sing or dance, but the story tellers are almost always mature men and the old. In the rare instances at a social gathering when the story teller is a woman, her repertoire steers clear of the male-preferred adventurous heroic tales and *trufas,* and sticks to true stories, myths, legends and superstitious tales.

The Vlach Gypsies warmly welcome complete strangers and share their food and drink with them. If the newcomer does not pass the test of their archaic norms of behaviour, however, they immediately express their contempt: *"Kana' zsaltar o manus varekaj, gyesz del: O Del tumenca! Anglal den: O Del tusza! Te durutno manus-i, pusen lesztar: Kathar avlyan? Zsanesz te phenesz paramicsa? Haj me csi zsanav, savale! Haj kaki, haj koki! Haj te khelesz? Csi kode? Csi te gyilabesz? Khancsi? Haj te cs manus szan? De bes tuke tejle, xa hal zsa maj dur tye dromesza! Atuncsi annyiba csi dikhen lesz, szar ekhe lase dzsuklesz. Te merav kade, szar besav, te na csacsesz phenav! Kodo sz o fontoso, hogy paramicsa te phenel o manus, atucsi fionom, mivelto manus. Den leszke mol te pel, the zsanel te paramicsazij haj tortineto te phenel. De te na zsanel csiszo, tejle szi dikhlo orokre."* (When you arrive at a place, you salute: the Lord be with you! They answer: the Lord be with you! If you are from a long way off, they ask you: Where are you from? Can you tell tales? Well, lads, that I can not! What the heck? Then how about dancing? Neither? Not even singing? Nothing? What kind of a man are you? Well, sit down on your own, eat, and then take to the road again! In their eyes a good dog has greater prestige than a man like that. Cross my heart and hope to die if I am not telling the truth. The important thing is to be a good story teller. Then you are considered a fine, well-brought-up man. But if you are not, you will be treated with contempt forever.) These social expectations show that the traditional Gypsy mind, besides music and dancing that express emotions symbolically, considers the mythopoetic narrative tradition as important.

The Transylvanian *korkotari* (tent-living) and *khelderas* (coppersmith) Gypsies have even closer tribal ties than their Hungarian fellow-Gypsies. They practise oral traditions—ballads, epics, archaic sung epics combined with

fabulous episodes and prose pieces as well—almost in an unaltered state. Their favourites are the long fairy-tales, full of heroic struggles, where the invocation of and later thanks for the help of the Lord or a celestial patron is sung. Usually, the audience takes part in singing the refrains, and this collective performance gives the story telling the character of a ritual. What is unique, vital and functioning is the archaic folklore practice of performing any of the tales as songs with a tied tune and rhythm and with an improvised text of sometimes more than one thousand lines. Usually only those storytellers who perform regularly in front of an audience have this remarkable improvisational skill. They use similar or identical words to close the lines of these compositions based on parallelisms. The use of meaningless suffixes like *u, -ju, oju, eju* is common and so are line-closing formulaic phrases such as *delrezovu, zovu* (so help me God, I swear).

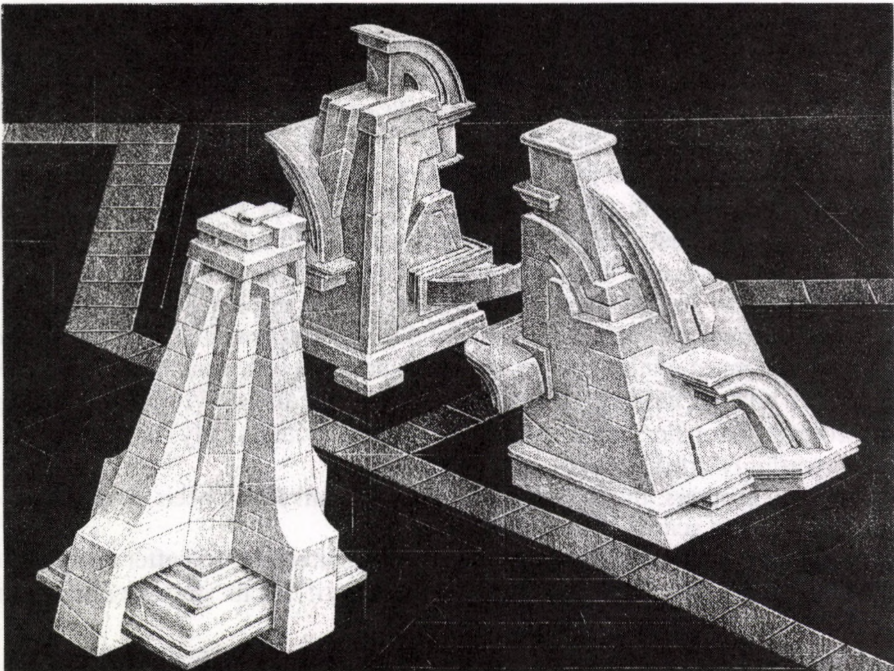
Among the Transylvanian Gypsies, archaic improvisational poetry created other genres as well. During festivities they sing not only songs with fixed lyrics, but also improvised fate-songs of an autobiographical flavour, in which the singer relates in great detail the noteworthy and sorrowful events of his life and his ever changing fate. According to my observations, every clan has its own tune for these songs, and sometimes it is also accompanied by a characteristic mode of performance. They sing similarly improvised texts to welcome a new bride, to honour and praise a respectful guest, to welcome back a family member released from gaol and to take leave of someone deceased.

The story telling during the deathwatch that resulted in the gradual ritualization of the genre, is based on the Gypsy notions of dealing with the dead: *"trezsil pasa o mulo, ke daral, kaj o mulo pe leszta bisavela i xutuja andar i kali luma"* (he keeps vigil over the dead person, for the fears he might send destruction against him from the realm of darkness). While the corpse lies unburied, the survivors have to refrain from every act that might imply a lack of respect, for in his anger the deceased would impose misfortune and ill health on them. The reason for telling stories during a wake is similar to singing, to entertain the soul of the deceased and prepare it for its long journey in the other world. During the rite, the dominant magical tales (reinforced by the ceremonial aura of the occasion) acquire a sullen, symbolic meaning and, as a consequence, the journey of the hero passing through the mythopoetic stations can be interpreted as the methaphorical expression of the ordeals mankind experiences in this and the other world. Mircea Eliade writes that in the case of many peoples, myths cannot be narrated at any time, but only at sacred times and during religious ceremonies. The moment of death is the meeting point of existence and non-existence, when the distance between the two kinds of reality ceases. Thus, the rite connected with death is especially suitable for invoking the characters of mythical events and transcendental regions. The invoked inhabitants of the other world will attend the soul of the deceased in the realm of the dead. To secure their good will toward the deceased, the story teller does not utter words that might weaken the power of the demons, although otherwise he would normally use them.

Wakes in different Gypsy communities take place in compliance with their own ancient precepts. During the vigil the story telling style is more subdued, there are fewer gestures and less mimicry, although the rhetoric is more pretentious. There are no strict rules concerning narration; the sequence of tales is determined by the individual story tellers.

A dominant theme in oral Gypsy tradition is expressed in folk-fiction based on the experience of wandering Gypsy communities. The narrative content, against a superstitious background, expresses a general sense of threat of almost cosmic proportions: not only noisy strangers approaching their camp are feared as enemies, but they also imagine the trees, the waters and the stones to be the dwelling-places of malevolent demons; they suspect the beasts of the forests and fields and the domestic animals around the house of being the malevolent dead wearing animal masks. They interpret the primeval reason for their being outcasts as an eternal divine curse imposed upon them. Their archaic thinking anthropomorphizes incidents and creates mythical visions concerning the fearful relations of a prejudiced society. Adventurous episodes, resembling cheap thrillers, are mixed with notions of inferiority, anxiety, of being at everyone's mercy, seeing enemies in everyone and everything.

One of the characteristic features of Gypsy folklore is a composition contrasting differing episodes. The Gypsies very skillfully and with great ease incorporate the situations and phrases of modern life into their ancient tales and the result is a finished product of peculiar atmosphere.



The Story of a Gypsy Woman Who Killed a Snake

Once upon a time there lived a Gypsy woman. This Gypsy woman had a baby that she carried with her whenever and wherever she went. If the baby was hungry she was not ashamed to nurse the child even when there were other folks around.

The husband of this woman was in prison for fighting. The judges hung on him twelve long dark years, and he was carrying the burden of that behind bars and locked doors. Once a month the Gypsy woman received a letter of permission to visit her husband. She always went faithfully, and never missed a single visit. She knew her husband liked his drink, so she always sneaked a little in with the food basket.

One day, when she received the monthly letter, she wrapped everything she wanted to give her husband in a scarf embroidered with roses and started on her way to town where her husband was being kept in prison.

She walked for a long time under the dark cloudy sky, and when she came to an open field, it started to rain. Large rain drops fell from the grey sky. Soon the woman was soaking wet and her little child was shivering with cold in the wet blanket. As she walked, the woman saw a small hut made of reeds, and she said:

"I do not mind what trouble God may send me, but I will go in here," and in she went into the hut. She put down her pack and laid her child on top of it, and started a small fire for light. Then, she sat down and started feeding her child. After the baby had taken his fill, he fell asleep, and the woman sat there half asleep watching over the little one.

During the night, a horrible, huge serpent, with scales like those of a dragon, crept into the hut and, hissing, it wound itself around the woman. Poor soul, she was so frightened that she couldn't utter a sound. The whirling beast waved its head in front of her and it kept thrusting its forked tongue towards her breast. Guessing that the smell of the milk was attracting the serpent, and determined to get rid of it, she unbuttoned her blouse and let the serpent suck. With one hand she held her breast, with the other one she started feeling around in her bag for the brandy bottle. Finding it, she pulled the cork out, and slowly started pouring the strong drink on her breast. And so the serpent, with its ugly slurping mouth, was unwittingly drinking both milk and brandy.

Well, my brothers, that was a brave little woman! Had I been in her place, I would have been scared to death.

So, she just went on pouring the brandy over her breast, and after a while she realized that the beast was getting drunk. Finally, it lost its strength and fell on the ground.

"Oh my dear God! What can I do now?", the woman said.

She had long black hair, so long that if she let it down it reached down to her ankles. She took her knife, cut off a long braid, and tied the snake by its neck to one of the poles of the hut.

After this ordeal, she broke down and started sobbing. She did not want to stay in that hut any longer. She picked up her baby and her pack, and walked towards the town. In the morning, when she reached the jail, her eyes were all red from crying.

Since she arrived very early, the place was not yet open, so she went to the place where the judges lived and knocked on their door.

"Honourable judges! Please listen to me because I come on a very urgent matter. I would like to tell you something of great importance, but only if you promise that you will reward me for my deed. It is a matter of great urgency, and I can prove everything I am about to say!"

The judges of the court said:

"All right Gypsy woman! We shall listen to you. Tell us what happened and what you have done. If it is so great a deed and you can prove it too, we shall reward you."

And then, the Gypsy woman said:

"As I was walking in the rain through the night, in the open countryside, I killed a giant serpent. It was so big that it looked like a dragon; it must have lived there somewhere nearby, killing country folks."

