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THEATRE & FILM

Károly Bari

To Be a Gypsy and a Poet

Reflections on Poetry, Prejudice and the Past

Our traditions preserve us. They do battle with time daily for our sake, they guide us through the ages, they teach us to be teachers. Knowingly or by instinct, we impart to our children the legacy of our forbears, the knowledge received from them—words and gestures, of celebration, of grief, things to help us find our way in the world.

So are past traditions preserved by us. We guard these traditions and do not let them fade away, for they define our being, our place in the community, empowering us to pass on knowledge of who we are.

But keeping traditions and customs alive in the ethnological sense is only one part of the story. There is also the all-important question: Must a poet shape his art and imagination according to the dictates of a traditional culture? The question is not just theoretical, for in this part of the world the problem of adherence to a set of cultural norms is present at the very earliest stage of a promising artistic career. In our region the "writer with a mission" remains a potent ideal; poets are still seen as leaders of people, with programmes to save an entire nation. Assuming this traditional role requires that the poet employ those themes and styles that the public acknowledges as being appropriately "poetic"; this is the only way his works can have any impact, the only way he himself can be regarded as the real thing.

Tradition marks out its own boundaries, it defines the dominant features of its terrain and assigns them meaning. A writer wishing to situate his work within the confines of this territory has at his disposal well-tested models, ready-made ingredients.

But is this usable property? The imagination never follows preconceived plans, unpredictability is its reason for being, allowing for the random flow of ideas, the ability to connect the real with what lies beyond reality.

Yet the basic forms of traditional culture cannot be abandoned, either,

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if only because they play a part in the way we think and create order in our world.

There is a recurrent motif in the decorative art of both African and arctic peoples: the depiction of animal prints left in sand or snow. These records, on shields, pottery and other household objects, are not realistic representations. The patterns of painted or carved footprint samples become symbolic images, abstract configurations, often reminding these people of the zoomorphic footprints of mythic ancestors.

As the imprint of beasts and birds remains in the sand or in snow, so do sights, feelings, happenings leave their mark on human consciousness. Poets create their images from just such traces, according to their artistic will and ability. They turn the most fleeting of perceptions and impressions—fog settling in for the night on stairs, a quiet whisper, a throbbing rush of blood, a pale dawn—into individualized symbols.

Only in such memory traces can our origins, our traditions be revealed, as part of a system of poetic signs. They cannot gain the upper hand, however, for then they may overwhelm other symbols and empty them of meaning. But if they assume their appropriate place in a poem, along with its other constituent elements, then the finished work doesn't merely echo an infinite past, but evokes the heartbeat of a real world that turns its back on that infinity.

I believe that a poet cannot allow himself to conform to the well-worn norms of tradition, although, morally, he is duty bound to acknowledge the essence of his communal heritage, especially if it acts not as an impediment, a barrier, but as a source of inspiration, an aid to the imagination. If the works born of this inspiration can testify to the poet's sense of liberation, his love of the unusual, his intimate knowledge of the world.

One may fully embrace the traditions of his community, in a strict ethnographic sense, or in the form of emotional, intellectual sympathy, though either way such commitment has its dangers—especially if these traditions are rooted in distant cultures. For the majority, the traditions may be unacceptably alien, and their practitioners may also seem annoyingly different. Societies from time to time expel from their midst minorities whose ways are unlike theirs; they consider them inferior, beyond the pale, expendable.

Are there people who in such circumstances are ready to protect and rescue the innocent victims? Are there people who will at least try?

The reason why there aren't is perhaps because humanity is like nature; things take their course and indifference reigns. Rocks do not protect trees when they are about to be chopped down. And trees do not prevent rocks from being toppled.

Except if there is a miracle. Yes, a miracle must occur for the unmoved and immovable to turn compassionately against destruction. Trees must shoot out their branches all the way to the sky to scare off intruders. And rocks must raise themselves into a mighty wall with which to surround and safeguard the trees.

We know of such miracles.

We know of people who, heeding the word from on high, risked their lives to help those in mortal danger. During the time of the Nazi Holocaust there were many who stood up to the madness of racial hatred. Religious institutions, diplomats in embassies, ordinary citizens were active in sheltering and saving people who suffered for being different. In the awesome partitura of a terrible age, compassion itself transcribed the secret notes of an inspiring melody, and they were sounded on the heartstrings of those who had the courage to decipher the notes. They were there to help conceal and save members of communities and nations persecuted by the Nazis.

But not the Gypsies.

Nobody hid them, nobody procured letters of safe-conduct for them, no one paid much attention to their annihilation. Even miracles were selective; no tree was made to sprout extra leaves, no stone walls were raised for their protection.

There is a type of prejudice that manifests itself in inaction. People who are cast out on account of their race are left to their fate mainly because the majority tacitly approves of the expulsion. They don't offer to help even when it's in their power to do so, and the reason is clear: the victims belong to a branded group. The problem is not cowardice but indifference, the kind that is brought on by a prejudice.

It is true that these people's aversions do not degenerate into brute force, yet the feelings lurking behind their inaction do resemble those that erupt in monstrous deeds. Even mild prejudices can fuel racial hatred, which has to be one of the cruelest of human emotions regardless of the form it assumes.

But what is it that calls such emotions into being? What is behind the hatred of the "other"? Why the age-old animosity toward Gypsies, for instance? What brought it on, what brings it on still? Their lifestyle? Their character? A set of external features? And how is it spread?

I've often thought that words of hate, as soon as they are spoken, come alive and turn into swarms of tiny creatures with rustling wings. And as they take to the air, they touch people one by one, each touch enabling these creatures to secretly penetrate a person's consciousness.

Or maybe it doesn't happen quite so fancifully. Perhaps it's the pull of reality that disfigures human attitudes.

The hostility toward Gypsies can be traced back to the image most people have of them—a distorted image that is nevertheless thought to be true to life. The mysterious, the unknowable and unpossessable invariably evokes fear. And this fear seeps deep into our thoughts and narrows our outlook. Gypsies, with their uniquely free lifestyle, their authentic traditions and folkways, their refusal to accept society's harness, always had an air of mystery about them. Their communities, closed and mistrustful because of constant persecution, remained completely unknown to the outside word.

For centuries, the image of the Gypsy was based on fantasy, superstition, vicious rumour, and official reports of criminal proceedings. The lives of ostracized and stigmatized Gypsies must have seemed so inferior and degraded, so utterly devoid of redeeming features, the general feeling probably was that they didn't deserve to be saved. Gypsy survivors of the Holocaust have told me that even in the concentration camps, when placed in the same barrack with members of other nationalities, they were sometimes assaulted by their inmates just for being Gypsies.

I am not sure if it's possible to find an explanation for this. It is hard to fathom that at that lowest level of human degradation and helplessness, where death lay in wait for every single prisoner, there were still some for whom the nearness of a fellow prisoner from a despised race was more unbearable—if only for a flashing instant—than being in the shadow of imminent death.

Perhaps the explanation lies in that mystifying process, after all: in the invasive, teeming force produced by hateful words come alive. For anti-Gypsy sentiments over the centuries have become so pervasive, so ingrained, no rational explanation can be offered for the indifference that greeted Gypsies being hauled off to the killing fields, or for the cases of abuse inside the camps.

In recent decades groups of Gypsy artists have become more self-aware and assertive. Some have entered the public arena and tried in more visible ways to dispel prejudices and myths that are still very much a part of the dominant culture. But because they were unfamiliar with the ground rules of public discourse, their searingly truthful, too-trenchant interventions did not help their cause.Their aggressive, brutally frank anti-establishment stance was born out of instinctive fear rather than boldness. They were afraid that state-sponsored assimilation would put an end to the traditions that had sustained them, and dispose of their language as well. And when that happens, when assimilation does away with language, surely the pinnacle of a people's cultural existence, the guarantee of their collective identity, then a people, as a people, ceases to exist. This fear-inspired frankness may be likened to the sting of a bee, which is delivered as a means of self-defense, even though the bee may die in the process. Predictably, the defensive action taken by Gypsy intellectuals evoked a punishingly hostile reaction and led to new forms of prejudice.

To be a Gypsy and a poet is a tall order; it means a solemn commitment to fight exclusion and hate. Yet a poet who wants to identify with his people need not wear the mantle of a visionary sage—especially if he is drawn by nature to aesthetic ideals which may be realized in language more universal than that expected from a poet with a sense of mission. In any case, I do not believe that modern poetry can be broken down into wholly disparate national variants. There are only two kinds of poetry—good and bad. At the same time, there are undeniable memory traces that point to one's origins. Like flash signals they elucidate a poem. In a bigoted environment, however, even these signals, which in reality are a poet's hallmarks, will be seen as negative racial attributes.

A poet who is the child of a scorned people can go in one of two directions: he can either aim for the heights or descend to the depths. I believe he must do the latter: work his way down to the very core of a reality that is made of both tangible and inapprehensible things. The lower he can plunge, the greater the force will be that will uplift him. The more profound his knowledge is of life's lower end, the higher his poetry will reach. And if his work is recognized by the world, this can be regarded as a victory over the prejudices directed at his ancestral community.

He must try to reach his goals even if he knows full well that a long time must pass before his own people will get to read what he wrote—for they must first overcome the burdensome legacy of centuries of backwardness and neglect. And this is so even though he knows, too, that words are like the human body, they become exhausted and age-worn with the passage of time; they falter, their meaning weakens, they can no longer carry the vital messages entrusted to them by their author.

Only by himself can a poet send off a poem packed with inexhaustible meaning, one that will stand up to boundless time. In it he strips to the bone and divides his presence among his words. It is his total honesty that ensures the inviolability of the poem's core, its power source. He peels away appearances and confers on his words all the certainties of his being, the totality of his instinctual and intellectual self. This way the power and worth of his poetic statement will be enhanced, renewed by the response of succeeding ages. The passage of time will not diminish its meaning but lead to the discovery of newer and newer layers of meaning. Only such resonant words can carry the messages entrusted to them to the farthest reaches of time.

Tradition itself is preserved and transformed by the written word. A genuine work of art can indeed strengthen a people's identity; its life, its world finds expression in symbolic correspondences, coded messages in the sequence of images. For in order to convey a sense of reality, a poem need not be minutely realistic. Clearly, things of the real world become the stuff of poetry through creative transformation; deep-reaching experience, the lasting imprint of past and present are shaped by gifted hands, and metamorphosed into the language of symbol and metaphor.

A poem finding its reader is the poet's greatest reward. If he is lucky this encounter will occur while he is still alive. But it may happen that he will be long gone and the reader for whom the poem was made still has not been born.

It is like reaching out in the night. The sender of a letter is asleep, and so is the person to whom the letter is addressed. Yet the mail train will not be stopped, it cuts through the endless night, taking the letter from sleeping sender to sleeping recipient. The hope lives on that a streak of light will rend the darkness, and in that glorious flash the message will reach the one for whom it was committed to paper.

Translated by Ivan Sanders

Károly Bari

Poems

Translated by Daniel Hoffman with Eszter Molnár

Death of a Stag

A szarvas halála

1

From north to south, leaf-scented solitude,
stuttering of leaves, thunder of birds' wings beating
against the sky, what kind of king rattles
the fallen branches, abased to black bones?
the wind laments his flashing limbs, on his splintered
crown the smut of blood, the peal of littered leaves
greeted the flowers, flowers for the king,
leaf-scented solitude!

2

The trees' breathing grates
on clouds' brows, as though a storm were raging,
green fire were darting, crested, with tears of wild roses,
these leafy spears whisper without mercy,
impaling eagles, their shadows
full of pain, in their shadows with open-lipped wound adorned
lies the king, a dying stag, guarded by troubled silence.
Sparkling moments sleep in the forsaken house.

My Anguish Set Me on My Way

Kínom indított útnak

Chimney reeking raw poverty
with crumbling walls, wind-torn roof
my den hung in the world, knotted into misery up to the chin.

My anguish set me on my way,
across sun-baked fields,
and the cold depths of valleys,
to take my own measure,
to strike stars out of blood and perspiration,
to rip my cursing mother's malediction
off of my despoiled sixteen years.

The singed shirts of my hell-fire blood
clothed me as a stranger
through the scintillation of my past looms the house,
from which my obstinate belief drove me to solitude,
drove me out into the world from emblazoned poverty
to tear about in the wide world like a dragon.

My heartbeat spins fate out of its place,
the rags of memory blaze up rekindled,
my face freezes into my childhood,
bygone sorrows intrude into my days,
and I must be saddened, again and again fall back
into burnt-out past, threadbare memories.

Suitor's Song

Menyasszonykérő

Panting roses fall to the ground,
lips blanched by grief:
frost, let us set out
into the whispering of black lily-forests
for the girl who trims her skirt with lace
of brushwood fire, let us bring
a tempestuous bride's dance

within our walls, spurred
with vigilant lamplights,
let's step into the snow-white houses of love
with our sparkling hearts held
above our heads,
we have come
for the joy hidden
in the rustling of ragged shirts,
give up the bride
bound with the immortal souls
of seagulls, under the threshold so no curse
can fall on her, we are here, the wedding-party riding
on the roar of driven winds, with our fingers' bone-stakes
we nail birds' songs into the sky,
faces of crushed flowers
lean into our breath,
adorned with garlands of tears
deliver the girl, let our fiery carriage
carry her off, let no one
weep for her,
from beneath closed eyelids curl clouds of smoke.

Winter Diary

Téli napló

Snow, fog, fingerprints
sprouting swans' feathers
on the windowpanes, the candles
walk the sills covered
with bristly carpets: the pine branches
in white wax dress suits,
flame flickers on the trays balanced upon their heads,
we still wait for someone, someone is coming now, will blaze up
before our door, like fiery hair: lightning
on the black soap of the sky, and pleads admittance,
tells memories of the light tying to his waist-belt
the dew-scalps of flowers, piercing together
our faces, saved from beneath the ice-harrow of the eaves,
like potsherds inscribed in cuneiform, and whispers, grieve,
in the lake rising in place of the trundled-away night

burning hot, golden pitch bubbles, into it is cast
your heretic youth, the hands fumbling among the pearl-cargo of brows
tremble, can youth have come to an end?
is the flying in the face of the storms' whetted breath
at an end? then why do I hear
the shrieking of imagination pressed against
the grindstone of fate? neon lights
strive hissing, boxed in, enclosed by the squares,
in the snow-saddle of lamp-maned streets
galloping round and round
consciousness balances
on vertebrae superimposed, escorting me handcuffed,
the clatter of heel irons, guards, guards,
from behind the shutters of their lips
they expel the manikins of spittle, show their teeth,
the blood-red fish-scales of days borne away: time
strews twilights among the onlookers,
is the march at an end? my tear-gloved eyes
are still black ice-fists, it is winter, it has always been winter since then,
through the walls gleam the snow-spokes of the wind, you stand
in your wide-open window, inevitably,
with unappeasable brow
protest, as they lead me away in chains before your eyes,
your touch burns away
the snow-buds sprouting on your velvet dress,
you send after me the flash
of the glowing red-hot knives
that sleep in your heart, send me a message,
your messengers are cloud-wigged rains, leaves, dreams, the
petal-lamellas
of roses moulded by dew-hammers,
from the seaside cliff
a moon with earlocks of mist stares down
at the depths mounted in spray
as though it were an appraiser in a pawn-shop,
it too always brings a message from you,
it is with your message the snow
stealing beneath the door awaits my awakening:
radiance still our companion, still glides with us, still questions us,
we are sun-fires gasping, writhing before mirrors,
our gestures watch us,
it is winter, unbanishable winter,

at daybreak you sew shirts
for consciousness reproducing infinity, the dawns
slipping lightning-like through the eyes of the needle, the beds,
the jealous lovers
who, sharing pleasure, wrestle each other,
the pines shooting out from the mountain peaks flash,
the snowflakes tugging at the frosty topknots of the grasses, our fears,
the forests tie cloud-bands
around their silver hair
and flatten the parchment scroll
of silence before them,
our lips are the footprints
of lightning-booted cries, I love you, I love you,
the hands of the trees move
as though they were writing.

The Day After

Másnap

Tomtits hopping on the white keys of winter,
they alone remember
the bled-to-death notes of the gardens:
they alone recall the cherries
strung by a single hair to the dimension lines of the branches,
and the thunderbolts gliding on their red skis
down the dark slopes of the clouds to administer justice,
caught between the black splinter-teeth of my eyelashes
time writhes, glittering, uncompelled imagination
proves its loyalty now, stands guard,
poem, poem, suspended death, night, snow-corroded streets,
a torrent veiled by the golden dribble of the moon
surges towards my heart: desperate sky,
fog-wafer crumbles on my tongue, I take the sacrament in silence,
they stare at me in terror,
in the hearth of their mouths my guests, feigning twilight:
red poppies arriving on wheat-stalk brooms
to the witch-Sabbath of memories
stare at me in terror,
because the tallow-throated candle
whimpers a tiny flame in the palm of my hand

and among the veins blowing red snake-stone at the cross-roads of my
body
God begins to haunt, as though doing penance,
he who made his son trample underfoot
the assembly of spume-teethed waves
listening to the gulls' mass, begins to haunt now,
appears suddenly, resplendent, from the depths of midnight-thick blood,
as if the wind were unwinding the ash-turbans of the embers,
and helpless fields
infested with dew-blisters cry out
in their cradles hung on crows' wings,
as when the bones of a herd of suicidal whales
blaze into their dreams from the rocky shores,
powerful conquerors: the lambs
kneel before the thistles
whose helmets are studded with iron thorns, and cry,
the dead knock at my door,
I do not let them in, hide from them,
a memory defiled by the chain of fear:
shaking behind the back of a black-thorn bear
flailing its arms towards bees spitting honey I fall asleep,
and start up—I have become a sludge-letter
on the silky pages of the depths
where the water browses through me.

Ádám Bodor

Give or Take a Day

(Short story)

Seen from the main road, the prison building lept up out of the smoothness of the meadow like some sort of natural wonder, as a solid, white rock. A blue and white road sign showed that this was a cul-de-sac; from here a short link road led to the main gate, opposite which stood the red brick building of the barracks, and under the dusty horse chestnuts, a wooden hut fitted out as a general store. Somewhere in the distance, above the acacias, the image of a church tower quivered in the air.

A motor vehicle stopped in front of the hut. Two soldiers jumped down and hand-ed demijohns to each other, which they arranged on both sides of the hut. An officer got out of the driver's cab and walked towards the main gate. He passed the benches set against the wall on which the guards usually sat at around the time for their relief. Now a scruffy-looking man with short hair was sitting on one of the benches. It was at this time, around noon, that the prisoners were generally released.

"It looks like Sturm," said the officer to the sergeant standing in the gate.

The sergeant looked in the register.

"That's who it is," he said. "Elemér Sturm left us at noon today."

Sturm stuck a cigarette between his lips, then put his hand in his pocket and took out a round tin. It was a bootpolish tin with a piece of cloth in it burnt black. He held the lower half of the tin with the burnt rag in it between his knees, with the lid at right angles above it. From his other pocket he fished out a white china button; a string was threaded through the holes, so that by pulling it rhythmically you could get it to spin, like some sort of child's toy. He let the rapidly spinning button touch the lid of the tin, and from the sparks flying off and the breath directed at it the burnt rag started to shrivel. So much so that Sturm could light his cigarette with it.

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While he was smoking Sturm watched the soldiers lining up the demijohns. Later he too went over to the hut, pressing his nose against the glass, gazing in.

When the soldiers had finished, an armed corporal and a rookie came over from the red barracks and asked the driver for a lift to the main road. The link road was about three hundred metres. Behind the cul-de-sac sign on the left side of the road stood a small guard-room; in its shade two other soldiers were resting in the grass while waiting for their relief. Two prisoners were whitewashing the guard-room; they were guarding those.

The prisoners were covered in paint from head to foot, they looked like real painters. They behaved like that too, as if they were doing a favour, and the corporal himself only glanced towards the door when a car went past slower than usual on the main road.

The afternoon bus stopped there just to see whether there was a passenger for town. Just about no-one ever got off. Soon after the bus had started again with a brief toot, nearer to where the soldier and the corporal were sitting in the grass, at the edge of the corn-patch, the short-haired shabby man appeared with a parcel wrapped in a newspaper under his arm, and since this was the nearest bit of shade, he settled beside the guards.

They stared at his faded greenish tunic which he wore with the same coloured trousers and tatty boots. The name "Sturm" was stitched in white at the bottom of his tunic and after it a stock number. Although badges of rank had long been absent, you could tell by the material that it had once been an officer's uniform. Sturm had a grey, stubborn face like that of a post-mortem assistant.

The corporal and the soldier were smoking, and when he got a whiff Sturm too got out a cigarette, then his shoepolish tin, and, keeping the lid at right angles above the rag, he held the lower part between his knees.

"So you bungled it," said the corporal to the soldier, while both of them kept an eye on Sturm.

"I didn't want to," said the rookie.

"There's no such thing as not wanting to, when it comes to a woman. If you don't want it, you're sick. Or was she perhaps a relative of yours?"

"Course not."

"So what happened then?"

"She went off with a maths teacher."

"To a maths lesson."

As they chatted they watched the way Sturm lit his cigarette. When it was alight, Sturm looked towards them, and for a while they went on looking at each other.

"What sort of uniform is that?" the corporal asked Sturm.

"A uniform," Sturm said.

"But the buttons, I can tell, aren't the original ones."

"No, they aren't. The buttons were cut off in time," said Sturm. As he spoke he stared ahead into the grass. Around his neck the cigarette smoke was floating like silver strands of hair.

"You should go to a good tailor," said the corporal.

"You've got a bit fat for it," said the soldier.

"Definitely," said the corporal.

Sturm took a good look at himself, but not like one about to rush off to a tailor. He stared at himself blankly.

The corporal looked at Sturm from the side too.

"Not really fashionable," he said. "You look like an ice-cream man in it. Or the sort of bloke who hangs around schools, making children run."

Sturm stretched his arms with a bored movement. The sleeves of his tunic didn't reach his wrists.

"I don't think it can be mine," he said. "Or could my arms have grown?"

"It's possible, if that's what the food was like. Probably very likely."

"My back could have got broader?"

"You may have changed shape a bit," said the corporal.

"Whenever did you move here?"

"In forty-six," said Sturm, and spat his cigarette on the ground in front of him.

"If your tailor was an old man," said the corporal, "he must have died by now. How old are you?"

"I'm fifty-four," said Sturm. "You people worked it out today in the office."

"Didn't you know yourself, Mr Sturm?," the rookie asked.

Sturm looked at him, but didn't say a thing. He pulled at the sleeves of his tunic.

"Yes, he did," said the corporal to the soldier. "Of course he did."

"The human body really is strange," Sturm said to himself in a whisper. "My arms must have grown."

"You see?"

"It grows and grows," said the soldier.

"What?" asked the corporal.

"The human body," said the soldier.

Sturm eventually undid his buttons. The corporal gave the private a shove meaning he'd better keep quiet, then he turned towards Sturm.

"The afternoon bus has gone. We'll wave a car down for you to take you to the station."

"We'll see," said Sturm, and looked over to the main entrance where several prisoners were setting out to get drinking water with a huge barrel fitted into a cart. Two of them were pulling it, two pushing it.

Two corporals accompanied them.

"Is that you, Sturm?" asked one of them.

"Greetings!" said Sturm.

"Time flies."

They crossed the main road with the water barrel and into the meadow in the direction of the wells. The corporal got up and went into the guard-room to see how work was progressing. The rookie offered Sturm a cigarette, he got out his bootpolish tin. The soldier leant close and watched as the burnt rag started to shrivel from the tiny spark.

"I'll give you a box of matches for it."

"No way," replied Sturm, shaking his head. "I need it."

"A clever tool."

"Clever, yes," said Sturm, and put it back in his pocket. "Can you play merils?" he asked.

"Yes, I can," said the rookie.

"Let's play a game then." Sturm took out a marked handkerchief from his pocket and nine black pebbles. "Haven't you got any stones?" he asked the soldier.

"Not me," said the private.

"Then break off the heads of nine matches." They set out the stones and the match-heads on the handkerchief.

"Listen," said Sturm during the game. "You get a piece of rag and let it burn well and thoroughly with a good flame. Then you put your cap over it and stifle it. After that you pick it up very carefully, so that it doesn't fall apart, and put it in a bootpolish tin. Or any other tin. Then you get hold of a china button, the kind village children wear two of in their collars."

"Hey!" shouted the corporal. "Something is coming." Sturm sat bent over the handkerchief.

"Look at that position," he said to the rookie. "Do you agree that it's hopeless?"

The soldier looked in the direction of the corporal who was now standing on the main road and waving down an approaching truck.

"Come on, Sturm!" shouted the corporal. "Come on, you'll get a lift into town."

Sturm stood up. He looked at the truck for a while then at the corporal, and sat down again.

"Let's go on," he said to the rookie. "Let it go!" he shouted to the corporal. "I'm not going yet."

When the truck had gone the corporal returned.

"It'll soon be evening," he said. "He would have taken you to the station."

"No hurry," Sturm said.

The corporal sat down beside them in the grass and watched them playing until the wind suddenly lifted one side of the handkerchief with the match-heads. Sturm looked around.

"The wind's blowing," he said.

"That it is," said the corporal.

"We could go in there," said Sturm, pointing to the guard-room.

"I can't allow that," said the corporal gently.

Sturm got up, walked over to the main road, stopped at the edge, and leant out over it as if it were a river, then he walked back.

"Can't you play by heart?" he asked the soldier.

"I've never tried."

"You have to imagine the handkerchief and the eighteen stones. Your stones and mine. There's no way you can cheat."

"I don't think I could do that," said the soldier.

"Maybe not," said Sturm.

The sun was not quite so hot now. They moved over to the far side of the link road, opposite the guard-room where the painters were working.

"It'll be eight before they finish," said the corporal.

"They've got to get it done by nightfall."

"What's happening tomorrow?" asked the rookie.

"Children's Day," said the corporal.

The others were approaching with the water-barrel from the meadow behind the main road. One of the corporals stopped to talk to the other corporal. Sturm, on he other hand, set off beside the cart as if they had merely swapped places; later he too began to push it.

"Where's Sturm off to?" asked the rookie when they had gone some distance.

The corporal looked over to where Sturm had put down his parcel when he arrived.

"He'll be back. It's not him we're guarding."

"He can do what he likes now, right?" said the soldier. "He can loaf around to his heart's content."

"Yeah, he can," said the corporal. "He hasn't been able to loaf around for quite some time. He could have got away with 10 years. But he broke the rules when he was in charge of executions. He got them to strip and ordered them to shiver and moan. Only then did he allow them to be shot. He got 25 years for that. A bit of imagination can get you into trouble."

"Perhaps he could become an ice-cream man," said the soldier.

"Well, you know where he could go," said the corporal.

In the mean time Sturm had reached the gate with the water-barrel, and he walked in with the others. Once the gate had shut behind them, they were counted.

"What the hell?" said the sergeant at the gate. "That beats me."

And he recounted them. He could see there was one too many.

By that time Sturm had dropped back unobtrusively towards the gate-room. The corporal who had been with the prisoners pushing the barrel suddenly woke

up and started to explain that it was Sturm, and that Sturm had been released that morning. The sergeant looked in the register and he too saw that Sturm had been released that morning.

"What the hell are you up to, Sturm?" shouted the sergeant. "Where the devil did you want to go at this time of the evening?"

Sturm was at a loss: he looked around in an obstinate sort of way and shrugged his shoulders.

"Nowhere," he said.

"I'd better think it was by accident," shouted the sergeant. "I'd certainly better think it was completely by accident that you strayed in here. Get out at the double or you'll get us into terrible trouble."

Sturm sat down on a bench outside the gate. He stuck a cigarette between his lips, then took out his bootpolish tin. When he had smoked the cigarette he walked over to the all-purpose hut and hung around there for a while.

The corporal and the rookie were lying in the grass at the side road. They were smoking when Sturm came back carrying a demijohn.

"What's that?" asked the corporal.

"I bought it," said Sturm, and stood it beside his package. Then he left just the demijohn there. "Aren't you hungry?" he asked, and unwrapped the newspaper. "I've got some bacon and onions and a bit of jam. It's what I was given for the journey."

"Are you hungry?" the corporal asked the rookie.

"I could eat something," said the soldier. "I could eat a bit of fried bacon."

"Let's eat then," said the corporal. He stood up, withdrew behind the guardroom, and brought back a few broken slats of wood and a shovelful of coal.

They lit a fire and waited for it to burn to embers. Sturm sliced up the bacon and carved some crooked spits from the branches of an apple tree at the side of the road. By the time the bacon had fried, the sun had gone down. The white prison building was waiting like a solid rock to blend into the grey of the sky.

"Aren't you going to eat something?" asked the corporal when he saw that Sturm hadn't touched the food.

"No," said Sturm, "I don't want to eat."

"Did you have lunch?"

"No," said Sturm. "I'm not hungry today."

When the corporal and the rookie had eaten their share, Sturm pointed to his own.

"Split it between you," he said. "Do you like jam?"

"I'd like a little," said the soldier.

"You'll eat at the station," said the corporal. "A proper supper, right?"

"Maybe," said Sturm.

"I'll wave a car down soon and you can get a lift," said the corporal. "But as you can see, there's not much traffic."

"I'm in no hurry," said Sturm.

Around eight o'clock the painters were finished. They got a cigarette each from the corporal. When they had finished smoking the corporal stood them one behind the other. They didn't know Sturm, but they had heard the corporal and the soldier talking, and they looked with revulsion at the man in his tunic who had made people shiver and moan.

"You'd better hurry," the corporal said to Sturm as he left.

"I'll sit around for a bit longer," said Sturm.

"He's waiting for some sort of female in the corn patch," said the soldier, then they set out with the two painters down the link road in the direction of the gate.

"He must have been a rotten sod," said one of the painters.

"And types like him are running free nowadays," said the other.

"Oh, come off it," said the corporal. "Are you always so squeamish? Such a worry-guts?"

"How long were you sent here to swan around for?" asked the rookie.

"Two months," said the painter.

"And you get paid too."

They were approaching the gate by then.

"Would you let types like that out of here?" the soldier asked the corporal quietly.

"I'll be frank with you," said the corporal. "It's not my business luckily. They were all just like lambs here. Sturm as well. But it could be that when he's outside he'll go wild again. Luckily it's not our business."

Not long after they were out of sight Sturm got up too. He looked at the road for a while, at the cars driving past, then he picked up the demijohn and walked off with it into the corn patch. When he felt he was about in the middle he put it down. He uprooted a few corn stalks, and with his feet scraped a nest for himself in the soft earth, big enough for him to sit in. He put the demijohn beside him, took out the cork, lifted it above his head and held it there upside down until all the petrol in it had poured over him. His hands stayed dry. He put a hand in his pocket and took out the bootpolish tin. He threw away the lower part with the burnt rag and held the lid between his knees. Then he took out the china button and started to tug at the string. When the button was spinning nicely he let it touch the lid.

A yellow light flashed against the wall of the corridor in the barracks, and two soldiers called the rookie out of the dormitory, saying something was burning in the corn patch. They watched the soon dying flames which were gradually hidden by the rows of stalks, and for a time the reflection of the fire only showed in the smoke circling above it.

"He probably didn't get a car," said the soldier. "And he's sleeping in the corn."

"Who?" asked another soldier.

"An old bloke," said the rookie.

"He's probably cold."

"The evenings are getting chilly."

"He might just have wanted some light."

"He may be frightened in the dark."

"He may feel as if he's on some sort of trip," said the rookie. "He was some kind of satyr before."

"What kind of satyr?"

"I meant to say, sadist or something. He did a tough twenty-five years."

"Twenty-five, that's quite a lot. That must be quite a lot of days."

"At least a thousand."

"Around ten thousand rather."

"If you count the leap years, it's even more."

"Who bothers about the leap years?"

"Including leap years it's nine thousand and thirty-one," said the rookie. "Give or take a day," he added. ❧

Translated by Elizabeth Szász

György Kocsis–Anikó Szántó

The Economic State of the Nation

"Hungarians have a special ability both for stopping at the verge of disaster and letting success slip away, since, on such occasions, they do not think in broader perspectives when making their decisions." The ambiguity of Hungarian economic policy was so described by Sándor Lámfalussy, President of the European Monetary Institute, in a lecture. Undoubtedly, running the country's economy at a steady pace and in a systematic and resolute manner is not the Hungarian way. Instead, policy-makers tend to stand idly by for some time, watching economic problems accumulate, before leading a courageous charge at the penultimate minute, a charge which, if there are no immediate results—is not followed up with proper patience. This pattern of behaviour was not unknown before the changeover to a market economy, but it has almost inevitably been intensified by the four-year election cycle of democracy.

The same pattern has also been followed by the socialist-liberal coalition that came to power in 1994. For nearly a year, it did nothing to stop the accelerating deterioration in the balance of payments or the growth in the country's external debt, which had begun under the previous governments; the current account deficit approached 4 billion dollars in 1994 and the net external debt reached 46 per cent of GDP. The austerity programme hallmarked by the name of Lajos Bokros, the Finance Minister appointed in March 1995 who resigned exacly a year later, reduced the balance of payments deficit, according to advance figures, to 1.7 billion dollars and the net external debt to a third of GDP by the end of 1996. Hungarians paid a heavy price for averting insolvency and for retaining the confidence of international finance: economic growth was virtually halted, and real incomes dropped by some 16 per cent in two years, mainly as a result of inflation, which shot up to over 28 per cent in 1995, and was still over 23 per cent in 1996.

Whether on the government side or the opposition, the demand for re-starting economic growth and letting living standards rise again along with a clamp-down on inflation, even at the risk of upsetting the balance, is being heard more and more often from politicians and citizens, experts and laymen alike. Indeed, while Hungary has won a great deal of acclaim for its bold stabilization programme at many interna-

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tional forums, it is also seen as the "black sheep" among the ex-socialist countries of Eastern Europe producing fast economic growth. In handing out praise, Western politicians are rarely moved by expert arguments, pointing out, for instance, that while the Czech Republic boasts an annual economic growth of 4–5 per cent, few of the structural reforms long completed in Hungary have been started or that, unlike Poland, Hungary has never asked for a rescheduling of its foreign debt but has consistently paid on the date due.

The 2 to 3 per cent growth expected for 1997 by the Horn cabinet and by Hungarian think-tanks (some foreign analysts, e.g. PlanEcon in Washington, prognosticize a growth approaching 4 per cent) may perhaps reach the degree of being felt by society and calm growing discontent, which is in the interest of the governing coalition as the election year of 1998 approaches. Yet this shift is seen also as a cause for concern. Most Hungarian analysts agree that even today, Hungary's economy is much like a seesaw with the GDP at one end and the trade balance at the other. The Bokros Package, they claim, was undoubtedly successful in halting the dangerous trend in debt growth, but a major role was played in its success by three elements which cannot permanently be relied on, namely surcharges on customs duties, income from privatization and a radical reduction in budgetary spending.

Most of the results of the stabilization programme were achieved through measures stimulating exports and limiting imports. The former was served by a one-off 9 per cent devaluation of the forint, followed by crawling peg devaluation still in effect; the latter was achieved by the introduction of a customs surcharge on imports, to be lifted in mid-1997. These measures were far from ineffective but their effect is declining: whereas exports increased by nearly 22 per cent in 1995, 12.6 per cent in 1996, only 8–10 per cent is expected this year, imports grew only by 7 per cent in 1995, but by 11 per cent in 1996, and are expected to increase at a rate similar to that of exports in 1997. Consequently the foreign trade deficit swelled from 2.6 billion dollars in 1995 to 3.1 billion dollars in 1996, and may be even higher than that in 1997.

The jump in imports started at the end of last year. In December, the balance of payments declined by 500 million dollars within one month. This is seen by several experts as evidence that the import needs of the Hungarian economy remained as high as they were before, especially as the government cut the customs surcharge by two per cent in 1997, while the figures showed a minor improvement in economic growth in the last quarter. The feeling of unease is also intensified by the fact that, in line with the agreement made with the World Trade Organization, the 1 per cent customs handling and import statistics charges were abolished, duty on goods imported from the European Union was reduced by 5 per cent, and the government cut the customs surcharges by another 2 per cent from March 10, and will completely lift them on July 1; as a result of all this the overall customs level may decline by a total of more than 10 per cent.

At the same time, the role of exports as the engine of growth is rather doubtful. The increase in exports of the past two years is seen by analysts mainly as a consequence of increased competitiveness stemming from the general decline in real wages (basically because the inflation rate has been higher than the rise in real incomes). Whether this can be continued is questionable. In addition, there is much debate amongst experts on whether or not the crawling peg devaluation is costing more than it earns. The introduction of

that measure of monetary policy was widely welcomed in 1995: it replaced a hectic, unbalanced exchange rate policy, stimulating speculation, with that element of predictability which had been so sorely needed. After having been in operation for two years, however, there are a growing number of those who believe that its export-stimulating effect is negatively counterbalanced by its inflation-generating impact.

It cannot be doubted that the bogeyman of the Hungarian economy is inflation, lingering at about 20 per cent for a long time now, half of which is no longer attributed by analysts to real economic factors—like the major rise in the price of electricity (25 per cent) introduced at the beginning of the year—but much rather to the inflationary expectations of consumers and producers alike. The expectations of producers, on the other hand, are constantly fuelled precisely by the predictable currency devaluations—0.04 per cent per day at the moment—automatically built into production costs and, of course, especially into import costs. In mid-February the Finance Minister and the President of the National Bank were still not in full agreement as to when and to what extent the devaluation, currently 1.2 per cent per month, may be further reduced during the year, even though reduced it must be for the government to bring last year's average consumer price index rise of 23.4 per cent down below 20 per cent this year as planned. The main concern of the President of the Central Bank is obviously that a forced reduction of the devaluation rate may push the domestic interest level below the rate of inflation, which in turn could harm the positive tendency, lasting for years, for savings to rise. The same reduction, on the other hand, is seen favourably by the Finance Minister because a one-tenth reduction of the monthly devaluation rate entails a 1.5 per cent decline in the interest rate, and that would mean a far from inconsiderable saving on interest payments by an exchequer struggling with an accumulated domestic government debt of 5 thousand billion forints. The President of the National Bank agrees that one of the means of halting inflation would be if, at long last, an overall wage agreement could be made at the national level, which would rein in inflation by a voluntary and collective reduction of the increase in nominal wages. Beside the fact, however, that there are no reliable figures showing the inflationary effect of wage outflow, there is little chance of negotiating a "social contract" of this type a year before the elections. Such an agreement had been included in the original programme of the governing coalition, but it ought to have materialized at the beginning of this current parliamentary cycle. Thus the stagnation of real earnings calculated for this year will most likely continue with the same rate of price and wage increases. That the race is indeed expected to slow down in the long run is indicated by interest expectations: in February the interest on one-year treasury bonds was 20 per cent, while the five-year bond, on an average, yielded only 15 per cent.

The year 1997 will also be critical for the Hungarian economy struggling in the Bermuda Triangle of equilibrium, inflation and growth because, according to many analysts, the driving engine of the economic growth so much yearned for may be precisely a small-scale increase in domestic buying power. Several experts claim that in the past few years, export orientation alone has not been sufficient to achieve an increase in GDP. One of the reasons is that the business sector is being split into two groups and the gap is rapidly widening between them: on one side are

Main Macroeconomic Characteristics

Change compared to the previous year (%)

	1997	1998	1999
Volume of GDP	about 2	3–4	4–5
Domestic exploitation of the GDP	about 1	2–3	3–4
Individual consumption	about 0	about 1	1–2
Communal consumption	about –10	–2– 0	about 0
Investment	10–12	10–12	10–12
Direct foreign trade turnover			
Change in the volume of exports	8–10	8–10	8–10
Change in the volume of imports	5–7	7–9	7–9
Price indices			
Consumer price index (annual average)	17–19	12–14	about 10
Producer price index, material prices (annual average)	16–17	10–11	about 9
Current balance of payments (billion $)			
Balance of foreign trade turnover	–2– –1,5	about –1,5	about –1,5
Customs statistics (billion $)	–2– –1,5	–2– –1,5	–2– –1,5

Source: Draft for the 1997 Budget Act of the Hungarian Republic

Main Living Standard Indicators (%)

Item	1997	1998	1999
		Index: last year = 100	
Gross total earnings	116–117	113–114	112–113
Gross average earnings	116–117	113–114	112–113
Net average earnings	117–118	114–115	112–113
Consumer price level	117–119	112–114	about 110
Real wages per earner	about 100	101–102	101–102
Real wages per head	about 100	101–102	101–102
Consumption by the population	about 100	about 101	101–102
Savings rate (%)*	13–14	13–14	13–14
Gross money savings, billion forints	490–510	600–620	660–670
Credit borrowing surplus, billion forints	0	30–40	40–50
Net credit, billion forints	490–510	570–590	620–630

Note: * total net savings of households (money and hoarding) compared to their total income.

the mainly foreign-owned or jointly-owned companies concentrating on external markets, which, embedded as they are in the world economy, are less sensitive to the domestic trade cycle—two thirds of both Hungary's imports and exports involve companies with foreign interests, mainly large multinational corporations. On the other side, there is a mass of domestically owned small and medium-size businesses, which are generally in rather bad shape, relying on domestic credit and on domestic markets. Analysts point to several remarkable consequences of this structure. With the expansion of the multinationals, Hungarian industry is growing increasingly dependent on processes on a global scale, policy makers thus having diminishing elbow-room to influence tendencies in the Hungarian economy. Also, their gaining strength in the retail sector means that legal sales are expanding, whereas privately owned Hungarian businesses, fighting for survival, are fleeing into the black economy, which is estimated at nearly a third of the GDP.