The judges of the court got onto a cart and with the Gypsy woman they rode out to that place. They found the serpent there; it was dead already. It had wriggled in the loop of the woman's hair until it choked itself to death.

The judges said:

"What you said is true! You truly deserve reward! Tell us what you want."

The Gypsy woman said:

"Honourable judges, what I want is very little indeed. Please free my husband from jail because this baby needs a father!"

The judges of the court looked at each other, they all nodded and said:

"All right, Gypsy woman. It will be as you wish." And they went into the dungeon of the prison and freed the woman's husband.

As for the Gypsy, well, it would have been better if he had died in prison. Not three days passed before he started tormenting his poor wife. He thought that she must have been with one of the prison guards, in order to get him set free. He beat her and tortured her day and night.

One day, the Gypsy could not endure the shame he thought his wife brought on him anymore and he decided to kill her.

Pretending to have work in the forest, he told her:

"My dear wife, get ready because we have to go to the forest for firewood."

They got in their cart and drove out to the forest. There, the Gypsy started felling trees while the woman was collecting thin twigs to weave baskets. The Gypsy man felled many a tree, cut their branches off, and chopped the logs up for firewood. While he was working he was thinking of how to kill his wife, how to send her down into the dark world of the dead. While he was thinking, he

noticed that his wife was standing at the edge of the forest lake, and he thought that it would be very easy to push her into the water. He was sure that the right time for his plan had come.

"You slut, now you will die," he said to himself, and slowly he started walking towards the woman who was still gathering twigs. As he was trying to sneak up behind her with the axe in his hand, he slipped at the muddy edge of the lake and fell into the water. Scared of drowning, he shouted: "Dearest wife, bless your heart, come quickly and save my life!"

Then his wife said:

"You see—all the evil you planned for me turned against you! I know very well that you wanted to get rid of me, but the Lord punished you! I will save you only if you swear by our Holy Virgin that you will never harm me again."

"I promise! Just have pity on me and save me!", the man said.

Then, the Gypsy woman reached out and let him grab the end of a thin, golden willow twig, and pulled him out of the water. Miraculously, the twig did not snap, though it was very thin, and so was the woman, but she managed to get her husband out of the deep waters of the lake. After the man was out of the water, the Gypsy woman stuck the thin willow twig into the ground and tied her ribbon on the top of it. Then, they got on their cart and returned home. The Gypsy man kept his word and never beat his wife again.

Many years passed. The Gypsy man and his wife wandered through the villages of the country. The woman read palms for widows to tell their fortune, and her husband sold cauldrons.

One night, as they were on their way home, they had to cross a forest but they got lost in it. It was a very dark night and they were just roaming around bumping into the trees. And as they walked they reached a lake in the middle of the forest. It was the same lake where the Gypsy once tried to kill his wife. And, at the edge of the lake, they saw a tall sparkling, golden willow tree, and beneath it a huge serpent with scales as big as those of a dragon. The Gypsy and his wife became frightened and were about to run away when the serpent said:

"Do not be scared, and don't run away. I am not going to harm you!" And they saw that, while the serpent was talking to them, beautiful red roses were falling out of its mouth.

"Have a look at this tree," the serpent said to the Gypsy. "This tree is the proof of your wife's innocence! It was a miracle of the dear Lord that grew this tree big from the twig your wife planted in the ground after having saved your life. And it was the Lord who ordered me to guard this tree for ever and ever. Your wife was true to you but you would not believe her! It is a sign of her innocence that the Lord has perfomed this miracle!"

They walked closer to the tree and saw that what the serpent said was true; the tree really had grown out of that twig because it still had the ribbon of the woman tied on it. The golden tree sparkled brightly all night, and the Gypsy and his wife watched it in amazement. At day-break they returned home, and they lived happily ever after.

The Black Man's Horses

Once upon a time there was a cowherd. One day, one of the cows wandered away from the herd, and so the cowherd set out to bring back the stray beast. He searched and searched but he fell into a dry well. He did not know what to do, because the place was quite deserted and no one could hear his cry for help. He began to think that he was going to die.

The evening came, and then night, and the poor man shivered with cold at the bottom of the well. As he was sitting there, all of a sudden in the dark he saw two pairs of eyes, glowing like fire, gazing at him. He was so scared he didn't dare move, and that is how he fell asleep in the end. When he woke up in the morning, he saw that there had been two big snakes with him in the well and that it was their eyes that had glowed in the dark. Fear seized his heart, but the snakes did not harm him.

There was a big stone in the middle of the well, and he saw the snakes coil themselves on it several times a day, licking both sides of the stone with their forked tongues. It turned out that one side of the stone worked against hunger, the other against thirst. On the third day, the snakes talked to him in a human voice, telling him to go over to the stone and try it. He did as he was told and after he felt neither hunger nor thirst. And the cowherd lived for seven years with the snakes in that deep, dried-up well.

One day, seven years later, one of the snakes flew up suddenly out of the well, as if something had pulled it from high above. The other snake was also about to fly up, but first it signalled the cowherd to hold on to its tail, which it had coiled into a ring shape. He held on to the snake's tail, and up they flew out of the well. Outside the well, he saw a man all dressed in black holding a big black book in his hands. The man had read the spells in this book to make the snakes and the cowherd fly out of the well. Next, the black man tied a rope around the necks of the two snakes, magically changing them into horses. Then he tied them to a tree.

After this, he started reading the book again in a language which the cowherd could not understand. As he was reading it aloud, the cowherd started to float all the way up into the clouds. Then the black man read a spell and brought him back to the ground and said to him:

"I saved you too! Now watch my horses!" After that the black man fell asleep. The two horses were moving their heads as if they were calling the cowherd. He went over to them, and feeling pity for them, unhobbled them. As soon as he did this, both horses changed back into snakes. One of the serpents coiled itself around the man dressed in black, who had rescued them from the well, and hit him with its tail. The body of the man split in two, but did not bleed. The snakes turned towards the sun, bowed three times, and crept back into the well.

Translated by Dezső Benedek

Gergely Hajdú

History Examinations

Péter Nádas: *Az égi és a földi szerelemről* (On Heavenly and Earthly Love). Szépirodalmi, 1991, 155 pp; Péter Esterházy: *Az elefántcsonttoronyból* (From the Ivory Tower). Magvető, 1991, 188 pp; Pál Békés: *Érzékeny utazások Közép-Európán át* (Sentimental Journeys through Central Europe). Szépirodalmi, 1991, 322 pp; Andor Bajor: *Részleges vízözön* (Partial Deluge). Héttorony, 1991, 209 pp.

Péter Nádas's latest essay does not fully come up to expectations. As his stories and novels show, the author has an exceptionally profound and empathizing knowledge of that complex called love. He has portrayed with extreme subtlety even a love triangle, which counts as one of the most difficult tasks a writer can set himself, since the countless products that misuse the term, in lack of an analysis of its homo-erotic aspect, are no more than love set-squares. In his chef-d'oeuvre, the novel *Emlékiratok könyve* (Book of Memoirs, 1986), Nádas uses varied means, even including mythology, to reveal the forbidden desires of the flesh held to be shameful. The organizers of the Fidesz academy (a cultural association of young people) had this kind of knowledge and a logical setting forth of it in mind when they commissioned Nádas to give a paper on "sexual roles and the principles of sexes". Nádas also has a first-rate volume of essays to his name, *Nézőtér* (Auditorium, 1983), showing him capable of systematizing. This time, however, he has failed to produce a work up to his own standards. Those who wish to know of his deep and concerned thoughts on love must look to his fiction in the future as well.

Nádas ranked the concepts in current use as unserviceable. He addressed his listeners with due reserve; there is no merit in belonging to one of the sexes, "no respect is due to anybody for this". Throughout, his aim was to clarify concepts and distinguish them from pre-conceptual knowledge. In comparison, his book uses many of the concepts unsystematically and does not bother to define them; apart from a few excellent passages, his exposition is fairly involved and redundant, sometimes guilty of slovenly logic. He uses a reverse order: the "Lecture" comes as the last chapter; instead of developing the train of thought of the lecture itself, he reconstructs the precedents to his thinking in the two preceding parts, the "Introduction", which sets out from archetypal images and anthropological determination, and the "Notes", which also continue with these motifs. The price he pays for this formal innovation is inconsistency: he solves some of the problems even before they have been raised, and arrives at Plato from rela-

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tively unfamiliar authors (such as Jean Gebster).

Beginning with a quotation from Teilhard de Chardin, he discusses the history of the recognition and self-recognition of man, and the relation between the two (which he casually identifies) with love. He subordinates recognition to self-recognition and ideation to the formation of the concept of self. Where Teilhard de Chardin uses "Man" with the species in mind, Nádas has the individual in mind. He thus arrives at the conclusion that the myth of Narcissus is the paradigm of modern man, of the "mental State". This, however, omits the person of the other.

In his middle section he deals with both the Platonic, idealizing approach to love and the modern, individualizing approach. Through a well written monologue of a naive lover, he puts over a confusing admixture in everyday thinking of the endeavours directed at the individual and those aimed at the Beautiful and the Good, through the Other One: "for me my lover is the most beautiful. But how has this *for me* edged its way into this?"

His notions of what exactly the personality covers are rather confused; he calls the core of the Ego, which lies deeper even than qualities, "the dynamics of the soul", and identifies it—a psychological quantum theory as it were—with the intensity of energy. At places, this appears to be synonymous with temperament, at others with the physique. Because of this lack of clarity, he again turns from the knowledge of the Other One, and interprets it as a detour leading to the knowledge of the self. From the key sentence of the concept of individual love of "What I wish is to be once, for a single moment, my lover", he immediately changes to "What I wish is [...] not to be myself."

He justifies thematic narrowing with an acceptable analogy: literary tradition is not concerned with love but with the sensation it arouses in the individual, as if instead of describing the wind, the rough waters, the bending trees and other objects, its effect were described. His next subject, "love is the reciprocity between us two" (p. 75), is, to use his own simile, still not the wind, only the bending as abstracted from the tree. Reciprocity, the state of consciousness of two persons, is to him of signal significance; this alone is what "simultaneously contains the perspective of all the precedents and consequences of the planes of consciousness typical of the race," but he fails to convince that (contrary to Jung) individual and collective consciousness do not possess this meaning.

The rest is mainly a rather savage criticism of language, culture and society. Although language, of course, is an imperfect means to the interpretation of the world, it is not as powerless as Nádas makes it appear. He only takes into consideration the failure of language in the confession box and in science, where definite concepts are used, but does not discuss the possibilities inherent in individual and artistic idiom, and in metaphors.

Concerning the relationship between power and love, here too, Nádas does not discuss its most intriguing aspect, the power asymmetry which (at least for me) inevitably emerges between two lovers, although if anybody could he would be the person able to do so. Instead he rather wastes his interest on social power, which, like the terms "discourse" and "control", for which he shows a predilection, shows the influence of Foucault. It is a negative influence; whatever the philosopher's achievements and wit may be, the themes he refers to in the titles of his books only serve as pretexts, as he only has something to say about power and its manipulations. The popularity of Foucault in Hungary today is a sign not so much of orientation, but rather of intellectual laziness. After the Frankfurt School, which, as in France, enjoyed hegemony for long here, this is easy to understand, but his basic principles are neither new nor really fertile.

Nádas assigns a political meaning to some psychological concepts (repression, censorship) and, like some vulgar Freudians (Reich and Fromm at best), opposes them with fetishized desire—fulfillment. As far as the master, Freud himself is concerned, Nádas occasionally evades and occasionally criticizes him. The former attitude seems justified as Freud did not deal with love, only with sexuality. He criticizes him and disapproves of his concept of sexuality partly for the frequent differentiation between the male and the female minds; of this Freud is mostly innocent. Nádas also challenges the view that man differs from animals in his activity and not *from the outset;* this view is not alien to Freud, but he, unlike Nádas, would see no offence to human dignity in this.

The other target of Nádas's is the way of life which follows given models, and which he passionately condemns—as if a one hundred percent reproduction could exist here at all. In fact this is none other than the long-standing polemic between Classicists and Romantics, in which Nádas, despite all his quotations from classical writers, sides with the latter.

The conclusion is an intentional paradox not without interest: presumably again under the influence of Teilhard de Chardin, he identifies Law intended for man with natural law, and then calls for a differentiation between the Natural and the Lawful. Typically of his extreme ontological pessimism, the offers as a reward the mind's suffering of a transcendental value.

In contrast to Nádas's comprehensive view of culture, the other works under review, concerned with shorter periods, are to a very large extent determined by a timely problem: that of Central Europe as a whole, which may be quoted in the formulation of the Czech Michal Cerny: "It would be easy to believe that since nationalism in general feeds on the past, it suffices to dissociate us from the past, not to meddle with old affairs, but to deal with more important things (the economy, etc.) ...An ordinary, cultivated and thinking person cannot do so, as *he too* lives out of the past, feeding on it: his memory makes him man."

Partly because of their forms, the value of these books is historical (paradoxically so, as they express an aversion to the over-valuing of history).

In his *From the Ivory Tower,* the novelist Péter Esterházy republishes articles written between 1988 to 1990, which ranged "from the intoxication of the possibility of expression to resignation over things that have been expressed and which should be expressed." Ironically, he even exaggerates the ephemeral character of the work, complaining in a preface that he himself no longer understands some of the hints in it. All the same, the collection is in its way even better than his recent novels. The refreshingly witty short pieces—expressions of mood and comments on recent events—succeed in balancing between two forms of pompousness.

The outworn form of pompousness in use right now is perhaps the less dangerous: the pathos with which the new political élite comments on weighty political events, the "questions of vital importance for the nation". The very title of the volume, which is far from the traditions of Parnassism, is meant to annoy them, as Esterházy does indeed have a say on all these issues. This he does with frivolous disrespect, with comic, familiar expressions, with an irony sparing not even himself, ("That's it. I think I've solved all the present problems of the country. Bye," he closes one of the articles.) The content displays a firm independence, whose very existence is reassuring.

The other, trifling kind of pompousness is exercised by the majority, opposed to culture and only recognizing material values. After the playwright Mihály Kornis, this is sometimes called "break-barbarism", as this language, all stere-

otype and phrasing intended to be humorous, is typically used on CB by cab drivers. Between the two firm points, of the favourite topics of the first group and the linguistic turns of the second, Esterházy performs his dazzling tight-rope walk.

The place of publication of the series of articles was also intended as a gesture. Ever since the late 18th century (Rousseau and Herder), European literature has often witnessed rivalry between an organic-immanent historical conception and an existential-transcendental one. In Hungary, those in the first tradition are called the populists (attached to folk ways and populism at the same time), and the latter, the urbanists. (In this usage, a populist, for instance, sets the "real American" Mark Twain or Hemingway against Henry James or T.S. Eliot.) The populists only consider autochtonous cultural phenomena as legitimate, while the urbanists accept the idea of cultural imports and point out that even the most ancient traditions had been borrowed from somewhere. Their opponents respond to this by accusing the urbanists of imitating attitudes that have no connection with Hungarian reality.

As long as this difference is evident only in discussions and artistic practice, it is justifiable, and indeed, can be even useful. In Hungary, since the 1930s, the relationship between the two schools of thoughts has unfortunately seriously deteriorated (unquestionably mainly due to the populists), so much so that they even exploited dictatorial state power against one another. The fascist and the communist governments might have profited from this, but literature certainly did not.

Pál Békés, a prolific but not particularly successful author, has now put his pen on a bold idea. His novel, *Sentimental Journeys Through Central Europe,* uses the idiom of Ferenc Kazinczy's classic translation of Sterne (1814-16), which is even more widely removed from today's Hungarian than Sterne's English is from that of today. Indeed, it was precisely Esterházy who failed in a similar undertaking a few years back. Two problems are involved here: how to insert present-day dialogues into an 18th century text, (Békés has not always succeeded in solving this) and how to assign a real function to the imitation.

The name of the narrator, András Jorik, combines references to Sterne's Yorick and to the Hungarian András Jelky (1730-1783), who, in the Dutch service, made several journeys to the Far East and wrote a travelogue which has remained popular. Békés's Jorik spends most of his childhood in railway stations before Lénárt Lux, a demonic antiquarian, takes him under his wing. Lux, true to his name, is a follower of the Enlightenment; his shop specializes in 18th and early 19th century publications (mainly travel books). Indeed, he pays little heed to the time that has passed since. Nor is his protegé allowed to read more recent works either; Jorik thus writes his journal in the only literary style he knows. "History is none other than the means to set first individuals and then many people against each other," the master harangues. "It is the means to project present miseries back into the past and to revenge past miseries in the present..." Jorik believes him and produces the same argument against even his aunt Rózsika, a survivor of Buchenwald. The aunt leaves a minor legacy, sufficient for the nephew, a devotee of Goethe, to travel to Weimar. Her secret plan is fulfilled when András, accidentally as it were, is confronted with Buchenwald and is compelled to recognize the significance of an unforgettable past in the present. You cannot escape from history, claims the epigraph in the words of Horace: "Post equitem sedet atra cura."

The novel's basic idea is certainly acceptable, the point of departure for a "what if" analysis, containing, as it does, the necessary minimum of probability. Some contradictions do emerge. The adventures

on the way (through Czecho-Slovakia into what was the GDR) include many picaresque motifs, with chance events and sudden decisions, which run counter to the idea of planning.

Most of Jorik's experiences are of an erotic nature, and so anachronism is paired with a measure of Kerouac. But then, anachronism in our age of radical eclecticism is scarcely anachronistic. More seriously, the fantastic and the everyday do not always join into a unified whole. The greatest problem comes from Békés's fussy didacticisms. The reader is quite capable of recognizing that Jorik's hosts in Prague, a pair of Siamese twins, stand for Bohemia and Slovakia; he will recognize the various figures who appear during the narrative (including Sterne himself, the military attaché of the Republic of Ireland to Prague), and the local legends, the Golem or the Pied Piper of Hamelin— but Békés still feels it necessary to explain all his symbols. Nor does the 18th century sentimentality, the ostentatious goodwill of the "sentimental traveller", and Central European cynicism on the one hand, and the rationalism which constructs the ideology and the unbridled vitality on the other, call for elucidation.

The elegant design by the eminent painter Liviusz Gyulai lends an unusually fine appearance to the book, wittily alluding to the period and to the Sterne edition Gyulai designed way back in 1976.

Andor Bajor, who was born in 1927, was a journalist in Kolozsvár (Cluj) in Transylvania and died at a relatively early age, in 1991. But it would have made no difference had he lived for a hundred years. He was one of those writers who seem to become stuck at a certain point in their development, even though capable of producing ingenious variations on a given successful form and tone. Indeed, the large number of such authors has implications for the state of the culture of the period and the geographical location in question.

Bajor's speciality is satire in the form of stories, sketches, or sometimes fairly tenuous vers libre. Taking *Partial Deluge*, this collection of his best works, for what it is for —to be read rather than be scrutinized— it will give real pleasure for its wry and somewhat morbid humour. Bajor presumably would have been able to do more, but one can only conjecture on the reasons for and the scale of the loss. The reader is occasionally reminded of the witty conversationalists of the 18th century, but with a far from insignificant difference. Bajor was not born into an aristocratic environment of rococo ease, but into a pettybourgeois background of Chekhovean mood. In some of the stories (e.g., "Singing in the Tub") he elaborates an idea in a more leisurely and detailed way than is acceptable to the present-day. Sometimes he definitely overexploits his own wit ("Diabolical Codex"), so that one feels pleasantly surprised when at a few instances the punchline is omitted ("Midnight Duty", etc.)

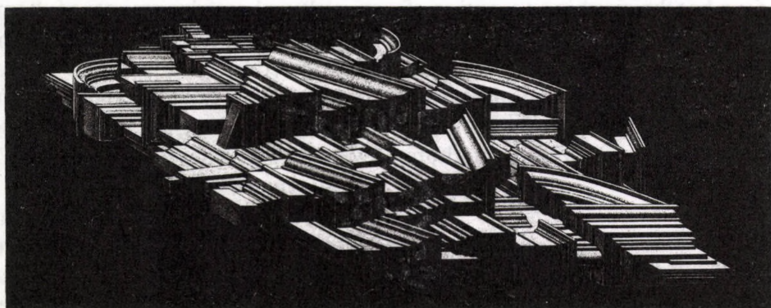
Transylvania is a deep-freeze for some ways of life, including certain literary traditions. The Chekhovean satire mentioned already is indeed an adequate portrayal of an old-fashioned small town, with its teachers, sensitive of their reputation, busy clerks and proud artisans. The survival of 19th century values was helped by the fact that modernization in Rumania had a complexion that was even less attractive than usual in Eastern Europe in general. In the Byzantine societies of the Gheorghiu-Dej and Ceausescu periods, this small world preserved positive values as well, but its negative features are also obvious. Much-criticized servility becomes absurd if the prize is not merely promotion but in many cases survival itself. Even Bajor's most normal characters carry the marks of pressure: in the strange lapse of memory when after all the deportations, re-settlements and reconstructions, the citizens are unfamiliar even with the last thirty years of the town's past

("Where Do Children Play Hide and Seek?") or in the sparingly doled-out sincerity when telling anecdotes by way of a confession of love ("The Bouncer's Sunday"). The bouncer himself, who throws his sweetheart out "with fervent love, with a broad gesture", is in a different category, that of anthropological lesion. Everybody is turning into an amateur Kremlinologist, scenting "secret signs" and adjusting in hot haste to the supposed changes in politics. ("Why Did Comrade Bodoni Eat Steak Chasseur with Dumplings?") The characters are not specifically condemned, but they cannot count on the author's indulgence —at most on some sad lyricism mixed into the irony. Thus the "heroes", who risk their lives in the hope of the first distribution of chocolate since the outbreak of the war. (The story, entitled "Dance Around the Potion of the Gods", is set in 1948.)

Bajor's seeming neutrality and incomprehension is an admixture of naivety and cynicism. It is an innocent, angelic cynicism, only possible in the face of unalterable circumstances.