This year's small-scale growth is generally expected by experts to be a result not only of the halt to the decline in consumption but also that due to the expansion of investment. Such a turn would be all the more remarkable since it would confirm one of the government illusions of the past two years: in connection with stabilization it was presumed by economic policy-makers that money diverted from the consumer will be transferred to enterprises and will automatically result in an increase in investments. (This was what the exemption of investment goods from the extra customs duty was also meant to achieve.) These expectations, however, have not been fulfilled. Although savings did increase, the rest, because of the above mentioned structure of the production sector, the limiting of consumption and the high interest rate level, went mostly to financing the budget deficit rather than being invested. This year, however, with interest levels declining, as expected, along with the base rate, the majority of companies may find new investment profitable, counting on consumption stagnating this year but perhaps already rising in the next, analysts hope. In addition to business investment, central and local government investment, especially infrastructural, is likely to expand again after a two years' decline. That, however, may have the consequence that the deficit may start to rise again despite the two years' hard work which led to the budget deficit in 1996 being a mere 0.3 per cent higher than the 3 per cent prescribed in the Maastricht Criteria.

Experts agree that the most important yardstick for the actual success of the stabilization programme deeply affecting Hungarian society will be the extent to which external equilibrium, especially the foreign trade balance, will decline as a consequence of the expected economic growth. This will show whether the economic policy involved has really produced deeper-lying structural changes, whether transformations have taken place in the micro-structure of the economy that will prevent growth in domestic demand, once again producing a surge in imports. As the more pessimistic of Hungarian experts see it, stop-go cycles, repeated every two years, will continue. The same thing will happen as between 1993 and 1996: rapid growth and a rapid deterioration of the balance, then a halt, with an improvement in the balance—and then the same all over again. The optimists, however, believe that—even if the stop-go will not fully vanish—the swings of the pendulum will become less and less wide. ❧

Nicholas T. Parsons

How to Be a Magyar

Ask a German how he is and he will tell you: *"Es geht mir gut, danke"*; or: *"Leider, nicht gut"*; or, non-committally: *"Danke, es geht"*. The Italian, seldom the sunny mortal that people take him to be, has mastered the art of the mournful response: *"Ci si tira avanti"* ("One struggles on"), he says, rolling his eyes heavenwards in a passable imitation of an ecstatically tragic saint by Guido Reni. An Englishman, eternally repressed, is likely to reply: "Fine, thanks," not wishing to burden his interlocutor with tiresome details: (his wife has just left him and his house burned down a few hours before). If these possible replies to inquiries in the phatic mode tell us something about the characteristics of other nations, how much more telling is the laconic heroism of the Magyar phrase *"Megvagyok!"* (literally: "I'm still here"). Whether or not it suits certain malevolently disposed people(s), and despite the chapter of disasters and misfortune that characterized the immediate past, and most certainly will constitute the immediate future, *"megvagyok"*. A Hungarian friend of mine hovers over this phrase, so pregnant with stoicism and remembered woe in a way that adds subtly to its portentousness: "How are things with you, Árpi?" *"Hát ... megvagyok."* "And the wife?" *"Megvan."* "The kids?" " *Hát... megvannak. Megvagyunk"*.

"Megvagyunk". We are still here, we exist despite everything. If there is a leitmotif running through all the ways in which Hungarians see themselves, this is it. The Tatars couldn't do for us; the Turks couldn't do for us; the Habsburgs couldn't do for us; the Russians couldn't do for us. *Megvagyunk.* "Since time immemorial," writes an Hungarian expatriate, "the spirit of the Magyars has wavered between devotion to their mission as founders of the great kingdom of St Stephen's Crown in the Carpathian Basin and a deep-rooted fear of extermination, surrounded by hostile Romanians, Slavs and Germans."[1] Actually the situation is even worse than you imagined (it always is in Hungary); if the hostile neighbours were not to swamp them; as the philosopher Johann Gottfried Herder predicted, the Magyars could do the job themselves by the simple expedient of failing to breed. More elderly and not so elderly Hungarians are leaving the world than little, round Hungarian

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Nicholas T. Parsons's *most recent books are* The Xenophobe's Guide to the Austrians *(Ravette Books, 1994) and* The Blue Guide to Vienna *(1996).*

babies are entering it. The nation is dying by degrees. Nemesis. Extinction. *Nemzethalál.*

Ignored, unappreciated, misunderstood...

"...magam vagyok a föld kerekén," wrote Árpád Tóth, a gentle poet in the early years of the century ("I am alone in the great expanse of the world"), adding to the basis of Hungarian *honfibú* (*Patriotenschmerz* or "compatriot sorrow"). An elegant and refined professional pessimism is more or less *de rigueur* amongst Magyar intellectuals and commentators, who like to scoff at the naive optimism of the Americans and the indefatigable complacency of the English. The Anglo-Saxons and WASP Americans can afford their emotional luxuries, they will point out: they are the lucky ones who have escaped the rape of history, whose societies were not weighed down with feudalism into modern times and who annoyingly got in first with their industrial revolutions. Worse still, island and continent have also contrived to get away with periods of behaving as "Herrenvolk" without attracting half the brickbats that rain on Hungary when it so much as puts its head above the parapet. *"...History to the defeated / May say Alas, but cannot help nor pardon,"* wrote W.H. Auden in his poem "Spain." To many Hungarians these sentiments ring all too true, and there is nothing unseemly in recycling them in one form or another whenever one is feeling ignored, or one's country has been slighted (again!) in some international forum.

In point of fact, these are sentiments with which all self-respecting xenophobes could identify, whether it be the British nationalist waxing indignant over shifty foreigners who refuse to buy wonderful English beef or the sophisticated French propagandist, unable to comprehend the fuss kicked up by non-Frenchmen over nothing more serious than the murder of an inconvenient environmentalist by French agents. However, the Hungarian attitude towards the outside world is a great deal more complicated. On the one hand, a Magyar patriot suffers from feelings of injured merit; on the other, he is tortured by what the Germans call a *Nachholkomplex* —a determination to "catch up" with societies, cultures and economies that he frankly and generously regards as more advanced than his own. Being misunderstood is thus a sort of occupational hazard of being a Hungarian, not least because the obscurity of the Hungarian language casts its speakers into spiritual isolation. The concomitant feeling of being culturally trapped is poignantly evoked by a celebrated Hungarian writer who described the mother tongue of the Magyars as simultaneously their softest cradle and most solid coffin.

By the same token, widespread ignorance about their homeland has often been a serious handicap to the Hungarians in building their international image. The rot set in as early as the 12th century, when one Otto of Freising ungraciously observed: "Fortune should be blamed, or rather divine patience admired, for having given such a beautiful country as Hungary not to humans, but to such monstrous men as the Hungarians." Exactly why Otto should have been so dyspeptic about his eastern neighbours is unclear, but the prejudice and ignorance he exhibits became a major component of *"bús magyar sors"*, the bitter fate of the Hungarians. The self-pitying phrase is counterpointed by the exaggeratedly negative opinion of foreigners (in the first half of this century, the historian and political activist Robert Seton-Watson, and the journalist Henry Wickham Steed). The largely hostile picture such writers give of

Hungary and Hungarians tends to be the one that has stuck, despite a short-lived reprieve during Lord Rothermere's campaign to have the terms of the 1920 Paris peace re-negotiated, or the brief flare of somewhat guilt-stricken sympathy for the protagonists of the 1956 uprising. The consequence is that the Hungarian of the twentieth century has constantly found himself playing the role of rejected suitor. While indifference and rejection may engender a posture of dignified suffering in the patriot, the boorish nationalist is inclined to veer between the extremes of servility and anger. Filled with frustration at the incomprehension of the world, he does not know whether his critics should be emulated or abused, whether he should shout at them "We are better than you!" or whiningly insist that "We are just as good as you!" The tub-thumping of a demagogue such as István Csurka, (an ex-police informer turned super-nationalist), reminds one of Lord Chesterfield's unpaid tailor, who had mastered the art of simultaneously licking his lordship's boots while shaking a fist in his face. Csurka (who, notwithstanding his political bluster, is a distinguished writer with a justified reputation) is an extreme case of someone overdosing on defensive patriotism. Such attitudes are seldom so aggressive or so aggressively presented: the blundering outsider is more likely to become suddenly aware that wounded feelings are in the air, or to say something which brings out the nation's ingrained sense of being less appreciated than is its due, an attitude that Hungarians themselves are well able to laugh at. The playwright Ferenc Molnár in his memoir *Companion in Exile* (1950) supplies a cameo of one such failure of communication, his account combining hilarity and pathos in equal measure. Giacomo Puccini paid a visit to Budapest, where he was magnificently feted at the City Hall. A very long programme of Hungarian folk music was laid on, Mayor Bárczy himself accompanying at the piano one Lóránt Fráter, whom Molnár describes as "the recognized chief expert in the genre and a captain of hussars." Puccini sat evidently unmoved through song after song. The performer redoubled his efforts, continuing to warble indefatigably until the concert was brought to a close, chiefly through the evident exhaustion of the participants. Tornadoes of applause nearly raised the roof of the City Hall. Puccini used every device in the lexicon of verbal dexterity to avoid giving an opinion, but was pressed again and again by his genial and enthusiastic hosts. Eventually he was cornered and confessed that he did not much care for this sort of music. Immediately an icy silence descended on the banquet and lasted until the scraping of chairs indicated it was time to leave.

Optimist: "I think we live in the best of all possible worlds!" Pessimist (a Hungarian): "I'm afraid so."

As is well-known to nobody except Hungarians, the historic mission of civilizing the Carpathian Basin was entrusted to the Magyars by the Archangel Gabriel himself and formalized by Pope Sylvester in the year 1000, when he sent a crown to King Stephen by special messenger. The Virgin Mary also volunteered to take the Hungarians under her personal protection, although those familiar with Hungarian history might well feel that this particular insurance policy has been spectacularly ineffective. Armed with such cast-iron credentials, the Hungarian crown embarked on a policy of expansion which brought it wealth, fame, and one big heap of trouble. A pessimist's chronology of Hungarian history looks something like this:

896 AD: To avoid being wiped out entirely by Pechenegs etc., the Magyars make a hasty advance (retreat) into the Carpathian Basin.

1240–1: Tatar invasion. Population decimated.

1240's: Béla IV decides it would be prudent to build a fortress in Buda, in order to give people something worthwhile to attack. Archeologists have painstakingly recorded thirty-one sieges thereafter.

1514: Revolt of György Dózsa: 70,000 casualties.

1526: Catastrophic Battle of Mohács at which the Turks slaughter 80 per cent of a combined Hungarian/Polish army of 25,000 men. The historian Stephan Vajda betrays his pessimistic Hungarian origins when he writes that the Hungarian plan of attack was typical of the national temperament "combining folly with theatrica overconfidence".

1541–1686: Hungary partitioned between Turks and Habsburgs. Population decimated.

1670: After the Emperor Leopold I hands over territories to the Turks which the Hungarians have just spent much blood defending, the Wesselényi conspiracy against Vienna fails. Savage reprisals include execution of leaders who had just saved Leopold's bacon and an opportunistic drive against Protestants.

1686 and subsequently: "Liberation" by imperial armies decimates the population and lays waste to the country.

17th to 18th century: Habsburg policy helpfully summarized by Cardinal Kollonitsch: "First I will make the Hungarians beggars, then Catholic, then German."

1703–1711: The Rákóczi War of Independence against the "illegal and intolerable yoke" of the Habsburgs. Illegal and intolerable yoke prevails.

1794–95: Martinovics conspiracy unmasked, not least because the instigator had naively informed Leopold II (as a fellow protagonist of the Enlightenment) of his activities, while subsequently keeping the members of his two Hungarian associations in ignorance of each other`s existence. Reprisals, executions, a generation of Hungarian literati silenced for many years.

1849: War of Independence fails. Russian army slaughters Hungarians. Baron Haynau ("the hyena of Brescia") "pacifies" Hungary with judicial murders.

1867 and subsequently: The Compromise with Austria. Things go well for a while, which in itself is a sign of impending disaster. Mass emigration to the New World.

1914–18: World War I. Disaster that would be on unprecedented scale if this was not Hungary.

1919: "Red Terror" of Béla Kun regime, for symmetry's sake followed by "White Terror" of Admiral Horthy. Mayhem and butchery.

1920: Meltdown: the Treaty of Trianon awards two-thirds of the historic territories of Hungary to her neighbours. She waves goodbye to nearly a third of her population.

1920's and 30's: Hungary becomes the country of "three million beggars," which is gratifying to the shade of Cardinal Kollonitsch. Mass emigration.

1941–45: Second World War just as big a disaster for Hungary as the first one. Over half a million Jews deported to death camps. Budapest decimated in nine-week siege.

1948–56: Stalinist terror: mass torture and executions. Emigration of intellectuals and the politically vulnerable.

1956: Revolution fails. Over 4,000 estimated dead through fighting and subsequent executions. Mass imprisonment. 200,000 flee to the west.

1989: Communists melt away. Country teeters on the edge of bankruptcy. Virgin Mary admonishes Hungarians over their violent past and they promise to do better in future.

Well, yes, I made the last bit up; but it is not entirely inappropriate, since Hungarians often feel that the world behaves as if the victims (i.e. them) are mostly to blame for their own misfortunes. In this perception of foreign indifference they are usually rather near the mark, western diplomacy having found no compelling advantage in taking up the cause of the Hungarians (who are few against many) against the powerfully voiced interests of Slavs or Romanians. The British, (who even awarded an honorary knighthood to that distinguished statesman and defender of human rights, Nicolae Ceausescu) have shown little interest in the plight of two million miserably oppressed Hungarians in Transylvania, and are not planning to offer a knighthood to László Tőkés (the central figure at the beginning of the 1989 revolution) for his stand against Ceausescu.[2] In such conflicts, the mandarins of western foreign policy generally take a "neutral" line, although in moments of stress their men on the spot have been known to quote Admiral Codrington's famous inquiry to his superiors during the Greek War of Independence: "Beg to be informed on which side we are currently neutral". The long-suffering Magyar, most of whose history consists of being left in the lurch by the Habsburgs (against the Turks) and by the west (against the Habsburgs, then the Russians) has learned to take a stoical view of all this. As the great Cardinal Pázmány once remarked, "if a man lives long without great suffering, *tarditatem supplicii gravitate compensat*"; or in other words, the intensity of the suffering you do have will make up for any you may unfortunately have missed along the way.

For the charge of paranoia sometimes levelled against them, the Magyars also have an unanswerable retort, consisting of variations on the view espoused by the Marx Brothers, Woody Allen and others, namely: "Just because we're paranoiac, it doesn't mean they're not out to get us". In these circumstances, it is no good pointing out to a Hungarian that his country has received the bulk of inward investment in the former Communist bloc since the change, and even now complaints are being made about the fact that it is currently receiving the biggest national allocation of funds for projects supported by the European Bank of Reconstruction and Development. Inconvenient facts or statistics threaten the self-fulfilling doctrine that the rest of the world spends much of its time plotting how to disadvantage Hungary, and all such statistics must therefore be discounted. You will be told indignantly that Poland, unlike Hungary, was allowed to reschedule its debts, or that the investments are wrongly applied, or simply that the Czechs, who are too clever by half, are overtaking Hungary in investment terms. None of these complaints are wholly without foundation; on the other hand, what the outsider has to learn is that deep down they are not susceptible of rational discussion, although they are always presented triumphantly as apodictic conclusions from given circumstances.

This attitude may well be part of the backlash from the *délibáb* mentality, the insanely over-confident pursuit of geopolitical chimaeras in the 19th and early 20th century that indirectly led to the present state of discontent. It is easy to see why, in view of the injustices sanctimoniously inflicted on Hungary by the victorious powers and opportunist neighbours at the Treaty of Trianon, the merest hint of optimism should now be regarded as the height of folly. Moreover, Hungary cannot escape the consequences of naive assumptions and historical ignorance that colour the attitudes of western public opinion, which often seems to take the pharisaical view that "some people are never satis-

fied" when regressive behaviour and historically determined conflicts resurface. "Even now," writes György Konrád, speaking of Central Europe generally, " people are saying that we're a bunch of primitive, squabbling hatemongers who use our new-found freedom of speech to call our neighbours names; that we either beg for charity or ask exorbitant prices for shoddy goods and services, and then take umbrage when our western partners point out where we have failed or misbehaved".[3]

Magyar pessimism is rooted in the conviction that history has cheated the nation in the past and is just waiting to do so again. Seen in this perspective, small successes are the prelude to greater setbacks. There is even a saying to describe this dismally predictable sequence of events: *"Törököt fogott, és most nem engedi...."* (he captured a Turk but is now himself a prisoner; or, in other words, he has been the victim of his own success). Generally, however, one is not talking about "success" , but rather about "escape from even greater disaster". This view has infected even such a level-headed public figure as Hungary's benign president, Árpád Göncz, who is reported to have remarked: "I am glad to have seen Hungary emerge from the previous disaster and hope to die before it is engulfed in the next one". The roller-coaster of Hungarian history has lent weight to those who say that "an optimist is merely a pessimist who is poorly informed". As everyone prepares for the next stomach-churning downward swoop, the good news tends to be seen as the necessary foundation for imminent bad news. One is reminded of the publisher who wiped out his profit on a title by ordering a substantial reprint just at the point at which the book had ceased to sell, a decision he gleefully described as "snatching a defeat from the jaws of victory".

Friends for the friendless...

It makes sense that the Magyar's only true friend is one who feels much the same way as he does about the world in general, and his neighbours in particular: "There's an old Polish saying, " writes Eva Hoffmann in her book *Exit into History*, "that roughly translates to 'Poles and Magyars are cousins', and that expresses a sense of temperamental kinship between the two countries. The affinity has to do with the propensity for melancholy and grand gestures, and also with both countries' penchant for revolutions, uprisings and other, usually doomed, acts of protest against foreign masters."[4] When the Hungarians took on the Habsburgs in 1848, their most outstanding general was the Polish General Bem, whose statue in the Víziváros has ever since been a focal point for patriotic protest. Readers of the novels of Mór Jókai will recall that no self-respecting Hungarian aristocrat of the mid-19th century would be without his tame Polish count, (an exile from the 1830 revolution in Poland), with whom he could indulge in melancholy contemplation of the injustices of the world—and plenty of drinking to make them bearable. Shared enemies are always a solace, and the Magyar attitude to the Russians chimes with that of the Poles, as innumerable jokes at the expense of Boris and his boorish Russian ways vividly illustrate. These satirical sallies constitute a sort of anecdotal record of the rape of a superior civilization by an inferior one. All Russia has ever done to Hungary (it seems) is wave a big stick at it: *"The ogre does what ogres can / Deeds quite impossible for Man...."*[5] A not untypical favourite with pessimistic Hungarian wits is the account of the Danube Waters Conference, where an epoch-making agreement is reached between the two states: the Russians are to be granted free-

dom of navigation for the length of the River Danube; in return, the Hungarians are granted freedom of navigation for the width. Ironically, the collapse of barter trade with the Russians after 1989 was highly disadvantageous to important Hungarian industries in the short term. Even so, poor Boris was the butt of grim jokes: a wine exporter was asked in an interview with the *Financial Times* why he did not simply switch his Russian exports to western markets. "Ah, that would be nice, but you see, there is a problem" replied the exporter. "What is that?" inquired the journalist, evidently puzzled. "These products are not fit for human consumption," came the sorrowing reply.

Of nations further afield, Hungarians struggle to find some affinity with their long-lost cousins, the Finns. Finnish architecture had a vogue in Budapest at the beginning of the century, and this despite the views of 19th century Hungarian nationalists, who had hotly disputed Antal Reguly 's discovery of the common linguistic origin of Finns and Hungarians. (The nationalists' unanswerable objection to this line of thought was that a noble steppe-riding folk of warriors—the Hungarians—could not possibly have sprung from the same stock as a phlegmatic and taciturn people "smelling of fish"). It is actually doubtful whether Finns and Hungarians have very much in common as far as temperament is concerned. An amusing television programme recently interviewed Hungarians who had gone to live in Finland and married a native. The chief problem was that the Hungarian side of the marriage never stopped talking, while the Finnish partner never said anything at all. The Hungarian's expatriate friends would come round and talk the house down for hours on end. The Finn would invite a select band to his home for a few hours of total silence. It was naturally hard to know what the laconic Finnish husbands thought of their partnerships, but the frustration of voluble Hungarian wives was palpable. They reminded one of the visiting dignitary in Cavafy's poem "A Monarch of Western Libya", who is described as "suffering not a little, having whole conversations piled up inside him."

Who to blame for all our ills?

Given the fact that the world does not operate as right-thinking Magyars believe it ought to, much of the frustration engendered by foreign indifference, incomprehension or hostility finds its way into the domestic sphere. Of the two most convenient scapegoats for the country's ills, the Gypsies provide only limited scope, since their near-total marginalization means that they cannot plausibly be blamed for being a bad influence on a society that they mostly reject and that anyway excludes them. That leaves the Jews. Hungarians of Jewish origin are probably the most successful societal element of any European country, having conquered the heights of business, the arts and the media; individual Jews may therefore provide high-profile targets that even the blunderbuss of a clumsy Hungarian nationalist can occasionally hit. The problem for the Hungarian anti-semite, however, is that the target group has been assimilated for so long that it is impossible to distinguish it from "Hungarians", although that doesn't prevent him from trying. In fact, Hungarian Jews do not constitute a group at all, although an ability to collaborate, coordinate and "work the system" is something that the individuals of an oft-persecuted minority have learned in order to survive. Insofar as such skills deliver success, they are also stimuli for the frustrations of racists: ubiquity and achievement orientation "prove" the racist's con-

tradictory assumption that "Jewish influence" is hard to detect (covert), but easy to define (brazen) by ascribing to it anything that happens to irk you. *Plus ça change.* When Robert Seton-Watson exposed the policies of *Gleichschaltung* pursued by Kálmán Tisza and others in the Liberal era, he operated under the pseudonym "Scotus Viator". The nationalist press of the day decided he was a Jew named Joseph Szebényey who sold himself to foreign papers for writing anti-Hungarian articles.[6] (Admittedly Seton-Watson was also accused of being in the pay of the Slavs, a charge absurd only insofar as the Slavs hardly needed to pay this repressed romantic—like so many Lowland Scots—to espouse their cause).

Constantly blaming others for your misfortunes is another by-product of Hungary's recurrently disastrous history; the origin of it as a national characteristic may well lie in the Habsburg tactics of divide and rule. Metternich's brilliantly executed plan was to keep not only nations, but also the different societal layers of the subject peoples in what he smugly described as "a slightly simmering mutual discontent". The poet and playwright Ernő Szép remarks world-wearily on the resultant game of buck-passing in his moving account of forced labour: "Hungary may be described in one sentence," he writes: "the peasants blame the gentry, the gentry blame the Jews, and the Jews blame each other."[7] But now there are (virtually) no gentry, and precious few peasants, so it is often the Jews that get the blame. The right identifies them with the Communists (never mind that just as many Jews were also in the opposition); to the rural Magyar (and following a long-established prejudice), they are the metropolitan and intellectual classes peddling the new ideas with the same agility that they peddled the old ones. Of course there is some substance to this charge, although it has nothing to do with race. György Konrád has described the opportunists of the new and old order as the "plastic people... the kind who assume whatever shape happens to be advantageous. Plastic people are ready to change at a moment's notice. With a minimum of coaching, for instance, they can master a whole new vocabulary...."[8] Plasticity of this sort was most conspicuous in the media immediately after the change, although, for obvious reasons, while you will read and hear about any number of real or imagined scandals in Hungary, you won't hear anything about this one.

"Life is a struggle, death repose" — Imre Madách

Imre Madách's masterpiece, *The Tragedy of Man* (1860), is in many respects the tragedy of Hungarians thinly disguised. Adam, on this reading, is a man who pays a heavy price for his naive, but often noble, optimism. As George Cushing, in the introduction to a recent translation of the work glumly remarks: "Madách had selected his material carefully, so that each scene would end in disillusion."[9] The poet János Arany, (who improved on Madách's original), found the ending too pessimistic even for a Hungarian work; nevertheless it was Arany who wrote the nation's quintessential suicide poem, which was his peculiarly Hungarian way of celebrating the inauguration of the Margaret Bridge in Budapest in 1876. According to legend, when a new bridge is opened, all the past suicides of the river emerge from the water and jump again, but only after they have been forced by fate to recite the reasons for having taken their own lives. Arany's ballad, *"Hídavatás"* (1876) is actually an excuse for a recital of present miseries: an apprentice jumps after botching some work; society women join the plunge out

of sheer, stupefying boredom; victims of the 1873 stock market crash emulate the free fall of the markets; and star-crossed lovers discover the one incontestably effective way of drowning their sorrows. Suicide in Hungary is not the taboo theme it has so often been in the Anglo-Saxon cultures, the absurdities of whose attitudes have been pointed out by a Hungarian (of course), Arthur Koestler. The latter outraged the English moralists by forming a society called "EXIT", which provided back-up and advice for those wishing to take their own lives, rather than be kept going with tubes and machines at vast expense. A sensibly practical approach to suicide is complemented by an aesthetic one, the art of dying being no less sophisticated in the land of the Magyars than the art of living. It is Hungary that has produced the suicide's theme tune, in Rezső Seress's "Gloomy Sunday", which had them jumping out of windows by the dozen in the 1930's. This less than cheerful but compelling ditty has given a new dimension to the phrase "smash hit", which it was worldwide. In Britain alone it had twenty-five suicides to its credit, before being banned by the BBC. In Hungary Seress was a hero of sorts. His moody song gave expression to all those pent-up feelings of bitterness that were characteristically turned inwards, self-punishment, even self-destruction, being a fitting response to the grossly disproportionate punishment inflicted by enemies. This masochistic tendency has been well summed up by a visiting Texan, who defined the difference between the American way of life and the Hungarian way of death as follows: "In Texas, if you're fed up with life, you go out and kill somebody. In Hungary, if you're fed up with life, you stay home and kill yourself." Unfair though it probably is, foreigners think that the Magyars have taken out a patent on suicide. Even the father of the hero (or anti-hero) of *Ulysses* could not escape his peculiarly Magyar destiny, despite having taken the precaution of moving from Szombathely to Dublin and changing his name from Virág to Bloom. One of the rather few words of Hungarian that Joyce knew and artfully worked into the family tale of the Blooms was suitably valedictory, (though probably he just liked the sound of it): *"viszontlátásra!"*.

"Temetni, azt tudunk"

Billy Connolly, the Glaswegian sage and gadfly, once remarked of his home town that it "doesn't care much for the living, but certainly looks after the dead", (a reference to the civic monumentalism of Glasgow's cemeteries). The Hungarians have encapsulated a similar idea in the resonant phrase *"temetni, azt tudunk"*, "we are good at burying". The truth of this proud boast is most poignantly demonstrated in the periodic reburials, at which the Hungarians are past masters. The point of such ceremonies is, of course, to administer justice post mortem, but also to embarrass or enrage those whom that particular burial might be expected to embarrass or enrage. Thus the burial of Lajos Kossuth, who died in exile, was an ostentatious way of reminding the imperial authorities and their hangers-on that, (notwithstanding the Compromise of 1867), there was still an authentic and independent Hungarian nation which the Austrians had failed to subdue and never would subdue. Unpopular governments are usually the targets of a really good burial, as was the case with the re-interments of László Rajk before the 1956 Revolution and of Imre Nagy to seal the change of 1989. On the other hand, the recent reburial of Admiral Horthy's remains was a

way of annoying the opposition during the Christian Conservative regime in power between 1990 and 1994.

Magyar male and female

The expression of Hungarian identity is dominated by the masculine, since women tend to have little time for political chauvinism when they have enough of the male variety at home; nor can they afford the world-weary affectations of the coffee-house when there is so much work to be done just keeping the family show on the road. True, the famous women of Eger earned a niche in history by pouring boiling oil on the Turks from the castle battlements, and Ilona Zrínyi held out heroically against besieging Habsburg forces: but in both cases they were fulfilling their duties of loyalty to their menfolk and/or the macho ethos of the heroic and combatant Magyar. A recent article in the *Pester Lloyd* remarks on the "masculine character of Hungarian society" and attributes to this the pronounced cultural animosity to homosexuality in Hungary. In fact male homosexuality was, until recently, a topic that was hardly mentioned in public or private. The taboo on discussing female homosexuality was broken by Margit Kaffka in her novel *The Ant Heap* (1917). Kaffka scandalized her contemporaries and enraged the church with her description of the malice and sexual frustration underneath the surface of convent life; but she also compelled attention as the first woman writer who could not be ignored by the literary world and the first to tackle what had been largely taboo themes.

About the time that Kaffka began writing, the threat of female emancipation was producing an hysterical male reaction in many European countries, where women became the targets of mysogyny and male chauvinist angst. However, the Magyar male felt secure in his unchallenged right to set the agenda and pontificate about the role in life for which women were destined. Even Baron Eötvös, the liberal-minded and civilized minister of education in the 1860's, could lay it down as self-evident that "the woman is destined by nature and by her character to home and family more than public life." Not an unusual male sentiment for the time perhaps, but he underpins the argument with a classic statement of the patriarchal position, whereby gallantry towards women conceals its real motivation, which is control over them: "If we recognized the equal rights of women and men, it would destroy the considerateness of men toward women, which women receive now only because they are weaker and subjugated to men, which is the reason of their advantages in society." What poses as concern is in fact a threat: Hungarian women have good reason to be sceptical of charming and suave Hungarian gentlemen who shower them with Baroque compliments and *kezicsókoloms* ("I kiss your hand"). Not that the men are being entirely insincere, of course. It is a peculiarity of the psyche of the Hungarian male that he feels most protective towards those from whom he expects most protection in return. The Magyars' hot line to the Virgin Mary has already been mentioned; but there was also the touching moment when an embattled Maria Theresa appeared before the Hungarian nobles with a babe in arms and appealed to their chivalrous natures. They responded by offering her their lives and blood and thereafter appointed her a sort of honorary mother of the Hungarian people. In the same way, the aristocracy felt simultaneously protective towards, and protected by, the Empress Elisabeth, empathizing with her dilemma of being indissolubly tied to her dreary husband, a dilemma they felt they shared.

As far as male chauvinism is concerned, things have changed a little in Hungary since the 1860's — but not much. Recently a post became vacant at an important national institution, where promotion had traditionally been awarded on the grounds of simple seniority. Two able women were next in line, but both were passed over and a less experienced young man promoted over their heads. Taxed with this, the Director explained unctuously: "You see, it was quite impossible to choose between two such talented ladies...!" In the case of another job vacancy in 1995, a woman got to the last three in a crowded field of applicants by using a male pseudonym; when she appeared for the interview she was turned down at once with hardly a word exchanged. Even in purely intellectual pursuits, women have a tough time combating male chauvinism, traditionally backed up by a reactionary church, whose general view at the turn of the century was summed up by a Catholic review: "The physical strength of women is insufficient for intellectual pursuit." Oppression disguised as concern is, of course, a religious speciality: the concern somehow never seems to extend to condemnation of the exploitation of women in the medical and vocational professions, where they languish on low pay and see the plum departmental jobs almost invariably going to men.

Communism, like capitalism, was adept at exploiting women as cut-price labour. This can be illustrated by changes in the educational pattern of girls. In the sixties, elite *gimnáziums* had three classes of boys to every one of girls. However, when jobs such as engineering were "re-categorized" as the province of "physical workers", and thus commanded much higher levels of pay than that of clerks, the gimnáziums were flooded with girls being prepared for all the low-paid clerical jobs, as also for jobs in the health system, where promotion was discriminatory. Most potentially lucrative jobs were reserved for men on some pretext or other (e.g. that female architects could not assert authority over rough-hewn navvies on building sites). Admittedly this sort of thing is by no means confined to Hungary (who ever heard of a famous female architect?), but the traditional supremacy of the male is under legislative and social attack elsewhere, while the average Hungarian male remains blissfully unaware of what is in store for him. As always, it is the saloon bar jokes that reveal the kind of complacency to be expected from a sex that does not feel seriously threatened. To the question as to why there are so many male concert pianists in Hungary, the answer is that concert pianists are forbidden to do the washing up. A Budapest acquaintance of mine is proud of having mastered the English idiom "alive and kicking"; but he has gone one better, and now constantly refers to his wife as "alive and cooking". A sketch by the much-loved TV personality, Imre Antal, features a comely bride, all aglow with anticipation, being carried over the threshold of the bridegroom's flat. She is taken swiftly straight through the living room and up to the kitchen door, which swings slowly open to reveal ...six weeks' worth of unwashed dishes! She can start right away.

Although such jokes are more cynical about men than they are about women, it would be rash to see them as an indication that the tide is turning. At the same time, the comfortable view of the Don Juan that women are a prey to be outwitted, and that in the end their sexual manoeuvres are just as unscrupulous as those of the seducer, (if not more so), is by no means extinct. This perception of woman as essentially frivolous in her emotions, though useful in her attributes, is again hardly a

peculiarity of the Hungarians. On the other hand, it is a Hungarian, Ferenc Molnár, who has given the most perfect expression to it. Asked how he became a writer, he replied: "The same way a woman becomes a prostitute: first I did it to please myself; then I did it to please my friends; and then I did it for money." Nor are such attitudes confined to men, as the careers of La Cioccolina and Zsa Zsa Gábor would seem to indicate. It was Zsa Zsa Gábor who supplied the least politically correct description of marriage ever publicly avowed when she remarked en passant: "All of my husbands have beaten me regularly like a gong; but if you've never been beaten, you've never been loved."

The Hungarian family — Count your (mixed) blessings

Women are of course the lynchpins of the extended Hungarian family, which is still more closely knit than families in most western countries. Traditional closeness — some might say claustrophobia — has been intensified by social factors such as the permanent shortage of accommodation (particularly in Budapest) and the near-absence of care for the elderly outside the family. The family can be a benign institution of mutual support and respect where duties are carried out willingly and obligations borne with a good grace, in a way that would (or should) shame the disintegrating families in materialist Britain and America. Stalinism sought to atomize society as a method of political control, but under Kádár traditional loyalties tended to reassert themselves. Personal friendships and family connections could be of great assistance in circumnavigating the system, even occasionally of rectifying or mildening some particularly grotesque injustice. While the churches were discredited institutions staffed by servile appointees of the regime, the family remained a focus of authentic values and honourable behaviour.

Unfortunately this does not always mean that life in the Hungarian family is a bowl of cherries. In the worst cases, families can be instruments of tyranny where selfish parents blight the prospects of single daughters, to ensure they will be around to look after them when the time comes; family obligations may be used as a form of blackmail to exert control or cosmetise the unacceptable behaviour of its most egoistic (male) members. Patriarchal behaviour is going out of fashion, but many Hungarian fathers and husbands of the older generation still seem to regard being obeyed and served as the natural, God-created, order of things. Perhaps it is partly due to old-fashioned authoritarianism that child care is something of a Hungarian speciality: leaving aside the policy of telephone deprivation pursued by the Kádár regime, one of the reasons that the Budapest telephone system has been brought to the point of collapse, (and many office lines are permanently engaged), is the hours spent on the phone by mothers supplying what is delightfully described as "long-range education". This has recently got so bad at the National Gallery that the management, to general outrage, has taken the draconian step of automatically terminating calls after only half an hour of speaking! When the children grow up, the process goes into reverse and long-range education becomes long-range comfort for the aged. This mutual dependence of families is entirely admirable (if rather time consuming), but it can be taken rather too far. In *Politics in Central Europe* (1994) George Schöpflin tells of a senior comrade at the HSWP congress of 1975, who was accused of using enterprise funds to build villas for all his children. In a tearful and self-right-

eous apologia he explained to his colleagues that he "had only acted out of parental love".

Your business is everybody's business

Both family and friends, but also colleagues and neighbours, operate a bush telegraph in Hungary whose efficiency renders satellite communications largely superfluous. In *A Journey Round My Skull* (1937), Frigyes Karinthy gives a memorable description of its workings. In a secluded corner of the Main City Library, he whispers to his closest friend, who is sworn to secrecy, that he (Karinthy) has been diagnosed with brain tumour. As he leaves the library a few minutes later, the lady who keeps the coats is already weeping at his imminent demise. Hardly has he got home, than his wife, (who was supposed to be on a shopping trip to Vienna) bursts into the room and falls tragically on his neck. When he arrives later at the New York Café, the waiter melodramatically tears up his unpaid bill; (some months later, after Karinthy has unexpectedly survived brain surgery, the same waiter is seen desperately trying to glue the fragments together again). As he takes his place at his accustomed table, the café habitués are already trying out a few little witticisms at his expense, ("he used to be a humourist, but now he's a tumourist !").

The hyper-activity of the rumour mill makes it rather difficult for erring Hungarian husbands to keep their amours secret, let alone their business affairs, which are conducted in an ever-burgeoning cloud of information and disinformation. Actually it is surprising that the average Hungarian has time for business in view of the number and complication of family rituals that he is obliged to observe. First among these is the name-day, a form of social blackmail unknown in the west. Indeed, almost every day turns out to be either the name-day or the birthday of some (usually) female member of the family, or of an acquaintance, or of a neighbour. Congratulations and flowers are *de rigueur* and most of the florists live on this name-day terrorism in the slack seasons between the Day of the Dead, Christmas, Easter, etc. The counterpart of family loyalties is a capacity for intrigue in professional and public life that has been honed by the experience of arbitrary rule and official mendacity. It is not simply that a Hungarian has mastered the art, as the clichéd joke has it, of entering a revolving door second and emerging ahead. It is also that the door may at any moment start revolving in the opposite direction, requiring enormous skills of bullshit and agility to remain in front. Add to this the fact that Hungarians are, by any standards, a gifted nation, and it is easy to see that there is usually too much talent around for too little opportunity. The excess energy is soaked up in intrigue, backbiting, and character assassination. This is by and large a family affair for Hungarians, who like to play their own games of skulduggery according to their own rules, or lack of them. Foreign investors and the like may be the victims of collateral damage, but they should realize it's nothing personal, merely business as usual. Arcane manoeuvrings often continue just as enthusiastically in emigration. As the historian Norman Stone puts it: "Hungarians stand out as immigrants in England, forming a sort of free-masonry that links many of the senior posts in business and the professions. True to Hungarian form, however, it is a free-masonry that conspires against itself rather than outsiders."[10]

Perhaps unfortunately, the only well-documented instance of expatriate Hungarians apparently pooling their skills is during the development of the atomic bomb at Los Alamos during World War II. However, it is almost reassuring to learn that,

one is tempted to say inevitably, Leo Szilárd and Edward Teller fell out over the ethical implications of their work; Teller was an aggressive spokesman for the achievement of first strike capacity, while the conscience-stricken Szilárd, in the cautious but pregnant words of *Chambers Dictionary of Biography,* became "a source of both inspiration and exasperation to his colleagues". Another magic circle of expatriate Hungarians existed in Hollywood: it is alleged that one of the studios bore the following inscription (in Hungarian): "Here it is not enough to be Hungarian; here you must also be gifted!" Generally speaking, the Hungarian is an individualist first and a team-player second, if at all. When the nation does pull together, it is usually a spontaneous reaction to intolerable pressure, as in 1956: yet even that revolution was conducted entirely by the seat of the pants, and with typical Hungarian and typically reckless bravura. As it transpired, it proved to be a (probably temporary) coalescence of three revolutions—one by the workers in Csepel, which had a momentum of its own; one by the army, which was led by the dashing but far too honourable and trusting figure of Maléter; and one by the students and intellectuals, most of whom mistakenly believed there could be such a thing as Communism with a human face.

Hungarian identities

As a periodically endangered species, the Hungarians have naturally devoted much time and effort to the question of identity, its assertion and denial, its creation and sublimation. Being members of a state-forming caste expands their horizons, belonging to an isolated ethnic group and linguistic culture tends to narrow them, (or perhaps it is the other way round). One escape route from these tensions is Protean, (the unique Hungarian genius adapts everywhere to the world, as the world adapts to it); another is mystical (the Magyars as the Lost Tribe, the apostolic Hungarian mission, the people of the east); a third is absurdist, as in the cabaret recreation of Árpád and his reluctant band on the eve of the invasion of the Carpathian Basin. In this discussion the pessimists, as usual, have the upper hand — there'll be trouble if we go on in; but then again there'll be trouble if we don't. The shaman has an idea, and conveys it to Árpád, (who unfortunately is a country boy and none too bright). "You should forbid the invasion!" he tells him. "Are you mad?" exclaims the thoroughly alarmed chieftain. "Don't you see," explains the shaman; "If you forbid it, they will all instantly be provoked to set off. They are Hungarians after all!"

As we know, the shaman's idea worked. However, occupying the Carpathian Basin was one thing, formulating a role there quite another. With the passing of the years it has not got any easier, and the Hungarians have had to don, discard or mingle a number of different responsibilities and identities. Much of the mixed idealism and frustration that all this entailed emerges in the career and personality of the painter Tivadar Csontváry Kosztka, and in his mystical cult of Hungarian genius. (Admittedly the latter got a bit mixed up with the cult of his own genius, and his double identification of himself with the rather unlikely pairing of Raphael and Attila the Hun). Although Csontváry was obsessed with his Magyar roots, he himself grew up speaking "Slovak mixed with German". This may actually be an advantage in aspiring to Hungarianness, which need not have anything to do with racial origin — after all, the national poet (Sándor Petőfi) was the offspring of a Southern Slav innkeeper and a Slovak mother.