One of the most effective pieces, "Balthasar", opens with: "I have no idea who poisoned our dog. Perhaps the first Dog Poisoner of the County, or possibly, the First Deputy of the First Dog Poisoner of the County. These extremely important individuals are most likely elected by us, by a ballot so secret that we do not even notice it." (See this and four other stories by Andor Bajor in *NHQ* 117.—Ed.) One rarely encounters this spontaneous, true-to-life tone in Bajor, and also such an unostentatious portrayal of the destruction of nature. For it is his endeavour to represent a kind of pathetic materialism, the imperative of a correspondence with the beauty and dignity of the cosmos.

Consideration rarely gives place to intuition, and so most of the parables remain parables, a kind of mental game. Perhaps the best story in the volume is "Lucky Conditions". The commander of Russian troops entering a small town wants to win over the citizens by some spectacular "gift": the assistant of the clockmaker, who has fled the town, is forced to move into the tower and repair the clockwork mechanism, out of order for many years. The assistant is baffled by the centuries old mechanism; his work provides a new sense to a scene which originally depicted Peter's denial and a dance of death. "But if I take the key away from the clock, the angel starts chasing the emperor... and St Peter admits a merchant to heaven." Under the threat of death, he completes the work as best he can, and his handiwork is exhibited at a festive celebration: "... St Peter came out, crowing... The Emperor admitted Death into heaven and slammed the door in the face of the Angel, while the spirit in a threadbare gilded dress suddenly submerged." The officers are perfectly satisfied, the soldiers taking part in the real dance of death do not even notice the dislocation of the world order—petty and apocalyptic at the same time.



Chris Springer

Breaking out of the Cocoon

Miklós Haraszti: *A cenzúra esztétikája*
(The Aesthetics of Censorship). Magvető, 1991, 145 pp.

Miklós Haraszti made his reputation as one of Hungary's foremost dissidents, before the events of 1989 made that occupation obsolete.

Haraszti first attracted attention when he took a job in Budapest's Red Star Tractor Factory in 1970 and exposed the shortcomings of socialist working conditions in *Darabbér* (Piecework), which was published in English as *A Worker in a Worker's State*. Its publication abroad earned Haraszti Western critical acclaim. Circulated at home, the work got him thrown in prison for eight months for "defaming socialism".

This would not be the last time Haraszti was held as a political prisoner. Nevertheless, as an editor of the underground journal *Beszélő,* Haraszti persisted in his opposition to the regime.

His next major samizdat work, *The Aesthetics of Censorship,* appeared in the United States in 1987, under the title *The Velvet Prison: Artists under State Socialism.* In it Haraszti described the new plight artists faced in state socialism—not the brutal repression of *Nineteen Eighty-four* but the numbing co-option of *Brave New World.*

"The old censorship is increasingly being superseded by something altogether new, less visible, and more dangerous", Haraszti wrote. "A new aesthetic culture has emerged in which censors and artists alike are entangled in a mutual embrace."

Unexpectedly, what Haraszti described as "the cocoon of state culture" has since cracked open. What has emerged from it is a democratic Hungary that has made possible the open publication of *The Aesthetics of Censorship* and simultaneously turned the book into ancient history.

In the meantime, Haraszti has found a new occupation—as a member of Parliament and spokesman for the opposition Alliance of Free Democrats (SzDSz). On the day *The Aesthetics of Censorship* was at last published officially in Hungary, its author discussed the book in an interview in SzDSz's Parliament offices. He reflected not only on the politics of art under the old regime, but also on the art of politics in the new Hungary.

With *The Aesthetics of Censorship,* Haraszti turned the idea of censorship inside out. He argued that Hungary's "progressive" socialist state destroyed independent art not by coercing artists, as the Stalinist regime did, but by supporting and co-opting them. The system provided a cultural environment of "amniotic warmth", wrote Haraszti: a comfortable, subsidized life within and an increasingly marginalized existence without. Furthermore, artists, long alienated from society, were now given a social role and a (truly) captive audience.

The result was that censorship was internalized, became part of the creative process. Artists under socialism effectively became "company artists". "The more

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Chris Springer *is a journalist from California now living in Budapest.*

successfully the artist has identified himself and his ideas with the interests of management", wrote Haraszti, "the more creative freedom he can retain". The catch was that "under socialism it is the same giant firm everywhere"; the artist could choose either to create art serving the state or to create nothing.

Many of these artists now work for the democratic state—as elected representatives and government officials. Their presence in today's Parliament does not surprise Haraszti.

"All official aesthetics of socialism defined art as a derivation of politics", says Haraszti. "People who were born into this culture, like myself, revolted against it. (state culture), naturally took the other side—but within the same definition of art."

Nor, says Haraszti, are anti-authoritarian dissidents like himself strangers to the seats of power they now fill. "It would be hypocrisy to say it is a 180-degree turn. If anything is true of what I described in my book, then in a paradoxical way dissidents were part of the establishment in that time as well."

Even as artists have entered politics, Haraszti adds, art itself has now been depoliticized. The rise of "soft" socialist culture relieved artists of the chore of political indoctrination. No longer required constantly to glorify the state, grateful artists agreed to respect it by producing banal and politically neutral works. Socialism's neutralizing strategy affects even post-socialist culture, Haraszti says: "All kinds of political writings are now overtly despised... We are still not able to stand on two feet."

Haraszti's book described a communist culture both more flexible and more durable than before; a culture whose artists policed themselves. American critics in 1987 found *The Aesthetics of Censorship* an apt critique of the new, more sophisticated brand of communism that appeared to be emerging from the early Gorbachev era. Yet ironically, the book was finished in 1981, at least five years before glasnost. Haraszti's analysis, describing the Kádár regime in Hungary, anticipated a similar trend in the Soviet Union.

What the book did not anticipate was the subsequent collapse of communist system in Europe. "We always hoped it would come during our lifetime," Haraszti recalls. "We always hoped it would come sooner or later. But we were schizophrenic about it."

This ambivalence was reflected in *The Aesthetics of Censorship*. Assuming the persona of a state artist, Haraszti painted a grim portrait of a culture celebrating its own surrender. This profound pessimism, Haraszti stated in the American edition's afterword, was partly ironic. If all artists had been as co-opted as the one he portrayed, the book—an independent work—could not have existed.

Nevertheless, in the same afterword, written in 1987, Haraszti wrote that he held out little hope of being able to abandon the underground press "in the foreseeable future". His most optimistic wish was merely for the "approach of a true pluralism in communist culture".

Today, Haraszti says the looming demise of that culture became evident soon after he finished the book in 1981.

"In the '80s (state culture) gradually became obsolete with the appearance of samizdat, of truly independent islands in the web of directed culture, especially in Poland. In any single Polish city there was more samizdat published than in the whole of Hungary in the '80s...

"That was the most important fact in the fall of communism: the Polish free press even after a (1981) military coup, where for the first time the Soviets didn't intervene and still the coup wasn't able to suppress the continuity of independent culture, of independent thinking.

"But even in Hungary the police in '82-'83 had given up on ever eradicating inde-

pendent culture fully, and they confined themselves from then on to a kind of lawnmowing, giving up hope of uprooting it."

Haraszti says his book now serves simply as a "journey in time", into the psychology of a bygone era. Even if events have left the message of *The Aesthetics of Censorship* outdated, Haraszti says they have vindicated other of his works. For instance, his 1981 essay "A Belated Introduction to Kádárism", published in *Corriere Della Sera,* postulated that the Kádár regime would be the last viable form of communism in Hungary.

The prediction was correct—but the communist regime did not simply collapse in the face of mass demonstrations. Instead, democratization came about slowly and steadily, with little of the drama seen at the Berlin Wall or Prague's Venceslas Square. To a veteran dissident like Haraszti, was that a bit disappointing?

"Yes, actually; I personally view it as a consequence of the opposition, a political mistake... namely in the (1989) talks with the Communist Party about peaceful transition to democracy... We agreed, or didn't protest, at least, that the talks began in this building (Parliament) without the press. It went on for months and months, and society lost interest in the whole process.

"From that evolved the belief that, in Hungary, had been the basis of the common ideology during the decades of Kádárism—that 'politics is the business of those people high up and we don't have anything to say about it.'

"The whole change of system seemed to them a game of elites behind closed doors", says Haraszti.

"And the waves of protest marches and demonstrations stopped. We were all here in Parliament; we didn't organize those things anymore.

"Then we began to fight inside the talks vigorously for open press coverage but that was later, and the press wasn't able to enter until the very end of negotiations. That single mistake is responsible, I believe, for the whole inertia and scepticism you see in the low voter turnouts today."

Haraszti says he and his fellow dissidents gained invaluable political skills through their long struggles in the opposition. He sees their political expertise as crucial for establishing Hungary's democratic foundations. Nevertheless, Haraszti adds, "I see that my being in politics kills my art; I hope very warmly that I will soon be able to leave politics".

Haraszti has confessed to a certain schizophrenia over his dual role as artist and activist. So it is no surprise when he reveals the subject of his current work-in-progress: an autobiographical account of his participation in the democratic underground. The political involvement that "kills" Haraszti's art also continues to inspire it.

Tamás Koltai

Brave New World

Arthur Schnitzler: *Professor Bernhardi*; Bertolt Brecht: *Turandot or the Congress of Whitewashers*; Friedrich Dürrenmatt: *Romulus the Great*; David Hare: *The Secret Rapture*

The new democracy has not yet inspired any new Hungarian plays, and it is questionable whether there will be any at all. Indeed some playwrights are more diligent in their pursuit of politics than of their craft.

Although drama's place seems to have been usurped by farcical documentaries (I have in mind television transmissions of parliamentary sessions), the theatre companies have added their comments on events through their staging of foreign plays. Some foreign playwrights seem to have written their plays with a prophetic foresight of Hungarian reality anno 1991.

One such is the Austrian Arthur Schnitzler, whose *Professor Bernhardi,* written in 1912, has been put on by the Vígszínház, re-titled *The Bernhardi Affair*. The eponymous Bernhardi, head of a hospital, refuses to allow a priest to visit a prostitute's death bed, who thus dies unshriven. The episode would hardly have become an "affair" had Bernhardi not happened to be Jew and thus accused of offending against religion. The scandal goes beyond the hospital, reaching the minister's office and even Parliament. They are about to table a question on it; unless Bernhardi refrains from nominating his own candidate, an unquestionably well-qualified Jew, as head of one of the hospital departments, the affair will be pursued in Parliament. The professor rejects the bargain, ignoring "the trifling matter that he lives in a Christian state"; in consequence, he has to face up to the anti-Semitism that distorts what has happened, to his fellow doctors and their different reactions, and to court proceedings. It has become a political affair. Although the minister, an old colleague and friend, insists that all that counts is "merit and aptitude in filling public offices", the deputy head of the hospital refers to certain quotas, insinuating that "in an institute where, according to the figures, 85 per cent of the patients are Catholics, the overwhelming majority of the medical practitioners belong to another denomination" is not universally approved.