There are, needless to say, other and worse difficulties in choosing to be a

Hungarian. In few other nations have so many potentially extreme polarities been moulded into a common identity, albeit one frequently at war with itself. Thus the eastern heritage *(kelet népe)* might challenge the dominant western orientation, both in terms of a periodically "rediscovered" kinship with the Huns, or the Avars, or of an affinity with the once methodically suppressed influence of Byzantium on the nascent Hungarian state. Csontváry, though much mocked by the urban intelligentsia of his day, has become one of the most popular, and certainly the most "Hungarian" of painters. There is no one else quite like him, and the powerfulness of his work is inseparable from his slightly dotty racial and cultural mythology. (On the other hand, Csontváry's blend of sun-worship and the Hun-Magyar ancestor cult is really no more bizarre than the Celtic mysticism of W.B. Yeats). But it is Csontváry's touching belief in simple remedies for present ills that betrays the influence of the *délibáb* at work. It must be doubted whether Hungary would have entered into a golden age of prosperity and happiness, even if the government had heeded the advice with which the painter bombarded it, and obtained from Syria the giant monolith, which Csontváry claimed was the source of solar energy on earth; (by some happy coincidence it was also the original altar of Attila). Notwithstanding his belief in the Hungarians as a chosen race from the east, Csontváry showed a touching concern for the Emperor (Franz Joseph) in the west. On reading in his café newspaper that the Emperor was unwell, he hastened to telegraph the Viennese court that they should "put his Majesty into the sun". The café wits, on hearing him boast of this, arranged for a fake telegram to be sent back, thanking him for his wise counsel and advising him of a noticeable improvement in the Emperor's condition.[11]

Csontváry's brilliant painting *The Solitary Cedar* can be seen as a powerful emblem of both personal and national isolation. Yet within the framework of their uniqueness and apartness, Hungarians have tried to resolve the historical tensions and competing cultural imperatives of Central Europe. A good example of something pressed into service for the Hungarian identity is religion. At once an enriching and divisive force, Christianity originally underpinned the Hungarian claim to be the state-forming caste with an apostolic mission. Come the Reformation, and ninety per cent of the population went over to Protestantism, a creed which appealed to the Magyars' streak of cussed individualism. The Counter-Reformation and the attempt to impose Habsburg hegemony helped Protestantism, (and in particular the dour creed of Calvinism, that had elbowed aside urban-oriented Lutheranism) to the role of "liberation theology". This was a faith now preached for the first time in the native tongue with the aid of Gáspár Károlyi's Bible; its imagery suggested inter alia parallels between the liberation of the Jews from Babylon and the liberation of Hungarians from the Turkish and, later, the Habsburg yoke.

The struggle of the faiths was also a cultural and sociological split mirrored in politics. The "culture of the word", originally a modernizing force importing ideas from Protestant German centres of learning, also implied resistance to the Habsburg Catholic hegemony. Transylvania, an autonomous principality, under its astute Protestant princes, notably Gábor Bethlen, thumbed its nose at Vienna. Later Kossuth, himself a Protestant, declared the dethronement of the Habsburgs in the church at the Protestant stronghold of Debrecen. The "culture of the senses", expressed in the aesthetic propaganda of the Baroque, was feudal, aristocratic, for the most part

Habsburg-true and concentrated in the western part of the country. Protestants busied themselves with improving matters here on earth, while Catholic apologists did their best to colonize heaven with Hungarian saints. A Jesuit named Gábor Hevesi even produced an *Index of Hungarian Saints* in 1693 and in the following century, Franz Anton Maulbertsch was commissioned by the church to paint a number of obscure, but doctrinally useful saints, such as Ágnes, Kinga and Hedwig at Eger, or St Wendelin at Tállya; whether these ladies were saintly or not is a minor issue: the point is they were indubitably Hungarian, while St Wendelin, as the protector of viticulture, might be expected to appeal to the parishioners' commercial instincts. Both religions thus courted the patriot and tried to interpret Hungarian identity in a way that would produce a satisfactory political orientation.

Unfortunately, much of the useful spadework put in by the Jesuits could be brought to nothing by less subtle minds, such as that of Cardinal Kollonitsch (see above), and it did not help matters when forty-two Protestant pastors were sent to the Neapolitan galleys in the late 17th century. Moreover, Catholic princes, such as Ferenc Rákóczi, were also provoked into leading the resistance to Vienna, only his confessional allegiance subsequently saving him from execution. (Meanwhile hehad enraged the Catholic hierarchy by extending tolerance to Protestants in his realm).

The co-existence of differing religious faiths and opposed *Weltanschauungen* in the collective Hungarian identity is mirrored in other divisions. There were always *kuruc* and *labanc*, who might be designated in the famously question-begging categories of the Spanish Civil War as "patriots" and "loyalists". There was always, (or almost always) an Árpád (sometimes an Attila) cult in opposition to a St Stephen cult. Since the 19th century at least, there has been tension between the wicked "cosmopolitan" (read: Jewish) society of the metropolis and the clean-living peasant existence of "the people". It is this sort of cultural schizophrenia that sometimes makes the Magyars in their public persona seem like the emotional barometer of Central Europe. Oscillating between east and west, rebellion and subjection, euphoria and gloom, naiveté and suspicion (the list could go on), the Hungarian psyche has a built-in mechanism for over-reaction alternating with fatalism. It is a recipe for achievement and breakdown, a paradigm for the struggle of irreconcilables. The last word, however, should lie not with an outsider, who can always be told he is thinking with his outsider's head and knows not of what he speaks, but with a Hungarian. It was Arthur Koestler who observed that "to be a Hungarian is a collective neurosis." Well, that is just what a successful Magyar would say. Interrogating Hungarians about themselves often produces this slightly surreal result, a feeling that their plight is both impossibly tragic and mildly absurd. A Budapest suicide joke admirably captures this ethos and might be offered as a sort of epitaph for a much-abused and ever-suffering nation: a man jumps from a third floor window and hits the pavement with a shattering crunch. A crowd gathers round the crumpled body. From the back of the throng, a busybody pushes his way importantly to the front and demands to know "What is going on here?" An eye located somewhere in the heap of twisted bones below him opens slowly, and after regarding the busybody reflectively for a few seconds is assisted by a voice located somewhere else in the heap, which observes plaintively: "How should I know? I only just got here myself." ❧

NOTES

1 ■ Paul Lendvai: *Hungary: The Art of Survival,* London, 1988. Herder's famous prophecy of doom is in *Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit* (1791), but has a considerable pedigree leading back, perhaps, to Bishop Miklós Oláh's *Hungaria* of 1536–37 (See *Die Ungarn: Ihre Geschichte und Kultur,* Ed. by László Kósa, Budapest, 1994, p. 338).

2 ■ The whole stomach-turning business of Ceausescu's state visit to Britain in 1978, from which he returned triumphantly with a knighthood, is described with macabre humour in John Sweeney's *The Life and Evil Times of Nicolae Ceausescu,* London, 1991.

3 ■ George Konrád: *The Melancholy of Rebirth: Essays from Post-Communist Central Europe,* 1989–1994 , New York, 1995, p. 84.

4 ■ Eva Hoffmann: *Exit to History,* London, 1993, p. 192.

5 ■ W. H. Auden: "August 1968."

6 ■ Details are given in Géza Jeszenszky's interesting "The Hungarian Reception of 'Scotus Viator'": *Hungarian Studies,* 1989, Vol. 5, No. 2.

7 ■ Ernő Szép: *The Smell of Humans.* Budapest, London, New York, CEU Press, 1994, p. 167.

8 ■ George Konrád: *Op cit.* p. 84.

9 ■ Imre Madách: *The Tragedy of Man,* Transl. by George Szirtes, Budapest, 1988. The comment occurs in George Cushing's Introduction.

10■ Norman Stone: "A Central European Historian: A.J.P. Taylor", A Contribution to the CEU History Department Yearbook, 1993. p. 156.

11■ There has been a good deal of illuminating work on Csontváry recently. See for instance articles by Géza Perneczky in *Budapest Review of Books,* Vol 3, Number 2, Summer 1993, and Katalin Sinkó's contribution to the catalogue for the recent Csontváry exhibition.

"The Two Butchers." The Russian Bear delivers up Hungary to the Two-Headed Habsburg Eagle. An 1849 Italian drawing.

Lajos Nagy

Café Budapest

Excerpts from the novel

Our solar system exists within outer space, this much is certain, though perhaps Einstein himself could not say what outer space really is.

The centre of our solar system is the Sun. The Sun is a gigantic orb of fire, and this orb has its own planets, which rotate and revolve around the Sun.

The planets are of various sizes, nine in number, or so they say, and one of them is the Earth. All that lies outside our solar system is completely unknown to us, for we do not even know whether outer space is finite or infinite, but then our knowledge of the world within our solar system is also incomplete. We do not know whether there is life on Mars, or on any of the other planets. But this much is certain, for most of us at least, that living beings people the Earth, plants, animals and man, and what is more, we have a rough idea of the number of humans: about two billion of this species live, work, produce, consume, find pleasure and suffer on our planet.

Hungary takes up a relatively small section of the surface of the Earth, ninety-three thousand square kilometres, the number of inhabitants is just about nine million. The capital of the country is Budapest, which is on both banks of the Danube, with a million inhabitants. The largest street of this city is the so-called Great Boulevard, and it is on this great boulevard that the Café Budapest thrives in magnificence and splendour—on which particular part of the great boulevard, there is perhaps no need to say.

Yet there is something amiss with what I have related so far with such arbitrary succintness. (What will the rest of what I have to say be like?) I have already mentioned the problem of the finiteness or infiniteness of space. The question of whether the world has existed from time immemorial or whether it is six thousand and some hundred years old is a delicate one, to which I can no more than allude here. That the Earth is round, rotates on its own axis once every twenty-four hours, and revolves around the Sun is not a universally accepted fact, for there are some who believe that the Earth is disk-shaped. What is more, there are some who know that the Earth is round, rotates and revolves—but keep this knowledge to themselves, and advise differently. There

Lajos Nagy *(1883–1954) published his first volume of stories in 1911. The illegitimate son of a village girl who worked as a servant in the capital, all his life his sympathies remained with the poor, the miserable, the humiliated, the underdog. Their lives he described in hundreds of stories and some novels with a sharp eye in a dry, sometimes passionate, sometimes sardonic, precise style. He was among the pioneers of what could be called descriptive literary sociology in the thirties, the genre that also produced* The People of the Puszta *by Gyula Illyés, now known in a dozen languages.* Café Budapest *(1936) also springs from a quasi sociological approach, aiming at the presentation of a particular way of Budapest life. Though on the political left all his life, a trip to the Soviet Union in 1934 opened Nagy's eyes and he completely rejected "socialist realism", with the result that he was not allowed to publish during the fifties. He died a bitter man. Besides his stories, his journal of the 1944–45 siege of Budapest and his two volumes of autobiography are now classics.*

are some who protest against our lumping plants, animals and humans together under the name of living beings. And there are some who knit their brows, half close their eyes, and look grave, burdened by troubling thoughts, when they read a word like "production," and at once begin to form suspicions regarding the text.

But, just as when you are knocked down by a car and break a leg, your chief concern is not that your pocket's been picked by a crafty fellow-creature making up the crowd hurrying to your aid, nor that your beloved has not replied to your last letter, but your mind is concentrated on your broken leg, at least for the time being—so all the problems I have mentioned in relation to the universe, the Earth and its inhabitants shrink into insignificance beside the true problem, which I have also mentioned, defining the two billion as suffering.

As far as I know, no one doubts that people suffer. Of course this is true only so far as it is suffering in general that we are talking about. For as soon as we begin to go into the details of this suffering, raising questions such as does everyone suffer; do the sufferers all suffer in the same way, or to a different degree; is their attitude towards life determined by their suffering, or do joy and suffering complement, compensate each other; have people always suffered, or is it only these days that they suffer more than they should; will they always suffer, or will the age of happiness dawn at long last—as I say, if we pose such questions and search for answers to them, then something is amiss again and it seems hopeless to expect that the probable answers should produce general satisfaction. And if we were to seek the causes of suffering! To say nothing of investigating what should be done, and whether there is anything to be done at all.

An all-round inquiry is out of the question when two billion people are involved. Even the magazine *Theatre Life* would not undertake such a task. We cannot organize a referendum on Earth, and it would be even more impractical to embark on some kind of general, county by county open vote. But there is one convenient way of ascertaining the views of people on their own suffering, and the suffering of mankind. These views are expressed in literature, in newspapers, in petitions addressed to people in authority, in private letters, conversations, gestures observed, sighs and curses overheard, in tears shed, in sombre and fearful glances, in mimicry, the shrugging of shoulders, in tossing and turning and groans uttered during sleep. Superficial knowledge of these signs, manifestations and facts enables us to confirm that people suffer; not equally, for some suffer more, and some less, and there are many whose lives can, without exaggeration, be defined as endless suffering. It is less certain, but quite likely that human suffering has intensified during the past couple of decades. And it seems that people themselves have a name for the aggregate of their suffering, and this is misery. The more scientifically minded speak of economic crisis. Others deny the importance of economic conditions and talk of the degeneration of the human soul. There are some who proclaim it a law of universal order that people cannot be uniformly happy and will generally always be unhappy, regardless of their circumstances—those who profess opinions of the sort, and this is of no minor importance, are mostly to be found among those who are relatively well off. (Perhaps those forced to endure poverty, hardship and distress are incapable of objective thinking.)

Well, never mind, only the contentious are liable to take issue here. If we take a close look around any small circle in any part of the world, we shall find a great many woes lurking behind the calm, perhaps even serene exterior. Let us pick any moment, say the evening of July 3rd 1935, to visit the Café Budapest. It is a fashionable coffee-house. Elegant, spacious, well-lit, clean, with fine, large windows—everything there is to say about it must be said in its favour. That it is expensive only means that everything it has to offer is perfectly delicious. It is L-shaped. Not like a normal, everyday L, but like a stylized one, the stems of which, but especially the lower, horizontal one, are quite thick. From this reference to the L-shape of the coffee-house it is obvious that it is in a corner building. Yes, the windows of the longer, narrower part open onto a side street, and the windows of the shorter, wider part open onto the boulevard. On this July 3rd it is summer, it is hot, the temperature in the noon hours—according to the meteorological report—peaked at 30° Celsius, therefore most of the windows of the coffee-house are open, with the entrance door on the boulevard side left open also, to serve as a large open window itself. On a weekday, a Wednesday, there are few in the coffee-house. All the more easy to survey the forty-odd people collected here, of whom thirty-six are on the terrace.

Which of the customers shall we begin with?

Right beside the door proper, which we might as well close now, a woman is sitting alone at a table set against the wall. Through the open window she keeps stealing hopeful, eager glances towards the boulevard. She has been doing this for some time. She is waiting for someone and that someone is late, or perhaps will not come at all. How embarrassing, no, worse than that, how painful. The woman is not at all pretty, and truth to tell, women of her kind are liable to find themselves waiting in vain for someone who does not arrive. And she may not even be able to pay for the ice-cream she ordered and ate two hours ago.

A young man with tousled blond hair is sitting at the foot of a pillar, also alone. He has taken off his coat and hung it up on the back of the chair, though his shirt is torn on the shoulder, an extremely conspicuous place. The allowance he gets from his father does not run to new shirts. Yet anyone who takes off his coat in a coffee-house requires a shirt that is fine, clean and above all untorn. That's the way it is, no use arguing about it. And in any case, man has a need of everything that is beautiful and good. The coffee should be excellent, the service prompt and polite, the arc lamps should shed light lavishly so that one can read the papers easily, without straining the eyes. The young man is reading Traven's novel, *The Ship of Death,* it is lying open on the table before him. He reads at night because he does not like to go to bed early, has trouble getting to sleep. Naturally he has trouble getting up in the morning also. So he has trouble with working as well. But one has to live, and one has to live well, and for this you need money, a lot of people need money, everybody needs money—and fathers and mothers are proving more and more reluctant to give their young and not so young children money. It is characteristic of the general situation that when here in the Café Budapest talk turned to a young couple in desperate straits, and someone asked why don't they go home to their parents, the person relating their plight replied because they *have* gone home to *their* parents. It may sound fantastic, but it is true that one cannot conceive a life of undisturbed tranquillity without everyone getting money from their parents.

This Traven novel is actually nothing but a succession of dreadful ordeals. It is about a man who has lost his papers and so has lost his place in the community of men. He has no choice but to sign on as a sailor on a battered old ship, a ship sentenced to death, by the company which owns it, planning it to be shipwrecked so they can lay their hands on the insurance money. The tousled-haired young man is devouring the book, as if his own unhappiness were not enough for him, as if he wished to add as much as he can to it. (His previous reading matter was *Crime and Punishment,* and it was the fourth time he had chosen that book to torment himself with). He has reached the part where the novelist describes the gruelling work of the death-ship's stokers. This means sixteen hours of work a day in intolerable heat, a continuous, desperate straining of muscles; their sleeping quarters are confined and filthy, food is scarce and foul,

their companions are ruthless, their commander hard and exacting, and there is no hope of shore leave, of breaking free, of flight.

The tousle-haired young man is a sensitive reader, but the sufferings endured in imagination do not diminish the actual suffering he is forced to endure because of the heat. It is hot, terribly hot in the world, in the city, in the coffeehouse, in the Café Budapest, in this damned oven, Traven's heat, plus the thirty degrees that we are actually experiencing is insufferable taken together, oh, impossible to go home and lie down, impossible, even more so than in the winter, or at any other time. Damnable fate! He should be sailing in the Norwegian fjords, and not on a death-ship but on a luxury steamer, first class, until September at least.

Another man, past his prime and running to fat, has ordered chicken and stewed fruit and is eating it fervently and with relish. If he continues to dine thus twice every night for some decades longer, he will live to a ripe old age. Yes, but there is no way he can be sure that this so pleasurable extra supping will continue undisturbed, if only for a few years. And for him, there's the rub: the lack of certainty, and that he is aware of this lack. This is why a bitter taste spoils the sweetness of the stewed fruit at times, and even if he realizes that the bitterness is a figment of his imagination only, for the stewed fruit is delicious, if there were someone to whom he could speak now, this is what he would say, being a Jew: *Da liegt der Hund begraben!*

Thus a man sits on the terrace who has quarreled with his wife, and is now staring out into the street, towards the boulevard, with a painful, heavy heart, staring not surprisingly in the direction he has come from, where he lives, and where—or so he feels at this moment—he can never return; and where his wife, his wicked wife, is now quietly and contritely crying. A beautiful streetwalker saunters past the terrace, parading, flaunting herself, her eyes casually encountering the eyes of the exiled husband, but immediately glancing away, for with the superhuman perceptiveness of prostitutes she has sized up the situation, grasped the truth: a man in the slough of dejection. Something must be troubling him, he wouldn't want her now. Though she's badly in need of business, for silk stockings are expensive and competition is fierce.

An old woman is sitting on the terrace too, with her married daughter and the daughter's husband, in other words her son-in-law. The couple's financial circumstances are unstable, they want to be rid of the mother, the mother has done her duty, she can go; the mother senses this and has taken to crying every day. This old woman is the only one on the terrace whose attention is arrested by the little scene taking place nearby. A filthy, unshaven, ragged creature with dark, fearful, red-rimmed eyes, broken weary, had been picking up cigarette butts from the pavement, and, running out of booty, had shuffled towards the nearest street bench and sat down upon it. A stylish prostitute was sitting there already, resting in the shade, in other words lightly dressed and fanning herself

with one of those little paper trays you get in a pastry shop. The butt-collector decorously sat at the end of the bench, whereupon the prostitute immediately and with an expression of disgust withdrew from the middle to the other end of the bench, but from then on they sat peacably beneath the same sky, lit by the moon. For some moments. Then a policeman came up to the bench. He left the prostitute alone, had no bone to pick with her, but he picked a quarrel with the butt-collector. The tramp stood up, slowly, unwillingly, making plainly embarrased gestures, faltering excuses, pulling papers out of his pocket—so he had not yet sunk as low as Traven's hero—displaying, explaining these to the policeman; the policeman held the papers up to the light, as though he were looking for a watermark, then finally thrust the documents back into the hands of the butt-collector, and with a decisive wave of the hand sent him on his way; maybe he has no home to go to, he certainly is tired and sleepy and weak, his eyes had closed as soon as he had sat down, but he has no right to rest on the bench.

The old woman witnessed the whole scene from the terrace, could almost swear she had heard every word, and her heart was filled with anguish. This may soon be her lot. All things considered, this may be what fortune holds in store. Yes, the sense of security of those living a life of ease is beginning to crumble. The old formula that says "trouble can befall anyone, except for me" no longer holds.

A shabbily dressed young man is hurrying along the boulevard in the direction of the Café Budapest. His dreamy gaze registers the scene with the butt-collector, the prostitute and the policeman, but it does not reach his consciousness: his mind is busy with other, much more important things, paltry affairs such as this are nothing to him. He has no need of small reminders, suggestive signs, he has gained awareness of the world in its entirety and weeks before came to a final decision: something must be done here!

Here—this must be understood as the place where one actually finds oneself at the moment, geographically speaking in a given small circle, but with a bearing on the whole city, the whole country, the whole world. In that small circle no larger than the area a man's eyes can survey on the open plain, the whole wide world is contained. The small circle is an organic part of the world and comprises all its characteristics. Thus, the whole wide world is contained within the Café Budapest. Every event taking place in the world takes place there too, for it is acceptable, almost palpable. A gentleman has been reading the papers for hours. *"The cashier of the Budafok post-office threw himself under the train... The wheels of the engine decapitated him."* Behold, something, a real decapitation from the outside world, even if it did happen practically next door. The wheels of the engine sliced through the neck, pushed the trunk and the limbs between the tracks, ploughing, tearing ahead with it, while the head, like a ball, rolled down the embankment. *"The unhappy woman's third attempt to escape into death succeeded ."* Both events appeared on the front page of a morning paper. Cannot be overlooked, cannot be ignored, cannot be sidestepped. *"The socialists*

are terrorizing Csepel workers. Bloody battles and arrests on the Csepel strike front. Anyone brave enough to work braves death ." Thus reads the front page of another newspaper. An article in the third: "*The economic situation of Hungary.*" What can it be like? It's a strange world, the answer may even be: not bad. "*According to Lloyd George, the outlook for peace is worse than it was in 1914.*" Should someone be curious to see Lloyd George, the shaggy artist's head, the smiling face which uttered these words, he will probably find his picture in one of the illustrated papers. This diagnosis, for that matter, applies to the whole world. While one's at it, and since the outlook for peace is so bad, one may as well take stock of the so-called focal points of interest. East-Siberian tension, Italian-Abyssinian conflict, German re-armament—and dozens more. "*Will there be war in Abyssinia?*" "*Paris disquietened by the Polish foreign minister's trip to Berlin*"; "*Air defence and the Upper House.*" "*Beneficence, not bluster and elbowing should be vindicated, proclaims the national association of the reform generation,*" "*Chancellor Hitler and Polish foreign minister Beck bury the Eastern pact in Berlin*"; "*Miklós Kenyeres-Kaufmann questioned today at the Public Prosecutor's office.*" This, too! And "*Fashionable massage salon in the central district, medicinal massage, modern electric treatment, manicures. 22, Ferenciek tere, mezzanine*" can be of no help.

It is quite understandable if "*Gentlewoman seeks discreet, pleasant company of middle-aged gentleman for the purpose of amusement. Sober 38, Codeword at the branch office.*" Or: "*Gentleman seeks acquaintance of strikingly pretty young gentlewoman for week-ends, dances, up to 23. Codeword Poet at the branch office.*"

The gentleman reading the paper has grown tired of the dailies and has gone on to the magazines. In *Illustration,* a group photograph portrays five gentlemen sitting around a small round table with troubled faces, among them Eden and Laval. In another photograph an amiably stout man in the ornate uniform of French academicians sits beside a small table, his right hand resting on a thick tome, obviously a great man of learning, he is Maréchal Franchet D'Esperay. You can almost hear the Marseillaise played while he, the scholar, was made a member of the academy. Another photograph, "Brueghel's Bridal Dance"; in the *Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung,* Hitler, steel-helmet, gas-mask, the jealous battle of two giraffes.

In another magazine, houses, gardens. What magnificent gardens, villas, palaces, furnishings there are in the world! That poor, unfortunate butt-collector may not even be aware that they exist. Well, there's a thing that could be done: he should be asked inside and shown these pictures. Let him feast his eyes on them too. Even a man of his kind may have some artistic sense. In the *Sourire,* splendid naked women! A display of breasts, thighs, shoulders and arms, plenty to tempt the eye. And such sophisticated jokes in the *Ojság:* "*Kohn goes over to Grün in the coffee-house and says to him:*

Hey, Grün, I hear you've come into ten thousand pengős recently. How about going into partnership with me? That depends—says Grün—on what you've got in mind. I've a marvellous proposition for you. Let's you and me open a flea circus together. A flea-circus? Yes. You provide the money, I'll provide the fleas."

Well, something certainly must be done here. It is just possible that the shabby young gentleman was right—the young gentleman who, passing hurriedly and indifferently by the butt-collector, the policeman and the prostitute, turned into the Café Budapest, sat down at a table in the back, ordered a cup of black coffee, while his mind was busy with the thought—though this was not the only one that occupied his mind, there was another thought besides, of which we shall speak later—that something must be done here.

But what?

What should be done and what can be done?

What can be done against cannons and tanks? Against the Japanese, the Russians and the butt-collector, or even for the butt-collector? Against the policeman, the prostitute, or for them? Against the Brueghel painting, the joke in the *Ojság,* against the Café Budapest, against black coffee, or even for it? For the old woman who may have to go through hard times, like the butt-collector. What can be done about the poor woman sitting by the door waiting in vain for her man—in actual fact not waiting any longer, for she has just got up and is leaving, her clothing too plain, almost proletarian, out of place in such a fashionable coffee-house, but she was after all able to pay for her ice cream. (Well, one does worry needlessly sometimes.)

What can be done to enable the tousle-haired young man in the torn shirt to sail to the Norwegian coast, or if he should stay, to make sure that he gets to bed in time in the evenings, gets up early and goes to work? Lujza Büki, textile worker, earns 12 pengős 24 fillérs per week— what to do so that this should not be so? How to make sure that there will be no more ships of death? Oh, and if we add to this that János Hanka earns exactly nothing per week, while Mr S. Gerő Schwarz earns five thousand pengős per month.

What should be done and what can be done?

One thing. And one thing only.

Start a paper. A brand new one!

The young man in shabby clothes, Béla Terebes by name, had decided weeks before that he would start a paper. And now, around midnight, he had come to the Café Budapest for the purpose of meeting two other young men, whose views were much like his own and who were also thinking of starting a paper.

The question was, what kind of paper should they start?

Obviously a revolutionary one. For without a revolution, society, which as we know is rotten to the core, can not and will not change.

And what do we mean by revolution?

Obviously the revolution of the proletariat. The struggle of the working people against capitalism which exploits them and the triumph of this struggle over the accursed, odious system.

It is midnight, a rather late hour for the revolutionary-minded young men to choose to meet. But then it is easier to take refuge in the inner, deserted recesses of a large, fashionable, cosmopolitan coffee-house so late at night.

Terebes arrived and seated himself in the following sequence and manner: he walked into the coffee-house, took a look round, found the premises eminently suitable at first glance, strolled along the side-street wing—the longer shaft of the L—until he came to the telephone booth, where he sat down at a small table above which the lamp was not lit; he looked at his fob-watch, found it was three minutes past midnight, and thought it was about time that the other two arrived, but no matter, as it was quite certain they would come; he ordered a cup of black coffee, and in the meanwhile slipped a hand into his trouser pocket to hold an exploratory survey over his sole pengő piece, which he had cadged off his married sister for paper-founding purposes.

When the coffee arrived, Terebes began sipping it slowly, leisurely, and glanced expectantly but not anxiously towards the large pane of glass that now served as the entrance on the boulevard side. He watched the entrance but saw nothing, for of course the other two had not yet arrived, and for him nothing existed now aside from the great task at hand. If something out of the ordinary, such as a murder for example, were to happen now in the coffee-house, and he were called upon to give evidence, to every question put to him all he could have answered was I set out from Hollán utca before midnight to make the Café Budapest by twelve o'clock, I walked along the boulevard, entered the coffee-house, by three minutes past midnight I was sitting at a small table, then ordered coffee and looked out to see if Halas and Gerlei had come.

Yes, between Hollán utca and the Café Budapest he saw and heard nothing; he could not say whether the boulevard was crowded or not, he did not notice that it was hot, he could not have told whether the moon was up and the stars bright, he did not hear jazz blaring, thundering, bubbling from the gardens of the Hotel Royal, swamping the neighbourhood in a deluge of sound, was not aware that the trams were still running, and did not see a single beautiful woman—though he could have seen a hundred. He saw no tramps sleeping on the benches, he passed twenty to twenty-five large German railwaymen, on a visit to Budapest, but did not notice them either, his eyes did not register the glitter of the neon lights at the Oktogon advertising Mallow soap, did not notice the young servant girl standing in front of a locked door on the boulevard and softly crying, though her distress could perhaps have been eased by a right-minded, honest man; did not see that there were people sitting on the terrace of the Café Budapest, had no idea—since he did not see them—whether there were many people sitting there, or just a few; apart from the conviction of the neces-

sity of starting a paper, the only other thought that occupied his mind was that Feldheim was a wicked, dishonest, shameless, dirty, stupid blackguard of a Trotskyite, who therefore must be counted among the most dangerous enemies of the proletariat, more dangerous than a retired white terrorist who has for the moment adopted a wait-and-see attitude, more dangerous than any functionary of bourgeois society in a position of power, more dangerous than bourgeois writers, priests, and scholars, even more dangerous perhaps than psychoanalysts, who are the most dangerous of all, proclaiming as they do—since they do not have an adequate understanding of historical materialism—false doctrines such as: if a woman steps out into the street, and a terrible fear seizes her upon the sight of so much space, so terrible that her heart jumps into her mouth, she cannot get her breath, her pulse speeds up, her whole body begins to tremble, her face loses colour, her skin turns wet with perspiration, her knees give way so that she must stop, and cannot take a single step further, and if she is forced to do so, then in her fear she may even faint and fall sprawling to the ground—then these, and other, similar phenomena may not have solely economic causes.

Yes, it must be said once more, but not for the last time, and never enough, that Feldheim is an ignorant, thick-brained, perfidious scoundrel, a public menace, a Trotskyite. This much has been determined, can be stated as a fact. One of the first tasks of the paper will be to square accounts with Feldheim, expose him, hold him up to public ridicule, blast him with great proletarian curses.

At this point Halas and Gerlei arrived. They turned in at the entrance and, as if they had known beforehand where to seek Terebes, continued towards the depths of the coffee-house in the direction of the telephone booth. Both of them were in their twenties, one hatless, with a great shock of hair, clean-shaven, wearing black-rimmed spectacles, with a fat briefcase in his hand—this was Halas; the other of small stature, thin, with round sloping shoulders, old for his years, with a little, pointed black moustache, neatly dressed, holding a book and some note-books—this was Gerlei.

"Hello," they say to Terebes, "Hello," comes the reply; they shake hands and sit.

While they are conferring with the waiter and finally settle upon a coffee—for Halas—and a glass of soda water—for Gerlei, a thickset, pot-bellied, bewhiskered man in a black suit, wearing a black bowler and gripping a thick knobbed stick strolls slowly down the length of the coffee-house, sits down at the adjoining table, sits so as to face the three youths, orders coffee, takes a notebook out of his pocket, lays it down on the table, then from the outer pocket of his coat takes out a crumpled newspaper and spreads it out before him like a screen.

"Comrades!" begins Terebes in a ringing voice, pronouncing the word clearly, as if it were intended for the ears of the black-hatted, knobsticked man as well. "You all know why we have gathered here tonight."

The other two are silent, indicating that they do.

"A new paper must be started; that is our duty."

Halas nods decisively, signalling his agreement: of course!

"This is the eleventh hour."

"It's past twelve, actually", mutters Gerlei.

A short silence. Terebes gathers strength. Then:

"First of all, we must decide on who is to edit the paper, which can only be edited by me."

"Why you of all people?" says Halas, and smiles sardonically, as one who is not for a moment taken in by such individualistic displays. "After all, the proletariat must decide for itself who it wishes to appoint as editor. In my opinion, the decision in this matter should be left to the proletariat, because I for one am not averse to editing the paper myself."

Gerlei interjected anxiously:

"For the moment, it is not at all certain whether it should be you who should not be averse to editing the paper, or me. Naturally I think it only right that I should edit the paper. For it is my name that the proletariat is familiar with, whereas it has never heard of yours."

A heated debate on who should edit the paper ensues. The collective spirit will best be represented if I am chosen to edit the paper—such was the conviction of all three, severally and collectively. Halas quotes Karl Marx, Gerlei quotes Lenin, whom—by way of precaution, and by sheer force of habit—he persists in calling Vladimir Ilyich Ulianov. But their arguments prove negligible beside Terebes's sole counter-argument: from his married sister, who, it is true, is the wife of a bourgeois doctor, he is to receive twenty pengős for the purpose of starting the paper, which amount can serve as the basis of the capital absolutely necessary to bring out the first two or three issues. (The subsequent issues will of course sell so well that the continuance of the paper is guaranteed).

Terebes declares that he will only avail himself of the twenty pengős if he is to be editor. There is no counter-argument to this, so they agree that Terebes is to edit the paper. Gerlei even addresses him as Comrade Editor once or twice.

Well, and what shall the name of the paper be?

"Red Star!" proposes Halas.

The other two reject the suggestion, and even Halas renounces his idea. The paper cannot be given a conspicuous name which will make its aims obvious to even the uninitiated. For the same reason they reject the following names: *Russia, Red Flag, In Vladimir's Wake, Proletarian Fist, Cyanide, Revolutionary Front, Eastern Light.*

Halas suggests *Red Tricolour,* but Gerlei laughs scornfully and informs Halas that the word "tricolour" in itself means a flag of three different colours, therefore "red tricolor" is an oxymoron. Halas, for his part, laughs scornfully at

Gerlei, as at one beneath contempt, for anyone who can come out with such rubbish can only be a rotten intellectual.

Eastern Light seems to be the most suitable, but the "Eastern" part is perhaps a bit risky. Everyone knows that this is an allusion to Russia, which lies east of bourgeois Europe, that is of Europe proper.

Let the name be *Northern Light!* This sounds more moderate, but the allusion to Russia is still there, for does not Russia lie north of Central Europe, or at least to the north-east of it? At a pinch one can always say that "northern light" is a phenomenon of nature.

"And that the eastern states are under democratic rule besides."

"That would be opportunism!"

Thus the name of the paper became *Northern Light.*

Well, it is rather an opportunistic name, a compromise, you can tell that Gerlei proposed it, Gerlei, who was a Social Democrat last year, an anarchist two years ago, and an advocate of l'art pour l'art before that; and will not become a fascist for some months yet, and two years may pass before he turns neo-Catholic.

Once the capital seemed secured, and since they had come to an agreement concerning the two most important questions, namely, the person of the editor and the name of the paper, they decided to break off the meeting and go home. They paid their bill. Terebes handed over his pengő—a terribly expensive coffeehouse, this—a coffee costs one pengő with the tip, the gate-money to his concierge will have to go unpaid—Halas paid with a five-pengő piece, and Gerlei paid by asking Halas: Put my soda water on your bill, would you? This did not please Halas—a touch is a bourgeois custom after all—but he made no objection and paid for the soda water too, keeping in mind that he had received the five pengős from Karola Székely as a six months' subscription to the new paper. Karola Székely is a well-to-do girl, who can pay half a year's subscription easily and readily did, for she had heard from Gerlei that Seltmann would be writing for the new paper too, and Seltmann is a very clever boy whom she, Karola Székely, finds extremely pleasant and attractive, she has already discussed the question of sex several times with Seltmann and they were in complete agrement in that sex-life is purely a bourgeois custom, a remnant of bourgeois upbringing.

The three newspaper founders departed. They marched out of the coffeehouse in hierarchical order, Terebes leading the way, as befits an editor, Gerlei bringing up the rear, as he had not been able to pay for his soda water, and such a person must to all intents and purposes be considered a member of the lumpenproletariat.

As soon as they had left, the man in the black bowler with the knobbed walking stick finished writing—for it appeared he was one of those gentlemen who keep a diary, noting down the events of the day before going to bed—just committed three last sentences to paper before leaving himself:

"There is a plot to assassinate His Honour Karl Marx, former Director General of the Hungarian State Railways. Several mentions were made of a certain Vladimir Ilkovich, who, as all three are suspectable of spying for Serbia, probably supplies them with money from Belgrade. One of them paid with a hundred pengő note."

The anonymous denunciation would be written up at home.

[...]

"Heat wave continues," Verő reads out loud to his companions.

He is reading the weather report in the *Est.*

"The noonday temperature in Budapest today was 26 degrees C."

"Ssss," hisses Dr Polák in consternation.

"I thought it was at least forty degrees," says Faragó. "I'm about ready to throw a fit."

"One's mind simply refuses to work," rasps Bölény, and looks sternly up at the ceiling, as though wanting to call the Lord of the Heavens to account because of the heat.

"The trouble with my mind is that it won't stop working," Faragó quips. "If my mind didn't work, I'd be a happy man. Perhaps I could even make a living."

The company is sitting in the Café Budapest after lunch, Verő, Dr Polák, Faragó, Gerlei, Bölény, Gróf, Vadász and Székely. Journalist, lawyer, writer, poet, sculptor, bank-clerk, stage-manager and actor. Verő has just arrived—well after three o'clock—having not long since got up, he is eating call it what you will breakfast or lunch. He starts the show with a large, so-called combined breakfast, which consists of coffee, butter, eggs, ham. They do not as a rule serve combined breakfasts in the Café Budapest at three, but they make an exception for Mr Verő, the editor. The company is sitting in a dimly lit corner of the coffee-house, the table is but a short distance from the cash-register, the other customers cannot see what is due to Mr Verő. Mr Verő is The Press. Literature and journalism both. He writes for an important paper and it is advantageous to keep on the good side of a serious paper. If Mr Verő wants breakfast at three o'clock, then he must be given breakfast, otherwise he will take offence and stay away, taking himself, his retinue and their custom to another coffee-house.

They are grumbling about the heat, Gerlei is smiling scornfully. For him the heat is not a subject worth discussing. He is even surprised that others notice that it's hot. He modestly ventures a remark:

"The thing to do is not to look at the thermometer, then one can almost believe that it is pleasantly cool, not more than 15 degrees.

"Idiot!" barks Bölény.

"There is a drought all over the country. The peasants are complaining terribly. Corn, sugar-beet, grapes—we'll have a disastrous crop," says Gróf, the bank clerk.

"Disastrous!" grumbles Bölény.

"Yes."

"Why d'you have to say it in such a fancy way? Why can't you say it normally, why don't you just say bad? What is the corn crop to you anyway?"

Polák laughs, coming to Bölény's assistance:

"Since when have you become such a staunch agrarian?"

"Pardon me, I'm no agrarian, all I said was, all I made bold to say was that a grave drought had struck the country. For the rest, I'm sorry that I spoke."

"And what if there is a drought? Why should it make your peasant head ache?"

"Because we'll have a poor crop or no crop at all, that's why. And if the crop's poor, that has an effect on all of us."

"What have I to do with the crop? I'm no smallholder. All I care about is having enough clients."

"Oh, come on, don't talk such nonsense. After all, our homeland is an agrarian country and if the crop..."

Gróf was not allowed to finish his sentence, for all the others burst out laughing, and Bölény roared at him:

"Our homeland! What are you playing the poet for? Why don't you just say Hungary?"

Faragó:

"I think Gróf has joined the reformists on the sly. Listen, are you going to write an article on the necessity of land distribution for the next issue of *Response*?"

Verő:

"Or an essay on the difference between cart-ladders and shaft-bars."

"The appropriate use of the swingle-tree."

"Or the classical elements in János Sinka's poetry."

The crop, the heat, the drought, reformists, popular poetry—these were the subjects that came up for discussion, the discussion only rarely turning into a debate. Debating is just a game, banter, quibble—in essentials they are all in agreement, whatever the subject, be it the afforestation of the North Pole. Example: the afforestation of the North Pole. Which firm will supply the saplings? How much money is to be gained by the deal? Only free trade can make mankind happy!

Gerlei is silent, listens attentively, feels a little out of place in this circle, but still thinks that *these* are the people with sense, because they've got money; they're good, honest people, they know where their interests lie, they know how to think and how to talk, while those others—Terebes and his friends—they're crazy, stupid, or at least idiots.

In the meantime Verő has eaten everything that the waiter put before him and is now asking what else there is. "What have you got by way of fruit?" He asks for cherries. They are out of cherries, the cherry season is over. Well, what have you got? Peaches. Peaches will be fine. Bring the best! They bring him superb

peaches, at least ten on a large glass dish, with a couple of pears. He eats two peaches and a pear. Then orders cream cakes. And black coffee. With whipped cream. He puts five lumps of sugar in his coffee. Buys a pack of super-fines from the cigarette girl. He lights one cigarette after another, but does not smoke them to the end, just takes a couple of puffs then extinguishes them in the ashtray and the crushed butt lies there, a bit of rubbish. He burns six fillérs every five minutes. Gerlei watches him. Verő has been sitting in the coffee-house for half an hour, and in that time has eaten and smoked away more than four pengős. Gerlei's heart sinks. But Verő commands his respect, he is envious of him. And besides... he would like to borrow a pengő from him, because he doesn't yet know how he's going to pay for his coffee otherwise. The pengő is not hopeless, because Verő is a good sort, why, he's offering him a cigarette right now. Free of charge, so he's smoking his third cigarette. Pity he didn't offer him a peach, but it's too late now, the waiter has taken the dish away, with the remaining peaches.

They're the smart ones after all, thinks Gerlei, and it's me who's a fool. This Verő knows how to live! Like a bank manager. He's always got money. At least he's always spending it. If he lands in a jam, it never lasts long. And he's always giving money to others, a pengő here, a pengő there. So one can make a living out of literature. You just have to behave the right way. Act smart. This Verő writes for a big paper. Yes, but he is still doing useful, and in the long run, progressive work. That he's serving the commercial system? Well, dear God, what's so sinful about that? After all, Hungary is still a half-feudal country and every category of people must fight feudalism, to begin with. And then one can go on from there. There are no leaps in nature, as Verő often says to Gerlei, any allusion to the chamois and the flea is a bad joke. Verő is fighting for democracy. Or, more precisely, he is lamenting democrarcy. Today the lament is a flourishing genre. The liberal citizen will give his last penny to be able to read, between goose-liver and dessert, someone lamenting democracy in one and a half columns, using fine words, a bold, powerful style and a rich association of ideas. And Verő laments it beautifully. So beautifully that if finely rendered and suffiently loud, perhaps a trifle aggressive, lamenting could awaken one from the dead, then democrarcy would surely be resurrected.

The conversation has shifted onto the reformists now. Verő is passionate and belligerent. "That Seregélyes is a scoundrel. A year ago he was writing communist poems—as I pointed out in my Sunday article, for the third time. He's an untalented rotter. This whole populist stuff's a fraud. He's dishonest. Tapoldy's a fool. And I'll bet anything that Seregélyes, that phoney populist, has Jewish blood. They're all covert communists. We should settle the bill with them once and for all. They're the vanguard of fascism."

Never mind, thought Gerlei. There's some truth in everything. He'll still do the paper with Verő and his lot. It's not the ultimate object that's important, but the direction. And their direction leads towards the final end as well.

Székely reads a headline from the paper:

"What will the Abyssinian war be like?"

Bölény:

"The wretches! So they already know there's going to be a war? And the only question left is what it will be like?"

Székely puts the paper down on the table. On the third page there's a map, a map of Abyssinia. So one can take one's bearings. Learn a little geography. Maps have appeared in the shop windows of bookstores. Books have been published about Abyssinia. People know the emperor's name: Haile Selassie; they are familiarizing themselves with the history of Abyssinia, they remember Adua, the defeat the Italians suffered at Adua, they remember the Emperor Menelik. They know that the emperor is a black man. That the capital of Abyssinia is Addis Ababa. There are people who don't know where Szalkszentmárton is, but they know that Gondar is in Abyssinia, north of Lake Tana.

Verő is of course on the side of the Abyssinians:

"The country is three times the size of Italy. Its population's ..."

Vadász interrupts:

"Ten million."

"Yes. Ten million. And the whole country is a rocky plateau. The most unfavourable terrain for European troops. A second Adua is sure to follow!

"The Abyssinian emperor inspects the troops ready to go to war." According to the paper, the troops are going to war. *"Abyssinia will take up the fight, the emperor told the correspondent of the Times." "Battling against the high costs of living". "Tradesmen are by no means to blame for high prices,"* begins the editorial. By no means, by no means. Tradesmen, as always, sell at a loss. If cherries are twenty fillérs at Apostag, and sixty here, then the remaining forty is the difference tradesmen lose on it. *"Poultry and vegetables have gone down in price, eggs, potatoes and fruit have gone up."* [...]

"Six Jews and six Aryan women were taken into protective custody in Breslau for defilement of the purity of the race."

"Outrageous!"

"Makes one's blood boil."

"Idiots!"

"They should be wiped out, all of them!

Two beautiful women enter the coffee-house. Polák stares at them longingly. Faragó rebukes him:

"Not so fast! Look out! You'll be taken into protective custody."

Around five o'clock the company begins to disperse. Verő has to drop in at the office. He's found a subject for his editorial. He is going to write about road accidents. A belligerent article, an attack against the authorities. High time they set things in order! There are a couple of fatal accidents every single day. Because cars dash about in the inner city, even along the narrowest streets, like wild beasts. The drivers should be severely reprimanded, stern exhortations addressed to the chief of police, the Minister of the Interior, the legislature. This

morning another fatal accident occured: Manó Weinberger, a wine merchant's agent, was knocked down by a car.

Dr Polák, too, is going back to his office. He only stayed this long—there may be clients waiting for him, since God knows when—because a man like him finds it hard to renounce the pleasure of sharing a table with Verő listening to his clever, witty talk, delighting in his bellicose spirit. Gróf is leaving too, accompanying Verő to the door of the editorial office like a faithful retainer. He can't wait to be alone with Verő, to be able to tell him that the "director" will be expecting him tomorrow at noon. At the bank. The "little matter" is all taken care of. A small "personal loan" call it patronage of the arts.

Verő beckons to the waiter. Starts listing what he had. Combined breakfast with butter, eggs and ham, two rolls, two peaches and a pear, a coffee, a soda water on the side, three cream cakes, that adds up to five pengős ten fillérs, without the tip.

"Put it on my account!" he calls out airily.

Then turns to Gróf, lest he should forget.

"Manó, old pal, lend us ten pengős, I haven't got any change on me."

"Of course," and Manóka is already reaching for his wallet, eager to oblige.

Manóka is happy, it would be worth twenty pengős to him to be able to give ten to the great Verő.

"What did you have?" Verő asks Gerlei, pleasantly.

And has Gerlei's coffee put on his account as well.

Gerlei smiles humbly as an indication of his thanks. His heart aches. Oh, if only he had money! Here's a man, not so very much older than he, who not only lives magnificently, but has enough left over to be generous to others. The bill he ran up just this afternoon comes to five pengős. With the cigarettes and the tip it adds up to at least six. He'll be walking to the office now, because Gróf will accompany him, but at other times he doesn't think twice about taking a taxi. A rough calculation will do: breakfast, or rather lunch, at this hour, in the evening supper at a restaurant or coffee-house, at night, coffee at a coffee-house again, cigarettes for the day, rent, tips, laundry, the barber, clothes, cinema, books, newspapers and magazines, correspondence, public baths, and you sometimes see him with a woman—all this comes to at least a thousand pengős a month, but probably more, perhaps a thousand two hundred, and he travels too, abroad even, perhaps a thousand five hundred. And all this can be earned by writing! Only by writing, according to Gerlei.

Verő, Polák and Gróf had taken their leave, were on their way out when Verő ran into Petur in the doorway. They greeted each other with faces twisted into politely friendly smiles. Gerlei jumped up and hurried to meet Petur.

"I was looking for you!" said Petur. "I see you've been hanging around the Israelites."

"Why Israelites?".

"What else, Muslims?"

"See, that was a slip. You should have said, what else, Hungarians, or what else, Chinese?

"Alright, alright, don't quibble. Come on, let's go and sit somewhere, over in the other wing, where I won't see them. At least the big nasty, Mr Verő, has gone. This is the fifth time I've come looking for you."

They sat down. Petur ordered a glass of wine.

"I hear you're thinking of starting a paper."

"There's been some talk of it, but we haven't got much further than the planning stage."

"Really? I'd heard you'd got some money lined up."

"Not really, only a couple of pengős so far." Petur fell silent. He may as well have saved his breath. Well, to hell with it, he's his own master after all, never mind.

The waiter brought the wine. Those sitting nearby all glanced round at them.

"Ayveh, goyim! That's what they're all thinking," laughed Petur.

And there really were some who thought so, Christians as a rule do not like coffee. Petur does, but he's such a good Hungarian these days that he considers it his duty to drink wine. By way of demonstrating for the country. Sometimes he is even moved to enthusiasm and commits excesses, but only in word, not in deed.

So they haven't any money after all! Unless this little coffee-house lark is lying, mused Petur, breaking off the conversation, for who is going to speak for free. (Those Jews are so materialistic!) Petur drank half his wine, licked his lips, hummed and hawed, yawned, then began to speak after all:

"But you do have some money, don't you? You weren't thinking of starting a paper without capital of some sort?"

"I told you, we've got a few pengős. We may be able to get hold of some more. And then we've got credit at the printer's. There's a couple of young lads, very keen, running around with us, they'll hunt up subscribers. I think if we can bring out the first couple of issues, the rest will take care of itself, because the paper's going to sell."

"Like hot cakes, right?"

"Yes, why not?"

"Alright. But I heard ..."

Here Petur leaned closer to Gerlei, giving him a piercing glance:

"... that you were thinking along the lines of the extreme left."

"*Some* were thinking of it, yes. Certain people."

"You've all gone clean off your heads. What would be the point of that?"

"Everything has its points."

"Oh yes. There's no disgrace in wearing clothes that are patched so long as they're not ragged, moreover the early bird catches the worm, and cucorbita pepo and zea mays, right?"

"Come off it."

"So you want to do a blinking Bolshevik paper. Because you're hot-headed. Because you're foolish and know nothing about differences in degree. And because you don't know the Hu-hun-garian people! Because you're scribblers, hacks, because you have no idea of a writer's duty. The real writer's duty, that is the writer who does not prostitute himself, who does not sell his soul to the rich, nor to the poor! Got it? Nor to the poor!"

And Petur stared ferociously, almost threateningly, into Gerlei's eyes, even raised his fist.

Gerlei defended himself:

"You think you've said something very clever, don't you. But you can't sell yourself to the poor, you know, because the poor can't afford to buy you off."

Petur brought his fist down on the table.

"No? You want to catch me out? Didn't you just say the paper's going to sell? In other words the paper, in your opinion, will support itself, and all of you too."

"There's a great difference between a bourgeois writer and writers like ourselves. We don't want to live in luxury, we just want an opening, a job. Of course such distinctions are beyond you."

"Don't throw your weight around with me! Don't play with concepts, distinctions. And don't play with words either. Don't go mixing luxury and job openings here. Yes, you are making a play for the wretched proletariat's money. You're going to spririt the proletarian pennies out of patched pockets by fraud, by promising an imminent revolution. I know you. For you the revolution's always on the point of breaking out, in two or three months at the most. Some time in China, in India, in Germany. Everything you know I've got at my fingertips, I'm up to here with your methods. You're forever drawing parallels. Ten people starved to death in England, five Negroes were lynched in America, fifty thousand textile-workers went on strike in Lyons—whereas in Russia the machine works in Rostov produced twenty combine-harvesters in 1930, two hundred in 1931, six thousand in 1935, therefore, *quod erat demonstrandum,* by 1940, every Soviet citizen shall have two combine-harvesters of his own with which to plough, reap, thresh and fly."

Gerlei laughs constrainedly. Then, by way of appeasement, says:

"In any case, I don't believe it will come to anything."

"That's a good one! I know you've fallen out with each other. But you'll make up again. You think nothing of calling each other stool-pigeon point-blank. For the likes of you it's a bagatelle, like saying stinking peasant or stinking Jew. A chap like you's a Stalinist one day, then when someone speaks ill of you or runs down a poem of yours, you'll turn Trotskyite and will soon start spreading it about that Stalin was a member of the Ochrana in his youth."

"You're drunk."

"To be sure, and the only way you can keep your face is if you tell yourself that I'm drunk. Alright. Let's say I'm drunk. That would be just the reason for my telling you flat out what I think of you all. Yet if I were not drunk I might hold my tongue, maybe even... praise your poems."

"But say...! Why were you looking for me?"

"This was one reason. But there was another. I see you're speculating on joining *them.*"

And here Petur poked a finger at Verő's table.

"If you can't do it any other way, you'll use them to have your paper. They're sure to give you a couple of pengős, if only to be rid of you. As it's a question of the printed page, they'll think at least it'll serve their interests."

"That's out of the question."

"I don't believe you."

"On my word of honour."

"Word of honour cuts no ice with me. Action speaks louder than words. Listen! Let's do the paper together."

"Together?"

"Yes."

"But you're an extreme right-winger."

"What a simple soul you are. You don't keep abreast of the times, do you? Do you still classify people and phenomena according to the sides they're on? Do you think Verő's a left-winger? Power struggle for the rule of high finance as a left-wing activity, cock-a-doodle dandy. I beg your pardon, it's made me think of a friend and comrade of yours, Balázs Roháti...."

"He's no friend nor comrade of mine."

"Alright, alright. You're always on the defensive. Always denying everything. You'd even deny you're a poet. And you know what? You really are not a poet. But what I wanted to tell you about was this. He once said to his wife, whom he literally considers his private property: I want you to love me so that if I were to push you off a moving train, you'd crawl after me to the next station on your hands and knees. This Roháti, who feels, thinks and talks in this way, when he forgets himself, or rather, when he finds his true self, d'you think he's a left-winger? Or look at this piece of rubbish I've got here, this so-called literary pamphlet, there're some poems in it, listen: *'The wind tugged your pleated skirt with a playful hand, I saw a flash of lace and the blood rushed to my head.'* That's the poem, and those who write tripe of this sort have the cheek to demand that others toe the "line", what's your opinion about them?"

"Let's not talk about unkempt, untalented scribblers, runners in maiden plates. They're not human."

"You're a scribbler too, and a maiden horse."

"But I feel human."

"That would be saying too much. But, to use Wells' definition, you're barely-human. Preceding the Neanderthal by about twenty thousand years. Intellectually and morally, I mean. And judging by your view of the world. But that's of no account. In another ten thousand years or so you may become a human yet. So let's do the paper together."

Gerlei wanted to say no. But curiosity got the better of him. What does this man want of him, why, and how? This wild beast. So he asked:

"And what should the paper be like?"

"Literary!"

"I don't get you."

"Because you don't want to follow."

"In other words, if I follow you right, no politicizing."

"See. You do understand."

"So you can conceive literature without politics?"

"It's the only way I can conceive it. A social attitude is necessary, but not current politics."

"How can you separate the two?"

"Leave it to me! Stories, pictures! No articles, no opinions! Descriptions of hill and valley. Stories about a button torn off, rolling away, getting lost, then getting found again, or never seen again since. But all this has to have inner dynamics of its own."

"That's all rather vague."

"Yes. And it has to stay that way. Vague, indistinct, elusive, nothing you can put your hands on, but powerful, a statement."

"That's still vague."

"Politics are a weapon. Literature is everything but a weapon." "That's an illusion. I don't understand it, but it's an illusion. Not realistic.

"If only weapons are real, we'd better have done with it all !"

Gerlei was silent. He had the feeling that the other fellow was mad. He stared into the empty coffee-house. He wanted to put into words something profoundly true, wanted to come out with a decisive, final argument, wanted to make a statement that should burst out of the very depths of his being. He stared, considered, was filled with anguish and suddenly came out with:

"And what kind of money would you be prepared to contribute to the paper?"

That was more like it. They were in the straight now. The *Northern Light,* which had gone out not long ago, was glimmering again, only to be extinguished once and for all. For the *Northern Light* was transformed in a peculiar and scientifically and physically impossible way into the *Spear.* For the group—the assembly of wiseacres, as Sinka called them—soon gathered together, and decided first of all who should edit the paper and what the title of it should be. Petur, Bara, Sinka, Gerlei, Noszlopy, Soproni and Vászon made up the group that wanted to start the paper, that is, wanted to make a statement through the

paper, make it known to the world that "we are here, we exist, the future is ours, young people gather round! And all you old ones, do your duty and die!" This is the small group that will pour out its heart in every issue, for a pittance of fifty fillérs per issue, in the hope that the paper will be bought by Hungarians in their hundred of thousands. What will they give to Hungarians for fifty fillérs? An ardent love of the Hungarian nation, a special love of the people, of the Hungarian people, a passionate, fervent love of the Hungarian language, in other words, the love of all that is theirs. And is all theirs. Noszlopy for example, with the *y* at the end of his name, loved the Hungarian people so much, for two long years—not the lumpenproletariat, not the beggars, and not the unpatriotic city worker, but the people of the Hungarian soil, the clod, the humus—so much that he was thinking of leaving off the *y*, or at least of writing an *i* in its stead, even went so far as to suggest that everyone should add a *y* as a sign of nobility to their name, even Szabó, which would make him Szabóy, and the others Petury, Vászony, Antalosy, Szekeresy, Weiszy. It is true that a literary paper never sold a hundred thousand copies in Hungary. But there was a reason for that: the paper was published in Hungarian, but was not Hungarian.

"We mustn't be highfalutin," said Bara, "we must come down to the level of the people."

"On the contrary!" cuts in Petur. "We must raise the people to our level."

"Not at all!" says Noszlopy, going one better. "It is not our level that's the plateau, but the people's. We shall raise ourselves to the people's level!"

"Hear, hee-ar!"

There was no disputing this statement. One could only approve.

"We'll show them we'll get to the homesteads."

"We'll be the first paper really read by the people."

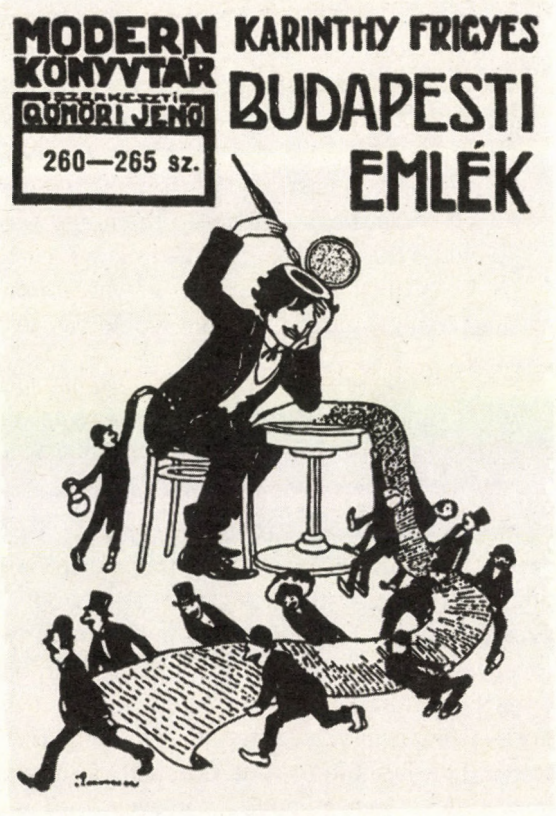
Gerlei is quite caught up in the wave of enthusiasm. He is thinking of a new poem. To the Hungarians—that would be the title. And it would begin something like this:

Hungarians, Hungarians,
An age-old curse upon you
Foreign fangs are bared
in anger against you.

Mace Club, Arrow, Plough, Hungarians, Hungarian Resurgence, For the Homeland, Tricolour, National Flag—these were some of the names proposed. In the end Petur's suggestion won, the paper would be called the *Spear.* "Literature is everything but a weapon." So Javelin is a symbol. The most expressive name. Ideal. A word, a short word, a Hungarian word, an ancient word, comprising everything that can and must be said about the paper in a single word. The paper is Hungarian, characteristically Hungarian, simple, combative, struggles for the Hungarian future, but not with fountain-pens of foreign make, nor with type-writers, nor grenades nor even with mustard gas, but with a Hungarian weapon—the spear is a symbol here—for the Hungarian future, but with due re-

spect for the historical past—one more reason why it must be spear—not covertly, not from the trenches, but with an open, honest upholding of the cause, with the courage of one's convictions, face to face—this is what it does for a pittance of fifty fillérs per copy, which amount, allowing for a hundred thousand copies, gives fifty thousand pengős, of which twenty-five thousand would be spent on working expenses, which would leave for the country, that is for them, twenty-five thousand pengős per month as a token of moral appreciation, a tribute to their self-sacrifice, their disinterested efforts. *Spear, Spe-ar.* If we like, the War God is contained in this name, chieftain Álmos, perhaps even the infinite plain, the Turul, the mythical eagle of the ancient Hungarians, the Milky Way. And the *Spear* is to be edited by István Petur, and his name will appear on the front-page as editor-in-chief, and András Seregélyes and Andor Gerlei will be appointed as editors. ❧

Translated by Eszter Molnár



Title page of the 1913 first edition of Budapesti Emlék *(Souvenir of Budapest) by Frigyes Karinthy. Pen drawing by Dezső Gumcser.*

Wilhelm Droste

The Importance of Taking Coffee

Coffee-houses in the Dual Monarchy

It occurs to me that I can't remember your face in any precise detail. Only how you walked away between the tables of the coffee-house, your figure, your dress, these I can still see.

Franz Kafka in his second letter to Milena Jesenska in April 1920.

The coffee-house is the most attractive relic of the Dual Monarchy. Not only has it survived into modern times, but in some places it has remained the embodiment of usefulness and convenience. The bizarre Habsburg Empire has left behind it no more delightful impression of its amiable and human side than this. The word "coffee-house" would not have such evocative resonance were it not for the fact that it achieved its greatest significance in the last phase of Habsburg rule, after the dynasty had embarked on the uncertain project of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. The coffee-house seemed to be (and indeed may have been) the living demonstration of an ideal, namely that people of quite different status and class, race and sex, political persuasion and nationality, could enjoy convivial intercourse under one roof, without thereby opening the floodgates to civil war and mutual destruction. It seemed as if, within its hallowed portals, everything could co-exist that outside on the streets (or indeed on countless battlefields) led only to hatred and murder.

What was alien could cautiously sniff at each other, and what belonged together could come even closer. Space for initiating encounters of every kind, space for distance and intimacy. Last but not least, coffee-houses provided a venue for meetings of every kind and of every level of intensity, a space, therefore, both for distance from, and intimacy with, one's fellow human beings. As Alfred Polgar famously remarked of a married couple: "For ten years the two of them sat every day for several hours quite apart in the coffee-house. That is a good marriage, you will say! No. That is a good coffee-house!"

With the creation of the coffee-house in its classic form, the Dual Monarchy achieved what it failed to achieve in the political sphere: namely the viable integration of contra-

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dictory and opposing forces. Under its generously broad aegis, the Wild East, if it was not reconciled to, was nevertheless successfully made to co-habit with the expansive West, as also the warm-blooded South with the reserved and business-like North.

The coffee-house itself is a fabulous concentration of influences from every bearing of the compass. The few sacks of coffee left behind by the Turks which (according to legend) led to the founding of the first Viennese coffee-houses, are not in themselves so significant. Far more important is the axial geometry of Habsburg lands, which brackets the Balkans with the European West and Italy with the Slav world. This geography could have been made for a drink that originated in the Orient, yet became a symbolic element in the triumphal world-wide spread of bourgeois emancipation, especially in the latter's early English and Dutch phase; this black drug of sober intoxication enabled the coffee-drinking middle classes to hold their own against the beer-drinking workers and the feudal pretensions of the wine,champagne, and liqueur-quaffing aristocracy.

If we are to believe Ilya Ehrenburg, a Turkish coffee-house in 1920 could be described as follows:

> The guests in the coffee-house sleep ... as they sleep in their warm and dark cattle byres, placing the indispensable saddle under their heads. Sleep here is as natural as kisses in the cafés of Paris. For any Turk, the coffee-house is work-place, sleeping quarters, dining room and even bathrooom all rolled into one.
>
> A corner of the coffee-house is reserved for the barber. The razor refreshes the cheeks and the coffee elevates the mind. The guests bring their own food with them — garlic, sweet corn, water melon ... here the talk will be of the evil eye and one listens to tales of rams born with two heads and of other no less fabulous events. Here also a professional scribe, on payment of a few piastres, formulates a request for a disability pension or the setting aside of a tax demand; such requests, of course, must be addressed not to a mere Governor, perish the thought, but to Kemal Ataturk himself. One can drink a cup of coffee in the morning and stay until nightfall. One can also drink nothing at all and order a water-pipe... and enjoy the sound of the water bubbling with every inhalation. The coffee-house stands ready to receive all persons at any time whatsoever — like the mosque, like death itself.[1]

At first glance, such a place is worlds apart from a Viennese coffee-house, yet the latter betrays numerous traces of its oriental origins, and not only because the first coffee-house owners were mostly orientals. The Viennese coffee-house also attempts to be a universe in a nutshell, open day and night, appropriate for any conceivable purpose, preferably however a place of aimlessness, of ease and indolence. Even if there are no barbers and baths for the guests, the attempt is nonetheless made to create a home from home with all its informality, a space equally appropriate for the intimacy of a kiss or the shrewdly calculated business deal.

1 ■ In: Ulla Heise: *Kaffee und Kaffeehaus. Eine Kulturgeschichte.* Leipzig, 1987.

In order to be accessible and convenient, coffee-houses need to be strategically placed amongst the traffic of humanity. Where people congregate and all the turbulent complexity of daily life is present, there must also be the coffee-house: on the great squares of the Inner City with their continual stream of passers-by, at railway stations and busy road junctions. In the Orient, coffee is often dispensed directly in the open air and on the streets or in markets; Central Europe is compelled to conduct its coffee rituals under a roof, although of course no coffee-house will fail to spread tables and chairs before its doors whenever the climate allows. However, quite apart from the wind and the rain, coffee-house owners have increasingly had to face a far worse foe in the twentieth century, namely the motor car. Not only has the car robbed the once generous domain of the flaneur of its promenades and compelled pedestrians onto narrow footpaths, but also the noise and stink of the automobile have ruined the unique joys of open-air coffee drinking. Anyone looking forward to an hour of indolent delight will soon be driven away by exhaust gases and the cacophony of the internal combustion engine. The time is long since past when the guest elegantly lounging in his chair could sniff only the wafted odours of carriage horses and ladies' perfume ....

Taking coffee in Montenegro. About 1910. Department of Physical Geography, Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest.

But even if the weather in the streets inhibits a close proximity to the tide of humanity, the Viennese coffee-house does strive to maintain its traditional contact with its surroundings. Enormous windows are as obligatory as the positioning of the café is vital: its façade should ideally open onto streets or squares on three sides. The coffee-house does not hide itself from the world: rather it is a safe haven in the midst of the world's turbulence. Each curtain which interrupts the view from the interior, or from the exterior looking in, transgresses against the spirit of a good coffee-house. Sight-lines and brightness are part of the magical ambience and darkness is simply anathema. Coffee (unlike wine) cannot be banished to the cellar, nor does its consumption gain in congeniality if (like beer) it takes place in some dingy little *Stube*. Thus the design of the interiors of cafés also reflects the principle of complete openness and transparency. Here are no compartments and annexes where one can hide oneself away, but rather upholstered benches along the walls, in which one can publicly distance oneself from others without thereby ruling oneself out of the company. This is the phenomenon so pithily described by the feuilletonist Peter Altenberg, when he remarked that the coffee-house was "a place for people who want to be alone, but who need the presence of others to achieve this."

It is more than a coincidence that the Europe-wide spread of coffee drinking coincided with the rapid distribution of the technology for interior lighting, as also the revolutionary development and diversification of reading material and news. Like three ubiquitous siblings, coffee, light and newspapers not only changed the image of cities, but created through novel forms of social intercourse a new quality of social life. In the Biedermeier period, Berlin had cafés where coffee cost no more than the extra candle which was often demanded by guests in order to exploit the numerous newspapers on offer without ruining their eyes.

In the pioneering days of the European coffee-house, newspapers were not only read there, but also written, edited and composed. This was how the Enlightenment sprang to life in England. It was only natural that a place in which both the latest news and the latest thinking were concentrated also became the fons et origo of new writing and ideas. Such places were in the happy position of being not only the passive conduits of the latest intellectual fashions, but also of providing a convenient forum where novel propositions could immediately be discussed and analysed. Friend and foe alike benefited from the stimulating discussions, and a new truth would emerge from the ebb and flow of debate, a truth that the newspapers had not yet reported. In England, this process went so far that academic coffee-houses arose, within whose portals the quality of thought and disputation was often deeper and more challenging than in the universities. Unfortunately such places, for all their remarkable qualities, soon degenerated into clubmen's bastions, effectively closed to the public, their intellectual brilliance meanwhile fading into a fog of self-satisfied tedium.

I do not think one can say that Vienna was a pioneer of that European development whereby the press and the coffee-house achieved a lively symbiotic relationship. As a matter of fact it was purely by chance (and reluctantly) that in the 1760's the Habsburg realms gave birth to a particularly interesting newspaper. In Lombardy (part of the Empire since 1714) a newspaper appeared every ten days, written in Italian and called "Il Caffé", a title which, in German, implied both the beverage and the place where it was consumed. This newspaper dealt with any and all types of theme and in its critical stance was far more bold than countless German newspapers available at the time. It was significant that it was not translated in Vienna or Innsbruck, but in Zürich. It was not until 1800 that Vienna became famous for its coffee-houses, and it was another hundred years before literary circles were formed in several city cafés, circles which fundamentally influenced, or indeed determined, the picture of German literature around 1900.

The Drechsler on Budapest's Andrássy út, 1890s. Photo by György Klösz. Budapest Museum.

Vienna has many qualities, but speed is not one of them. To the contrary, lethargy enjoys an unusual protection in the Viennese way of life and is cultivated with something approaching stubbornness. The coffee-house is also an institution where tranquil ease and patience reign. This is one reason why the coffee-house no longer thrives in the frenetic, performance-oriented centres of capitalism, such as London, Amsterdam or Hamburg, where the relaxed life style

it implies is not appropriate. Indeed, one could say that coffee-houses have effectively been suppressed in such cities, since their very presence implies contempt for the concept that "time is money", and also because they fail to conform to the time-economy of the middle classes. In short, it couldn't be allowed that in coffee-houses was squandered what capitalism so rigorously subjects to the discipline of value—namely time. Vienna, however, is "different" *(Wien ist anders)* as the saying goes. No place on earth has been more stubbornly and successfully protected by the coffee-house from the hysterical pursuit of performance and productivity than has Vienna. This remarkable privilege enjoyed by Vienna deserves to be examined more closely. Up to now, it has been stressed to what extent coffee and coffee culture have changed Europe. Yet are we now to consider Vienna, slow, cautious, old-fashioned, yes, even backward Vienna as the guardian angel of this stimulating beverage and the unpredictably creative conviviality it promotes?

I began by describing the coffee-house as a coalescence of exceedingly diverse elements, which had once seemed too alien to each other to be successfully combined. This ability to merge incompatibles is, when not simply the result of the passage of time, indisputably an Austrian, and more specifically, a Habsburg talent. In the fulfillment of an ancient need, anything that is foreign is patiently chiselled and shaped until something emerges that has been so carefully mingled with the indigenous as to be no longer distinguishable from the latter's continually refreshed identity. In this way the coffee-house in Vienna has achieved its ultra-clear contours and its idiosyncratic character. Indeed, there is much to be said for reserving the term "coffee-house" exclusively for this Viennese type of establishment, and using the word "café" for all other variants.

Even in the preparation of the coffee beans, in the mixture of coffee varieties, in the intensity of roasting, a diplomatic compromise in qualities has been struck. The black coffee of Vienna is not as strong as the Turkish version, a little lighter and more diluted than the Espresso of the Italians, stronger and more aromatic than all Northern European and transatlantic variants of dilution. On the other hand, the basic "small black" coffee allows of multiple variations, which are so much the norm in a Viennese coffee-house that the simple ordering of "a coffee please" without further specifications marks one down as a bumpkin fallen among sophisticates. The most important of the possible permutations are as follows:

■ The "large black" is a double portion of the "small black" mentioned above. The small black is served in an Espresso cup, the large in a bigger one which nevertheless is only half filled, so that the coffee retains its concentrated strength and is not drowned in the water. The cups (known in Austria as *"Schalen"*) are made from sturdy porcelain and warmed on top of the coffee machine, since the coffee must, without fail, be served piping hot.

■ If you want the cup filled up, you must order a *"Verlängerten"*. This type of

coffee is still stronger than a German or American one, as well as being fresher and hotter, because each cup is made individually.

■ The *"Mélange"* is a northern sister of the cappuccino, a black, slightly diluted coffee with frothy milk. The coffee is not quite as highly roasted as the Italian version and the frothy head lacks the sprinkling of chocolate that has become de rigueur for the cappuccino.

■ The *"Kleine Braune"* and the *"Grosse Braune"* are variants of the *"Schwarzen"*, with added milk or (better) with cream. In many places it is possible to specify the exact mixture and colouring from light to dark when ordering.

■ The *"Einspänner"* is a strong coffee in a glass with whipped cream on top, the cream being known as *"Schlagobers"* in Austria.

■ Iced coffee *"Eiskaffee"* is based on quality vanilla ice-cream over which strong ice-cold coffee is poured, with *"Schlagobers"* on top.

These are the most important variants. Many coffee-houses offer a number of others, for example real Turkish coffee, extremely sweet and several times boiled in a little copper can. There is also genuine Espresso and Cappuccino, so that Italians should not feel obliged to subject themselves to North Tyrolean experiments in taste, and for the cherished guest from North Flensburg, there is also filter coffee.

Definitely Austrian, however, is the ritual that accompanies the serving of coffee. No coffee enters the world without an initial journey on a little square tray sitting next to a diminutive glass of water, the significance of which has always given rise to theological dispute. All that is certain is that this glass provides a resting place for the coffee spoon, which must be lying against the edge of it when the coffee is served. Whether it is advisable to drink the water before the coffee, in order to prepare the palate and the stomach for the great experience to come, or to drink it afterwards, to soothe the passage of the pleasurable coffee; or whether its true function is simply to legitimise the presence of a guest who has drunk a single coffee in the morning and is thereby entitled to occupy his table without let or hindrance until the shadows lengthen and the evening falls, ever and anon consuming newly filled glasses of water courtesy of the management (and without being subjected, even by mien and body language, to anything so insensitive as a hint that it might be time to order something else): all this remains part of the secret code implied by the glass of water, and will so remain until the end of time. All that one can say is that it is part and parcel of the unmistakable ritual of the coffee-house.

Just as one can rely on the presence of the glass of water, so also can one be sure of being served by a man in the coffee-house, even today. In the 19th century the entire institution was run by males for the benefit of other males and the appearance of a female guest was as damaging to the reputation of the management as it was to that of its masculine clientele; but with the arrival of the twentieth century, things began to change and for the first time women were allowed in. Of course, in the *Konditoreien* and on the garden terraces of the cof-

fee-houses, women had already begun to make inroads on the male preserve, establishing there a bridgehead from which a successful assault was launched on the coffee-house itself. From then on, the vicarious enjoyment of the erotic was no longer available only to those with the window seats.

The unashamedly feudal hierarchy that characterized the division of competence among the waiters of a coffee-house was a reflection of the Monarchy itself; in the same way, the architecture of the high-ceilinged, generously proportioned and often luxuriously ornamented rooms were an obvious attempt to imitate and emulate in architecture the clubs and casinos of the aristocracy and the officer class. It is not surprising, therefore, that coffee-houses were often in turn the favoured meeting places of the best society, or those who considered themselves as such, and the range of the clientele extended from the aristocracy and the military to all levels of the middle class, as also from rich bankers to the impoverished editor of a Socialist provincial newspaper, and even from austere judges to notorious con-men and bigamists or gold-diggers. The coffee-house was an extraordinarily effective instrument in the Monarchy for binding together the most unlikely social groups in shared conviviality. And if an officer from the Vorarlberg should happen to be posted to (for example) Brody in East Galicia, the generous social space of the local coffee-house afforded him an extremely important refuge, one which offered an accustomed, and therefore cheering, form of social life. Safely esconced in this bastion of normality, he could begin cautiously to familiarize himself with an environment whose speech was foreign to him. Meanwhile, he could read the German newspapers, perhaps even that of his home town, order his preferred form of coffee, collect information about the place in which he found himself marooned, watch the natives through the window, establish a few initial contacts and feel himself a little at home in an otherwise totally alien world. Quite soon his face would be familiar to all the waiters, and he might even achieve the status of one of their "regulars" ; little by little he would begin to feel rather less that he was fighting a losing battle with homesickness, which certainly would have been the case were it not for this firmly holding anchor to the real world.

So far we have primarily been concerned with the Viennese coffee-house per se. However, the great achievement of the latter was its capacity to replicate itself all over the Dual Monarchy in a way that seemed entirely natural and to be expected. Even the smallest towns of the Empire were anxious to demonstrate their role as a vital cell in the great organism of the whole, by having a coffee-house of their own. Just as the uniformly yellow-painted Baroque buildings of the time of Maria Theresa manifested the connection to the Habsburg Empire, so were coffee-houses in 1900 an indispensable badge of belonging to the same, a clear indication that any individual urban area had wider horizons than simply its own municipality. Even the most provincial of places felt themselves just a little bit cosmopolitan when they boasted a coffee-house, while larger towns might have several, each with its own individual profile.

A coffee-house in Kassa (now Košice, Slovakia), 1910s. Kossuth Lajos University, Debrecen.

The scholars' table in the Café Central in Budapest, 1910. Historical Phototèque, Hungarian National Museum.

The more distinguished of these would be the coffee-houses where the petty nobility rubbed shoulders with the upper middle class. Typically, such places would be integrated into the main hotel, invariably located on the main square. Coffee-houses were always situated where they could tempt customers from the street. However, there were also rather more modest hotels further out, on the market, at the railway station or situated between two leading emporia, since hotels also require a location where people congregate en masse. Here sat the teacher in lively dispute with the lawyer, the businessman bargained with the wholesaler, the pensioned official met with his friends for a game of Tarok, or sometimes a hand of Rex. Large billiard tables only existed in the more prestigious coffee-houses of the locality. The guests would find here a generously enlarged living room such that they themselves could never have afforded, and could use it to discharge their social obligations; (this was especially useful for the outsiders, people staying in the hotels). It meant they were not confined to the inconveniently small rooms of their lodgings, or to the grudgingly offered couple of chairs in the hotel reception (as today), but could meet with business colleagues, friends, superiors or inferiors in the expansive atmosphere of the coffee-house.

It was true for everybody that in a coffee-house they could discard the chains of their social role, finding themselves in a space which permitted a new sense of identity. The servant of his roles could, after passing through the doors, become his own man in a new way. Thus the coffee-houses create a magic space and are like a bit of foreign territory within the domestic borders, a foreign journey undertaken at home, like free

Three of the menu covers designed by Pál C. Molnár for the Café New York. Late 1920s. Hungarian Museum of Commerce and Catering.

The restaurant of Budapest's Café Hungária (Café New York) in 1964.
Photo: Tamás Fenyves. Historical Phototèque, Hungarian National Museum.

ports along the ocean of the well-administered. They challenge the unsocial being to peel off one of his protective skins and offer him the tantalizing prospect of rebirth. That is why they are also so often the fertile ground for astonishingly accomplished literary activity.

But we must get back to the real world. The practised eye will still have no difficulty in detecting, not only in almost every Austrian or Hungarian town, but also in the whole area of the former Dual Monarchy, where the countless coffee-houses once stood and performed their invaluable function. Traces of them are ubiquitous, yet hardly any have survived the pressures of our century, and especially not those of its second half, not even in Austria. Vienna is the one and only conspicuous exception to this rule, and even here many of the traditional coffee-houses have disappeared from the face of the earth.

As an example for a somewhat more remote place, let's take Nagyvárad (in Hungarian, Oradea in Romanian, Grosswardein in German), in its splendour, and today, when mere traces and remnants betray, how exceedingly rich life must have been around 1900. Because of the city's significance as the forum for the first impulses leading towards the creation of a modern Hungarian literature, contemporary memoirs tell us a great deal about its diverse coffee-houses, which, through their rivalry and expansion, played such an important role in the stimulation of the vivid round the clock social life of this strongly Jewish town in

the Secessionist 1900's. The elegant Kaffeehaus Royal in the Hotel Rimanóczy was designed for the indulgence of luxury and sybaritic living. The most distinguished circles of the town met here, partly because it possessed the best billiard table. It was also the leading venue for formal representation and celebrations. The façade of the hotel looked out on the Sebes-Kőrös River, but the coffee-house, with its large garden terrace, faced the most important square of the town, Bémer tér, now Square of the Republic (Piaţa Republicii). It was in Nagyvárad that Endre Ady, founder of modern Hungarian lyric poetry, discovered the combative impulse of his genius and sounded the pioneering notes of a genuinely new poetry. He often sat in the Royal during the morning, that is if he had managed to get up at all after a night of debauchery.

The richly decorated rooms are still in astonishingly good condition and (together with the equally well preserved garden terrace) are used as a restaurant. The Oradea Restaurant, as it is now called, is far too little used when one remembers its former glory. Nevertheless it is a small miracle that the concern still functions at all. The hotel is also still functioning, although it has lost its steam baths, which fell victim to office development some years previously.

Bémer Square, dominated by the great theatre on the main axis, was once the absolute centre for coffee-houses in the city. Even more important than the Royal for intellectual life in Nagyvárad was the Café Emke. This is where Ady sat at the front of the café, often until late into the night: now it is called Hotel Astoria and is honoured with a memorial plaque. It was here that the freemasons met, as also any others whose concept of liberty was a great deal more radical than that espoused by the functionaries beholden to Vienna and Budapest. In this coffee-house—nota bene, not in the overmighty Hungarian cynosure of Budapest—a group of young writers was formed in 1907 which established the basis of modern Hungarian lyric poetry through their anthology *Holnap* (Tomorrow).

Even today one can enjoy a drink in what used to be the Café Emke. Everything here is somewhat less well preserved than in the Royal, and one sees at once that its scale of operation was anyway more modest. Its particular charm lay in the possibility of ascending to the gallery level over a flight of stairs, from which vantage point one could look down and observe the happenings below. This second level of the café could also be reached directly from the hotel rooms. In this way a guest can still reach Ady's usual table without running the gauntlet of reception, and spend a few minutes conjuring up for himself the ghosts of yesteryear.

The *house* has apparently remained true to its liberal tradition, but the same cannot unfortunately be said of the *coffee-house*. The quality of the coffee is suspect. The Thonet chairs, the marble-topped tables with wrought-iron feet, the alpacca trays, the little glasses of water, the laid out newspapers have none of them survived the forces of "progress"; still, the space is still there and only awaits, like Sleeping Beauty, to be awakened to life by a Prince. The same

is true of an open-air theatre lurking in the courtyard of the house. A large rocking-horse, probably a relic of the final piece that was played here, despite its long bombardment by rain and snow, is all too clearly waiting for the chance to carry the Prince, if only he should come, to the furthest corners of the world.