These are sentiments that may be heard in Hungary now—notoriously, the government did not dissociate itself from their well-publicized expression by a prominent MP. The minister in Schnitzler's play is also familiar to us, when caught on a lie, he brazens it out: "In public life there are higher interests than keeping one's word… And this is to keep our objectives in view and not to let our work be destroyed."

What Schnitzler wrote is a sort of political tableau, exposing policies and political amateurism wreathed in slogans. Live transmissions from Parliament daily produce statements such as those in the mouths of Schnitzler's characters: "There are still those among you who do not reckon with

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Tamás Koltai, *editor of* Színház, *a theatre monthly,* is NHQ's *regular theatre reviewer*.

the spirit of the day, with the popular trends, but we must elaborate the relevant philosophical standpoint in the public institutions."

The play, well-constructed and serious in message, calls for an informal everyday naturalism in its acting, like the plays of Ferenc Molnár. Unfortunately, László Babarczy's production for the Vígszínház fails to provide loose, smooth conversation and is unable to present the features of the professors and politicians of the play. Its luke-warm reception seems to be due to the weakness of the production—or to audiences having become surfeited with politics.

Turandot or the Congress of Whitewashers, a rarely staged parable of Bertolt Brecht's, from the renowned Katona József Theatre, can only be actualized by way of an allegory. Brecht dubs the intelligentsia "Tuis" (an abbreviation of Tellect-Uell-In, an anagram of "intellectual") and sees them as used by the powers that be to manipulate reality. The Tuis hold a position in the immediate vicinity of power in the Chinese empire and have the duty of providing acceptable explanations for why things happen, why there is a rise in cotton prices, why cotton disappears from the market when the warehouses are full of it, and in general, why people have to live in want, why living standards have fallen to destitution level. The Tui who gives the best explanation wins the hand of Pricess Turandot, the emperor's daughter. (When first performed in September 1990, there was a drastic rise in petrol prices in Hungary, and however desperately some Hungarian Tuis argued the necessity for the price increase, they were unable to prevent a nation-wide blockade by taxi and lorry drivers, which paralysed the country for a few days.)

Although Brecht was taken by the subject from the thirties onwards, he only got it written in the early fifties. His working hypothesis is that the Weimar Tuis of the 1920s and '30s kept on arguing about how to explain the social and economic failure to the people until a bandit by the name of Hitler (called Gogher Gog in the parable) emerged, whom the Tuis did not accept as one of themselves, and so he was compelled to realize his solution in his own singular manner. By the time Brecht actually wrote his play, there had been some changes in the circumstances. In June 1953, there had been rioting in East Berlin, and the authorities, once the riots were quelled, gave a Tui-type explanation of events. This embarrassed Brecht who wrote various malicious references into the play; yet he himself was not sure of what to think, and the première was postponed—by some twenty years.

Gábor Zsámbéki's production, with the alienation of Brecht's theatre and the approximation of didactic analogies, quickly made audiences recognize that the story is meant for us and is about us or, more exactly, about those of us who, as members of the Tui Association, compete for the prize of the most acceptable expounders of government measures. The pure, clean composition of the play, the superiority of Brecht's reasoning, even when not at the top of his form, makes it all enjoyable. There was a special delight in seeing the cast removing their masks and sitting down backstage to follow the work of their colleagues with bright eyes.

Another fine repertory company, the Csiky Gergely Theatre of Kaposvár came up with *Romulus der Grosse* (Romulus the Great), a grotesque comedy by Friedrich Dürrenmatt. János Mohácsi's production portrays the collapse of the Western Empire in a spectacular manner. In a tumbledown imperial residence, all broken columns, crumbling tympana filled by neon tubes, busts overgrown with weeds, everything is covered in chicken droppings, down and straw wisps: prefects, officials and the occupying Teuton bar-

barians continually have to scrape off from their soles what they have stepped into. The imperial household has been turned into a chicken run, for the emperor is reduced to raising poultry.

Romulus the Great was written in 1950, the climax of the confrontation between the "world empires" of East and West. The cloven hoof shows under the comedy, which is iconoclastic in the manner of G. B. Shaw, and political in the manner of Brecht (unlike Brecht it is moralizing as well). Romulus, a languid Epicurean, has been systematically working for the disintegration of the Empire for twenty years; he is the moral executioner of a society that has outlived its time. The Teutons are obviously the Soviet menace. As a twist in the political dramaturgy, Odoacer, their prince, is not the expected cruel butcher but a philosopher, who in fact would get on with his enemy, were he not kept in check by his bloodthirsty nephew Theodorich, who aspires to full power. This nephew may be read as Mao's China, although only in the years after the play was written did China begin to exert itself against its Soviet big brother.

Let us not dwell here on how Dürrenmatt's view has been justified historically and whether "catastrophic capitalism" really did deserve a "capital catastrophe". (After all it is the duty of every respectable satirist to nettle the system in which he is living, and *Romulus the Great* is not so much a political morality play as a satire on the failure of imperial thinking based on moral principles, or the lack of them.) The metaphoric portrayal of the collapse—with the public finances functioning (or rather not functioning) as a chicken farm, the monarch giving away the last leaves of his golden laurel wreath, the sale of the imperial statues, the freedom expected to come from the capital of the foreign manufacturer of trousers, and the zealous liquidation of the files of the archives—does arouse more associations in a Hungarian audience that has just lived through a transformation of the political system than it could have done forty years ago in the West, which was the play's target. In our days the world empire that Romulus describes as having "openly institutionalized murder, looting, ransom and violence at the price of other nations", does not necessarily call to mind imperial Britain or the France of the Indo-China war. Here, we have other pertinent historical experiences. Slogan studded national pathos, this target of Dürrenmatt's irony, is also familiar to the audience not so much from the Roman or Swiss past, much rather from the Hungarian.

János Mohácsi, a director more noted for his extravagances, has now practically shown self-restraint. The play strikes a balance between irony and parody, verbal humour and gestic triviality. The last 20 minutes bring a brilliant cadence. A German armed detachment bursts upon the scene and gains control over the terrain professionally, machine-gunning everybody present and collecting them into a container. First, however, Theodorich reads out the pacification document, which the military interpreter translates for the would-be victims sentence by sentence. Then their commander, Odoacer appears: languid, enervated, leaning on his cane, to warn his men against abuses with an intellectual informality (and in German), and to impart to the conquered his own dissenting opinion as an intellectual. (He does not allow the interpreter to translate the defeatist parts.) After the pensioning off and disappearance of the intellectual moral philosophers Romulus and Odoacer, the military dictatorship breaks into song over the ruins of the disintegrated chicken-farm empire.

In *The Secret Rapture,* David Hare tries to demonstrate how an intolerant, philistine, arrogant political order shatters the individual and his human relations. London critics saw a critique of Thatcherism, and even of capitalism, in this 1982 play. This seems frightening to

us here, in Hungary, For forty years all we heard was criticism of capitalism, to our utter misfortune, from the standpoint of Existing Socialism, which, however, proved to be a treacherous bog. Up to our necks in the mess, we could not fully enter into the spirit of criticizing capitalism. Indeed, in recent years it was Mrs Thatcher's capitalism that was expected to draw us out of the mire called socialism. It is then a little strange, particularly after the passing of the Thatcher era, to digest the criticism of Thatcherism. What have we to do with the conflict between Marion, a Conservative party junior minister and her sister Isobel, sticking to her tiny graphic design enterprise? What should we say to Tom, Marion's husband, chairman of his church's Ethical Committee and a leading light in Christians in Business, who by investing in the firm ruins it? How are we to interpret Isobel's perdition, the shatted hardness of Marion as a party politician, and the fact that by the end of the play, Tom can say "I've slightly lost touch with the Lord Jesus."

Hare's play sounds familiar to us not only because of the changes in parliamentary and governmental conditions in Hungary (sentences such as "her party's in power. For ever." have a different ring here than they did even a year ago), but also because the mindset behind these conditions has also become familiar—the smugness of the government, naked business interests disguised as Christian morality, the cult of money as the paramount moving force of society. There is a familiar ring to words such as: "You know I think this Government's appalling. But on the other hand, let's face it, given what's going on, it's just stupid not to go out and grab some dough for yourself."

All this, of course, does not turn *The Secret Rapture* into a contemporary Hungarian play. But then, were somebody to write down the same sentence under the present Hungarian conditions, this would not necessarily make a contemporary Hungarian play either. This is also true the other way round: Shakespeare's *Timon of Athens* can sound valid here and now, regardless of the distance in time and space. David Hare tells us as much as the theatre is able to draw out of him, as much as it can show of the shift in space and time and of the change that has taken place in our personalities and in our minds.

Gábor Zsámbéki's production in the Katona József Theatre has upset the play's Chekhovean mood and the smooth dramaturgy. A certain amount of sandpapering has left its marks, for instance in throwing up the minimal sets. Energetic stage hands shift their elements with noisy nonchalance. The way they throw down the big plants in their leather pots as they whistle and energetically shift the furnishings carries meaning. They turn into actors, and their presence, even in silence, brings in something of that other world which is not portrayed in the play.

As a necessary consequence of this stark atmosphere, the actors expose the characters well in advance. This brings the satire of the play to the fore at the cost of its lyricism and melodrama—another shift of emphasis. The protagonist is Isobel not Marion, the Conservative junior minister, who finally seems to find her human face (indeed, one may be surprised to read in the programme that the playwright has presented her with understanding and compassion). Here in East Central Europe, we are more sensitive to victims. Unlike Michael Billington, the London critic quoted in the programme, I have fewest problems with Isobel, at least when watching Dorottya Udvaros's rendering of her. Here is someone more interested in human possibilities, like love, work and art, than in the possibilities that follow from the political order. Does something like this still exist? Or is it to be taken as a romantic Utopia? Udvaros's Isobel is not a heroine, she has no devotion, ecstasy or "secret rapture". She is far from being a

wordly bride of Christ's, she is simply a normal individual among the rabid, amazed at the bustle, the unscrupulous ambition. She is too weak to say no when she ought to. The overbearing characters pin themselves on to her, and when she finally shakes them off, one of them proves unable to bear his own spinelessness and breaks down, destroying her in the process.

It is perhaps an exaggeration to say that this production is about what Hungary is like today. But it holds out a warning of what Hungary might become like.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Sir—In her enchanting article, "Stalky in a Hungarian Convent" (Spring 1991) Piroska Szántó removes all doubt, in my mind at least, of the importance of fiction in our lives. Her love of Kipling's *Stalky and Co* bridged an awkward gap when on her first visit to England she found herself sitting in silence with the Cambridge don who was to be her guide. He was obviously bored with the idea and she did not catch his name. As they reminded each other of episodes and characters in the book, the ice between them broke; he rolled with laughter and "shouted like a man inspired."

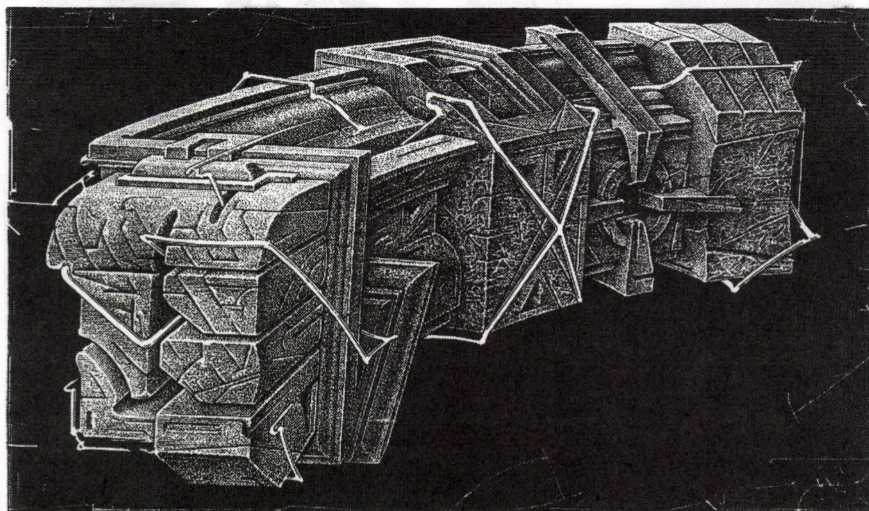
There is no doubt that fiction can be more real than fact. When Tennyson visited Lyme Regis, the setting of most of Jane Austen's *Persuasion,* his friends wanted to show him the place where the Duke of Monmouth landed. He brushed aside the idea: "Don't talk to me of the Duke of Monmouth. Show me the exact spot where Louisa Musgrove fell!" (There is now a plaque on that spot on the harbour wall).

Again, an Oxford don at a party in a college garden wondered what the poet Philip Larkin was doing there. As she did not know he had any connection with the college she asked him. He explained that it was the scene in one of Barbara Pym's novels of which he was particularly fond. "So I had to come."

Wendy Trewin
London

Sir—*NHQ* is a fascinanting and well-written magazine, far above what is available for general, intellectuel interest in the US of A. You should be proud of it. It is just full of first class, general and local stuff. You Magyars are really something special! And don't you just know it! Bravo! Keep on!

Jascha Kessler
Santa Monica, California



Gergely Bikácsy

Dream Tracings

Péter Forgács: *Privát Magyarország* (Private Hungary)

The title recalls (no doubt intentionally), the late Gábor Bódy's experiment, *Private History*. Bódy composed a quasidocumentary out of old film clips he "had found", a slice of our collective memory. Or, rather, a slice of the lack of such a collective memory, of our pent-up memories consigned to oblivion. Péter Forgács's amateur film reconstruction, *Private Hungary,* is an undertaking of greater import. He varied Bódy's title, here we take the heading *Dream Tracings* from the late Miklós Erdély, that highly influential avant-garde artist.

Forgács completed the first part of his cycle in 1988, the fourth last year, and a fifth now. Following international prizes and a wide press reaction, Hungarian television has broadcast the first four parts.

The original amateur shots are mostly from the 1920s and '30s. The third part, *Either-Or*, is closest to the present, as the maker had kept up his film diary till the mid-1960s.

Forgács's series is more than a document of collective memory. It is on the borderline between our shared and our individual dreams. The individual, taking shots of his family, was not even an amateur film-man, he had no personal history of his own, as the history of every family is the same, be they a happy or an unhappy family. The film has no heroes or characters, since every family film appears to feature the same people in the same home and the same environment, and in the same city. Does he peer through the 8 mm camera into our shared world? Or does he on the contrary, as Heracleitus described the dreamer, submerge into his special world? Is it the shared world of our waking state or the most personal world of our dreams? Perhaps it is both together, thus embarrassing both Heracleitus and Freud, and indeed, embarrassing the viewer as well.

What is so confusingly enchanting is not merely the odd radiance of these films, moving along the strange borderline between dream and wakefulnes. The documentary itself is an impossibility. *Private Hungary* offers documents of lives, made by amateurs. But no unadulterated documentary has ever existed. The greatest, such as Flaherty's, are scarcely disguised feature films, and Vertov's are somewhat more disguised pseudo newsreels in the avant-garde spirit, but deliberately constructed. "Sham genius"? Yes, there exists such a thing. Cinematographic masterworks, the fabrications of daily politics and history. The greatest documentaries have a dual character. Paradoxically, non-professional films seem to be the most genuine. They appear to have come about accidentally. They are awkward and incidental, as if nobody had been behind the camera, which had panned of its own accord, with indifference, without wishing to interpret the world. (This method has been employed by major feature film directors, cunningly creating art by and through it.) Yet, chance amateur shots of private interest are the most au-

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Gergely Bikácsy, *a film critic and writer of fiction, is* NHQ'*s regular film reviewer.*

thentic. Only they must be touched most carefully, like treasure trove about to disintegrate. Forgács touches them with appropriate reverence and elegant care, he creates a unified cycle out of the oceans of scarcely connected private films, and in so doing gives us one of the most moving works to come from the Balázs Béla Stúdió, the documentary genre and the Hungarian cinema.

Sometimes original newsreel clips are mounted into a feature film at some important point. But instead of adding authenticity, this makes the fiction before and after, invalid, for the original breaks through the imaginary sequences with a force that vanquishes them. This is exactly what happened to a film-maker as powerful as Andrzey Wajda, when he confronted his own scenes with original German newsreels shot in the Warsaw ghetto. The amateur film-maker is portraying his own family life, his reputation as an artist is not at stake. It is action per se, the spectacle as it appears on the film, which is of aesthetic value. No aesthetic problems can really emerge here. As Bazin puts it, a photographic document, extended in time, the moved moment does not confront the viewer as a work of art. There is no question of cinematographic art here and one does not even expect one. Not even if the family amateur tries to "direct", if he positions his actors, as Zoltán Bartos does in the first part of the cycle.

The Bartos Family is a fragmentary collection of a great epic family chronicle, which is simultaneously a fragment of a sketch and a quaint, experimental work deliberately assembled out of fragments. The epic passage of time has the structure of a lyrical film and even of a broken, intermittent ballad. It is a kind of private history with several unknowns, governed by some inner rhythm, in which one accepts all the many omissions, all the shifts, and feels them as rich in creating tension. It is an epic of lyrical effect. This is the most finished, the best rounded off, the most animated of the four parts, of great richness.

Yet it is not only a historical film, a documentary meant for historians. Tramways and gentlemen in old-time clothes, hats and neckties appear. And old-time cars. They provide a spectacle impossible to invent or, rather, one that can be imagined all too easily, like all phantoms stepping out of the past. Everything is fictitiously unreal, with the authenticity of a dream. There is nothing like it and everything can only be like this in a tale. Types stylized in the manner of fairy tales, yet individuated, non-recurring, unrepeatable people. And this also provides their demoniac beauty, even that of the ugly, the distorted, the unpleasant. Here too lies the beauty of the film, these private lives panned within the secrets of their own world, shining through history kept in the background.

The dance tunes of the time are heard with growing volume. The commentary was written by Zoltán Bartos, the progatonist and maker of the amateur film. We follow him through his workaday life. A family well-to-do though not rich. We see where and how they live, we see what they wished to have immortalized of themselves, the mirror fragments developed into a dream tableau. Nothing really happens. All that is special happens over their heads and without them anyway. We see the urban fringe, a lumber yard, then Pozsonyi út. The wife on the balcony, in a bathing suit... Now they are on the beach... Now they are playing with the dog, now jumping childishly at the camera. They are travelling abroad. Banal shots of Paris, of Venice, and yet nothing is banal, the quaint mood of the dream returns. These people lived once, this is a true story taken from life. Yet we are justified in spying upon them, as they themselves have entrusted their lives to us.

It is so nightmarishly moving, the way they strut, turn around, dance and live in slow motion. Forgács has opted for the

only, the appropriate, solution of sometimes slowing down, sometimes freezing the original takes. The pictures preserve their museum character, and a beauty which can also be watched as fiction, as a feature film. Now it is impossible to separate the documentary from the ballad in them, either. History —with a capital H— thundering in the background, with the petty daily life of the characters. A forest of arms raised in the fascist salute at the railway station in Rome. "Eyes blue like ink/Sweet like pancake," goes the silly yet touching Bartos hit tune, while his wife smiles in different dresses on the balcony of their flat, with the 1930s Pozsonyi út below. Life is an unrivalled scenarist.

The Bartos Family is a curious film epic, while the second part of the cycle, *Dusi and Jenő,* provides the purest lyricism. Practically all that can be seen are Dusi and Jenő, a married couple from the Tabán District in Budapest.

And the old Tabán itself, between Elizabeth Bridge and the Chain Bridge, as a small village (long vanished since), a landscape in its own right. We see the Korona Cinema: a bearded, grey-haired gentleman runs across the tram tracks towards the Korona Cinema. Appearing for a split second, he somehow lends the film special authenticity. Here is a bench advertising GSCHWIND in big letters, another ad reads STÜHMER. (The first part, too, brought unforgettable facia in large letters: FÜLÖP HAAS AND SONS, LINOLEUM.)One could walk straight into the picture, stepping into that life of fifty years ago: this is not the reality of a documentary, it is quasi-mysticism, as in the famous legend of the Japanese painter.

A blizzard in Attila út. Huge, dazzling piles of snow, deserted townscape. We see the storm from different angles. Lamp-posts, sign-boards moving in the wind, the wind driving the snow in different directions. These sequences are of Impressionistic perfection. Everything in the background or outside the film-maker's calm and chamber-like world is insignificant. German troops rattle along the Danube embankment, but a lady in a big hat in the Tabán looks more enduring. So also does the Chain Bridge in winter, complete with gulls. Or two women hurrying along in the cold weather with hands thrust into muffs. Then comes Pasaréti tér and an old blunt-nosed number 5 bus. Crowded trams with passengers hanging on wherever they can. The imperishable memories of reality. Tibor Szemző's incidental music catches the past, present and worlds to come, and springs from the very essence of the film.

The following two parts of the cycle have a similar foreceful effect. Forgács perhaps intervened too strongly in the third, *Either-Or,* when he sharpened the material, though the ugly friend with a mafioso exterior and his beautiful wife are an eloquently mysterious couple all the same in the original shots. We learn little of the central figures in this film. I wonder what their occupation was in the 1950s, that they gave such a dazzlingly splendid birthday party, with real, pre-war tableware and in such style. The fourth part, *Diary of Mr N,* on the other hand, excels in minute observations of the history of the day. *Mr N* can replace a newsreel in its own right. *Either-Or* also brings the 1949 May-Day parade, posters, Rákosis, and even more Stalins. "Excerpts from a Film Trouvé", reads Forgács's explanatory note. A favourite motto of Godard's, this precedes several of his great films, many of which were presented as part of an endless and connected newsreel. *Private History* is close to this Godard type of film: history cum-family album, with pictures of private interest and a self-contained universe.

Crowds enthusiastically march at a word of command in the street. Other crowds march to other commands. The progatonists take dogs for walks, go on trips or to the cinema. Instead of the words of command, we hear the words of a popular song. "When was Napoleon victorious, when was he the loser? I just can't remember a date..."

The screen slowly fades into darkness.