It is indeed like being in a fairy tale to walk on Republic Square in 1995 and to be surrounded on virtually every side by the same architecture that made Bémer Square so lively and important around 1900. Here one easily forgives the coffee-houses for having transformed themselves into primitive cafés, one looks benevolently on the only and therefore proud Chinese restaurant with its terrace, one enjoys the life in front of the café that once faced the former Café Emke and that now brews the best coffee in the city, even if its young clientele reek of nouvelle richesse and the coffee still leaves much to be desired.

The third showpiece of coffee-house culture lies in the imposing Hotel Fekete Sas (Black Eagle) on the other side of the river. Formerly there were grand ceremonial rooms here for musical performance, cabaret and literary events. The building, an ornate citadel of *Jugendstil,* is still to be seen in all its glory; but the hotel, the coffee-house and the cultural happenings have all vanished. That is in fact exceptional for this city, which, although it could by no means preserve the original quality of its gastronomy, has nevertheless managed through cunning survival strategies to avoid the complete extinction of every appurtenance of an obsolete way of life. Thus it is still possible today to drink a coffee or eat a meal at all the places where it was already possible to do so in 1900. That is an astonishing achievement of preservation and survival in the face of the multifariously destructive tendencies of our age.

In contrast to the vanished coffee-house and hotel, the shopping mall in the Fekete Sas has survived. This impressive glassed-in gallery is a symbol of the town's self-conscious identification with modernity in 1900, another manifestation, like the many coffee-houses, that Nagyvárad was a little Paris on the Sebes-Körös river.

One could give many other examples of vanished coffee-houses in Nagyvárad that lie on the routes traversed by today's tourists. It is worth drawing attention to a particular square which was called Mülleráj (Müllerei) in the Germanized Hungarian of the time, and which boasted a kiosk café, the latter a typical institution of the large towns of the Dual Monarchy which was often to be found in parks and on promenades. Based on a small pavilion, such kiosk cafés served a large garden area with drink and sweet pastries. Now situated in Trajan Square, the kiosk has been transformed into a little Ady Museum, the poet thus bearing the main responsibility for the expulsion of coffee from the premises. As a sop to conscience, in view of the fact that it is no longer of practical use for the masses, the kiosk now provides a small copying facility at the rear. However, in the longer term (and in the spirit of the kiosk's founder, Salamon Müller) it was again coffee that was meant to grow and multiply there, and not printed matter. In any case, Ady cannot have been such a frequent, satisfied customer of the Müllerei that he would wish to destroy it.

Nagyvárad was certainly a place with a disproportionately large number of coffee-houses because of the large numbers of the sophisticated Jewish bourgeoisie, and cannot therefore be regarded as representative for the extent of coffee-house growth. Nevertheless it is clear that the Viennese coffee-house, albeit if with varying success, could establish itself all over the Dual Monarchy. This ubiquity was also a political paradox, for generally speaking the more nationally self-confident were the territories (and especially the cities) outside the Austrian Crown Lands, the more assiduously did they avoid any imitation of Viennese mores. Budapest itself, in its restless search for suitable role-models to assist in conjuring a metropolis out of a sleepy provincial town, sought explicitly to emulate Paris, and perhaps secondarily New York and London, but absolutely not Vienna. Even for Nagyvárad it would have been considered shameful, had it been referred to as a "Vienna on the Sebes-Körös". No, it had to be Paris and moreover Paris without a detour via Budapest, so self-confident and vain were its citizens. That Budapest reached its goal of comparability with the Paris model is accepted and attested even today, since many still see in it the "Paris of the East".

In 1900 there were more than five hundred great temples of the coffee ritual in Hungary, an unbelievable richness of choice, whereby Hungary all but exceeded its Austrian competitors in the very act of imitating them. ❧

Translated by Nicholas T. Parsons

Jenő Dulovics: In the coffee-house.
Die Fotoschau, *January 1910.*
Hungarian Museum of Photography.

Corrective Coffee

An interview with the daughter of Menyhért Kraszner, the proprietor of the Café Japan, now the Writer's Bookshop

Round the clock

Until 1928, my father was a hotelier. He managed the Grand Hotel on Margaret Island. He went on his own when he acquired the lease of the Café Japan. In the spring of 1928 the family moved to number 10 Liszt Ferenc tér, where we lived until 1937, when an apartment became available here, on the floor just above the café. At that time, the café was open round the clock, and they worked day and night, in two shifts. They all had their work cut out for them. The three of them, my father, my mother, and my mother's mother were all working there at the time, too.

We were open round the clock for many years. I think it was around the time of the air-raid protection rehearsals that we first closed the premises. At first we had to close around 2 a.m., like everyone else, if my memory serves me right. Later, it was midnight.

Buying

Grandmother was in charge of buying. She had a list of what they wanted to make the next day and what raw materials were needed. I presume it was prepared by the chef who was on the night shift, because he didn't come in mornings. The meat and the fish were delivered by the butcher and the fishmonger. What she didn't like, grandmother sent back. She didn't use something just because they brought it, so they knew that if she was going to send anything back two or three times, they would lose her as a customer. The vegetables and other fresh produce she went after herself. She took someone along with her, and they put the stuff into those long net bags people used for fish. They did the shopping at the market hall in Klauzál tér, where she had someone for the geese and someone for the vegetables, and where she could pick and choose to her liking. It had to be good enough for our discerning chef. They put the meat and the fish into the big four-part "americanaire" ice-box.

The family snug

In the morning grandmother would go and sit in the family snug because, needless to say, when the customers came, she would have to chat with them. Often they would even join us in the family snug. The atmosphere was not too intimate, still it was like a real family atmosphere. Our family was on good terms with many of our customers. They used to play cards with some of them. I think it must have been rummy, because I don't recall my family ever playing anything else. It was always the same people, and grand-

mother, mother, or father would sit down to play with them, though father didn't do so very often.

Father's job was to walk around the café from time to time greeting customers and exchanging pleasantries. Our motto was "The customer always comes first," and "The customer is always right". The family as well as the staff always behaved accordingly, because this was the only way to keep customers. It was very rare that a guest would take offense at something, or stay away and not come back. I can't remember this happening, ever.

Mornings

In the mornings business was always more leisurely. There were far fewer people in the morning. Some had breakfast. They had a black coffee or coffee with milk, mostly the latter, because in those days people preferred not to have a black coffee early in the morning. The rolls and danish pastries were laid out on the tables, and when they paid, they mentioned what they had had to eat. Of course, there was always water on the tray next to the coffee, and a new glass was regularly brought over. There was a choice of coffee or tea. The Pavoni coffee machine was at work twenty-four hours a day. In the morning, some of our customers would come in, read the papers to find out the latest news, then go open their shops.

The customers

The Café Japan was considered an artists' café, just as there were journalists' cafés and leather merchants' cafés, here, on the corner of Laudon (now Káldy Gyula) utca and Andrássy út. We had painters, some musicians, but not too many, writers, mostly journalists, and many actors, thanks to the fact that the theatre district, where the Café Japan was, was full of life back then. We also had customers come over from the nightclubs and the theatres. Instead of rushing home, they would come in to enjoy themselves, or to relax and discuss the night's events. We had a whole bunch of actors, but about a third of our late-night customers were the artistes who finished at the nearby Moulin Rouge at dawn, and didn't go home until the small hours. They'd ask for bean soup or something before leaving. These were mostly groups of friends who were held together by common professional interests. Actors came from abroad, and film people, mostly from Vienna, and travelling acrobats, too, foreigners. They liked coming here because mother, father and grandmother spoke German, English and Italian. Father even spoke a bit of Russian because he had been a prisoner of war there for two years. He also spoke French, and in 1904 and 1905 he worked on Lake Maggiore, in Italy, and a year at the Waldorf Astoria in New York. This was in 1911 and 1912.

Our customers included civilians as well as artists. By civilians I mean lawyers, doctors, businessmen, members of the professions. The artists belonged to an entirely different world, of course. Our regular customers went to other places, too, including the artists' club, the Fészek. Generally, most of them went to both the Café Japan and the Fészek. Sometimes they ate at the Fészek and played cards at the Café Japan, and sometimes it was the other way round. But they'd also go to other places such as Bucsinszky's, which was a café for writers and journalists.

We also had many racing people, jockeys, drivers from the trotting track, stable owners, because there was a betting office in the yard. They just had to rush over, or if they were told over the phone to place a bet, they'd go and place the bet on their customer's behalf. The office looked very

The artists' table at the terrace of Café Japan. Sitting, from left to right, Pál Szinyei Merse, Tibor Pólya, József Róna, Adolf Fényes, Miksa Bruck, Valér Ferenczy, Elek Falus, Miklós Szigeti, József Rippl-Rónai, Béla Iványi-Grünwald. Photo by Gyula Jelfy, 1912. Historical Phototèque, Hungarian National Museum.

nice, with wood pannelling. I wasn't personally interested in the races, but I know those people were there. Some came with their families, others with their wives, though some came alone. Others just came to play cards. But they were all friends of my grandmother's.

At night, Flaschner and his partner, the owners of the nearby Moulin Rouge, also ended up in the Café Japan. They brought along those artistes who were their friends, or possibly some of the permanent staff. They closed around 4 or 5 in the morning or thereabouts, and when the show was over, they'd come to the café and have dinner. They lived at night, so instead of having dinner in the evening at eight they had something to eat at the break of day.

Music and musicians

The band only played on New Year's Eve, thank God, and I don't know who they were. We weren't too crazy about them, I can tell you. But New Year's Eve was a grand event, we even laid the billiards table for dinner, and we even had groups of friends come who otherwise were not regulars. They drifted from place to place, and if they found an empty table, they'd sit down, have a drink, and that meant that there had to be music. Otherwise we didn't make a habit of providing a band. We didn't have

literary evenings either. People would read, chat, or work; this was how they generally spent their time. They felt at home here.

Tables for the regulars

Anyone who had his regular table wouldn't think of sitting anyplace else anyway. We had families who would meet here regularly, which meant that all sorts of people would meet here. For instance, once a month, I don't recall the exact time, there was a pharmacists' table and a lawyers' table and a doctors' table. These were always the same tables with the same people who came together on previously agreed on days. One pharmacist had a beautiful wire-haired fox-terrier, Péter. He was my favourite.

People who came to play cards regularly also liked sitting at the same table every time. If we didn't have a "Reserved" sign out, strangers would sit there, but would usually move when the regulars arrived. We didn't make a big to-do, though; the waiters knew where the regulars liked to sit, or when they could be expected. On the other hand, a guest couldn't very well be made to move from his table just because someone might come in, let's say, in an hour. These were unwritten rules, I suppose. Things took shape in their own way.

Women customers

The great majority of our customers were men, but we also had actresses come in. Back then, there was something called a "bed-sheet artist". In the telephone directory they may have been designated as actresses, but in reality they usually had a patron. These men supported them. Occasionally they may have even found small parts for them. There were also loose women, though we didn't usually serve women who came in alone. This was my father's rule. A woman who came in alone rarely left alone. If there were two of them, or if they were older and we knew them, that was different. But if a woman came in by herself and sat down, you could presume that she was out to find a man, and we wouldn't put up with that. If an actress came in alone whom we knew personally or knew who she was, that was another thing entirely. But there wasn't much unpleasantness, though, because women of that kind didn't come in in the first place. Our rule of thumb was that the Café Japan is not a place of assignation. Those who came in we knew, and as I just said, in those days these women who came in by themselves rarely left by themselves.

And then there was billiards

People came and went. Some sat outside on the terrace, or else ate something inside, then went outside to chat, or ate outside, and came inside to play cards or dominoes, because we had cards, dominoes, and chess. There was no gambling, so no poker and the like. And, of course, billiards. People played billiards all the time.

Many people played dominoes. It was the game for peaceful natures. Others played chess or cards, can't really remember anyone playing Hungarian card games, but rather rummy and the like. Between the wars ten and fourteen-card rummy was most popular. They handed out the games at the cashdesk. The waiter took them to the customers and made a note about who had what. I don't know how much this cost. But I do know that the cards were quickly messed up, so someone came every day or every other day to take them and have them cleaned. Back then, we used Piatnik cards. If someone insisted on a new pack, we gave him one, though I don't really know, because these people were regulars, so we were familiar

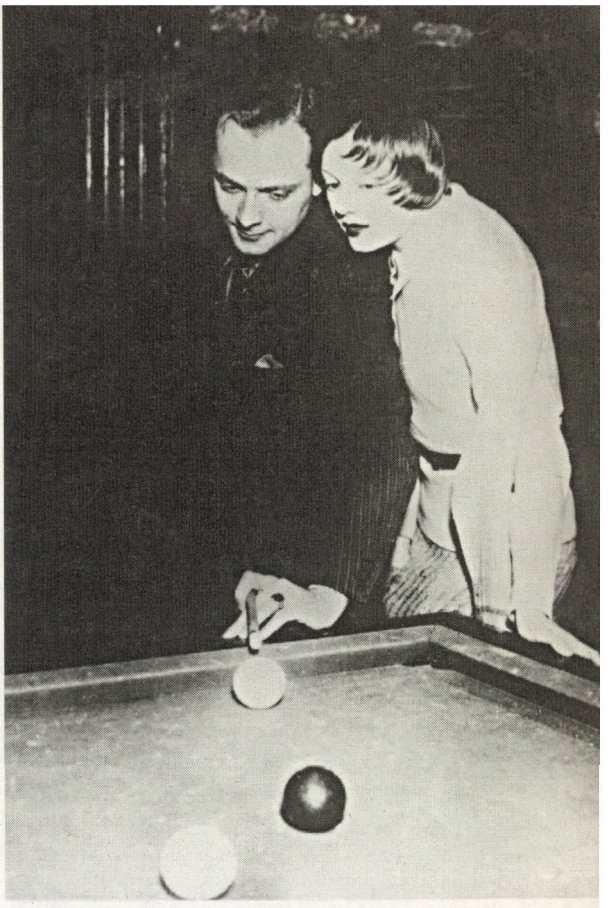
with their habits, and they were familiar with the house rules. In short, there were no card sharks here, and no gambling.

Newspapers, magazines

There was a big case for periodicals at the Andrássy út and Liszt Ferenc tér corner of the café. We kept the weeklies and monthlies there. There was a rack in front of that, and that's where we kept these classic bamboo newspaper holders. The most important dailies and weeklies were kept in ornate leather folders. Though my father kept out of politics, he felt that since he had customers with divergent views and from different walks of life, it was important that we should have a large variety of newspapers and magazines. Anyone who paid his bill was welcome as long as he didn't make a scene or what have you. So generally there were no problems between our customers and the staff or between the customers either, no slapping of faces or punching of noses, no ugly scenes. It just didn't happen. So, then, father subscribed to foreign newspapers too. These weren't really papers but rather monthly or weekly journals, including the *National Geographic*. There was also a Spanish weekly or magazine, I don't know which, although I don't remember having any Spanish-speaking customers. There was also a medical journal because we had quite a lot of doctors come in. They even had a regular table of their own.

The square by the café

All the time that we kept the café, the same lady rented and ran the cloakroom. Any costs, as well as the profit, were hers. She took all the risks. She employed one or two people. The use of the cloakroom was not compulsory, but when someone came in in a winter coat, they'd



Imre Ráday and Mici Erdélyi, two well-known actors, in the Café Japan around 1936. Photo by Sándor Pál. Historical Phototèque, Hungarian National Museum

usually deposit it. It was in their own interest not to get the coat creased. But if someone just put it down because he wasn't doing well at the time, nobody looked askance, whether it was an actor, a writer, a journalist. They didn't all have a racehorse to their name. But it was a profitable undertaking, that cloak-room.

The terrace was opened in the spring, and come autumn, everything was packed up. There were no rails on the Liszt Ferenc tér pavement, except for two or three rented shrubs. The pavement on the Andrássy út side was wider. The shrubs were connected by an ornate railing there. There

were two rows of tables here, and one on the Liszt Ferenc tér side.

On nice warm summer days, people would eat dinner outside, though not in the spring or autumn. The food would have turned cold by the time the waiter took it out, or the customer started to eat. Coffee and drinks were served at any time, though.

The chairs and the coat racks were Thonet, and outside there were wicker chairs. My name for them was stocking-killers.

The so-called glass snugs stood across from the main entrance. The rest of the snugs were located on the side fronting Liszt Ferenc tér. These had larger tables, with benches. They were at right angles to the windows. In the winter there would have been a draught if the benches were placed by the windows. Also, people preferred to look outside, to watch people pass by.

In the L-shaped room in front of the snugs there were square marble tables in two or three rows. There may have been four rows, though I don't think so, because there wouldn't have been enough room for the waiters to move about.

The far end of the longer arm of the L-shaped space was where the kitchen was located, the counter, the toilet and telephone booths. The kitchen was American-style. It wasn't walled off from the café. Our small office, where our book-keeper also worked, was in the back, too. A narrow set of stairs between the toilet and the telephones led up to the gallery, where there was a separate card room and also a changing room for the staff.

The café had a wooden floor, and the kitchen had a stone floor, for hygienic reasons, I suppose. Big glass panes looked out on Andrássy út and Liszt Ferenc tér. You could only open the ones that served as doors during warm weather. We didn't put curtains on the big windows so those on the inside could look out, and those on the outside look in. In winter, there was a big purple cloth curtain in front of the cloak room to keep the cold away from the attendant.

We had our own furnace down in the cellar, which we used to heat the place. There must've been a man to stoke the furnace, because the waiters certainly didn't do it, not because they were such snooty men, only the headwaiters were gentlemen, but you had to know how to stoke the furnace. I never saw the stoker myself, he must have lived somewhere in the underworld, compared to my world, that is, somewhere around Hades. I have no idea, but he never came up, it was warm, and that was enough for me.

Waiters

We had two headwaiters, what I mean is, one must've been the real headwaiter. One worked during the day, the other during the night. We also had a waiter who was there all the time, Uncle Jani, we called him, he was well on in years, and spent his entire life waitering, and he worked for us. We probably took these people over instead of getting new ones.

There was a morning waiter who left in the afternoon, or at six in the evening, possibly at eight, and then came the other. They took turns, because, obviously, there was more tipping at night. The late-night guests were more easy-going and more readily parted with their money. After consuming a lot of food and liquor, they tipped high. The tip was the waiter's, the headwaiter settled with him.

There was a cashdesk, too, but only the headwaiter had any dealings with that. A woman sat in the cashdesk who wrote down the orders. There were three of them. The women who kept track of the

orders for payment were all older, and all three were very reliable. As far as I can recall, all three stayed with us as long as we had the café.

When a waiter was off with an order, and put sugar for fifty or a hundred coffees on his tray, let's say, he took it to the cashdesk, and had it billed. There was a wooden board with nails sticking out of it, and the woman who wrote down the orders stuck these house-bills on this. When it came time to change shifts, she'd add them up, because there had to be some sort of accounting so we'd know what left the kitchen and what was left over, and what the takings were. It all had to add up.

The telephone

There was a person to man the phone. When there was a call for Mr X or Mr Y, he didn't run around with a board, but looked for him personally. We had two phone booths in the back. They were closed, so you could talk in private.

There was a special token for the phone with the number of the café on it. It was given to us by the post office, and it could be used only in our two booths. Sometimes a customer would buy one from us, but if he didn't use it here but someplace else, it was very unpleasant, because we got a warning from the post office not to do this.

Tobacconist, bookseller, florist

The tobacconist sold tobacco, stamps, stationery, stuff like that. He was a disabled Great War veteran. His toes had frozen off, and he hobbled around the café with mutilated feet, without toes.

People collected the most beautiful empty cigarette boxes for me. For a while as a young girl, they were my passion. There was smoke in the air all the time. There was a man who smoked English pipe tobacco, that's how I knew if he was around. That tobacco gave off such a sweet smell, it filled the entire café.

There was also an itinerant bookseller, Mr Gombos. He was a short, thick-set man who'd show up from time to time with a bundle of books under his arm, that's how he sold literature.

Marika, the flower girl was five years old. She'd show up late at night. She was sent in by her mother, and people would buy one or two flowers from her out of pity. I remember what she used to call out, "Get your fragrant carnation!, your fragrant carnation!"

Cold cuts, cakes

The cold dishes were prepared by women right behind the delicatessen counter, and maybe they also worked in the kitchen. There were one or two cleaning women, too, and a woman to do the baking, perhaps five in all. The waiters were all men, and in the kitchen, the chef and the coffee-maker were also men. We had someone exclusively in charge of the coffee.

We also had a speciality, a very small sponge-cake "bombe", a ball-like something. When it was baked through it got rounded out, and had a bottom. It was cut in two, and it was filled with ice cream or a creamed-rice sort of thing. They added a touch of whipped cream to that. They called it the Bombe Japan. The mignons and desserts were brought over from the Lukács patisserie. They're not made much any more because it would be too costly. Perhaps Gerbeaud's still have them. The cheese pockets were brought from the Andrássy and the Lukács patisseries.

The cakes were sold by Lídia, the cake-girl. She was a great favourite and got lots of tips from the guests. She was sweet, friendly, and courteous, and sort of mid-

dle-aged. She was already working for us when she got married, I remember that. She was with us all the time. Her tray swung from her neck, and she went around with that, offering her wares. She knew the customers, she knew who could be expected to buy something. It was in the afternoon, of course, when the coffee was going strong, and they ate cheese pockets or mignons with that, or other pastries.

At one time there was a big ice cream machine between the delicatessen counter and the open space. We made the ice cream ourselves. It was delicious, a real treat. There were three kinds in the summer, vanilla, coffee, and about two fruit tastes, and that was that. We had a beautiful ice cream scoop, wavy, not round, they dipped it in the ice cream, and it was like when they decorate mashed potatoes with the tines of a fork.

The delicatessen counter held the cold cuts and other cold dishes. It was a small smorgasbord except that the waiter served the food and took it to the tables. There was a small round Sheffield plate, it even had a paper doily on it. There was tongue and pork on it. We had small and large cold plates. Five or six kinds of meat, cold cuts, not bologna, but better things, decorated with pickles and the like. They made creamed rice, too, served on glass plates and decorated with whipped cream and some glacé fruit on top, and the waiter ordered it from the delicatessen counter and took it to the tables.

We sold a lot of iced coffee, served in stemmed glasses. We bought the silverware, the serving plates and meat plates and also the big cold cut plates from the Hungarian representative of Hacker's in Vienna. It had "Hacker" engraved on it, and some of the pieces may have also had "Café Japán" on them.

There was a big stove in the kitchen with several racks, and lots of space for roasting. They could roast two whole shoulders of pork simultaneously, or whatever meat there was, and then the chef would carve them. He got the fish live, and he killed and cleaned them himself.

Menu, wine list

At noon, some of the customers who were friends and who were hungry, if they asked for soup or some meat dish, then they, just like us, got something left over from the day before. But this was a friendly gesture, I have no idea really if they paid for it.

We didn't have a menu until around evening. They started cooking in the afternoon, and by evening, there was a full menu. I don't know whether there was a wine list with prices or not, because we had a partial liquor license, which meant that we could sell drinks by the bottle, except for spirits. I don't think we had beer at all. There was wine, though, soda water, and various mineral waters.

Corrective coffee

Our coffee maker consisted of two huge copper drums, the coffee was made in those. The person who manned it had a separate counter, but not where the customers could see him. The waiter said he wants two coffees with milk or one coffee, filtered, with whipped cream, or filtered but with milk on top, or cold, or hot, or light, whatever the customer wanted. Of course, we had mostly regulars, so they knew who wanted what.

They said we served very good coffee. All the coffee places and shops had their own blend at the time. My father said that a good blend had to be a mixture of at least five kinds of coffee beans. The Coffee Makers' Trade Association bought in bulk, we brought the coffee from them in sacks.

The Association had a coffee roasting place at József körút 38, which was also their headquarters. We had the sacks taken to be roasted by taxi, and later, when we had one, by car. It was gigantic. They poured all those different kinds of coffee into it, mixed it and roasted it, and sent it back in the sacks. I went along whenever I could, and I remember the smell of the roasted coffee. Taking a whiff, oh, it was wonderful for me as a child! Afterwards, the coffee was ground in small batches just before it was used.

The "corrective" coffee was our house speciality. The adjective was not meant to be qualitative, needless to say; it meant that if a customer only had enough for one coffee, he asked for a bit of "corrective" milk or a bit of "corrective" coffee. We all knew what was behind it. We called it corrective coffee. It also happened that a couple would come in. We knew them, and we also knew that they were hard up at the time. They asked for two plates and two forks, and ordered one portion of poppy-seed noodles. We brought it out the way we always did, the sugared poppy-seeds and the noodles separately, then they asked for a bit of corrective poppy-seed, a bit of corrective sugar, and in this way they enlarged the noodles so they could both eat. They ended up eating something warm, and their stomachs weren't rumbling any more either, but they paid for just one portion.

These were innocent little tricks everyone was in on, they were, and so were we. We'd look the other way, so to speak, there was a silent agreement between the customers and us. And it didn't ruin our business. Of course, we didn't do this with everybody. We knew who were in need. They weren't asking for a handout, it's just that this bit of helping out came in handy. It was only natural, and it was worth it for us too, because of the good relationship with the customers.

Epilogue

The mood or the atmosphere didn't change after 1939 either, though later, when they took people away for forced labour, we did lose some of our customers. I'm sure some men must have been recruited, because there was already recruiting in 1940 and 1941. People ended up without work, actors and film people. They went to America, and they sent us postcards.

I have no idea how the family managed to cope with the laws on the employment of Jews, because there weren't that many people here for six out of a hundred to make sense, or three out of fifty or one and a half out of twenty-five. In our case, six per cent meant 0.3 men. And needless to say, you can't have just a waist or a foot or a left hand go to work.

In 1942 we sold the café to István Ábrahám. He brought the right to the lease at a very good time, though how profitable it was I don't know. A portion of our customers disappeared in early 1944, when we saw from our apartment window how they rounded up people and took them away.

After we sold it, we didn't set foot in the café, why should we have done so? We had no business there.

After the liberation of Budapest my father opened up again. All I know is that the billiards table had disappeared, and so had the cues and the balls.

There wasn't much to start with. What could we serve? There was a sort of rum essence, you served that and called it tea with rum. There was unrefined oil, it had a putrid smell and tasted awful. There were no potatoes yet, there were only dried beans and some soya-like stuff.

Anyway, my father tried a comeback for a couple of months, but there were no customers, and no staff. There was no life;

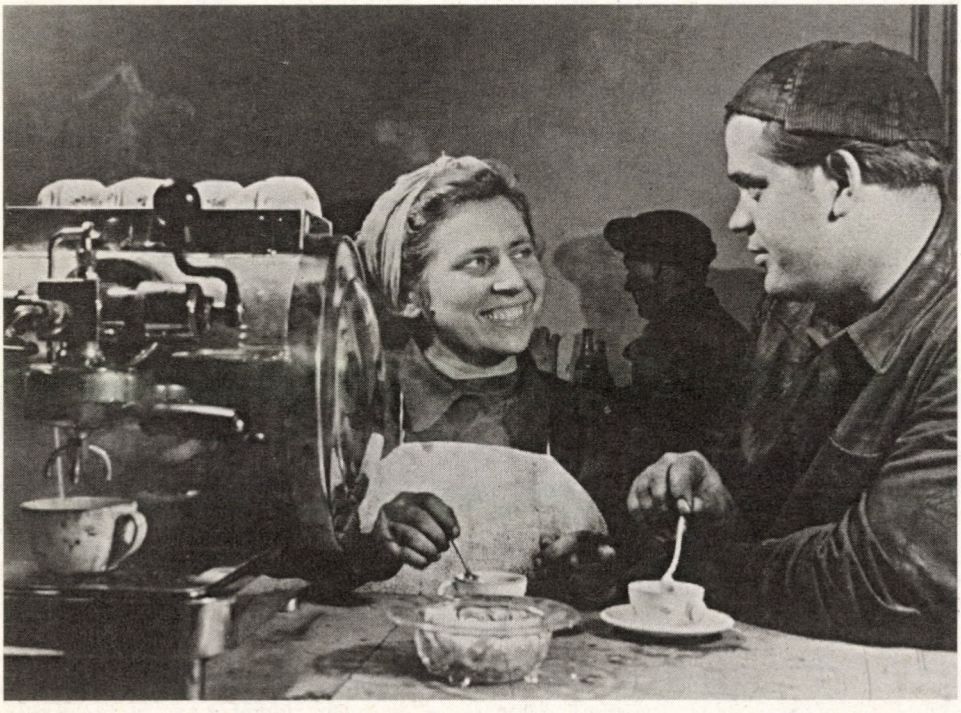
there were no people anywhere. There was just mugging; people were stripped of their clothes on the street. If you got through the day and had a home that wasn't bombed, and you had something to heat with, you could count yourself lucky, and you ran all the way home.

Then came the black marketeers, when things were passed through six sets of hands, and that's why everything was so unbelievably expensive, in dollars or gold, because all the middlemen made something on it.

Before we knew it, the ownership of the café became a bone of contention between my father and the Ábrahámś. All I know is, Ábrahám came back and ran the Café Japan, but not for long, because in 1948 it was nationalized.

Today things aren't what they used to be. People are wound up, and they're not as interested in their fellowmen the way they once were. When someone came in here, he'd sit around for hours. He'd look around, read the papers, greet friends. People would come over to his table, or he'd join someone at theirs. They talked. People today don't even talk any more. Something human has gone out of life. ❧

Interviewed by
Gábor Kresalek and Gyula Zeke



Coffee break at the Rákosi Works. Early 1950s.
Historical Phototèque, Hungarian National Museum.

Yvette Biró

Sarajevo, Back to School after War

There are thirteen of us in the narrow, almost empty library of the Film Academy. Future directors and screenwriters. I came to Sarajevo to work with them, trying to further their attempt to return to a normal life. Unmatched chairs, a makeshift table and broken windowframes make do for comfort. Huddled together within the damaged walls, they are ready to jump into work. We will be discussing and writing a lot, exercises and short scripts, all to reanimate their imaginations. After forty-five months of siege they now have to open themselves up, rethink everything, understand and reconsider what they have lived through, and also what they had wanted, had conceived of before. What may remain of the past? How to transform an unrelenting history into a story? How to express without empty rhetoric all that has been so endless, monstrous and yet so unbearably banal? No one could unerringly define the borderline between overused *déja vu* and honest confession, showing where the commonplace ends and authentic experience begins. We have to start from very far back, or, on the contrary, from as close as possible, to attack the mind in the most personal way. Let them not speak about the war or the recent situation but about their own selves. What I am asking is who are you. Not in factual data but in your desires, your emotions, your unique, appropriate universe. I encourage them to think or inhabit their fantasies in a totally free way, to launch themselves into their imagination. I invite them to play, to dress for a masquerade, so that they express themselves without fear or inhibition. And the manoeuvre works. Equipped with their note-pads and cheap pens, they leave the stifling room, install themselves on the rubble of bricks in the ruined courtyard, and start to write.

Yes, the school building, like the whole city, is in ruins. On the staircases and the corridors the debris, the smithereens of windows mixes with the dust from the slow, barely

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begun construction. Destruction and hesitant reconstruction vie with each other. Certainly, this reconstruction has nothing to do with the enthusiasm portrayed in socialist realist works. There is no shining happiness to be found. The vitality is uncertain, accompanied by faltering efforts. Suspicious expectation and lack of faith imbue what they are doing, if not the wry fatigue of the losers and the disenchanted. Even if there is window-panes and running water tomorrow, what will the new order of things be, after such murderous injuries and the victory of universal indifference? In the shadow of the plastic window-panes, marked with the initials of UNHCR, or sitting on the terraces of the crowded pavement cafes, sipping their daily one DM fixed price coffee, what kind of life, what chances for work and pleasure await these students? And since we are here among filmmakers, what kind of films will be needed, financed or expected to be made?

No way to be smart enough here. "Nobody bears witness for the witness," Paul Celan reminds us. Nobody could or should pretend to become the spokesman for their pain. It is up to them to speak up, in their most troubled and uncontrolled way, in a transfigurative form if necessary, to reveal what they have stored and repressed during those somber years.

This is an odd group indeed, or just emblematic in its utmost variety. Among them there are Bosnians and half-Croatians, Serbians and even more complicated blends, a twenty-year-old bespectacled Jewish boy and a father of a family, liberated from prisoner's camp; a fresh, alert girl translator next to a religious playwright, a blond Muslim poet sporting a ponytail and a funny-looking comic actor. No ethnic schism separates these students, they are friends. Having gone through their country's disintegration they share the same exasperation. It is not surprising that in what they write something common comes irrepressibly to the fore: the desire to go away, to fly. They all have a dream of becoming free.

"The kite, floating high in the sky, is beautifully coloured and very free. She can fly and dance around the sun and the clouds. She tries to learn how not to be sad when the moment of death will arrive, "so begins one story. Nor is the ending cheerful: the man she encounters is selfish, looking out only for himself. He doesn't understand the language of the flying kite. She cannot have her independence if she wants to survive.

Another girl tells the story of a turtle who lived happily in peace on an island until she had to suffer being kicked and viciously attacked by human beings. She decides to escape into the protecting sea but life there is no more peaceful. She can never see the sun. In the end she learns that her fate is one of permanent struggle, with the vague hope that there might, somewhere, perhaps be a better world.

And what can we say about the sublime idea of having the "heroine" become a scoop of ice-cream, imprisoned in a freezer? In her glacial cell she desperately waits for the door to open—only to melt away immediately.

The injured poet writes about a castrated monk whose only dream is to fly and whose life, too, will end in suicide. In the next story, too, the protagonist kills herself. Having fallen in love with a foreign journalist, she knows she can never trust the promises of her "visiting" lover.

I read the other stories: the heroes are a kicked, obstinate football, a defiant "petit prince". All these personifications resemble one another; they represent the destinies of the defeated rebels.

But the most revealing self-portrait is of an old man who, having lost his whole family during the war, feels prompted in his disturbed mind to paint red flowers on the ruined walls. When the war is reaching its end he sees his flowers being effaced by the wake of reconstruction. This will then be the moment of his death. His pain is not the experience of the devastation, but the suffering the destruction of the memory of the destruction causes him. He is mourning the trivial obliteration of the traces of the past.

The melancholy and somber sadness of the stories and the frequent mortal solutions derive from the perplexity of this postwar situation. It relates to the anxiety over the future these young people must confront. Even with the passing of heroic times, the scandal of life, its dismal drama has not come to an end. It has only changed. They don't know what to do with the burden they have been carrying for so many years. In these texts they give voice to their primary tensions and desolate emotions. The metaphors are not that mysterious. They speak with transparent directness about the experience of horror, in tones more of complaint than accusation. Sometimes through the means of fairy tales, unwilling to condemn Evil or praise Good. The extent to which these treatments are charged with lyricism is compelling. Touching *"confessions des enfants du siècle"*, they are profoundly intimate, and it is this which gives them their authenticity. Everything they say about themselves becomes poetry. Fatigued by combative, politicized attitudes, they offer doleful reports on the state of things, the scars of time.

Coincidences?

About a year ago, in the course of a workshop I held at the Hungarian Film Academy, a young student wrote a story, triggered by a well-known photograph by Lucien Hervé, "Three Women". This story has since became famous. The film he made won a Palme D'Or at the Cannes Film Festival. Although the photograph, with its nicely balanced composition doesn't suggest a tragedy—three women look at something beyond the frame—the film, *The Wind,* reveals in a single circular long take a terrible event: an execution. Unknown, nondescript victims are taken to a meticulous, silent hanging, after which the women return to their houses, speechless, without the slightest visible commotion. The most shocking thing was the mute horror of this reality: the casual co-existence of violence and indifference, the admission of terror without any outcry, a response

that can only be explained by force of habit. The young filmmaker, Marcell Iványi, has spoken of the specific source of his inspiration. One night, during the family dinner, TV transmitted the execution of the Ceausescus. Though his parents were rather upset by the event, the dinner went on, and he, then fifteen, tried to understand how these simultaneous actions may so easily co-exist in life. This became the basis of his film, which succeeded in transforming it into a more general contemporary drama, the banality of Evil. There was nothing more natural for him, watching these ladies watching something, than arriving at the obvious conjecture: something dreadful had to happen.

I found his reading of the image so strong that I couldn't resist repeating the exercise with my Sarajevan students. Is it possible that the imagination couldn't move in any other direction? And what I was expecting happened. Many stories written in class were drawn from the same source of associations. Most often, the departure point was the fact that these three women, childhood friends and neighbours, are tried by the war, either by the death of their husbands or sons, or by the hostility of the divided forces. And they survive in their impassivity.

Here is the most compelling Sarajevan story: "They put handcuffs on him. They were not in uniform. The weight of the gun made them nervous. The captured man was perhaps drunk, he could hardly stay on his feet. One of the gendarmes pushed him, he fell down. Then another grabbed him by the collar and tried to put him on his feet. Two villagers brought a dead woman out of the house. They put the corpse on the carriage. The gendarmes left, taking the man with them. Now women arrived from the village. There were three of them. They covered the dead woman with a brown blanket. The carriage set off. A man followed it with a spade. The women remained motionless under the glaring sun, watching in silence the carriage disappearing on the dusty road."

This story was written by a man of twenty. According to his comments, the vision of the photo elicited two immediate observations: first, though the women are exposed to blazing heat—it has to be noon, the shadows an unshakable discipline. The second, perhaps linked to it: we are dealing with people who are used to death, who have learned to cope with blows without histrionics. The idea was to write a story after the tragedy, but not deprived of it. What is the most staggering in their approach is that the reference to cruelty and death is not the legacy or skillful use of melodrama but, on the contrary, parts of the most everyday, paralysing experiences of life.

These are their first "testimonies", "witnessed by the witnesses", though reworked with the cunning of creative transfiguration. I didn't want to become their confessor. They didn't make a secret of the fact of how fed up they were with the new-style safari visitors who shamelessly pumped them and then sold their Passion on the media market. In fact, I came as a kinesitherapist, to rehabilitate them in finding the right exercises against the temporary "akinesia", in order to facilitate the recapturing of their destroyed world.

Listening to the voices in their writings, discerning their emotional fabric, it became clear to what extent all their questions are open. What is one capable of doing after such a trauma? Has the moment to bid farewell to the dead already arrived? If yes, where will the right balance be found between mourning and acquiescence, vengeance and tolerance? In other words, what kind of cohabitation between remembrance and forgetting, pain and a will oriented to the future can be established? I think of Gombrowicz: "The most tragic trait of the great tragedies is the fact that they bring about small tragedies, and in our case, these are boredom, monotony and something like the superficial and monotonous exploitation of depth."

Uncertainties, rhapsodic rhythm of abrupt stops and starts mark this first summer after war. But also the desire to move on, and the openness to enjoy what life can still offer.

The last night of my stay Ivo Pogorelich gave a concert in the half-renovated theatre. Against all safety regulations, the hall was overcrowded. Well-dressed older citizens and youngsters in ragged jeans were crowded on and amidst the seats. The President of the Republic was present. The great pianist played Mozart in the mode of Beethoven, Mussorgsky in the excessive vein of Stravinsky. His robust passion echoed the spirit of the place. It was a simple feast, interrupting the monotony of ordinary days, and beyond mourning and melancholy, with the natural force, if not the blasphemy, of pleasure, and rearranged something in this everyday life that is so different to recreate. ❧

Sarajevo, July 1996

© *Lucien Hervé:* Three Women. *Audincourt, France, 1951.*

János Tischler

Interconnections

Poland's October and the 1956 Hungarian Revolution

It is common knowledge that the demonstration in Budapest on October 23, 1956 was intended as a show of solidarity for the October events in Poland. A famous speech delivered by Wladyslaw Gomulka, the newly elected First Secretary of the Central Committee of the PUWP, the Polish United Workers' Party, at the 8th Plenum, was published in the Hungarian press that very day, and the sites chosen for the demonstration—the statues of General Bem, the Polish commander in the 1848/49 Hungarian Revolution, and of Sándor Petőfi, the poet and revolutionary—were to serve as symbols of the same solidarity, just as the odd juxtaposition in the rhymed chanted slogan "Poland presents a model, let's follow the Hungarian way".[1] In Warsaw, the next day, the 24th October, at a rally in the square in front of the Palace of Science and Culture, attended by hundreds of thousands, which could be called the climax of the October events in Poland, some of the participating students, having learned about the previous day's demonstrations in Budapest, marched carrying the Hungarian flag, enthusiastically cheered by the crowd. Gomulka, however, was definitely displeased.[2] After the end of the rally, more than 2,000 people, joined by others on the way, marched to the headquarters of the CC of the PUWP (the Polish Communist Party), and then on "to the Embassy of Hungary to express their solidarity with the Hungarian nation". Finally, "a brief rally with the slogan 'Warsaw—Budapest—Belgrade' was held."[3]

As far as the interplay was concerned, there was a third site too where the events taking place in the two countries had been conjoined on the agenda for some time. That was Moscow. It is on the record that representatives of the "fraternal parties" had been originally called to the Soviet capital for the 24th of October to be briefed by Khrushchev—who only reluctantly approved the intervention of Soviet troops in Budapest on the 23rd because he still did not exclude the possibility of an eventual armed Soviet intervention in Poland. The briefing was to be on his negotiations a few days earlier in Warsaw, but by the time the meeting began, the agenda included the Polish as well as the Hungarian

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situation.[4] It was the situation in Hungary that made it clear to Khrushchev what monstrous consequences had been avoided by a political solution in Poland.

I.