Alan Walker

The Liszt Piano Competition, 1991

The Liszt International Piano Competition for 1991 will go down as one of the very best in its history. The general level of piano playing was extremely high. For the first time in ten years the jury was able to award a first prize. And when one thinks of the finalists, such words as "spectacular", "world-class", and "peerless" come to mind. I do not use these words lightly. It was indeed a special competition.

When I was asked to serve on the jury I accepted with mixed feelings. My aversion to competitions is no secret, and I have spoken out publicly against their dark side. But my interest in the music of Liszt is also no secret, and the organizers presumably thought that my opinion would be valuable. I am glad that I accepted their invitation. The experience gave me some valuable insights, not only into competitions, but into competitors as well.

The fourteen-hour journey from Toronto was difficult. I arrived in Budapest exhausted and went straight to bed. It was a bad mistake. I slept deeply for five hours and woke up at three o'clock in the morning, wide awake and ready to go. But where do you go at three o'clock in the morning? I opened the drawer of my night-table and brought out the inevitable copy of Gideon's Bible with which all hotel rooms now seem to be equipped. It was Martin Luther's beautiful German translation, and I settled down to improve my knowledge of that language. I opened the book at random and my eye fell upon Matthew, Chapter 7, Verse 1: "Judge not, that ye be not judged." My worst fears seemed to be confirmed. I hastily closed the Good Book and decided that it would be more productive to unpack. For better or worse I was here to judge.

The next day I attended a meeting at the Liszt Academy called by Mr Tamás Klenjánsky, the genial Director of the Competition, who introduced the members of the jury to one another. They were: Sándor Falvay (Hungary, and Chairman of the jury), István Lantos (Hungary), György Nádor (Hungary), Lev Vlasenko (Soviet Union, and a former first prize-winner), France Clidat (France), Harold Schonberg (USA), Hubert Stuppner (Italy), and myself. Also present were Mr Klenjánsky's highly efficient secretary Mária Liszkay, and his multi-lingual translator Beata Schanda, both of whom looked after us with true devotion and

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attention to detail throughout the entire competitions. Mr Klenjánsky distributed a copy of the Rules of the Competition, and explained to the jury the type of marking system to be adopted. Since this system helped in large measure to determine who were the prize-winners, I shall have more to say about it presently.

The Competition was heralded by an opening concert, during which the members of the jury were introduced to the audience. The playing order of the competitors was also determined at this concert, by lottery: the youngest competitor, fifteen-year-old Evelina Borbély, drew a name at random from a drum in which all the names had been mixed. The dubious honour of opening the contest fell to the German pianist, Heinz-Walter Florin. Thereafter, everyone played in strict alphabetical order. Although 70 competitors had registered, only 33 showed up. This was a relief to the jury; 33 is a large number, but it is at least manageable.

Let me return to the marking-system within which each member of the jury was obliged to work. Mr Klenjánsky explained that the marks would range from 1 to 25, with 25 as the highest. After each candidate had played, the jurors were to record their individual mark on a confidential slip of paper which would then be collected by the secretary and placed at once within a sealed envelope. These envelopes would in turn be placed in a sealed box. Not until that box was opened in full view of the jury, at the end of each stage of the contest, would the jurors see one another's marks for the first time. A candidate would require an *average* mark of 16 or more in order to proceed to the semi-finals; and an *average* mark of 20 or more in order to proceed to the finals. According to the rules of the competition, the highest and the lowest marks awarded to each competitor were to be eliminated before the averages were calculated. This was intended to prevent any individual juror from creating wild swings in the numbers, and determining the results. And because of the way in which averages work, it would be possible for a prize-winner to emerge who was not the first choice of any of the jurors.

The advantages of such a system are obvious. Since there could be no possibility of collusion (the marks having been immediately placed under lock and key), the jurors and the candidates were free to discuss the merits of individual performances at any time, and several did so. Under different conditions, the jurors and the competitors would have to be segregated. The disadvantages of such a system are not so obvious, but are nonetheless real. There were many times when I and the other jurors were inhibited against giving a very high, or a very low mark (however well-deserved) for fear of losing it if it fell at either end of the spectrum. This had the predictable effect of driving all the marks towards the middle, so that the differences between the candidates were often expressed in fractions of a percentage-point—too small to be meaningful. Perhaps I am being irreverent, but I was reminded of a game of poker, with the jurors silently wondering what marks were recorded on each other's cards, and considering whether or not to increase the stakes.

It is not hard to see why more and more competitions are adopting such marking-systems. I call it the "Competitor's Revenge." In years past, there have

been some sorry spectacles of juries getting into violent quarrels, packing their bags, and leaving town in a huff, simply because certain players did not get through to the finals. Warsaw, Moscow, and Leeds have all witnessed these displays of temperament. This does nobody any good, least of all the competitors. The recently-published memoirs of Fanny Waterman (one of the founding members of the Leeds Piano Competition) and of Sir William Glock (the first Chairman of the Jury of that same Competition) tell of the harrowing arguments that went on behind closed doors as the jury struggled to reach its verdict, both in 1966 and in 1969. And in the worst days of the Cold War, politics played a role in the results—at any rate, in Central and Eastern Europe. There had to be a better way; juries had to be put in their place. With the "impartial" system of the Liszt Competition, all argument is stifled (or made redundant). The numbers do everything. They are clean, clinical, irrefutable.

Even the Liszt Competition itself has not always been immune from internal strife. It was held for the very first time in May 1933, and Ernst von Dohnányi (the Director of the Liszt Academy at that time) had gathered together a distinguished jury. The problem arose because Emil von Sauer, so it was rumoured, was having an affair with Angelica Morales, who was then a young, pretty, but rather insignificant pianist. Sauer was determined to have her win the first prize. When he saw that she was getting fairly low marks in the semi-finals, he declared the Competition "fixed" and announced to the press that "the spirit of Liszt guides him to leave." Several members of the jury (also pupils of Liszt) issued prompt refutations of Sauer's charges, and the competition continued without him—and without Angelica. As everyone knows, the first prize was eventually awarded to the eighteen-year-old Annie Fischer—a pupil of Dohnányi.

The Dohnányi story is now a part of pianistic folklore. But it raises a central question. Should teachers serve on juries of competitions in which their own pupils are competitors? (Several jurors in the Competition of '91 found themselves judging their own students; indeed, one of those students won the first prize.) There are two schools of thought. On the one hand, it is argued, if the marking system eliminates the lowest and the highest marks from the final calculations, that should remove any expression of prejudice those marks might otherwise express. The other school of thought (to which I belong) is that such a device is beside the point. We are dealing with *perception*. Even if the marking system is absolutely foolproof, there will always remain a lurking suspicion that the jury was swayed by personal considerations. In a court of law, the issue would not even be debated. Any judge would instantly disqualify himself from a case in which he had a personal relationship with one or more of the parties. Why not in piano competitions?

But to return to this particular Competition. What was the jury looking for? I can speak only for myself. Liszt often attracts the wrong pianists. These are the players who are built like tanks and can drive the piano through the floorboards. Why these qualities are deemed to be desirable for Liszt (by some musicians, at least) I have never been able to understand. The greatest Liszt players have never possessed them, but today they are fashionable. That is unfortunate, since they

help to give Liszt a bad name. I have remarked on other occasions that Liszt is not "performer proof". How often have we left a Chopin recital that has gone badly, saying "What a bad pianist!" And how often have we left a Liszt recital that has gone badly, saying "What a bad composer!" The sins of the interpreter are visited upon Liszt in a way that simply could not happen with other composers.

What, then, are the marks of great Liszt playing? There is an aphorism which helps us towards a definition: "The less the more." It has to do with economy of means. The less the pianist puts in, the more he gets out. The more he puts in, the less he gets out. That sounds like strange advice to give for the interpretation of the music of one of the leaders of the Romantic movement. Was not Liszt himself full-blooded, impetuous, rhetorical? Yes, he was. But we should never forget that there soon arrives in Liszt a law of diminishing returns. Since his music already contains within it so much that is rhetorical, it suffers genuine harm when the performer adds yet more rhetoric of his own. Indeed, in the worst cases the player may push the music to the brink of vulgarity. It is therefore very important to place some distance between himself and the music. No matter what storms are brewing at the keyboard, he must remain above and beyond it all. That is what Liszt meant when he referred to the ideal technique as being "transcendental". Technique itself has to be transcended. His music, in short, must be allowed to speak without the benefit of those meaningless "interventions" on the part of the player—agogic accents, rubatos, rallentandos, and opaque pedallings—the last refuge of the player who cannot handle the difficulties and therefore tries to obscure them.

The first round, as one would expect, contained both good and bad. It was the primary task of the jury to hear 33 recitals containing some of Liszt's most formidable studies (Chasse-neige, Gnomenreigen, La Leggierezza, La Campanella, among them), to determine the differences, and to send the best 12 candidates forward to the semi-finals. I found this very difficult, for among the 21 candidates who had to be rejected were some advanced talents. Several individual performances linger in the mind's ear. I recall with pleasure the playing of Deborah Kiszely, and Joo Ann Koo (during whose performance of Nuages Gris the stage lights went out, providing an unwitting visual counterpart to the "Grey Clouds" of the music). Kyoko Saito's playing was near-ideal, but she too was knocked out in the first round. I shall never understand why. Her performances of Chasse-neige and the A minor Paganini Study were world class. Her delivery was flawless, and even while she was creating fireworks galore, she presided over the keyboard with magisterial ease. Her removal from the competition gave me a bad conscience. (Ms Saito, wherever you are, I want you to know that you stole my musical heart.) Leonid Kuzmin's performance of Liszt's Second Rhapsody created a minor sensation. He not only brought a totally fresh approach to this jaded work, but he knocked the jury flat by adding Rachmaninov's rarely-heard Cadenza to it.

If there was a general weakness among the competitors it had to do with the fact that many of them (even the best ones) had not yet learned that the very hall

in which they played was itself a musical instrument—which could make or break them. It is never enough to play the piano; one must also "play the building". Now the Great Hall of the Liszt Academy is rightly admired for its visual beauty, and even for its sound, but it is treacherous. It has such a lively acoustic, in fact, that beyond a certain volume the lower register of the keyboard simply produces noise rather than definite notes, particularly if the hall happens to be half empty. We heard deafening performances of *Funérailles*, and *Wilde Jagd* in which you could not hear the notes for the noise. The competitors might as well have been drilling the road outside.

Seven competitors reached the finals. Each player had to perform Liszt's B minor Sonata, that monumental work which has become the graveyard of so many pianists today. The jury then went into conclave to consider its verdict (or, rather, to be confronted by those cold numbers which symbolized the Will of the Majority). The first prize went to Alexandr Strukov (Soviet Union), the second prize was shared between Midori Nohara (Japan) and Leonid Kuzmin (USA); while the third prize was shared between Etelka Csuprik and Valerie Shkarupa (both of the Soviet Union). A special prize was created for the young sensation of the competition, Evelina Borbély, whose formidable talent is bound to secure for her a brilliant reputation. Later that evening, the prize-winners assembled in the Great Hall to receive their awards and to play a Liszt concerto of their choice, with the Hungarian Radio Orchestra. This Gala Concert was attended by the President of Hungary and the Queen of Spain, and it brought this most memorable competition to a fitting climax.