The events in Hungary were followed with particularly close attention by the PUWP leadership and by Gomulka personally. They seized on every possible source of news to get as accurate and authentic information as possible.[5] Beside the pressure of the news from Budapest, the still weak Polish leadership also came under pressure from public opinion at home. The revolution in Hungary was regarded as their own, as something identical with "the Polish Revolution." People showed their support for their "Hungarian brothers" by queuing up as blood donors. The Polish leadership was committed to change and in its search for support and allies in a Soviet bloc where the "Stalinist line" was still dominant they thought to find that ally in Hungary. At the same time, the political and also military pressure Moscow had previously exerted solely on Poland was now divided between the two countries because of the Hungarian revolution. This was a favourable development from the Polish point of view, since it helped to complete some of the changes that could no longer be put off, for instance, the recalling of Marshal Rokossovsky of the Soviet Army, as Polish Defence Minister, and the dismissal and sending home of the Soviet army officers and military advisors.[6]

The Political Committee of PUWP decided at its October 28 meeting that an appeal to the Hungarian nation should be made in the name of the Central Committee of the party.[7] This became all the more urgent as the Polish leadership, uncertain about what was going on in Budapest in the confusion of the flood of contradictory news, had been silent in the days following October 23. It was no longer possible to keep silent, especially when—possibly with the approval of certain bodies and taking advantage of the impotence of censorship—the Hungarian uprising had in the meantime been welcomed and supported in leading articles in the national party daily *Trybuna Ludu*, and in a series of its regional papers after that. An appeal of that kind expressed, the Polish leadership sincerely believed, that here were indeed a number of similarities between the Polish and Hungarian changes, furthermore it could help in the search for allies to shore up the Polish cause, and by exerting a beneficial influence on the consolidation of the Hungarian revolution help to normalize the Polish situation as well. On October 28, Adam Willman, the Ambassador of Poland in Budapest was instructed to have the appeal translated into Hungarian immediately for publication in next day's newspapers.[8] This was done, then the Polish original and the translation were passed to János Kádár and Imre Nagy who asked Willman to convey their "warm thanks" to the leaders of the Polish party for their immense help.[9] They needed the Poles' support. On 29 October the appeal of the PUWP CC was published simultaneously in every Polish daily and in *Szabad Nép* the national Communist Party daily in Budapest. It was signed by Gomulka and Prime Minister Józef Cyrankiewicz, both members of the Political Committee. The appeal began with an expression of deep sorrow for the heavy destruction suffered by Budapest, and continued with a call to Hungarians to put an end to the "fratricidal struggle" as soon as possible. The message went on: "We are familiar with the programme of the Hungarian national government, a programme of socialist democracy, growing welfare, the foundation of workers' councils, the withdrawal of Soviet

troops from Hungary and Soviet–Hungarian friendship based on the Leninist principles of equality. Far be it from us to intervene in your domestic affairs. We believe, however, that this programme conforms to the interest of the Hungarian nation and of the whole Peace Camp. [...] We are of the opinion that the programme of the Hungarian national government will be rejected only by those who want to divert Hungary from the road to socialism. [...] You and we stand on the same side—on the side of freedom and socialism. [...] Let peace prevail in Hungary, a unity of peace and the people, a unity so badly needed for you to accomplish the wide-ranging programme of democratization, progress and socialism defined as a goal by your national government."[10]

The expression by the Polish leadership of support for the withdrawal of Soviet troops from the territory of Hungary was strikingly contradictory, since they considered that inconceivable as far as Poland was concerned. The only reply Gomulka could come up with toward the end of October to the increasingly powerful demand for a similar withdrawal was still that Hungary's geopolitical position was utterly different from Poland's, and that those who were making such a demand were playing into the hands of reactionaries at home and abroad who were waiting in the wings, ready to leap in and turn the situation to their own advantage.[11] It took a few more days and some events of major significance for Gomulka to find the most suitable formula, one that he was to keep on using for many a year speaking about "Polish state interests".

Also on 28 October, a two-member delegation left Warsaw for Budapest in order to study the situation and to gather direct information. They were also instructed, in line with the interests of the Polish leadership, to make all possible efforts to prevent the Hungarian revolution from shifting further to the right, and to try to persuade Imre Nagy and Kádár to call a halt to the changes at a given point. Besides, the visit provided a good opportunity for them to assure the Hungarian leadership of their support and to express their unequivocal condemnation for Ernő Gerő's call for armed Soviet assistance "to restore public order". The delegation was made up of Deputy Foreign Minister Marian Naszkowski and Artur Starewicz, a substitute member of the CC, soon to be appointed head of the Press Bureau operating alongside the CC. They met members of the Hungarian leadership, and had longer discussions with Imre Nagy and János Kádár, on the very same day. A several-page-long coded report on the meeting was sent by the delegation directly to Gomulka and Foreign Minister Adam Rapacki (who was also a PB member). That secret telegramme contains an objective analysis of the situation as given by the Hungarians on the events of the previous days and the possibilities for a settlement. According to the Polish delegation, "not one member of the Party leadership was able to mention a single reactionary centre, moreover, there was no evidence of a distinctly anti-Communist or anti-socialist character of the movement in the capital either". At the same time, the Hungarian leaders agreed that "every day and every hour by which the fighting was prolonged would move the reactionary and anti-Communist rabble more and more to the head of the rebel movement."[12] On the basis of what they saw in Budapest, two members of the Polish leadership could see for themselves what disaster had been averted by the peaceful solution of the crisis in the period of the 8th Plenum. They were only too aware that even with extreme caution avoiding all confrontation, Soviet troops marching into Warsaw would have provoked an uprising of elemental power in

Poland, which the PUWP would have been unable to control, just as it happened in Hungary.[13] An eventual armed conflict in Poland, however, would have taken far larger dimensions, tearing open barely healed wounds made by the war. Therefore Gomulka as well as other members of the leadership frequently expressed their satisfaction over the political self-restraint showed by the Poles.

On October 29, at the Soviet embassy, Starewicz and Naszkowski met Mikoyan and Suslov, then in Budapest, who could not, or would not, reveal their intentions with any degree of unambiguity. All they said was that everything depended on whether the Imre Nagy government would be able to control the situation.[14] The two delegates returned to Warsaw on October 30, reporting on their visit in Hungary that very day.[15] What is equally significant, however, is that they regarded informing public opinion in Poland as highly important. Shortly after his return, Starewicz was interviewed on Polish Radio about what he had seen in Hungary. In his reply he stated his conviction that the realization of the programme of the Imre Nagy government could begin after the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Budapest.[16]

II.

In the morning of November 1, 1956, Khrushchev, Malenkov and Molotov met a three-member Polish delegation headed by Gomulka in the town of Brest-Litovsk, close to the Soviet-Polish border. The Poles were informed by the Soviets about the imminent intervention in Hungary, the final decision having been made in Moscow on the 31st of October.[17] Although the Poles expressed their "dissenting opinion" since they could not possibly concede that crises of this kind—like the Hungarian problem or the Polish problem twelve days previously—should be settled by a foreign power simply using its own armed forces, nevertheless they did agree that the danger of a counter-revolution was clearly present in Hungary.[18] As a rather weak argument against armed intervention, they brought up that in Hungary the Soviets were facing possible prolonged partisan warfare.[19] Thus they acquiesced in the Soviet decision, being powerless to do otherwise, yet the PUWP regarded it important to make its "different opinion" concerning the problem public, too. The Soviet announcement made in Brest-Litovsk put a winning card into the hand of Gomulka who, from then on, was able to make his political standpoint clear without playing at tactics, or mincing his words. Referring to "Polish state interests", he thus included the presence of Soviet troops, the country's membership in the Warsaw Pact and the unchangeability of the Polish borders altogether redrawn in 1945. In a sense, the Poles were blackmailed by Gomulka, who maintained that any disregard for, or violation of, "Polish state interests" would result in Poland's suffering the same tragic fate as Hungary; the only proper solution in dangerous international political situations was for the people to rally behind the PUWP.

The first time Polish *raisons d'état* were formulated openly in this way was in an appeal to the Polish nation by the Central Committee of the PUWP dated November 1. The "dissenting opinion" of the Poles, conveyed to Khrushchev earlier that day in Brest-Litovsk, was included in that document. It shows the importance of the Brest-Litovsk meeting that a couple of hours later the full Political Bureau of the PUWP, completed by the "Brest Three", was convened for the sole reason of discussing new developments regarding Hungary. They reviewed "the Hungarian situation, the matter of the deployment of Soviet

troops in Hungary," and "the Political Bureau's position was to condemn the armed intervention of the Soviet Union in Hungary". The resolution related to the agenda declares that the Party's position must be made public in an appeal to the nation: "the protection and maintainance of the people's power and the achievements of socialism should be accomplished by the Hungarian people, not by external intervention."[20]

An editorial committee under the leadership of Jerzy Morawski, a member of the PUWP PB, was appointed to formulate the appeal—the other purpose of which was to "throw cold water on overheated Polish heads". The text, after Gomulka's approval, was released to the Polish press the next day. The part of the appeal dealing with Hungary condemned the previous leadership of the Hungarian Workers' Party which had resisted the will of the masses and, instead of democratization, had called in Soviet troops. Next, the PUWP CC emphasized the continuously growing threat of reaction and counterrevolution, pointing out the chaotic character of the situation in Hungary, "reactionary bands" taking the law into their own hands, and the bestial murder of Communists. The PUWP, in the name of Poland, firmly condemned the reactionary forces driving Hungary toward catastrophe, at the same time expressing the hope that the Hungarian working class and the labouring masses would be capable of united action, thereby averting the "reactionary attack". The appeal continued with the resolution formulated at the PB meeting on the unacceptability of foreign intervention, which was followed by the statement that the troops of the Soviet Union were stationed in Polish territory on the basis of the Potsdam Agreement, in order to secure the supply lines of Soviet occupation forces in the GDR. Thus their pull-out from Poland was inconceivable as long as a peace agreement with Germany had not been signed, or the troops of all the four great powers had not been simultaneously withdrawn from German territory. Beside providing security for their supply lines, the presence of Soviet troops in Poland was precisely what protected the country's Western borders against the German appetite for revision, but the conditions and circumstances of their stay in the country would be governed by precise and proper legal forms soon to be agreed on between the Polish leadership and the Soviet government. Finally, the Party pointed out: in the knowledge of the international situation, the demand for their withdrawal was contrary to the most fundamental Polish *raison d'état,* and that the present period required calm, discipline and responsibility instead of demonstrations and rallies, for "this is the most important command of the moment".[22]

Despite all the signs indicating imminent armed intervention, on November 2 the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, under the signature of Naszkowski, instructed Ambassador Willman to reply to Imre Nagy's plea for help that the Polish leadership hoped the official view as it was voiced in the appeal of the PUWP to the Polish nation—which, as we saw, was decided in the evening of November 1—will be of assistance to him. The sentence in the text read: "the protection and maintaining of the people's power and the achievements of socialism must be accomplished by the Hungarian people, not by external intervention."[23]

On the evening of November 2, a cipher telegram was sent by Willman, addressed to Foreign Minister Rapacki, in which the Polish government was requested by the Hungarian government to approve that "Warsaw be the scene of negotiations between government delegations from the

Soviet Union and Hungary, the subject of which would be a settlement of disputes between the two sides, particularly concerning the stationing of Soviet troops in Hungary".[24] It was evident that a discussion on "the stationing of Soviet troops in Hungary" was equivalent to demand, on the part of Hungary, for the withdrawal of the Soviet army, a demand utterly rejected with regard to Poland once again, and very clearly less than a day earlier, by the Polish leadership. Still, the answer was drafted and duly dispatched to the Hungarian capital within an hour and a half. If it suited both parties, the Polish government would consent that the scene be Warsaw; moreover, when the date of the negotiations became known, it wished to inform Polish public opinion too.[25] By thus fulfilling the request of the Hungarian government, the PUWP PB was given another opportunity to express its "dissenting opinion of Brest" again.

The cable describing the Polish ambassador's conversation with Imre Nagy early in the afternoon on the 3rd of November was sent by Willman to Warsaw during the night of November 3 to 4. Despite the apparently hopeless situation, the Hungarian Prime Minister was still trying to seize every opportunity, however small, for normalizing the situation. Since he assumed that the Prince Primate, Cardinal Mindszenty, might "take a position in a reactionary spirit", he asked the Polish government to persuade Cardinal Wyszyński, who had just been reinstated in his office, to "exert proper influence on Mindszenty in order to reduce tension in Hungary".[26] The next act in the "Hungarian Tragedy", which started the following day, the 4th of November, rendered that request, along with much else, meaningless.

Gomulka himself regarded an eventual separation of Hungary from the direct sphere of Soviet interest impermissible—if for no other reason than because such a precedent would have triggered off his own fall from power—but at the start he found it hard to support the second Soviet intervention, if only because Poland had had to face the same threat two weeks earlier. Besides, in its appeal to the Hungarian nation of 28 October, the PUWP CC had unambiguously condemned the earlier Soviet intervention which took place four or five days before. Therefore, on November 4, Gomulka did no more than stress that accomplished facts had to be accepted. It followed from the "accomplished facts" concerning Hungary that the Political Committee of the PUWP—convened that evening solely to discuss the "Hungarian issue"—decided that the Polish UN representative should vote against the American resolution condemning the Soviet intervention; which he did.[27] Next day, the news that the UN representative of Poland had voted together with the other countries of the socialist camp, was received by a meeting of the chief editors of the Warsaw daily newspapers and the editors of Polish radio in the building of the PUWP CC. The editors were angry, and in a belligerent mood, claiming that this betrayal of Hungary would never be forgiven by Polish public opinion. They demanded a review of the action. They suggested that the only thing that might save the prestige of the Polish leadership and Gomulka himself would be the immediate resignation of Foreign Minister Rapacki. Gomulka heard this out, then reacted with irritation: "You expect me to place the fate of Poland at risk. You want me to take a stand in defence of Imre Nagy when I do not even know who he is and what his intentions are. All I know is that there were practically no Communists left in his government, the reactionary parties won a majority position, and Communists were hanged on lampposts by the mob. You want me to subject Poland to the same fate as is now being suffered by

Hungary in defence of that government. I will never do that. And anyway, have you ever considered what would happen here in Poland if the anti-Communist parties had triumphed in Hungary? Well, then we, too, would be seized by the throat by reaction, [...] and we would be flooded by the same tide. I will not allow that."[28]

The Polish changes had reached their climax at the time of the 8th Plenum of the PUWP CC. From then on, the efforts of the still weak party leadership were aimed at consolidating the situation in Poland, reducing tension, and stabilizing their own position. Having lived through much, Gomulka was fully aware that despite genuine mass support, unique in the history of the People's Democracies, which he enjoyed,—and which was to turn out to be temporary—the Polish communist party would never be able to keep its monopoly of power without the military presence of the Soviet Union. However, he wished to lay down the rules of that military presence in a bi-lateral (Polish–Soviet) agreement with proper legal guarantees. The agreement was duly signed in Moscow in mid-November, 1956. The sole guarantor of Poland's new Western borders, drawn in Potsdam was, again, the Soviet Union. Poland, however, could still have felt seriously threatened by a German territorial revisionism which undoubtedly existed at the time. The First Secretary of the PUWP CC took advantage of that threat and the bloody crushing of the Hungarian revolution for the consolidation of his own position and regime during the autumn and winter of 1956. What Gomulka represented was an endeavour to maintain the "independence" extended by the big Eastern neighbour to the maximum, to stretch it to the limit, to eliminate the remnants of Stalinism, and to lend a national character to socialist development ("the Polish road to socialism").

Gomulka went beyond the "acceptance of accomplished facts" for the first time on 29 November 1956, so much so that he pointed out the difference between the armed aggression of the Western states against Egypt and the armed intervention of the Soviet Union in Hungary, declaring that the latter was of an entirely different nature since "the Soviet Union is not looking for a wealthy region to exploit in Hungary, nor has it the intention to expropriate the labour of the Hungarian people or turn Hungary into a colony of its own".[29] By the end of December 1956 the Polish position on Hungary had been crystallized in a formulation the leadership of the PUWP was to adhere to consistently for the next year and a half. It was an amalgam, cautiously made up of two components. As regards the first, the necessity of the Soviet intervention of November 4 was not disputed in the least, although the fact that it had happened was "deeply regretted". The intervention was unavoidable in the circumstances, something that had to be done to prevent the takeover by "reaction" in Hungary, an event of terrible, uncalculable consequences for all the other socialist countries. The "deep regret" of the PUWP was otherwise a subtle indication of their restraint, implying that they would relatively rarely express this view of theirs, since "people are usually reluctant to talk too much about embarrassing things."[30] The other part of their appraisal, however, was widely different from that of the other countries of the Soviet bloc. The latter put the blame for the events in Hungary almost entirely on reactionaries at home and abroad. According to the Polish view, however, the explosion in Hungary was a sad consequence of the criminal, distorted policies of Rákosi: the incendiary material had been piling up for years. If the other fraternal parties shift the responsibility entirely to the activity of

subversive groups and external factors, then by doing so they absolve the relevant party from responsibility for errors, within their own ranks and from the incorrect policies pursued by the party in a given country. [31]

Although he strongly condemned the political moves made by Imre Nagy in the early days of November, Gomulka objected to the kidnapping of the Hungarian Prime Minister and his associates on November 22 firmly, and he made this view clear on several occasions. In May 1957 he resolved to take a step that no other communist party leader would take: he intervened with Khrushchev in the interest of Imre Nagy. It was not any identity of political views with those of Imre Nagy that led him to do so but his dread of a return to the old way, the physical destruction of political opponents customary in Stalin's time, a practice to which Gomulka himself had nearly fallen victim. Almost at the same time as the 9th Plenum of the PUWP CC was declaring war on ideological revisionism, a secret cipher telegramme was sent from Budapest by Willman, which let the Polish leadership know that Imre Nagy—who was also regarded by Gomulka as a revisionist— had been taken back to Budapest, and preparations for a trial were under way.[32] A week after the reception of the telegramme, avoiding all publicity, a Polish delegation headed by Gomulka and Cyrankiewicz travelled to Moscow in order to settle the issues that remained to be clarified after the Soviet–Polish treaty signed in November 1956.[33] During the discussions—as if just making a passing remark—the problem of Imre Nagy was raised by the First Secretary of the Polish party. He argued against a possible trial by pointing out the political harm that might ensue, the wave of international protest to be expected, and he insisted that "Imre Nagy was certainly not an imperialist agent"[34] In the face of Khruschev's totally negative attitude, Gomulka brought up in defense of the Hungarian Prime Minister that even if he had been a traitor, he could not have had total control over everything on his own, deciding every single issue (Cyrankiewicz even interpolated that if the counter-revolution had won, Imre Nagy himself would have been hanged).[35]

Poland's official attitude *vis à vis* the Kádár government was, at the same time, somewhat different from what went on behind the scenes. From November 1956 on —at the beginning without being clearly formulated—the prime target of Polish foreign policy with regard to Hungary was to promote the consolidation of the position of the Kádár leadership by economic aid and by international political actions while refraining from making judgements. In accordance with that, at the urging of the Hungarian government and despite its own economic difficulties, on November 24, 1956 the PUWP PB and the Polish Council of Ministers made a simultaneous decision to extend aid in the form of goods to the value of 100 million zloty.[36] At the same time, on the plane of official Polish-Hungarian contacts, the leadership of the PUWP chose to keep its distance, making it perfectly clear to the Kádár government that it did not agree with the merciless retaliatory policies of the HSWP and with the terror it was employing. For that reason Kádár had to wait for a year and a half until in May 1958, after a great deal of procrastination and prior guarantees with respect to the Imre Nagy trial, Gomulka finally made an official visit to Hungary, thereby granting greater legitimacy to the Hungarian party leader.

III

The Poles reacted to the events of the Hungarian Revolution of 1956 with utmost interest. The organization of aid op-

erations was legitimized by the October 28 Appeal of the PUWP to the Hungarians, practically encouraging action of this kind—in the hope that it would help to dampen the national sentiments the Polish "October" itself aroused.

During the Hungarian revolution, 795 litres of blood were airlifted from Poland to Hungary. This indicates that around 4,000 donors were involved. In addition to the blood donations, money, food and medicine began to be collected all over the country, for several weeks, with a new momentum imparted after November 4. Polish authorities did not interfere with this spontaneous aid, nor would they have been able to stop it, had they tried.

The first Polish aircraft landed in Budapest on 26 October. That plane carried aid that had been in store, mostly Polish army stocks. However, up to November 3, 15 farther plane loads of aid landed, carrying the above mentioned 795 litres of blood, 415 litres of blood plasma, 16,500 kilograms of blood substitute, serums, medicines, bandages and 3,000 kilograms of food.[37] Till the end of 1957, the Polish Red Cross delivered 23.5 tons of blood-substitute, medicine, bandage, medical instruments as well as 331 tons of food, 32 tons of clothing and 10 tons of soap and building material to Hungary, taken there in 42 vans and 104 railway trucks, all as assistance from the Polish people.[38]

The Poles saw the Hungarian uprising as a genuine anti-Stalinist revolution with aims very similar to their own, with the difference that in Hungary the narrow outlook of the old leadership and the obstinacy with which it had clung to power led to a bloodbath. This vast movement of aid made it possible to do away with the empty slogans about fraternity that had, up to then, been ritually repeated, and to revise memories of the traditional friendship between the two nations, such as that of the 100,000 Polish refugees given shelter in Hungary in the autumn of 1939 of the Hungarian troops later stationed in various regions of Poland, including the vicinity of Warsaw, who had refused to act in the manner of an occupying army. With few exceptions, the blood donors gave blood for the first, and most likely the last, time in their lives. They were simply overcome with the urge to help. There was also the factor of the anti-Soviet attitude, always strong in Poland, and the feeling that Poland had managed to avoid the tragedy suffered by Hungary.

Many rallies in support of Hungary were held in factories, universities and other locations but, up to November 4, there was only one single street demonstration in support of "our fighting Hungarian brothers". Organizers clearly regarded demonstrations too risky for fear of not being able to send the crowd home peacefully once the demonstration had ended, and the general mood was anyway in accordance with the appeal by Gomulka, still highly popular at the time, at the October 24 mass rally in Warsaw, urging that it was "time to finish rallying, let us begin to work". That demonstration, involving a crowd of 10,000, was held in the town of Olsztyn, where the local Red Army Square was renamed "Square of Hungarian Revolutionaries" by those taking part.[39] In the morning of November 5 1956, however, silent demonstrations were organized in Cracow and Poznań involving several thousand people carrying Polish and Hungarian flags, protesting against the second Soviet intervention in Hungary and commemorating the Hungarians who had fallen.

Gomulka wanted to consolidate the still rather uncertain conditions in Poland as soon as he could. Despite great efforts it took quite a few more months for any

considerable progress to be made. The tremendous sympathy for the "fighting Hungarian brothers" sweeping Poland was kept within limits mainly by the strength of the argument that the same tragedy might befall Poland as Hungary (hundreds of "agitators" were mobilized all over the country to that end).[40] However, after November 1956, the Polish authorities took efforts to avoid any domestic political move that could have stirred up passions again. The Polish leadership was perfectly aware that it would be unable to make Poles believe that there had been a counter-revolution in Hungary—especially as the leadership itself did not entirely concur with that judgement of the Hungarian events—when a major part of Polish society shared the ideals of the Hungarian Revolution, and saw the events in Hungary as a repetition of all that happened in Poland a few days before. For that reason, the idea of a "Hungarian counter-revolution" was not stressed, and was not spoken of as loudly and frequently as elsewhere. They preferred to keep silent, to speak as little as possible, rather than to pursue ineffectual propaganda. That is probably why, despite several attempts and initiatives by the Hungarian embassy, an "exhibition exposing the Hungarian counter-revolution" was never mounted in Warsaw,[41] and the responsible Polish authorities flatly refused to publish the "White Book on the Hungarian Counter-revolution" in a Polish translation.

Although the Polish leadership tried to hold back the media, newly freed from censorship, in the period of the Hungarian Revolution, these efforts were largely unsuccessful. Following November 4, Gomulka first struck a more conciliatory tone in his treatment of Polish journalists, and tried to "bring them to their senses" himself. He told them that given Poland's economic and political conditions and the current international situation, the country could not afford to challenge the Soviet Union on such a major issue as the events in Hungary. He asked the press and the broadcasting staff to exercise self-restraint: there were events—and the Hungarian problem was one such thing—about which you could not write and tell all.[42] However, since much of these explanations made little or no impact, the leadership reacted by tightening censorship, and by taking other measures to prevent journalists who had been in Budapest from recounting what they had seen at meetings held in various plants, factories and clubs. There were also dismissals from the Radio and from the press.

The Polish leadership was taken completely by surprise and was deeply shocked when Imre Nagy and his associates were executed in June 1958. Gomulka flew into a rage upon the news—he thought he had been deceived by Kádár—and used words like "vicious murder".[43] It was widely believed at that time that the Polish party leader—who, after more than a year and a half's procrastination, had finally made his visit to Hungary hardly more than five weeks before at the head of an official Polish delegation—had been promised by Kádár himself that even if there were a trial, there would be no death sentences. However, although the PUWP did not agree with either the Imre Nagy trial or the way in which it had been conducted, it had no intention of openly confronting other countries in "the camp". At the most, it disapproved behind the scenes. The summer of 1958 was already far from the autumn of 1956. Gomulka's speech in Gdańsk on June 28, 1956, left no scope for doubt when, in the marks of "political pragmatism", he completely embraced the official Hungarian position regarding the Imre Nagy trial.

NOTES

1 ■ The slogan emphasizes that there must be no servile copying of the model of other countries. Each country must follow its own way. The same idea was underlined in an interview given by Imre Nagy to the Italian paper *Giornale d'Italia* on October 31. The Prime Minister suggested a Western-type democracy for Hungary which would not be like Titoism, nor would it follow the Gomulka line but take a "special Hungarian direction". See Polska Agencja Prasowa, Biblioteka PP, Biuletyny Specjalne 1–15. XI. 1956 r. Biuletyn Specjalny nr. 3473, Warszawa, dnia 2 listopada 1956 r., (Dzial): Materialy i dokumenty, s 3–4.

2 ■ Oral History Archives. (OHA), No. 572. *Interjú Emanuel Planerrel, a Lengyel Rádió Tájékoztató Osztálya egykori vezetőjével* (Interview with Emanuel Planer, Former Head of the Information Department of Polish Radio), by János Tischler, 1993.

3 ■ *Az 1956-os magyar forradalom lengyel dokumentumai* (Polish Documents on the Hungarian Revolution of 1956, henceforward *Az 1956-os magyar forradalom...*), compiled, translated and introduced by János Tischler, 1956-os Intézet—Windsor Kiadó, 1996, pp. 203-204, Document No. III/5./157

4 ■ Az 1956. október 24-i moszkvai értekezlet (The Moscow Conference of October 24, 1956). Published by Tibor Hajdu, in: *Évkönyv I.* (Yearbook I), Budapest, 1956-os Intézet, 1992, pp. 149–156.

5 ■ See Note 2.

6 ■ The meetings of the Soviet Party Presidium, held daily or every other day after October 23, 1956, concentrated on Hungarian events, which was in a way their sole subject. The "Polish problem" remained topical only in so far that the Chinese Party delegation, headed by Liu Xaoqi, which participated in the October 24 and 26 meetings of the Soviet Party Presidium, tried to persuade Moscow not to approve the dismissal of Rokossovsky by Warsaw. In the end, the Kremlin had to reconcile itself to the fact that Rokossovsky, extremely unpopular in Warsaw and unacceptable to Gomulka and his associates, was dismissed and sent back to the Soviet Union. With regard to that, at the October 30 meeting of the Party Presidium, Khrushchev declared: "As far as Rokossovsky is concerned, I told Gomulka that this was their (i.e. the Poles') business." See *Döntés a Kremlben, 1956. A szovjet pártelnökség vitái Magyarországról* (Decision in the Kremlin, 1956. The Debates of the Soviet Party Presidium on Hungary), edited by Vyacheslav Sereda and János M. Rainer, Budapest, 1956-os Intézet, 1996, pp. 30–34, 51-52.

7 ■ *Az 1956-os magyar forradalom...*, p. 152, Document No. II/1./133.

8 ■ OHA, No. 571. Interview with former Polish Ambassador to Hungary Adam Willman, by János Tischler, 1991.

9 ■ *Az 1956-os magyar forradalom...*, p. 45, Document No. I/1./18.

10 ■ *1956 sajtója* (The Press of 1956), Magyar Tudósítások Kiadó, 1989; The Appeal of the PUWP to the Hungarian People, *Szabad Nép*, 29 October 1956.

11 ■ Archivum Akt Nowych (AAN), Archives of Current History Documents, KC PZPR, 237-V-840. Przemówienia Wladyslawa Gomulki, 20 October–23 November1956, s. 47–48.

12 ■ *Az 1956-os magyar forradalom...*, pp. 45–47, Document No. I/1./19.

13 ■ János Tischler: *Lengyel szemmel 1956-ról* (1956 With Polish Eyes, henceforward: Lengyel szemmel...) Interview with Artur Starewicz, former Head of the Press Bureau of the PUWP CC., Múltunk, 1992, Nos 2–3, pp. 277–278.

14 ■ *Lengyel szemmel...*, pp. 278-279.

15 ■ Az 1956-os magyar forradalom..., p. 153, Document No. II/1/134.

16 ■ Archiwum Polskiego Radia i Televizji (Archives of the Polish Radio and Television), Polityczne Nagrania Archiwalne, 435/1/3, Muzyka i Aktualnosci, 30 October 1956.

17 ■ *Döntés a Kremlben...*, pp. 62–65, and *A "Jelcin dosszié". Szovjet dokumentumok 1956-ról.* (The "Yeltsin File": Soviet Documents on 1956), ed. by Éva Gál, András B. Hegedüs, György Litván, János M. Rainer. Századvég Kiadó—1956-os Intézet, Budapest, 1993, pp. 70–73, Document No. II/12.

18 ■ The Soviet delegation sent a telephone message to Moscow concerning the meeting, according to which "full agreement could not be reached" because the Poles were of the opinion that this was Hungary's internal affair, and there should be no intervention; at the same time they said they also believed that reaction raised its head in Hungary. To which the Poles added that in the case of eventual free elections, the Hungarian Communist Party would get 8–10 per cent of the vote, and that "workers must be armed in Hungary, and allowed to keep those arms". *Döntés a Kremlben, 1956...*, p. 66. In his memoirs, Khrushchev had the following to tell about that meeting: "We explained our viewpoints to Gomulka and Cyrankiewicz. They lis-

tened to us in silence. We asked: «What shall we do?» Gomulka took the position that although the situation was very grave, still, armed force must not be employed. [...] «Let us suppose the troops are not withdrawn but they do not intervene either. Let the government expose itself, which has taken a counter-revolutionary position. Then it will be overthrown by the Hungarian working class itself.» So we did not come to an agreement." Memuari Nikiti Sergeevicha Khrushcheva, *Voprosi Istorii*, 1994, No. 5, p. 76.

19 ■ *Az 1956-os magyar forradalom...* pp. 175–179, Document No. II/9/145.

20 ■ *Az 1956-os magyar forradalom...* pp. 153–154, Document No. II/1/135.

21 ■ OHA, No. 473. Interview with Jerzy Morawski, a former member of the PB of the PUWP, made by János Tischler, 1991.

22 ■ *Az 1956-os magyar forradalom...* pp. 159–161, Document No. II/4/140.

23 ■ *Az 1956-os magyar forradalom...* p. 140, Document No. I/2/118.

24 ■ *Az 1956-os magyar forradalom...* p. 50, Document No. I/1/31.

25 ■ *Az 1956-os magyar forradalom...* p. 140, Document Np. I/2/117.

26 ■ *Az 1956-os magyar forradalom...* pp. 57–58, Document No. II/1/34.

27 ■ *Az 1956-os magyar forradalom...* p. 154, Document No. II/1/136.

28 ■ Andrzej Werblan: "Czy los Imre Nagy'a przerazil Gomulke?" (Was Gomulka Scared by the Fate of Imre Nagy?), *Prawo i Życie*, 1991, No. 43.

29 ■ Magyar Országos Levéltár MDP és MSZMP Ügyiratok Osztálya (Hungarian National Archives, HWP and HSWP Documents Section), 228. f. 32/1958/14 ö.e. p. 130. The above-mentioned speech by Gomulka was reported by *Népszabadság* as well.

30 ■ This was emphasized by Gomulka, too, in his address at the Rzeszów District Conference of the PUWP. AAN, KC, PZPr, 237/V–842. Przemównia tow. Wl. Gomulki, 19–22. XII. 1956, s. 282, 306.

31 ■ This official Polish position, with some minor modifications, was expounded by Gomulka at each of a series of Warsaw and regional party activists' meetings convened to discuss the new policies in the wake of the 8th plenum of the PUWP CC.

32 ■ János Tischler: Egy 1957 májusi lengyel követjelentés Budapestről, *Népszabadság*, 13 February 1993.

33 ■ In mid-November 1956, a top-level Polish party and government delegation visited Moscow to settle the problem of the huge damages suffered by Poland owing to the Soviet Union's ruthless exploitation of the country in the previous years, and to regulate the status of Soviet troops stationed in Poland. Making considerable concessions, the Soviet Union went a long way towards meeting Polish demands.

34 ■ See Note No. 19.

35 ■ See previous note.

36 ■ Archiwum Polskiego Ministerstwa Spraw Zagranicznych (henceforward AMSZ, Archives of the Polish Foreign Ministry), zespól 7, wiązka 69, teczka 571, Wegry, międzynarodowa pomoc spoleczna, 1956–1957, s. 35.37, see also *Az 1956-os magyar forradalom....*, p. 155. Document No. II/1/137.

37 ■ *Żolnierz Wolnośći*, November 28, 1956.

38 ■ AMSZ, zespól 7, wiazka 69, teczka 571, s. 69.

39 ■ *Az 1956-os magyar forradalom...*, pp. 205–207, Document No. III/5./159.

40 ■ Magyar Országos Levéltár, Külügyi Iratok (Hungarian National Archives, Foreign Affairs Documents), XIX-J-1-j, Poland, Box 3 4/j, 00783/1958.

41 ■ For the complete history of the exhibition see János Tischler: "A varsói kapcsolat. Az 1956-os magyar ellenforradalmat bemutató kiállítás varsói története" (The Polish Connection. The History of an Exhibition Meant to Expose the Hungarian Counterrevolution in Warsaw), *Kritika*, No. 10/1995, pp. 39–41.

42 ■ AAN KC PZPR, 237/V-324. Przemówienia, wysąpienia B. Bieruta, W. Dworakowskiego I Wl. Gomulki, 1954, 1956–1957, s 60, 70–71.

43 ■ See Note 2.

Gomulka's Intercession with Khrushchev on behalf of Imre Nagy

Excerpt from the records of the discussions conducted between The Party and Government Delegation of the Polish People's Republic and the Party and Government Delegation of the Soviet Union 24–25 May, 1957.

[Archiwum Akt. Nowych (Current History Archives), KC PZPR (PUWP CC), paczka 112, tom 26. Materialy do stosunków partyjnych polsko-radzieckich z lat 1954–1954, kart 685]

On the first day of the talks: Present (Soviet Union): Khrushchev, Bulganin, Zhukov, Mikoyan, Saburiv, Kabanov, Nikitin, Gundobin and Ponomarenko;
Present (Poland): Gomulka, Cyrankiewicz, Spychalski, Szyr, Jedrychowski, Graniewski, Waluchowski.

[...]

Gom[ulka]: On 15 and 16 June we intend to visit Ulbricht for a few days at their invitation. We were also invited by Kádár but we had no time. Cyrankiewicz was in Asia and Czechoslovakia. Our latest information is that the Hungarians want to put Imre Nagy on trial. He is in prison now in Budapest. In our opinion, looking at the case from a political viewpoint, it will cause grave damage. It is, of course, their affair but we are also concerned. Our position is that if the trial of Imre Nagy were to start now, then the matter would become even more complicated. Because of the lack of time, we have not informed the Hungarians of our view. Nor did we get word officially from them. We were informed unofficially by a Hungarian comrade[1], then next day the news was in the papers.[2]

Khr[ushchev]: So what shall we do about him?[3]

Mik[oyan]: Send him to Warsaw perhaps?

Gom[ulka]: That is not the issue. We had our problems too with some of our own people. The situation must be settled in a politically favourable way. Otherwise another anti-Hungarian campaign will begin, and those events will be back in the news. Of course, we do not have sufficient evidence in our hands. All we know is what is found in your correspondence with Yugoslavia. Imre Nagy, however, was certainly not an imperialist traitor. There will be great outrage.

Khr[ushchev]: Yes, there will.

Gom[ulka]: But that is politically damaging.

Khr[ushchev]: No, it is not. Our enemies will shout in protest, and our friends will understand that he played a traitor's role. Whether he was an agent in the legal sense or not and whether he got money for it—that is irrelevant. Irrelevant because he pursued subversive activities.

Gom[ulka]: Perhaps our information is incomplete but even if he was a traitor, he could not have decided about anything on his own, and he did not.

Khr[ushchev]: That is right, on his own he did not but he was the banner. Kopácsi, the head of the police, did what Imre Nagy ordered him to do, and Kopácsi had Communists hanged. This is a complicated problem, and not a case for Hungary only. We believe that the persons guilty of the coup must bear responsibility for their actions. Those are the laws of war. This is a class war.

Mi[koyan]: You solved the problem in a correct way in Poland[4] but the situation

there was different. Imre Nagy took action against the people's democratic power.

Khr[ushchev]: He quit the Warsaw Treaty, declared neutrality on the Austrian model, and a persecution of Communists began (Zhukov: Without any court procedure or investigation). What sort of a proletarian dictatorship is this? If they had won, Kádár would have been hanged a long time ago.

Cyr[ankiewicz]: If the counter-revolution had won, Imre Nagy would have been hanged, too.

Khr[ushchev]: You cannot be sure about that. The Americans backed Imre Nagy. They said terror must be curbed.

Gom[ulka]: Still, I think a single man would not have been able to provoke all that.

Khr[ushchev]: There were others as well. The Yugoslavs played a bad role in the affair. In a sense they were instigators too. And you can find examples like that in the history of the workers' movement. Take the case of Noske.[5]

Cyr[ankiewicz]: The Communists, the working class fought against Noske.

Gom[ulka]: Imre Nagy is no Noske.

Khr[ushchev]: Let the Hungarians decide as best they can. However, the Hungarian nation must understand that the errors had been made by Rákosi but Imre Nagy took advantage of them.

After we visited you, we saw Tito.[6] He was of the same opinion as us. After all, what kind of a Communist is a man who, as a Communist prime minister, has Communists hanged? Tito was also disillusioned. He asked: "What if Imre Nagy resigned as prime minister if the counter-revolution won?" We answered that it would be the right thing for him to do. Tito promised (on November 2) that he would persuade Imre Nagy to act in that way. The talks were attended by Tito, Rankovic, Kardelj and, I think, Mićunović. Our talks lasted all night long. There was no difference of opinion between us. Tito said: "It is necessary that you should be the ones to intervene. A gigantic country. The leading force of the Warsaw Treaty." The Romanians, the Bulgarians and the Czechs also wanted to help the Soviet troops as volunteers. Tito replied: "There is no need for that. It is better if you alone intervene. The counter-revolution must be crushed." Tito himself saw us off at the harbour next dawn. I persuaded him to leave Brioni. (He was ill at the time.) I said the island could be bombed by mistake. We kissed each other goodbye when we left. So there was no obstacle to cooperation there. The date, however, was not set. Zhukov was making calculations, for which he had been given three days. The decision in favour of armed intervention had been made before I had left Moscow. We arrived back on a plane at around 3 or 4 o'clock in the afternoon[7] together with Malenkov. Kádár arrived at the same time. Bulganin phoned from Sofia. He had not met Kádár before. At that time there were Horváth[8], Bata[9], Münnich and Kádár all staying in Moscow. (Tito said that if Kádár had broken with Imre Nagy, then this was evidence of the position of the working class. It was the conscience of the working class.) There was a discussion about who should be prime minister. The decision was that it should be Kádár. When we asked the Hungarians, they all said Kádár, despite the fact that at the beginning we had thought either Münnich or Kádár. And this was how we formed the Hungarian government in Moscow. At 15 minutes past 4 o'clock in the morning Zhukov went into action. We expected Imre Nagy to resign. But the scoundrel called for resistance, and he himself fled to the Yugoslav Embassy. This destroyed the mood, and we sent a letter to Tito. Now, on the basis of all this, in your opinion, is Imre Nagy

guilty or not? Tito was terrified. If we had not made a move, the fascists would have won. And the Yugoslavs have a 1000 kilometer long border with Hungary. Tito said he saw no other way out either. It was an unacceptable thing for him too. And now he condemns us and speaks about intervention. Historians will have a hard time finding the truth. We spoke to you[10] about the long time it would take us to heal the wounds caused to Hungary. You said that we should expect a protracted partisan war in Hungary. But the Hungarian nation did not support them. The army put up no resistance either. Zhukov disarmed the army in two days, and occupied all its arsenals. The resistance lasted longest in Budapest. Just recently, on the anniversary of the liberation of Hungary[11], the graves of fallen Red Army soldiers were visited by more people, and more wreaths were laid than at any time before. Our soldiers do not have any quarrel with the population. Kádár asked us to order party workers of the rank of colonel to Hungary, engineers as well as district and provincial party secretaries. We sent them there in army uniforms. They went to various factories. Kádár got better information from them than from his own people. Then he also asked for majors [sic!]. The economy is on the upswing, coal production is approaching the level before the uprising. On the first day of the uprising, when the rascals attacked the factories, the workers drove them out and defended the factories.

If Gerő had been a man of character, all would have happened differently. But he failed. The Central Leadership fell apart. They themselves would never have committed such a thing. Imre Nagy, Donáth, Losonczy and some writers incited rebellion. After all, while the demonstration was going on,[12] arms were being distributed at the same time. That was done by the Horthyists. Early on we supported Imre Nagy ourselves. We decided to smash the first group of rebels. Mikoyan phoned[13] that Imre Nagy would not approve. He said a delegation of rebels had come to see him, and they had promised to capitulate. Then we decided not to start military action. And that Imre Nagy was a traitor. For this was already a sign of the great fire. Then we withdrew our troops from Budapest. Imre Nagy saved these counter-revolutionaries. He made an agreement with them, and he cheated us. They completely smashed the Central Leadership of the party. We have shots taken by Hungarian film cameramen in our possession which show the horrible acts done. It will be incomprehensible to the workers and the Communists if Imre Nagy is not sentenced. Not a single unit made up of workers or peasants fought against the Soviet troops.

Zhukov: The intellectuals fought.

Khr[ushchev]: Writers, journalists.

Jędr[ychowski]: There were not that many writers there.

Khr[ushchev]: It was an organization. The point is not who is participating in person, only under whose leadership, and shouting what slogans he is acting. Kolchak[14], too, had workers' units and so had others. Ultimately it will be the decision of the Hungarians but this is how we think about it.

Adjourned until next day. ❧

NOTES

1 ■ The information was divulged by József Révai who, freshly back from Moscow in April 1957, did not feel obliged by HSWP party discipline, so he had no qualms about "spilling the beans" to Willman. János Tischler: "Egy 1957. májusi követjelentés Budapestről" (An Envoy's Report from Budapest in May 1957), *Népszabadság*, 13 February 1993.

2 ■ What Gomulka said was untrue: between 26 November, 1956 and 17 June 1958, no information was published about the members of the Imre Nagy Group either in the Hungarian or in the Polish press.

3 ■ About Imre Nagy, that is.

4 ■ Mikoyan was referring to the events in Poland in October 1956, as a result of which Gomulka ultimately became First Secretary of the PUWP.

5 ■ The German Social Democrat Gustav Noske was Germany's Minister of War in 1919–1920.

6 ■ From this point on, Khrushchev was talking about the events of the first days of November 1956. First he mentioned the Soviet–Polish meeting of 1 November, then switched to describing the substance of the talks with Tito, Kardelj and Ranković on the night of November 2 on Brioni Island. The meeting was also attended by Mićunović, the Yugoslav ambassador to Moscow. On Khrushchev's visit to Brioni Island, see also Veljko Mićunović: Moscow Diary 1956–1958, London, Chatto & Windus, 1980.

7 ■ The afternoon of November 3.

8 ■ Between 1948 and 1956 Imre Horváth had served as head of mission in Berlin, Washington, London and Prague. From July 1956 he had been a member of the Central Leadership of the HWP. He was Foreign Minister from July 30, 1956 till November 2, then again from November 7 until 1958. He was a member of the CC of the HSWP from November 1956 to 1958.

9 ■ István Bata had been Chief of Staff starting with 1950, then Minister of Defence from 1953 to 27 October 1956. In 1953 he was elected member of the CL of the HWP and a junior member of the PC. On 28 October 1956 he fled to Moscow. He was able to return in September 1958, and became a workshop manager at the Budapest Transport Company.

10 ■ Khrushchev referred to at the Brest-Litovsk meeting of November 1, 1956, when he had informed the Polish delegation led by Gomulka about the imminent second intervention in Hungary.

11 ■ April 4.

12 ■ The reference is to the demonstration in Budapest on 23 October 1956.

13 ■ On the morning of 28 October 1956, Imre Nagy, meeting Andropov and Mikoyan at the Soviet embassy in Budapest, prevented a Soviet attack, heavier than any before, planned against the rebels. On the same day he ordered an immediate cease-fire, then, in a radio speech, declared the events of the previous days a national democratic movement and promised to meet the basic demands of the rebels.

14 ■ Admiral Alexander Kolchak was one of the leaders of the anti-Bolshevik forces during the Russian Civil War. In January 1920 he was captured by the Red Army, and shot on February 7 in Irkutsk.

OBITUARY

Balázs Illényi

József Bognár: Politician and/or Scholar

The scholar–politician relationship is never simple: one knows, the other does. In this part of the world many a cautionary tale warns of an amalgam of the two. Success is rare. József Bognár, economist and politician, who died aged 79 on November 3rd 1996, might be an example. Even those who knew him well cannot make up their minds whether he was more of a scholar or more of a politician. He was one of the most influential economists in Hungary, and his career can be described as characteristic of his times.

Bognár was born in the western marches of Hungary, in 1917, as the Great War was drawing to a close, the third child of an engine driver. Nevertheless, he received a good education. He matriculated from the Premonstratensian College in Szombathely in 1935 and came to Budapest to study Hungarian, German and History at the Pázmány Péter University, intending to become a schoolmaster. As a young student he met some of the leading lights of the intellectual life of the country, including the composers Béla Bartók and Zoltán Kodály, the novelist Zsigmond Móricz and the poets Mihály Babits and Gyula Illyés. He came under the influence and was closely associated with Dezső Szabó, the writer who was the *guru* of all those who looked for a populist-nationalist way out from the mire in which a lost war and the resulting peace had placed the truncated country. Dezső Szabó was the man who made the way straight for "folk" writers who, relying on the unspoilt spirit and traditions of the peasantry, attempted to formulate a political and cultural alternative that rejected both the dictatorships of the Right and the Left, and the western democratic institutions which had shown themselves indifferent to both the growth of these dictatorships and the financial, social and moral crisis for which Hungarians blamed the Trianon Treaty and its aftermath. Following his graduation in 1939, he established close links with these writers, but once war broke out Bognár felt that it was politics rather than the writers who counted. He met Endre Bajcsy-Zsilinszky, a man who started his political life on the extreme right but later became a leader of the Smallholders' Party and of the Resistance. He was executed by the Hungarian Fascists late in 1944. Bajcsy-Zsilinszky's influence on the young Bognár was great—both as a man and a thinker.

Bognár was called up for war service in 1942 and returned home early in 1945. His

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rise in politics, as a member of the Smallholders, the largest political party, whose power base lay primarily in the peasantry, was meteoric. He was elected to Parliament in 1945, and held a seat in every Parliament right up to 1990 and the end of Communism. In 1946, barely 29, he became Minister of Information in the second post-war government. Not for long, however, since, in the spring of 1947, he became Mayor of Budapest. As such, he had the doubtful distinction of offering Stalin the Freedom of the City.

Meanwhile, he went to the top in his own party. Early in 1947 he became Deputy Secretary General, and in March 1948 Executive Vice President of the Smallholders' Party. By that time the power and influence of the Communist Party were very much in evidence. Enjoying the active support of the Soviet occupying forces, their primary aim was to destroy the Smallholders' Party from within, the party with the strongest democratic traditions and the greatest electoral support. József Bognár somehow escaped the slicing knife of these "salami tactics". Soon after the war he had caught the eye of Mátyás Rákosi, who asked Bognár to join the government being formed in 1949, giving him a choice of portfolio between Education and Home Trade. Bognár chose Home Trade, leaving Education to Gyula Ortutay, a close friend.

For almost eight uninterrupted years he was a member of the government, first as Minister of Home Trade, later of Foreign Trade as well. His youth—he was still only 32—and his inexperience of economics were the lesser difficulties he faced. These were the fifties, with Stalinism rampant, and any minister dealing with economic questions must have on occasion transgressed into the sphere of competence of Ernő Gerő, the all-powerful Moscovite Party economics *supremo*. It has therefore puzzled many how Bognár, who had meanwhile been a passive observer of the destruction of his own party, managed to survive in office during an age in which so many in leading positions ended up in gaol or on the scaffold. He once said in an interview that, even when young, he was praised for being able to bring out what was common between clashing ideas or trends, and that may be a possible explanation. It may be relevant in this connection that he was invited to join Imre Nagy's government during the 1956 Revolution, but he left it even before the return of the Soviet forces, judging it to be too radical. With that he left politics behind in the strict sense of the term, holding no more government posts. Starting with 1957, he devoted his life to economics and scholarship in general.

Bognár started to teach at the Budapest University of Economics in the early 1950s and was appointed to head the Department of Home Trade after the failure of the Revolution. His students recall how much he stressed the difficulties of the transfer from theory to practice. Teaching, however, did not mean that he totally abandoned policy, at least in an advisory capacity. In 1957 he was a member of the Government Commission working on the reform of the socialist economy. His contribution primarily concerned foreign trade. These plans were finally aborted by power interests opposed to them.

In 1959 Bognár published a study on systematic economic planning which came to the attention of Kwame Nkrumah, then President of Ghana, and the hero of all those who saw the future of Africa through leftist spectacles. Nkrumah invited Bognár's advice, and the result, in the early 1960s, was Ghana's first Five Year Plan. Bognár was guided by the recognition of similarities between the problems of the socialist and the developing countries. In both the peculiar relationship of politics and eco-

nomics implied that economic development was not possible without enlightened autocratic political management. Nkrumah was removed from office and that was the end of that in Ghana, but elements of Bognár's ideas have been included in the development plans of successive Ghanian regimes. On his return home in 1965, Bognár, whose interest in the developing countries had grown, formed the Afro-Asian Research Team of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. The gradual expansion of its activities led to its transformation in 1973 into the Institute for the World Economy, which still flourishes. Its reputation, and Bognár's personal repute as an economist, grew in tandem. It must be said, however, that much of what the institute and Bognár achieved depended on his political networking skills, which fully exploited his earlier political connections. In socialist Hungary science and scholarship, including economics, were the handmaidens of politics. What Bognár achieved was to persuade politicians to accept the limits set by economic rationality, and to persuade his economist colleagues that implementation, that is politics, set limits to theory.

The Institute of Cultural Relations was the central government agency which tightly controlled all scholarships and trips abroad for study purposes of scholars, artists and scientists, whatever their academic standing. József Bognár headed it between 1961 and 1968, and he served his country well. He succeeded in coming to an agreement with the Ford Foundation, making Hungary the first country in Eastern Europe to benefit from its grants, allowing around 250 scholars and scientists, many of them economists, to study in its institutions. This created a considerable breach in the ramparts of the University of Economics—known as a citadel of dogmatic Marxism—for more modern and more democratic ideas.

By 1968, economic reforms could no longer be postponed in socialist Hungary. József Bognár had a prominent share in drawing up what came to be known as the New Economic Mechanism. It was an article of faith with Bognár that, given a one-party system, the élite had special responsibility for economic change. There were principles which he believed in and, in all his actions, he did his best to implement them. He never ceased to stress that a Hungary poor in raw materials could not afford economic isolation, that being open to the world economy was a geopolitical must. At the same time, he consistently opposed systemic change for its own sake, that is all dogmatic or technocratic notions which left the prosperity of the populace out of account. Furthermore, he insisted right up to his death that, for historical reasons as well, agriculture was of crucial importance in Hungary.

The reform got off the ground but—early in the seventies—political interests succeeded in breaking its back. Bognár did his best to carry on with what he stood for at the Institute for the World Economy. Establishing it had not been easy, many politicians had opposed it. What was the point, they asked, in studying non-socialist economic systems that were doomed to failure in the first place. It became clear early on that staff would largely have to be recruited amongst people who, at least in economics, did not toe the accepted line. Bognár, however, who had meanwhile been elected a member of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, was not interested in ideological commitment but only in performance. In this way he managed to create a team which—also thanks to his extensive political contacts—provided a carapace to many a future member of the democratic opposition. This, at the same time, made it possible for economic thinking in Hungary to keep in touch with major

world processes. Perhaps this is why his Institute was known in the eighties as the most liberal centre of economic thinking east of the river Elbe. His way of thinking, an open mind ready for rational compromises, by influencing others made a significant contribution to thawing the system.

Bognár was a man of culture, of great wit and charm, a raconteur of note, albeit of few close friends. He is remembered as a good boss, his leadership style was never authoritarian but consensual.

He was one of the first economists anywhere who, early in the seventies, drew attention to the fact that what was in the offing was not a mere trough in the trade-cycle but the overture to a periodic change in the world economy. He was also amongst the first to identify new global challenges such as environmental problems and the world food crisis.

His standing as an economist was recognized by his election to the Club of Rome in 1980, the World Academy of Art and Science in 1982, and the Geneva based International Social Prospect Academy in 1983. That same year UNITAR (a UN agency) invited him to join the Panel of Eminent Persons. For many long years he was a member of the editorial boards of the journals *Monde en Développement* and *The Asian Journal of Economics*. His skills were particularly in evidence where an interdisciplinary approach to the social sciences was called for.

József Bognár was not without honour in his own country. Numerous scientific societies, committees and commissions benefited from his advice and management skills. *The NHQ*, as this journal was then called, was one of the many periodicals of whose editorial board he was an active member, tireless in providing a wealth of ideas. He was also a frequent contributor to *The NHQ*, thus reaching a wider, English-reading public. He was a member of the Presidium of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences and, for six years, headed its Economics and Jurisprudence section.

At various times Bognár may have been close indeed to the Communist leadership, so close, in fact, that he never had to join the Communist Party, nor ever describe himself as a Marxist. Indeed, he did not deny his roots in the Smallholders' movement, even at times when it was not done to question the single-party system. Starting with the seventies, he regularly arranged unofficial meetings of former Smallholders' Party politicians, now beyond the fringe, whom he kept informed on questions of economic policy. And this while, all along maintaining closer contacts with many Communist leaders than they did with each other. He was one of the very few with whom both Rákosi and Kádár were on what could be called the Hungarian equivalent of *tutoiement*. Right up to the end of communism, Bognár was always consulted on questions of economic policy.

One should add that Bognár was convinced that a certain kind of pluralism is possible even within a one-party system, as long as there was no one-man dictatorship. Different factions, representing different interests and points of view, would see to that. He did not reckon with such a speedy collapse of communism—no one did. He thought of change in terms of slow reforms, initiated on the inside. The changes surprised him, not least because he had imagined that the Soviet Union would continue as the dominant power in this region for some time.

The changes may have diminished his political influence but he continued unabated as an economist. There is no better evidence for this than the creation of a research team into the nutritional crisis expected in the 21st century on which he worked as a seventy-nine-year-old, being forced to abandon this activity only a few weeks before his death. ❧

Zsuzsa Gonda

The Man Who Designed Heroes' Square

Schickedanz Albert (1846–1915): Ezredévi emlékművek múltnak és jövőnek (Millennial Monuments to the Past and the Future). Catalogue to the exhibition at the Museum of Fine Arts, 19 September 1996–31 December 1996. Catalogue of works and introduction also in English. Ed. by Eszter Gábor and Mária Verő. Budapest, 1996, 456 pp.

For more than three months, the huge posters on the central colonnade of the Budapest Museum of Fine Arts proclaimed *Schickedanz 1846–1915* in huge gilded script. Most visitors, however, were only made aware inside that the subject of the exhibition was the man who had designed the building.

The Museum of Fine Arts is the country's prime art collection. Its opening in 1906 was attended by Francis Joseph, the Emperor-King in person, but the Museum has not dealt kindly with the man who designed, along with the building, the whole ensemble making up the monumental Heroes' Square, the Hősök tere or Heldenplatz. In fact, the Museum did not bother to acquire his architectural designs, nor paintings or water-colours as they cropped up in the art market. Of the more than a hundred items exhibited only three large sheets are from the Museum's own Department of Prints & Drawings , two perspectives that were part of the 1899 competition, and an inner perspective of the Renaissance Hall. It might be mentioned by way of excuse that Historicism, the key to Schickedanz, has only achieved the status of a period worth studying within the past quarter of a century in Hungary.

There isn't a soul today who thinks of Historicist architects or designers as the servile copycats of times passed. On the contrary, their superior skills and knowledge of history are much admired. The artists looked for the best in every style, their longing was to create something perfect, the real thing, by combining the chosen elements.

To this day Historicist architecture defines the Budapest townscape. It was the style of the post-Compromise (1867) building boom, and it ruled right up to the end of the 19th century. In those few decades the united market towns of Pest and Buda metamorphosed into the metropolis Budapest. The building boom suffered a break at the time of the 1873 economic crisis, but it picked up again at the end of the seventies, and peaked at the time of the millennium around 1896.

New kinds of public buildings mushroomed as a by-product of urbanization: theatres, railway stations, banks, depart-

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ment stores, university buildings and hospitals. The status of Historicism was, however, established primarily by the large-scale public buildings of the time, Parliament, the Curia (or Supreme Court, now the Museum of Ethnography) and the extensions to the Royal Palace. The demographic explosion entailed the building of many dwellings, primarily blocks of flats.

The features of the Budapest of Historicism—often labelled as Eclecticism—were nowhere near as integrated as those of Neo-Classicist Pest had been in the first half of the nineteenth century. The Neo-Renaissance, of which Miklós Ybl was the most prominent architect, was gradually replaced by something more *mouvementé* and picturesque which, by the end of the century, was close to the Baroque.

Opportunities attracted architects from distant lands. Schickedanz, who came from a family of Saxon burghers in Northern ("Upper") Hungary, was no revolutionary genius, says Eszter Gábor. Indeed, Schickedanz's *oeuvre* beautifully shows the care and the concern for art and craftsmanship of architects of that age.

The exhibition is the fruit of years of persistent work by Eszter Gábor. The architectural designs and contemporary photographs displayed in elegant frames and uniform passepartous after careful restoration give no hint of the cruel fate which befell them. Most surfaced from the depths of archives, the store-rooms of museums, and caches in lofts. The art historian's reconstructing an oeuvre is not unlike a criminal investigation. The desired complete picture is handicapped by a multitude of contradictory data, and by spots that remain blank, however hard the effort made to fill them in. Survival is contingent, even when, as in Schickedanz's case, a fair proportion of his bequest found its way into public collections. The designs that were found do not always relate to the genesis of the most important works. Take, for example, Schickedanz's designs submitted to two competitions won by Ödön Lechner (1845–1914), the greatest of Hungarian Art Nouveau architects. Schickedanz had been one of the midwives of the Museum of Applied Arts, spending several years in its service, but the plans he submitted in 1891, jointly with Vilmos Freund, only came third. These designs have not been found, though they might have shed light on a number of unresolved issues. The commission was out of the ordinary: no new museum building had been erected in Buda or Pest since Mihály Pollack's National Museum (1837–46). Three years after the competition, however, Schickedanz's mind was already on ways of arranging the Museum of Fine Arts. The 1896 designs for the Budapest Geological Institute, an austere building of lesser importance recalling a Quattrocento Florentine *palazzo,* survived intact.

The superb selection was able to patch over these difficulties which are only brought to light by the catalogue, which is much more than a mere documentation of the exhibition.

The presentation of Schickedanz's oeuvre commences in the Marble Hall that leads from the Main Entrance to the Gallery Wing. The portraits and townscapes on the wall and the historicizing furniture in this huge space were dwarfed by its dimensions.

Schickedanz owed it to his outstanding draughtsmanship that he found employment with architects after a year's, at most two years', study at the Karlsruhe Technische Hochschule. The 23-year-old Schickedanz, however, had other plans for the future. His life would have been different if he had been granted a scholarship to study painting at the Munich Academy. His paintings are evidence that he never aban-

doned his childhood ambitions. Károly Lotz and Bertalan Székely, outstanding Hungarian painters of his age, were his teachers. Schickedanz's portraits and landscapes were regularly exhibited, and to his contemporaries he was a painter as well as an architect. His portraits, however, remained within well-established conventions. His wife and daughters, his kith and kin, are invariably placed in stiff poses before a dark background. Not much of their personality appears on canvas.

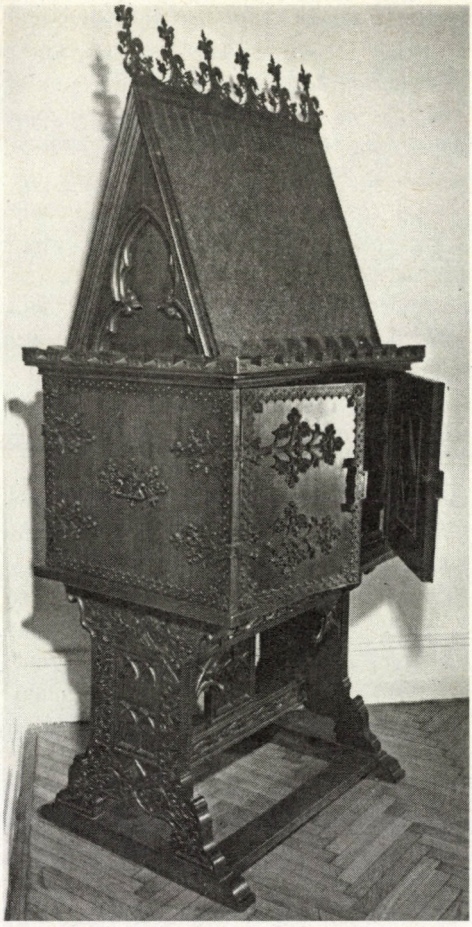
Sketches submitted to the 1884–85 Budapest Panorama Competition, and full-blown canvasses based on them, are another aspect of his art, more closely linked to architecture. Buildings that still survive, such as the Opera House, appear on them: the majority of them are important documents, showing what has vanished, for instance Sacred Trinity Square with an ante-restoration Great St Mary's (today's Matthias Church). György Klösz's photograph of the central Fish Market, on which Schickedanz based first a colour sketch, then an oil, is most interesting. That area went under in town-planning, during Schickedanz's own life-time, when the Elizabeth Bridge was built. In 1894 Schickedanz submitted a plan for the Eskü Tér bridge—named for the murdered Empress-Queen when it was built. Schickedanz's town-scapes display an odd duality: the buildings are impassively presented, detailed to a fault, but the figures that people the foreground appear relaxed and life-like.

Schickedanz really shines as a water-colourist. What he painted on days out and longer journeys is evidence of a mastery of techniques. The themes are simple, small boats near the riverbank, a corner of the woods, but all this in radiant, glowing colours and free of conventional tricks.

The display of furniture is appropriate, since most architects of the time designed furniture. Schickedanz, however, was more closely linked to the movement concerned with the collecton of *objets d'art,* in particular to Károly Pulszky (1853–1899). Pulszky, an art historian of outstanding scholarship and energy, had a defining role in the establishment of both the Museum of Applied Arts and the Museum of Fine Arts. His purchases at the 1873 Vienna World Fair were those of a man of sound judgment, and it was these which laid the foundation of the Museum of Applied Arts. Schickedanz helped with the classification of these acquisitions, and he and Pulszky jointly signed the first Museum Catalogue. From 1880 Schickedanz taught at the College of Applied Arts. This was a sound background for his work as a furniture designer.

György Ráth, the future Director of the Museum of Applied Arts, was his most distinguished patron. In 1879, he commissioned a dining room. Its richly carved, heavy Neo-Renaissance pieces, displayed alongside Schickedanz's paintings, are closest in style to some of the Historicist furniture made in Vienna at that time. The ornamental cabinet which, filled with drawings by Hungarian masters, was presented to the novelist Mór Jókai is Neo-Gothic.

Schickedanz the architect was on display in the Baroque Hall, one of the huge halls meant for plaster casts and much criticized after their original function ceased. Huge looking glasses placed on drawing boards in the Renaissance Hall, which links the two spaces of the exhibition, invited a pause. There was scarce a passer-by who did not stop and take a look, glimpsing himself midst the columns of the upstairs ambulatory or the vaulting of the ceiling. Thanks to the carefully chosen angle and the unusual perspective, never-before-seen details put in an appearance. With the help of the mirrors, Krisztina Jerger, who mounted the exhibi-



Ornamental cabinet presented to the novelist Mór Jókai (1893–98). Petőfi Museum of Literature.

tion, was not only able to link the two spaces but to convey that the whole building, and, for a fleeting moment the visitor himself, was part of the exposition.

Schickedanz came to Pest the year after the 1867 Austro-Hungarian Compromise, following a brief sojourn in Vienna. His first job was with Miklós Ybl (1814–1891), the most highly respected Hungarian architect of the age. His arrival was well-timed: it was a boom era, and building boomed too. The Municipial Board of Works, established in 1870, produced a well thought out urban development plan, which was implemented. The Radial Avenue (now Andrássy út), linking the inner City and the City Park, and the Grand Boulevard, were created. The Opera House, Ybl's chef d'oeuvre, was on Sugárút (Radial Avenue). Presumably Schickedanz, who painted perspectives of several Ybl buildings, contributed to the design of the façade of the Opera.

Schickedanz's promising start as an architect then had a setback. Leaving Ybl, he found himself without major commissions right up to the mid-nineties. He showed his versatility in coping with a variety of jobs. Types of works, rather than chronology, therefore proved a better classifying principle when presenting his work. Schickedanz designed ornamental diplomas, the covers of periodicals, stained glass windows, the pedestals of statues, funerary monuments, the architecture of bridges and church furnishings. His most important decorative painting commission was the ceiling of the main assembly hall of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences (1886–88), with the ornamental framework for Károly Lotz's allegorical paintings.

Schickedanz regularly entered architectural competitions, even when no commission was in the offing. This included a plan for a Hungarian Pantheon, an ambition which went back to the Age of Reform and Count István Széchenyi. In 1882 the Hungarian Engineers' and Architects' Association called for concrete architectural plans though not even the judges knew exactly what they wanted. They expected the Pantheon to be unlike any other type of building, hence they objected to Schickedanz's designs as being too similar to Michelangelo's work on Saint Peter's in Rome, that is, too similar to a church. As the Millenary Celebrations approached, the idea of a National Pantheon took back-

stage. The Gallery of Kings of the Millennial Monument survived as a faint echo of the Pantheon.

In 1882 designs were invited for the construction of Parliament, the most important public building of the period. Debates concerning the appropriate style, in both parliament and the press, were not unlike those that had occured over the Academy building in 1862–65. It was then that a society undergoing enbourgoisement wanted to have its say on architectural questions. Imre Henszlmann, the highly respected art historian, argued that only the Gothic was worthy of the spirit of Academy, nevertheless Friedrich August Stüler from Berlin was commissioned to produce a Neo-Renaissance building.

Eventually, the European Gothic Revival had its last fling in Parliament, on the Danube Bank. (Imre Steindl, 1885–1904). The competition, however, was a success for Schickedanz too. Of the two sets of designs which he submitted jointly with Vilmos Freund, the one coded "Constitution II" was awarded one of the four first prizes. Like most of the others, it employed the stylistic elements of the Renaissance, the Baroque, and Classicism, combining them harmonically and *comme il faut.*

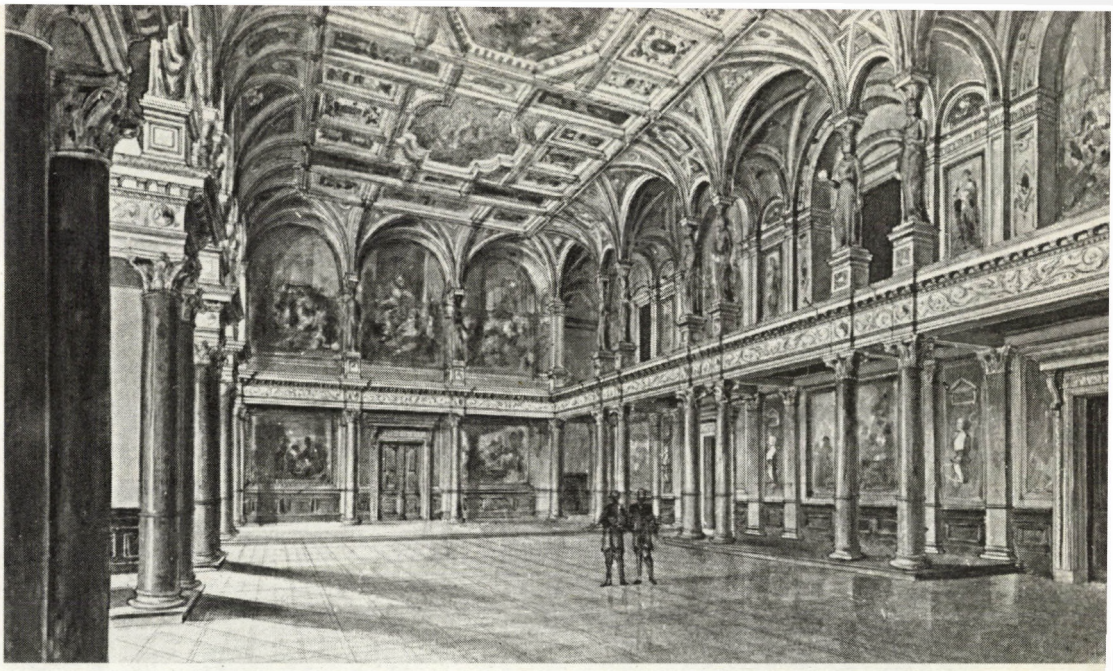
It was building connected with the 1896 Millenary Celebrations that produced a breakthrough for Schickedanz. The sets of designs which document the genesis of Heroes' Square took centre place in the architectural part of the exhibition. The designs for the Millennial Memorial were hung on the back wall of the hall, and those for the Museum of Fine Arts and the Műcsarnok (Exhibition Hall) on folding screens before it.

The Millennium of the Hungarian Conquest was widely celebrated in 1896 and a huge exhibition was held. Preparations had been underway for years. In 1893 competitive designs were invited for the location of the so called Historic Division of the Millenary Exhibition. Schickedanz, unusually for him, wanted to compose the exhibition building using ancient monuments of various styles. The idea was, perhaps, not even his own, but Pulszky's who, around that time, was working on his proposals for the Museum of Fine Arts. Schickedanz was, once again, in close contact with him. The competition was repeated, and although Schickedanz's idea was taken as a basis he was not given the commission.

It must have been some compensation to be asked by the Artists' Association to build the Műcsarnok, where the art material of the exhibition would be housed. The name of Fülöp Herzog, Schickedanz's new partner, also appears on the designs. Herzog, who was Viennese, was drawn to Budapest by the expected boom. He was no doubt largely responsible for the greater spirit of enterprise shown by Schickedanz in the 90s.

Most of the buildings were meant to be demolished at the close of the Millenary Exhibition, but not the Műcsarnok. That was meant to be permanent, right from the start. The desire for lighting from above explains the huge wall surfaces of the single level buildings. The outer brick wall is faced with coloured pyrogranite from the Zsolnay Manufacturing Works in Pécs, creating an ornamental effect in the Renaissance spirit. Such ceramic tiles were also used by Schickedanz to cover the entrance pavilions of the Millenary Underground Railway. The Műcsarnok was restored a few years back, so the vestibule can once again be admired in its not so ancient glory. Eszter Gábor has shown that this vestibule is a paraphrase of that splendour of the Hungarian Renaissance, the Bakócz Chapel (1506–11) in Esztergom.

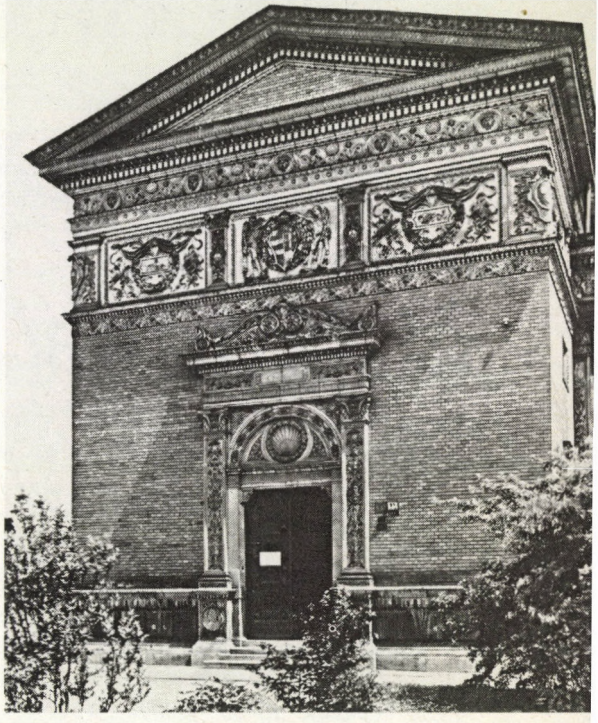
The trade had not liked the Műcsarnok commission and when Prime Minister, Sándor Wekerle, so to speak privately



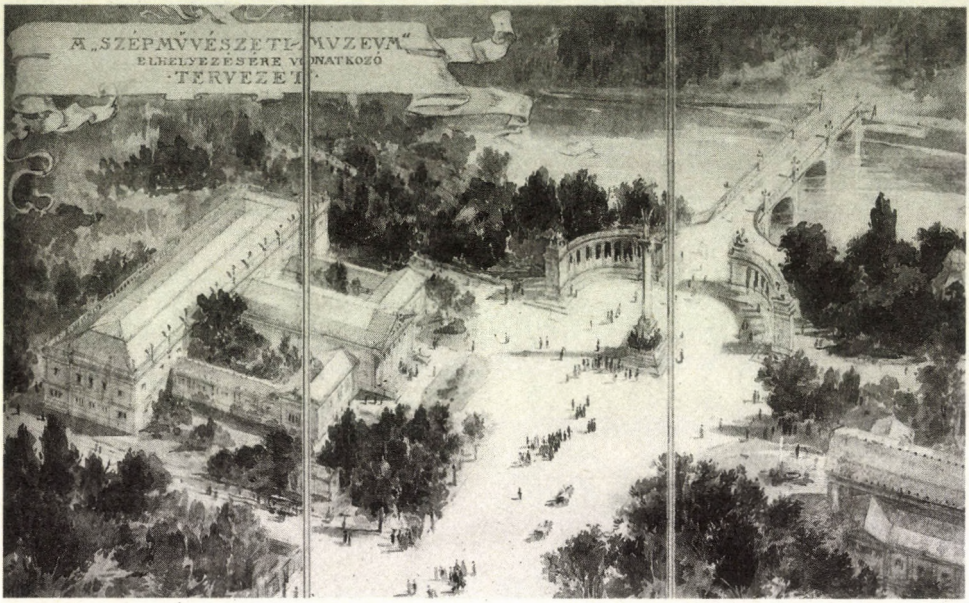
Sketch of painting for the ceiling of the ceremonial hall of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences (1886–1888). Water-colour, 280x440 mm. Private collection, Budapest.

asked György Zala, the sculptor, and Albert Schickedanz to design the Millennial Memorial, the whole art world was up in arms and demanded a competition open to all. It is a paradox of Schickedanz's life that, albeit he assidiously entered competitions, all his more important work was commissioned directly. It is difficult indeed to explain what he owed this preference to. There can be no doubt that the Millenary Memorial carried a highly involved ideological message. It had to make manifest the Conquest and Landtaking, Asian origins, and a thousand years' continuous presence among the concert of nations in Europe. The commission was nevertheless given without a prior plan, and questions of detail were discussed by parliament in committee, because of the political importance of the Memorial.

Construction can be followed step by step. The semi-circular colonnade and closing off of the Sugárút were first linked on the designs, never carried out, for the Andrássy Memorial. A memorial fenced by



The Műcsarnok. Detail of the side view with the pyrogranite finish (1894–96). Szabó Ervin Library, Budapest Collection.

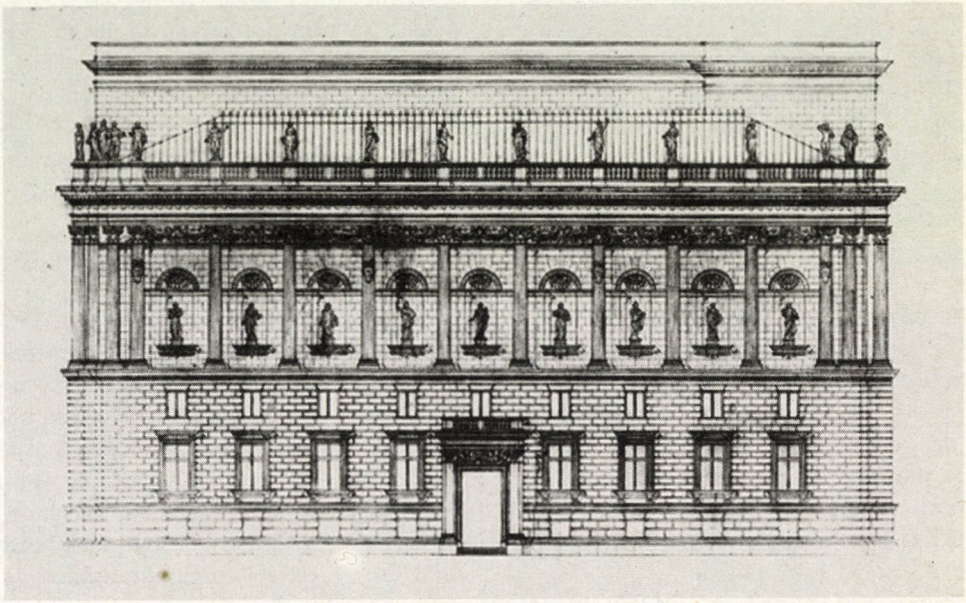


A water colour sketch of the planned spatial arrangement of the Museum of Fine Arts, mounted to be folded in three. Paper on cardboard. 328 x 493 mm. Budapest Museum.

a colonnade is already present on Schickedanz's first successful work, the Batthyány Mausoleum (1870–74) and is a recurrent motif in his work. Schickedanz proposed a number of options for the Millenary Memorial: a kind of arc de triomphe at the centre of a colonnade; an open-canopied row of chapels, a broken series of colonnades, with a statue at its centre.

The final plans were approved in 1897: quadricircular colonnades, with a 36 m high column at the centre, the Archangel Gabriel on top, with open wings, in the act of delivering the Hungarian crown. Below, on a high pedestal around the column, the seven equestrian chiefs, with Árpád's mounted figure at their head; figures of kings in the intervals between columns, with thematic reliefs below them. The entablature of the colonnade are ornamented by allegorical sculpture. The architectural work on the Millennial Monument was finished in 1905, sculptural work, however, dragged on to 1929.

The Museum of Fine Arts completed the spatial arrangement of the square. It was only the 1896 Millenary Act which established it, but Károly Pulszky, the curator of the National Picture Gallery which preceded it, had submitted detailed plans regarding the future museum to the Prime Minister in 1893. In 1894 the government agreed to underwrite the costs of building and put aside substantial sums for the purchase of works of art. In Pulszky's opinion the policy was to cover all schools rather than acquire a few masterpieces. Pulszky's time was largely tied up by acquisitions, nevertheless, Schickedanz's early designs show that Pulszky was also closely involved. At the time of the first plan, a single court, quadrilateral ground plan inspired by the Quattrocento, the Museum still lacked a defined location. The City of Budapest was reluctant to permit further



Competition entry for the Museum of Fine Arts (1899). Perspective view. Paper on cardboard. Water-colour. 515 x 825 mm. Museum of Fine Arts, Department of Prints & Drawings. Final plan of the elevation to Aréna út (today Dózsa György út). Pencil drawing. 511 x 736 mm. National Archives.

encroaches on the City Park. The second solution, elongated, organized around two courts, is in keeping with the arrangement of the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna. In 1896 Pulszky was accused of accounting skulduggery—unjustly, as we see it now—and dismissed. A Government Commissioner was appointed to run the Museum. Schickedanz did not escape unscathed, but he continued to work on designs for the Museum. He may well have had a say in the choice of the final location. His designs pay due regard to the façade of the Műcsarnok, and that led to the idea of a

"fore-building", connected with the block-like Gallery Wing.

The 1898 competition was no longer for a museum as Pulszky had imagined it. Just about as much space was demanded for the plaster casts of statues as for the gallery of paintings. Schickedanz only came second, but bearing in mind the functional advantages of his design and town planning considerations, he was given the commission.

The Museum is structured as two blocks. A Neo-Classic "front-building" is linked to a Neo-Renaissance gallery block. The Gyptothèque and the Cabinet of Prints & Drawings are on the ground floor, as are the library and the administration suites. The large halls intended for the plaster casts are all in different styles: Dorian, Ionian, Romanesque, Renaissance, Baroque. Both the halls in the gallery, lit from above, and the rows of rooms, lit from the side, are well-proportioned and bear witness to familiarity with the building's functional needs.

The Museum of Fine Arts completed the arrangement of the space closing off the Sugárút. It is what we still see and it is difficult to perceive that it did not all happen as the result of an integrated plan. A national memorial between two museums, with ample space, is a common category in European town-planning.

The *chef d'oeuvre* proved to be a coda. Schickedanz was never given another job on a comparative scale. By 1900 his approach appeared obsolete and conservative. The designs he submitted later repeated tried and proven motifs. One of his last, for a memorial for the Empress-Queen Elizabeth (1900–1902), looks back to the Millennial Monument, and one of its views brings to mind the façade of the Museum of Fine Arts.

The exhibition suggests that Schickedanz was hard-working and meticulous. He regularly entered competitions and carried out his commissions honestly, without wasting resources. He only exceptionally deviated from the classical idiom of architecture, with the Renaissance being what most attracted him. Looking at his carefully executed designs, we are inclined to forget that the 1900 Paris World Fair already saw Art Nouveau triumphant.

What is perhaps most attractive about Schickedanz to us is what made him look somewhat out of touch to his contemporaries. He was not an upwardly mobile entrepreneur, he did not run a huge office, but he took pleasure in draughtsmanship, in meticulous, detailed work. These days it is rare to experience the deep respect for craftsmanship present in every design.

Those who attended the exhibition enjoyed it. The perspectives that helped to understand ground plans and cross sections, the contemporary photographs, documents of biographical interest: all made things enjoyable even for those less familiar with architecture. Budapest residents came closer to the history of their city, and could wonder what might have happened if Schickedanz's "Palm Garden" design had been used on Gellért Hill, or if the synagogue seating 3,000 had been built in the part of Budapest where wealthy Jews once lived.

Almost concurrently the Künstlerhaus in Vienna arranged a Historicism exhibition, comprehensive both spatially and temporarily. Perhaps simultaneity explains why Schickedanz is not even present as a footnote in the catalogue. The Budapest exhibition is no doubt a guarantee ensuring that such forgetfulness will not occur in the future. ❧

Klára Hamburger

Liszt: Conclusion to a Life

Alan Walker: *Franz Liszt, Volume Three. The Final Years 1861–1886.*
New York, A. Knopf, 1996, 594 pp.