"Competitions are for horses", Bartók used to declare. That remark needs to be qualified. Competitions are for race-horses. Cart-horses need not apply. With race-horses talk is about form, bloodlines, the condition of the track. And so, too, with piano competitions. What conservatory? Which teacher? What kind of piano? How many races were won so far this season? Such talk governs the conversation at all international contests, and it is the talk of cynics. That should not be surprising since competitions create many more losers than winners. When I am asked my opinion about it all, especially by the losers, I become philosophical. It is very important to win a competition, I say. But it is not at all important to lose one. And when I am asked to explain that paradox, as I invariably am, I reply: "How many prize-winners of the last twenty-five years have gone on to enjoy international careers?" A long silence ensues while my interlocutors rack their brains. "And how many pianists presently on the world stage did not win any competitions at all?" The long silence gets longer. I rest my case.

Paul Griffiths

Hungaroton/Quintana Records

There are many Liszts. Two of them, radically different, are brought to life in new recordings by Károly Mocsári (Hungaroton HCD 31203) and Dezső Ránki (Quintana QUI 903024), each of which extracts a tragic-dramatic repertory from the enormous oeuvre, but where Mocsári's selections are from the grand, public virtuoso music, Ránki's strengths are rather in the very private late music. Mocsári, born in 1962, is obviously a formidable technician, flinging his fingers around some of Liszt's most taxing music: *Après une lecture de Dante, Funérailles,* the Fantasy and Fugue on BACH, and the not so familiar B minor Ballade. But as this choice of pieces must also suggest, he has a strong sense of the high drama of Lisztian fantasy form: these are strongly, purposefully projected performances as well as extraordinary showpieces. There is also here an essential simplicity, a candour, that seems right.

In that respect Ránki could hardly be more different. His playing has a delicate sophistication that searches out cross-currents of feeling, and captures well the bitterness and self-disgust that goes along with the lamenting, say, of *La lugubre gondola.* He also includes some of the least well known utterances of the aged abbé, such as the short slow movements for the Transfiguration and for St Dorothea. One could wish, though, that he had gone further in this exploring rather than include yet another version of the B minor Sonata, since here his calculation of phrasing and sonority conveys an impression of awkwardness: one longs for Mocsári's natural ease and readiness.

Another poignant contrast with Ránki's generally distinguished recording is provided by a disc of Liszt's "chamber music" (HCD 11798), which includes virtually his entire output in what was for him so distant a medium. For here is *La lugubre gondola* again, in a version for cello and piano that inevitably soups up the melancholy and makes the piece a much more ordinary thing than it seems in Ránki's performance. Most of the other pieces in this anthology are also arrangements, and again the colouring vulgarizes: another example is the Elegy no.1, a late piece for cello, piano, harp and harmonium, though this has the advantage of Miklós Perényi in the intense, rocking melody part.

Another distinctive performer is Mária Zádori, whose astonishingly fresh, young-toned soprano graced one of the outstanding Mozart releases of 1991. She is again exceptional in a recording of Pergolesi's *Stabat mater* (QUI 903011), partnered by a beautifully agile, sensuous counter-tenor, Derek Lee Ragin, with the old-instrument ensemble Capella Savaria under Pál Németh. Also included here are two of Pergolesi's settings of the *Salve regina,* rather in the same engagingly demonstrative style, and again suiting Zádori's angelic manner perfectly.

She is perhaps less natural as a Monteverdi singer, and altogether the companion recording on QUI 903014 of "madrigals" (really dramatic solos, duets

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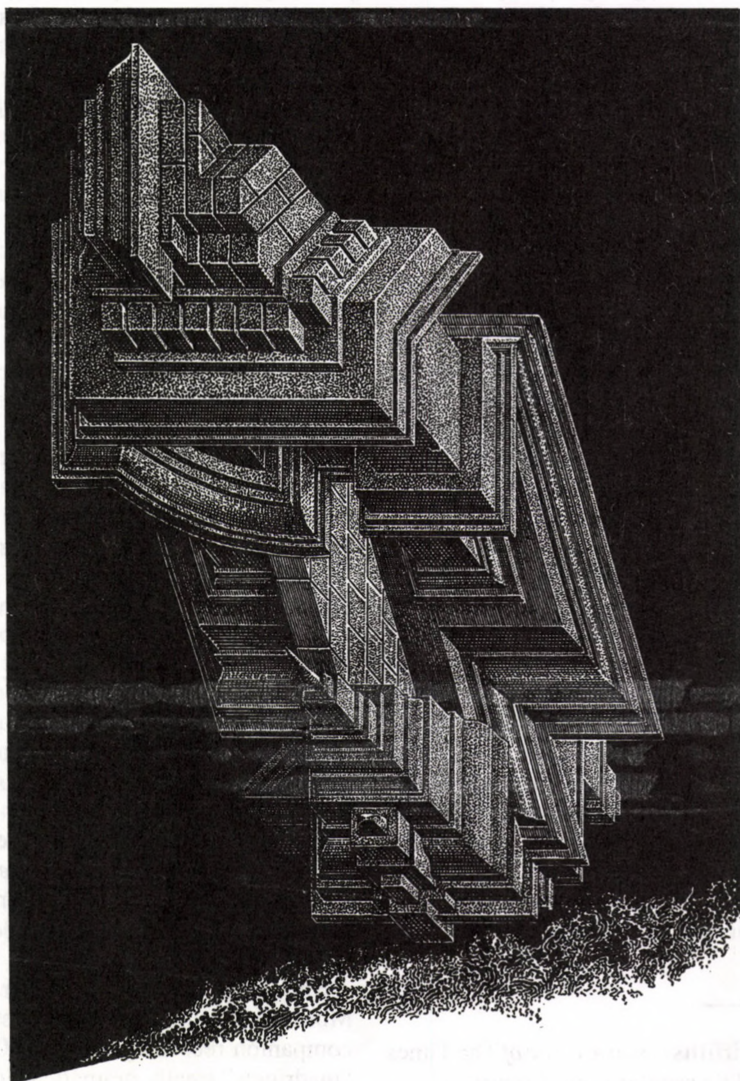
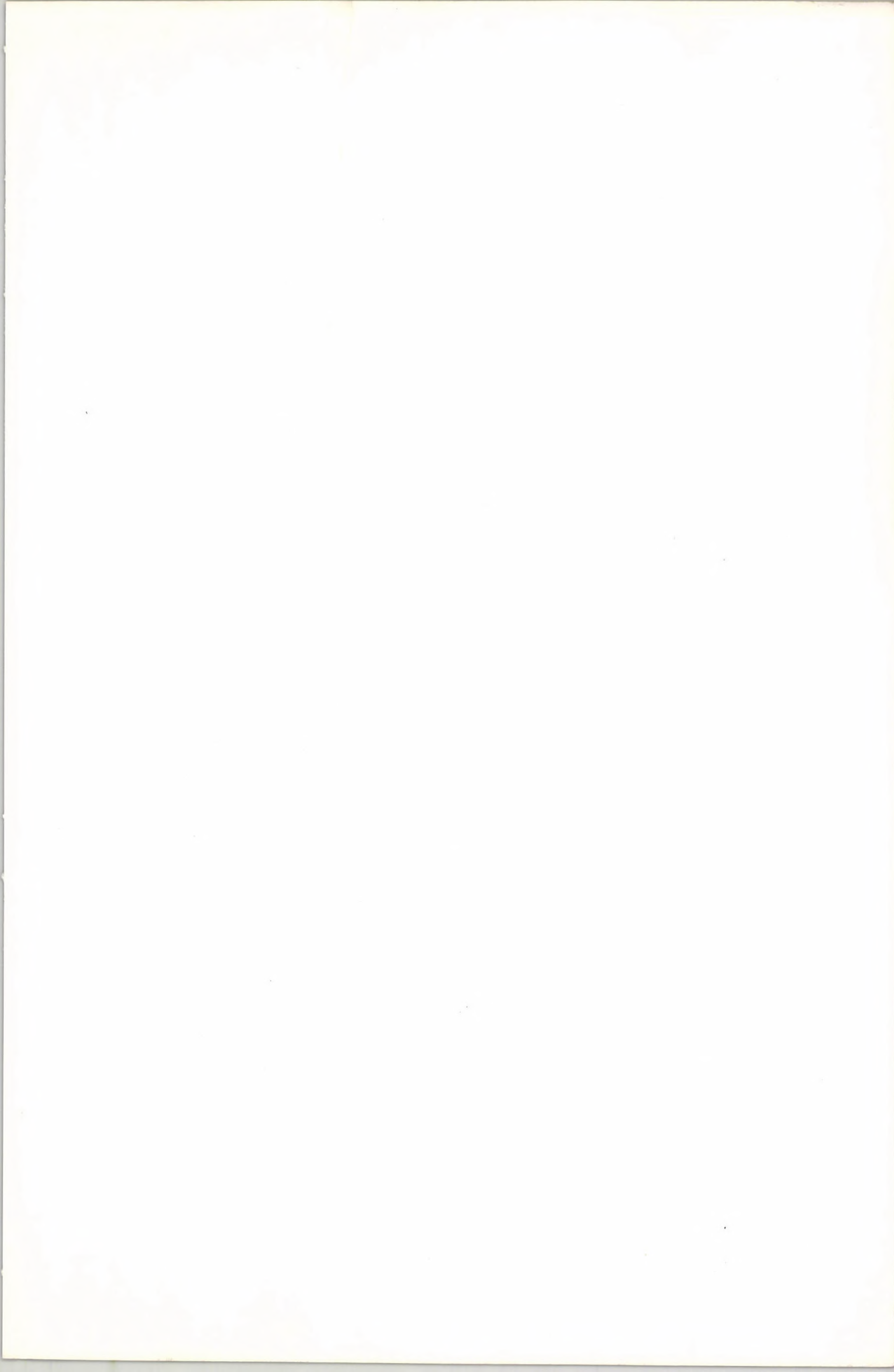
and scenes for the most part) from his later collections is less convincing. The singing is fine and lively, but it needs more flesh on it, more rasp and bite and tang. There are good things, though, from the two tenors, Guy de Mey and Martin Klietman. Nicholas McGegan directs and accompanies, with members of the Capella Savaria once more in the more fully scored items.

Finally a brief bravo for the third and final volume of Michael Bilson's complete recording of Mozart's solo sonatas, the first on a reproduction eighteenth-century piano. This double album (HCD 31013-14) covers again a wide chronological range (wide, that is, in the foreshortened terms of Mozart's lifetime), and includes the C minor fantasy and sonata. Played on an early-style piano, the fantasy in particular seems quite as defiantly clamorous and on the edge as Liszt's most powerful music in the hands of Mocsári. This is an exciting issue.





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The idea of Europe does not merely require, it depends upon a defence of its culture; and this European culture is nothing else than the defence of a certain conception of human nature. This is why the composition of "Europe" must be inclusive as well as exclusive: inclusive of those nations whose political and civil structure presents that conception of human nature, and exclusive of those that do not, or do not yet, present it.

From: *Concept and Symbol of Europe*
by John Lukacs, p. 3.