June of last year saw the publication of the third and final volume of this, the largest of Liszt biographies to date, a work which Alan Walker, Professor of Music at the McMaster University in Hamilton, Ontario (Canada) has devoted much of his life to. *The Virtuoso Years,* 1811–1847 appeared in 1983, and *The Weimar Years,* 1848–1861, in 1989. The Hungarian government has honoured this distinguished Liszt scholar with the Pro Cultura Hungarica order and this final volume was named as Book of the Year in the United States. Professor Walker has edited and contributed to a volume of essays on Liszt[1] and, as a byproduct of the great biography, has also published two other important works.[2] He has been an untiring organizer of Liszt conferences and festivals in Canada. He frequently lectures in Hungary, acts as a judge of the International Liszt Piano Competition, and generously supports the Liszt Ferenc Museum and Liszt Ferenc Society.

Klára Hamburger
is Secretary of the Hungarian Liszt Society. Her many publications on Liszt include a biography in English, published by Corvina Books (1985).

"To Lisztians across the world, wherever they may be... affectionately dedicated", Professor Walker writes, and indeed, he presents Liszt as one of the most important composers with a key role in 19th-century music, and not like many musicologists as merely an incomparable pianist. Many, such as the French and the Germans, have claimed Liszt as their own but Walker shows him to be self-evidently and unambiguously the Hungarian musician Liszt himself always considered himself as being. This also means that Liszt's activity in Hungary, the main events in Hungarian history during the last century, a detailed description of Liszt's Hungarian background, and the story of the foundation and early years of the Budapest Academy of Music have all found their way into the standard literature on Liszt abroad.

Across nearly 600 pages, Walker narrates the last phase of Liszt's life—one rather more colourful and eventful than that of most artists, and presents the locales and participants in a way which makes the book almost impossible to put down even for those, like the present writer, who have been professionally concerned with the subject for many long years. For Walker, readers are sacrosanct and for their sake he has provided this rolling stream of events, as in the earlier volumes, with an excellent frame, dividing

it into books, chapters and sub-chapters, all with pertinent and poetic titles (often harmonizing with Liszt's works) and numbers. A résumé of each is included in the Contents. Even the typographical design assists the reader in finding his way effortlessly through this huge mass of material with running heads at the top of each right hand page and those of the sub-chapters on the left. Indeed, the staggering dimensions of the material are also evident from the footnotes, which in a masterly fashion condense people and events that could fill further volumes. Orientation is further facilitated by illustrations of real curiosity value, four Appendixes (two of documentary nature: "Liszt's Titles and Honours" and a "Catalogue of Princess Carolyne's Writings"), a bibliography of sources consulted, and a detailed index of persons, places, and titles.

As the earlier volumes did, so too does this take a pre-eminent place, outstanding among biographies of musicians in general. It too processes a multitude of so far unpublished documents resting in the libraries and archives of several countries: manuscripts (letters, diaries, reports, medical diagnoses, notes and official entries, papers and minutes) along with items from the contemporary press and old publications which had been completely forgotten or inaccessible—indeed even the very existence of most of them had not been known.

During the course of his many years of research, the author visited all the many and different places that Liszt's career had taken him to. Clearly his own prestige and personal charm helped him gain access to places that Hungarian scholars can only dream about, places closed so far to curious scholars, such as the Dominican convent of the Madonna del Rosario on Rome's Monte Mario. He gathered important information in institutions where others are glad even to gain admission, such as the Archivio Segreto Vaticano, and was received by private collectors who possess Liszt documents.

All the many quotations taken from the fantastically rich documentary material and primary literary sources add new elements to the biography or clarify some neglected, distorted aspects, circumstances and their background. They present Liszt as he showed himself to others in word or deed and convincingly display the way he was seen by his contemporaries. The personalities of people around him who were crucial to his own life are clearly portrayed. All this provides a more precise, complete and authentic history of Liszt's life than any earlier one. Indeed, it seems as if at last a great many so far irresolvable conundrums have been solved: how exactly did that-and-that happen? Who exactly was so-and-so? Where exactly did such-and-such happen and why?

Professor Walker's sensational documentary volume on Liszt's frustrated marriage with Princess Carolyne von Sayn Wittgenstein (See Note 2) is, as it were, continued by the first book of this volume (From Weimar to Rome, 1881–1885). It opens with further disclosures on this still mysterious episode before going on to provide details on Liszt's first years in Rome, up to the time he took lower orders. The second book (The Abbé Liszt, 1865–1869) reviews the second period of the Rome years. The finale to Liszt's life, which he spent commuting between Pest (from 1873 Budapest), Weimar and Rome (The Threefold Life, 1869–1886) is tackled in two parts: The Threefold Life Begins, 1869–1876, and De Profundis, 1876–1886. A chapter is devoted to the failure of his "Gran" Mass in 1866 at its Paris première, which proved a catastrophe for Liszt. As an aftermath, Liszt's funeral and the posthumous complications over his estate are de-

scribed. A chapter is devoted to his elder daughter, Blandine, who died an early death, and the last years of Countess Marie d'Agoult, and to Princess Carolyne, who was a distant but permanent presence in Liszt's life in those years. The circumstances of the scandalous end of the marriage of his daughter Cosima—the only child to survive him—with Hans von Bülow are treated in two long chapters (The Cosima–Bülow–Wagner Crisis, I and II). Liszt intervened actively, siding with the abandoned and humiliated husband but to no avail. Cosima's divorce and marriage to Wagner, coupled with the acute differences in the outlook of Liszt, who supported France, and Cosima and Wagner, passionately German during the Franco-Prussian war, led to a break between Liszt and the newly-weds, lasting for three years and particularly painful to him. Professor Walker also deals in detail with the much-mulled over relationship between Liszt and Wagner. His view is that the fact that starting with 1876, the year of the first Bayreuth Festival, Liszt "practically fell into Bayreuth's arms", which "slowly worked to his disadvantage" (p. 354), was an explicit reaction to Carolyne's "anti-Bayreuth crusade on Liszt".

Regarding Liszt in Hungary, Professor Walker was able to turn to a reliable and substantial source, Dezső Legány's two-volume work, also published in English (*Liszt and His Country,* Corvina, 1983 and Occidental Press, 1992). But he devotes equally full details to Liszt in Italy, Austria, Germany, France, Belgium and the Netherlands. Concerning the composer's links with the Anglo-Saxon world, Walker examines in the same minute detail not just the links with Britain, but also those with the New World—the United States and Canada—which Liszt never visited. Professor Walker's focus on medical questions is pertinent in clarifying seemingly contradictory aspects of Liszt's personality. He is the first to publish notes and diagnoses about the physical state of the elderly Liszt, his illnesses and his fall down the stairs of the Hofgärtnerei in Weimar in July 1881, which marked his entrance to "his twilight years". He provides a new and individual twist to the story of the once incredibly robust musician's physical decline and the ensuing mental problems: melancholy, death wish and growing alcoholism, all this parallel with mental fatigue, and even impoverishment. He documents the stages of Liszt's physical decline and his tireless energy amidst all the suffering. The volume also includes the first detailed description of Blandine Liszt's postnatal complications and the medical neglect that caused her death, as well as the anamnesis of Marie d'Agoult's illnesses. In his first volume, Alan Walker included an account of *Nélida,* the *roman à clef* the Countess wrote against Liszt; here, for the sake of this volume, he is the first to have waded through *Causes intérieures de la Faiblesse extérieure de l'Église,* Carolyne von Sayn Wittgenstein's unavailable and unreadable work of several volumes, which everyone else has simply referred to.

Liszt, the peerless pianist, the congenial composer of piano transcriptions and the exceptional teacher who scorned the traditional methods of the conservatoires has remained invariably important to Walker—a maestro giving free lessons, indeed giving financial aid to pupils in need of it, who more than once imposed upon his kindness, the father of the "master-class". Walker has taken these most interesting data about Liszt's piano playing, his teaching and his relationship with his pupils from the notes, journals and letters of several of the musician's pupils, which he managed to unearth.

It is self-evident that somebody who herself is the author of a Liszt biography, if only in one volume[3], sees many things in a

different light or would like to see them in a different presentation. As I see it, Liszt, even in his old age, was a great, radiating, often impetuous personality, and a man made up of conflicting traits. Walker's account is of introspection and decline and less of the varicoloured character of a romantic worldly-minded artist *par excellence,* who remained such even as a cleric in his declining years, and who, by his own account, had Mephistophelean features as well. In order to have his exceptional human merits properly set off, his human failings should also be presented. One can truly appreciate his disposition of a *grand seigneur,* his tolerance, his kindness, his selfless readiness to help, his modesty, his unbelievably ascetic way of life and profound faith only if one does not suppress his weaknesses. If, for instance, one mentions those histrionic trappings which caused aversion in many of his contemporaries—that he expected his pupils to kiss his hand, a gesture which he returned by kissing them on the brow (even in the case of established musicians such as Hans von Bülow, and even in public, on the concert platform). He yearned for creative solitude but passionately wished for society, for personal success, not least as a man, and enjoyed the homage of young female pupils, who swarmed around him. It seems as if Walker were negating, "prettifying" Liszt's legendarily frequent liaisons, (he remained attractive, witty and charming even in old age) treating this as a sin, as it were. "There is no evidence that the relationship between Liszt and Olga [von Meyendorff] was more than platonic," he writes for example on page 199, and there are similar remarks concerning all the affairs of his old age with the exception of those with Carolyne and Agnes Street-Klindworth (pp. 336–7). But what kind of evidence would be required? Does this matter, especially for today's reader?

Walker is more interested in the depression accompanying his failing physical powers, which also became evident in his works, than in his open, creative, innovatory spirit, his range of interests, his views and taste, his relationship with contemporary literature and art, which all remained vibrant to the last. The volume acknowledges the fact that it was his faith alone which prevented Liszt from committing suicide; all the same, the very special and most intimate relationship which Liszt, preparing for death, had with God and religion could have been more closely examined.

Walker has used Legány's book in describing the scandal that was caused by a chapter dealing with the Jews in the second, 1881 edition of Liszt's infelicitous book about Gypsy music, *Des Bohémiens et de leur musique en Hongrie,* which had caused him much trouble in Hungary when the first edition of the work (1859) appeared. Unlike Legány, Professor Walker in this context makes mention of the Tiszaeszlár trial for ritual murder, which to the best of my knowledge previously only featured in my biography among writings concerning Liszt. This was a notorious court case involving a charge of ritual murder in Hungary, some ten years before the Dreyfus affair; innocent Jews were persecuted for years and finally found not guilty. Like Legány, Walker writes that the new edition of Liszt's book with the ominous, inflated chapter was the work of Princess Wittgenstein which Liszt had not even seen before publication, and thus the Princess alone was responsible for the chapter. As a reaction to it, it was Liszt the composer who was bitterly attacked by leading Jewish journalists both in Hungary and Vienna. Walker includes Liszt's open letter of 1883 in which he dissociated himself from anti-semitism, though gallantly not mentioning the Princess's name and shouldering responsibility for authorship.

All this is true, but the situation is still much more complicated. It is an amply documented fact that Liszt—unlike the anti-semitic circles of Chopin, Wagner, Cosima, Bülow and the Princess Wittgenstein he also moved in—was not motivated by religious hatred (nor national or social prejudice) and gave many benefit concerts for Jewish institutions in Hungary as well. That Liszt did not even see this new version of his book before it went to press is something Liszt scholars, including myself, have always assumed. Walker refers to this already as a proven fact, unfortunately without giving his source.[4] Nevertheless, it calls for the full knowledge of the original text to understand what this chapter, appearing under Liszt's name, meant to modernist (*neológ* as opposed to orthodox) Jews in Hungary in the early 1880. Of all the national minorities in Hungary, it was they who most sincerely desired to become assimilated and were just becoming emancipated. The anti-Jewish manifestations, organized by an anti-semitic party in Parliament, caused them much distress. Following Legány, Walker only writes: "Particularly sensitive to Jews was (the Princess's) view that they be given their own state in Palestine, by force of Western arms if necessary. Palestine belonged to the Jews, she said, just as Italy belonged to Italians, Poland to Poles ..." (p. 405). But the text that appeared under Liszt's name was in no way as moderate as that. It called for the use of force against the Jews and not in their interest. In fact, in this notorious chapter, the Princess added to allegations in the 1859 earlier version—the Jews lack creative force, etc.—the latest racist slogans and premisses of the new race theory that was being formulated at the time. The fiercely anti-semitic Princess published, in the name of Liszt, one of the first documents that expressed the ideology behind the modern persecution of the Jews. In conformity with contemporary anti-semitic lampoons, the chapter speaks of the evil, hideous, crooked-fingered Jew who is responsible for all social evils (subversive liberalism, radicalism, socialism and communism, along with the Reign of Finance over the poor and of the omnipotent Press), who is the embodiment of hatred: unable to assimilate, a parasite whose very existence is a threat to people in their own countries, his principal goal being to cause injury to Christians. Concerning Palestine, the *Endlösung* suggested in the chapter in the original text reads (again in keeping with the most extreme formulations of the time) "this perilously noxious, blood-sucking race, thirsting for power, must be forcibly deported back to Palestine."

In my view, this question, tragic for Liszt in more than one respect, cannot be resolved simply by shifting full responsibility onto the Princess. After all, his name still appeared as the author of the work. (Indeed, he insisted that nothing should be omitted even in the German translation, which came out in 1883.) What is certain is that this kind of manifestation was alien to Liszt. Just as Richard Wagner told Cosima on the day before his death, it was rather his loyalty to the Princess, a cavalier self-martyrizing that made him shoulder authorship and the consequences devolving upon him.

The volume provides a more detailed description than any previous biographies of the festivals of the Allgemeiner Deutscher Musikverein founded by Liszt and of the Tonkünstler Versammlung. However, there is no mention of the one that took place between 8 and 12 July, 1882 in Zurich, though it was there that Saint-Saëns introduced to Liszt the young Gabriel Fauré, who described in a raptuous letter his own selfconsciousness and the Maestro's informal kindness.[5] The lists of Liszt's

pupils are informative, but in many cases it is difficult to tell whether it is the question of actual pupils or only occasionally co-operating musicians, friends and admirers.

British musicologists have done particularly much for the appreciation and presentation of Liszt's music, thus the English Liszt Society is responsible for the discovery and publishing of the unknown late works, which, however, are of great importance; the late Humphrey Searle for a comprehensive critical presentation of Liszt's music. He wrote the best ever book on the subject (*The Music of Liszt,* Dover, 1966), and is also the author of the Liszt article in the Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians. Alan Walker, himself an eminent pianist, has written a book, *Study in Musical Analysis,* and contributed major chapters on Liszt's music in *Franz Liszt: The man and his music.*

Departing from "the man and his works" type of biography, Walker's book is principally a narrative of Liszt's life probing only keynote or select musical topics. Though it remains unsaid, Walker, along with many but not all eminent scholars, considers Liszt's late works not as the dawn of 20th-century music and a culmination of his art but as a decline that accompanied his physical deterioration. There is a chapter "The Music of Liszt's Old Age", and indeed throughout the volume Walker breaks up the biographical narrative by discussing major compositions and certain aspects of Liszt's music. I must admit that I would have preferred more in the way of systematic musical analysis. (Clearly Walker does not wish to burden the reader with technical terms, though I for one have never encountered the term "Madonna chord," which features on page 483). It would perhaps have been more fortuitous to present the late works in their depth, their nuances and real significance, in their stylistic, biographic and musicological contexts.

One final remark. It is extraordinarily difficult to provide the sources for such an enormous quantity of material Walker had acquired and had to sift through. However, it would be of assistance if he, who himself unearthed an amazing amount of hitherto unknown documents, would in future editions supplement the Bibliography by listing all the sources he has used from the great mass of secondary writings on Liszt. ❧

NOTES

1 ■ *Franz Liszt: The man and his music.* Edited by Alan Walker. London, Barrie & Jenkins, 1970.

2 ■ *Living with Liszt: The Diary of Carl Lachmund, an American pupil of Liszt, 1882–1886.* Edited, annotated, and introduced by Alan Walker. New York, Stuyvesant, 1995.; *Liszt, Carolyne and the Vatican: The story of a thwarted marriage.* (American Liszt Society Studies Series No. 1), New York, Stuyvesant, 1991.

3 ■ *Liszt,* trans. by Gyula Gulyás, translation revised by Paul Merrick, Budapest, Corvina, 1987, p. 243.

4 ■ In her lecture at the Hungarian Liszt conference in March 1996 in Budapest, which Professor Walker attended, Bettina Berlinghoff said that during her preparations of a critical edition of Liszt's prose writings in Germany, she rummaged up the correspondence between Princess Carolyne and the publisher Breitkopf & Härtel, which has made this unambiguously evident.

5 ■ To Mme Camille Clerc in *Gabriel Faureé: Correspondance.* Présentée et annotée par Jean Nectoux. Paris, Flammarion, "Harmoniques", 1980, No. 45. pp. 107–8.

András Wilheim

Bartók: The Creative Process

László Somfai: *Béla Bartók. Composition, Concepts and Autograph Sources*. Berkeley, University of California Press, 1996, 344 pp.

It is rare in scholarship for the work of a single scholar to embody the formation of his discipline, rarer even for the achievements of a single scholar to establish or decisively shape an entire area of research. Such work is particularly impressive in an era of specialization, when parts of a discipline develop their independence and the work of a lifetime can be devoted to a chapter, even a footnote, on a particular topic.

In musicology, the critical reception of the work of the "classics" is gradually drawing to a close. Comprehensive accounts have been published and critical editions have been completed: Yet, specialized research hasn't made it necessary—nor, for that matter, possible—to reassess the significance of major composers, let alone to rewrite the history of entire epochs through new insights into the role of individual composers. Clearly, the achievements of a Spitta, Abert or Thayer could not be surpassed these days.

Today scholarly production has shifted from the monograph towards various kinds of reference works, companions, to mention only the latest vogue, or encyclopaedias, which attempt to achieve completeness through a disjointed mode of presentation. Uncertain as we have become of our convictions and hierarchies, these works lure us with the illusion of an undiminished wholeness of knowledge. Only the study of twentieth century classics offers the musicologist the opportunity of significant progress in source studies, formal analysis, biography and the history of interpretation, not to mention various auxiliary subjects—provided, of course, that the legal, archival, public, and other conditions for such research are met and the skills of the musicologist are equal to the task.

László Somfai's work on Bartók emerged under a happy constellation of all these conditions. His early research was on 18th-century music, most significantly on Haydn, and his publications remain indispensable to any serious student of this subject.[1] Then, almost by chance, he was appointed to the staff of the Bartók Archives and left his post in the Music Department of the National Széchényi Library. In the Archives he worked with Denijs Dille, the Belgian scholar who, due to the absurdities of the climate of the times, was considered more acceptable to head it than a Hungarian. Dille was the

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very embodiment of the enthusiastic dilettante: he worked with great dedication, and often to good effect, but he committed basic scholarly errors owing to his inadequate knowledge of Hungarian or the history of the country.

For someone who wanted to work on Bartók, the situation was far from ideal when Somfai began in the second half of the 1960's. Important basic studies had been initiated, and although unfinished, were evidently going to produce significant results. Despite the lack of institutional backing, János Demény had begun to publish Bartók's letters[2] and a vast body of biographical and historical documentation, publication of which, however, was to remain incomplete.[3] A catalogue of Bartók's works was in preparation on the basis of András Szöllösy's work,[4] and the most complete, scholarly edited though unfinished collection of Bartók's writings was published.[5]

Around this time, Ernő Lendvai presented musicians with a theoretical account of Bartók's music[6] which, by its very nature, did not facilitate further study of his musical idiom. Nor was it possible to contest this theory, given the unscrupulous and hysterical attacks that it generated. Thus the only alternative theory put forward by János Kárpáti[7] was also denied the historical and theoretical scrutiny that its importance for the musical analysis of Bartók's oeuvre would have warranted.

The *official* Bartók biography was written by József Ujfalussy in 1965.[8] This volume still provides valid reading. Ujfalussy was remarkably successful in balancing his analysis on a knife edge, including everything known about the composer at the time without offending ideological or personal sensibilities. Dille's activities, as it were, had put certain aspects of Bartók's life out of bounds.[9] Bence Szabolcsi's works were regarded as breaking new ground at the time of their publication but were in fact more representative of a past stage.[10] Beside these works, only György Kroó's book[11] and his papers[12] were able to demonstrate the possibility of an interpretation construed on traditional premises, but substantiated by thorough historical and source studies.

Somfai's work on Bartók set out in two directions at once. One was the strict study of sources; the other was an attempt to redraw and re-animate the image of Bartók, which, at the time, was increasingly rigidified into an idol. Initially, his research concentrated on texts[13]—a topic outside Dille's own field of interest but amply documented by the material available in the Archives, as well as rendered possible by the legal situation. As regards his musical analyses, thanks to their specialized focus, Somfai could circumvent the abortive theoretical debates besetting Bartók scholarship. He was also able to avoid the moors of Marxist aesthetics, which, though relatively low-key in musicology, still exerted a pressure via the most prestigious scholars of the time.[14] In addition, Somfai soon discovered a field of study for himself: Bartók, the performer.[15]

The possibilities for research were, of course, limited in a number of ways. First of all, Somfai had to be mindful of the sensitivities of three individuals: Bartók's widow and his elder son, Béla Bartók Jr, who lived in Hungary, and of his younger son, Peter Bartók, in the U.S. Since they exercised control over all publication rights and their permission was required for the publication of material hitherto unpublished, the scope for research was seriously limited by the filter of family censorship and a kind of self-restraint dictated by the scholar's awareness of family sensitivities. A further handicap was the fact that Bartók's papers were geographically and

legally divided between Budapest and the U.S., and between private and institutional collections.[16] There was significant variation in the accessibility of the manuscripts. The material in the Budapest Archives was supposed to be a public collection, whereas, in fact, access depended on the good will and whim of Denijs Dille, the Director of the Bartók Department, the caution of Bence Szabolcsi, the Director of the Bartók Archives and—in the case of temporarily deposited manuscripts belonging to Béla Bartók Jr.—the permission of the latter.

For various legal reasons, but also and not least because of financial and political considerations, the American material was in practice inaccessible to research. Although at the start of Somfai's work on Bartók a glimmer of hope appeared that the documents would be made accessible to scholars—György Kroó was the first musicologist from Hungary who was able to look into the New York material—this hope soon evaporated. Somfai's grant from the Ford Foundation, which he had wanted to use for research into Bartók's papers in the U.S., was a lost chance as he was not able to acquire the necessary permission for archival research. Anyone realistically weighing up the prospects of Bartók research would have made the same decision as Somfai, which was to maintain his interest in Bartók while cultivating related fields. Continuing studies into 18th-century music mark this period in Somfai's activity as well as an intense preoccupation with the work of Webern, Schoenberg and Stravinsky.

All musicologists were aware that the material in Hungary by itself would not take them far. Major projects could not be based on material deposited or donated in the Bartók Archives or on its limited puchases. The most important manuscripts and documents were not available. Bartók himself at the time of his emigration was fully aware of what was important and had to be safeguarded. Apart from the folk-song collections, which mainly concern Bartók the ethno-musicologist, what was in Hungary was either there by chance, was a document which Bartók reckoned of secondary importance, or was a manuscript which was no longer in his possession when he left. The fact is that scholars were even unaware at this stage of what was in Hungary of much that was within easy reach. Following the death of Ditta Pásztory, Bartók's widow, a search of her papers produced sources which, not in quantity, but as regards their importance, made the entire collection at the Archives pale into insignificance.[17] To this day, not everything in Kodály's papers that may be of crucial importance in the study of Bartók's early compositional period has been made available.

After Dille's retirement, Somfai was appointed Director of the Bartók Archives. He saw his primary task as reshaping research plans, both immediate and long term, and in shifting the emphasis from what had by then clearly emerged as a dead end. In an article "A budapesti Bartók Archívum második évtizede elé" (Prolegomena to the Second Decade of the Budapest Bartók Archives),[18] he wrote that "What is needed in the first place if Bartók research is to make progress and in order to replace the platitudes and distortions in the existing literature is basic research and highly accomplished source studies." That sentence critically formulated the goal of Somfai's own work, articulating a feeling that research cannot carry on in its accustomed ways, as well as firmly implying the overriding importance of all the material being made available to scholars. This was not a purely organizational or musicological challenge: it also required diplomatic *finesse* and the prospects were bleak in-

deed. Let us not forget that this was 1971. The Iron Curtain appeared unchangeable; relations within the Bartók family were tense; rights were controlled by people who had an interest in a continuing *impasse*; and the expiry date of the Bartók copyright seemed ages away.[19] A concensus, imagination and enterprise of all beneficiaries and the publishers holding rights were needed. Somfai embarked on his work in the hope that a favourable change was in sight, perhaps not in the world as such, that is in politics, but at least in the micro-world of Bartók scholarship.

"Highly disciplined source studies and basic research" were ultimately needed in the interest of the publication of a critical edition of Bartók's complete works. However absurd it seems, it remains true that the half century which has passed since Bartók's death has not been enough to make all of his compositions available in a trustworthy, (and as much as possible, fault-free) edition. Existing publications are unreliable and inconsistent, at the very least when it comes to questions of detail. More than one important piece has remained unpublished to this day.

Somfai's initial aim was to secure the support of the family and of the publishers holding the rights for producing an up-to-date, scholarly complete edition that would serve the interests of both performers and scholars and to start preliminary work as soon as possible. To facilitate this, he took steps to create an integrated Archives at least in the form of photocopies in order to chart and make available the wide range of existing primary sources, supplemented by a collection of relevant documents, and he assembled a research team.

The twists and turns of the Bartók critical edition, publication of which has not even started, will certainly be told in a history of Hungarian musicology. Somfai, for his part, devoted all his energies to make the best of the circumstances by arranging his work so that the results would in some way make a contribution. Somfai's work in connection with Bartók's recordings, for example, (their complete edition,[20] an analysis of interpretations[21]) are definitive studies, in addition to what they contributed as preliminary studies to the future complete critical edition.[22] Their methodological import points well beyond their proper subject.

The time when Somfai's work as it were changed direction can be easily established. "Analízis-jegyzetlapok az 1916-os zongorás esztendőről" (Analytical Notes on the 1926 Piano Year) appeared in 1981, the Bartók centenary year in the volume *Tizennyolc Bartók-tanulmány* (Eighteen Bartók Studies). A footnote stated[23] that Somfai had, for some years, been working on a larger study, to be entitled "Bartók's Piano Music". An earlier article referred to it as well,[24] as do two important studies in the above volume.[25] We can only speculate as to why the work was never finished. Perhaps the manuscripts on which Somfai would have based arguments, which would have inspired a truly authoritative analytical aproach, were inaccessible in the preparation phase. In the meantime, however, inspired by the complete Schoenberg and Hindemith editions which were on the way and the proposed complete Webern, as well as the approaching Bartók centenary, the idea of a Bartók complete critical edition resurfaced, or rather its basic preliminary requirement, a systematic study of the sources. Somfai's decision, recognizing what was needed, was prompt. His recently completed "Kézirat és Urtext: A Bartók-művek forrásláncai" (Manuscript and Urtext: Chains of Sources in Bartók's Works)[26] was given pride of place in his 1981 volume. The argument and terminology of this study, to-

gether with Somfai's great archival Bartók exhibition, "Bartók's Workshop" and its catalogue in 1987,[27] formed the seed of the volume that appeared in English in the USA in 1995 and now under discussion.

Various conditions needed to be fulfilled for this summary work to take shape. All of Bartók's papers had to be studied for a start. Bartók's widow died in 1982. Following her death, all the documents held in her home became accessible. Some years later, in the autumn of 1987, Peter Bartók, the composer's son who lived in America, decided that to assist work in progress at the Archives he would provide the Budapest institute with photocopies of all the material in America.[28] (Peter Bartók had become the sole owner of the papers in America on the death of his mother and the winding up of the Bartók Estate.)

Somfai began work using the photocopies, and was then able to continue working on the originals when Peter Bartók invited him to the States in 1988. In the years that followed he was able to examine all the autographs and manuscripts and other sources of manuscript value in the world's public and private collections. Then new counter-arguments, other problems, some of them financial, had surfaced. Copyright, which was just about due to expire, was extended by a further twenty-five years. With prospects fading for an immediate launching of the complete edition, Somfai's own task, a project tailored for a lone scholar, crystallized as the cataloguing of manuscripts, the analysis and arranging of their contents, while keeping the future planned published series in view.

Anyone first arranging source material must display an integrated approach. Somfai has done so in a highly personal manner, in keeping with his professional experience and opinions. Somfai's work on Bartók's papers thus implied 1) an interpretation of phases of composition, 2) an analysis of how each work came to be composed, and 3) an understanding of Bartók's habits and attitudes when composing music. Furthermore, work in progress came to prepare the project of a thematic catalogue of Bartók's which could be undertaken by him alone.[29]

The present book is based on the six Ernest Bloch lectures given by Somfai in September and October 1989 to the music faculty of the University of California in Berkeley. The text was ready for publication by the end of 1992, but a further four years elapsed before the book appeared. Clearly, the discussion that followed the lectures had to be incorporated in the main text with every assertion supported by a wealth of enlightening examples.

In spite of the huge amount of material on which the book relies—in-depth research into the New York and Budapest collections and Bartókiana in general—one cannot presume that, a handful of experts excepted, readers will really understand what the argument is about.[30] Some will seek information about Bartók analogous to what they have obtained from similar works on other composers, most, however, will presumably be motivated by a general curiosity on the way composers function. They will not be disappointed. They are given an overview of the history of Bartók scholarship, and are introduced to Bartók's own declared opinions both about composition in general and about his own works.

The backbone of the book is given by Somfai's systematic account of every type of source connected with the genesis of the compositions. Thus, separate chapters are devoted to the sketches, fragments, and planned works which, for various reasons, remained unrealized. Somfai carefully differentiates between notes for works which were completed and notes for works which remained fragmentary of whose final form

we know nothing, and draws our attention to essential differences between sources that are apparently similar.

Somfai discusses the manuscript paper used by Bartók in detail, showing how much research of this sort can help in clarifying chronological details. He gives examples showing Bartók's work phases on the way to completing a work and the point at which he considered a work to be complete. A typology and hierarchy of sources is given, showing that every type, from drafts to fair copies and proofs, right to corrected scores used in performance and the composer's own recordings, reveals new problems as it is positioned and has its role in the creative process, at the end of which stands the work in its final shape. In a chapter, Somfai deals with the connections between scholarship and performance, with his conclusions primarily drawn from Bartók's own recordings.

In an Appendix, he provides a complete list of sources that can be traced back to Bartók, in the order of the thematic catalogue in progress. In this sense the book is a truly comprehensive volume, as Somfai quite justifiably states in the Introduction: "My intention in this book is thus to summarize the results of nearly three decades of work, for the benefit of future Bartók studies."[31]

Those who know Somfai's work, will again and again come across chapters and paragraphs that look familiar, ideas similarly expounded earlier, in various languages. This in itself indicates how tenaciously and systematically the book has been composed, how all the preliminary layers were prepared with their eventual fusion in mind. A comparison between the texts shows that the earlier publications already offered the right answers to the questions posed, and that amendments were only necessary where sources only recently made available produced some decisive change.

Naturally, there is much that is new in the way of information or argument for specialists too. Carefully selected facsimiles with accompanying commentaries make up nearly a third of the volume, albeit the author does not attempt to provide a guide along every element of one single composition, he does, however, present all the major types as they occur in different pieces selecting the most interesting and significant examples. Even if the whole chain of sources for one work cannot be followed all the way, one can clearly sense how Bartók passed through certain discernible phases before reaching the point at which he could regard a piece as finished.

A difficult decision was finding a way to present the documentation related to Bartók's life in as varied and multifarious a way as possible, without leaving any single important phase unmentioned, while at the same time formulating general principles, characteristic of Bartók and Bartók alone, which are manifest in a highly varied oeuvre. Somfai had no wish to demonstrate the value and soundness of his categories and methods at the hand of a single work, he looked for the most characteristic and suitable examples in the oeuvre on which to test the soundness and usefulness of his methodology and system. Glimpses over the ramparts of meticulous scholarship are few and far between.

This methodological decision and self-restraint proved fruitful. There probably is no single major Bartók composition for which a primary, authentic chain of sources is available. Somfai's book aims to be both an introduction and a synthesis and is conceived as a kind of a hand-book for musicologists allowing them to recognize the import and significance of any Bartók document they might come across.[32] For this reason the book—*pace* the methodological hiatus—is also a type

of catalogue. It thus provides much information of minimal practical usefulness even to the average specialist, such as a list of copyists or of missing drafts (p. 114) and score engravings (p. 223) but who knows, perhaps it is the fact that such things are here published which will make it possible to identify a hitherto unknown Bartók document.

The two chronological tables summarizing types and the chronology of pedal markings in Bartók's scoring (pp. 276–277), impressive in their own way, are also hardly more than curiosities. At times, however, similar lists are useful indeed, thus anyone with an interest in discrepancies between different editions will find the book invaluable. We are told, for instance, whether or not Bartók's final version is present in a given score. (See, for instance, the pages on Bartók's Violin Rhapsodies, or the tables presenting revisions in tempo indications (p. 249 and pp. 259–262).

The central chapter is about drafts. This is most thoughtfully planned, displaying scholarship of the highest standard (The Key Manuscript: The Draft). Following a general discussion of this phase in the chain of sources, examples illustrate a method of analysis that far transcends the field of Bartók studies. The methodological question is how tracing and reconstructing how a work took shape may in itself be turned into the analysis of that work. Can a composition's core be reached via a study of the sources?

Given limitations of space, and also of the aforementioned practical considerations (namely that the detailed study of the sources of one Bartók work could not represent Bartók's compositional method in general) we are presented with only a few carefully selected parts from some of the compositions. As Somfai puts it, this is given "more as an introduction to further individual studies in the genesis of major works, a much needed special field in future Bartók research."[33]

Thus, all he says about the genesis of a section of the Third String Quartet, the shaping of the 12-tone theme of the Violin Concerto, the Piano Sonata and generally the 1926 piano works or the "strategies" involved in Bartók's compositional process is to intimate that a combination of style analysis and source analysis focused on a single work offers a method or approach tailor-made for the examination of individual works, one which does not evaluate preliminary works divorced from their final forms (as sketch analysis often does today) but considers every amendment as part of an evolution, explaining it in terms of the final result. What this method truly means is illustrated by two earlier chapters.

One is about the sketches, discussing the various types much as a catalogue does, going on to explain what was changed in the final form and why. The other chapter deals with the compositions which survived as fragments, which Bartók abandoned, and with his unrealized plans. Here the analysis is so detailed that flashes of insight are given into connections between individual periods, suggesting the reasons why a work or arrangement once started remained unfinished, why a plan was never carried out. Somfai shows that imagining that someone could complete an unfinished work in the true spirit of Bartók was an illusion. He treats the Concerto for Viola fragment as an exception, but it actually follows from his series of illustrations that it is impossible to transform the Concerto's sketches into a finished composition. At the most, a paraphrase or an adaptation could be produced, perhaps a fantasy, but with somewhat greater skill than Tibor Serly succeeded in doing.

László Somfai knew that he was breaking new ground and repeatedly makes it quite clear that Bartók research has arrived at a turning point. Let me add that Somfai's work has been instrumental in leading it to this point. However, I have some remarks to make, both as regards minor details and some problems of a more general nature.

Minor errors will certainly be corrected in a second edition. Largely the issue is not of "mistakes", but of inaccuracies for which the time which elapsed between the date when the manuscript was ready for the printer and that of publication can be blamed. The reader will automatically correct them. It is thus mere inconsistency that the abreviation BBCCE is not elucidated, but the reader will quickly make the connection with the planned *Béla Bartók Complete Critical Edition* series.

As regards terminology, it seems to me that in an English text the use of the term *Licthpause* is inexact. Somfai uses it for the type of manuscript which Bartók wrote on transparent sheets: on tracing paper furnished with five-line staves. In German such paper is called *Pauspapier,* or *Lichtpauspapier,* in the light of which the precise meaning of *Lichtpause* is a copy made from the transparency. Bartók's usage (as quoted by Somfai on page 33) is correct. He refers to the fair copy written on tracing paper as *Lichtpausreinschrift.*

It is understandable, although debatable, that Somfai uses only the "accepted" English titles of works. This will do, of course, for the text, but in the appendices the original (Hungarian) titles should also have had a place for practical purposes too, making it easier for the non-Hungarian reader to identify certain works.

It is regrettable that the volume does not refer more fully to the manuscript facsimiles which have been appearing quite frequently over recent years. Doubtless the primary reason was to put a limit to the number of footnotes. Any reader interested in the basic message of the book will regularly turn to the Appendix where even dispersed publications could have been listed. To insist that every one-sheet publication be listed would, of course, be pointless, but a fuller account would have made sense since these secondary sources are part of the primary evidence of the book.

The publication of facsimiles gives rise to a more important methodological question, to which Somfai himself has since made a significant countribution.[34] Can an almost mirror-like reproduction of the manuscript, that which is called a "diplomatic copy," help us understand the compositional method?

The copy in fact helps with the deciphering of the manuscript's most complicated places, faithfully reproducing the cuts, corrections, observing the crossed out notes and insertions. To my mind the only major inner contradiction in the book is in the use of these diplomatic copies. If we accept Somfai's view (and so we must, for it is our only option) that "the work's most inspired compositional decisions are to be discovered in the most prosaic facts,[35] then we also have to accept that even in the most faithful copy these facts evaporate, such as signs of Bartók's working speed, the reconstruction of the sequence of corrections, &c. There are only possible alternatives: either a plain reproduction (perhaps with commentaries clarifying places which are illegible on the photocopy) or else a publication which is explicitly an analysis, with appraisal, exposition in the form of reconstruction, the presentation of layers of the manuscript mirroring the chronology of the work's history and detailing the independent layers, but certainly not an apparently "faith-

ful" diplomatic copy, with its enticing illusion of authenticity.

By now Somfai's Bartók research has progressed in three clearly discernible directions. The first has been to establish the guiding principles for the study of sources in Bartók research as it is encapsulated in this volume. No one is likely to say anything radically new in the near or distant future on this subject to the same degree. Somfai's terminology and methodology, his examples and micro-analyses are part of the idiom. We employ his terms in our own work without thought of reference to him.

The second goal is the thematic catalogue of Bartók's works, of which numerous publications testify[35] and which, as a preliminary extract, appears as sources listed in the Appendix of the present volume. In as much as it is possible to draw conclusions from what has been published by Somfai so far, the future volume would seem to be a good deal more than just a catalogue. When finished it will be an encyclopaedia of research on Bartók, the most important handbook for the use of musicologists to date.

The largest and most ambitious of his plans, the complete critical edition, may turn out to be Somfai's great illusion, a hope that remains unfulfilled. Who knows, perhaps this plan, which has been looming for decades yet never approached realization, is in its non-realization the sign of a new turning point in Bartók research. Perhaps this type of plan cannot be carried out today. The huge amount of preparation, diverse efforts made by so many, the great skills and talents employed may be all in vain.

The question is whether we can allow all the knowledge, gifts, and practical experience which would have found their place in a complete edition to remain inaccessible for much longer to all those who need it in their own work. ❧

NOTES

1 ■ *Haydn als Opernkapellmeister,* Budapest–Mainz, Akadémiai Kiadó–B. Schott's Söhne, 1960.

2 ■ The first three volumes appeared in Hungarian in 1948, 1951 and 1955.

3 ■ It appeared in four parts, encompassing Bartók's life between 1899 and 1940. See *Zenetudományi Tanulmányok II* (1954), III (1955), VII (1959) and X (1962).

4 ■ The first version to appear was in *Béla Bartók válogatott írásai* (Béla Bartók's Selected Writings), Budapest, Művelt Nép, 1956. It followed in French and German (1956 and 1957). For the most complete version see the second edition of József Ujfalussy's *Bartók Béla,* Budapest, Gondolat, 1970, pp. 478–522.

5 ■ *Bartók Béla összegyűjtött írásai I* (Collected Writings of Béla Bartók I.), Ed. by András Szöllősy, Budapest, Zeneműkiadó, 1966 [1967].

6 ■ The first two volumes to appear were *Bartók stílusa* (Bartók's Style), Budapest, Zeneműkiadó, 1955 and *Bartók dramaturgiája* (Bartók's Dramaturgy), Budapest, Zeneműkiadó, 1964.

7 ■ *Bartók vonósnégyesei.* Budapest, Zeneműkiadó, 1967. In English: *Bartók's String Quartets,* Budapest, Corvina, 1975 and its extended version, *Bartók's Chamber Music.* Pendragon Press, 1994.

8 ■ *Bartók Béla.* Budapest, Gondolat, 1965.

9 ■ See his publications in volumes 1 to 4 of *Documenta Bartókiana,* which he edited.

10 ■ *A csodálatos mandarin* (The Miraculous Mandarin), *Csillag,* 4/IX (April 1955). In English in *Béla Bartók. His Life in Pictures,* Budapest, Corvina, 1964; "Ember és természet Bartók világában", *Zenetudományi Tanulmányok X* (1962), pp. 5–13, in English, "Man and Nature in Bartók's World", *The New Hungarian Quarterly* II/4 (1961), pp. 90–102.

11 ■ *Bartók színpadi művei* (Bartók's Works for the Stage), Budapest, Zeneműkiadó, 1962.

12 ■ "Adatok *A kékszakállú herceg vára* keletkezéséről", *Magyar Zenetörténeti Tanulmányok II,* Budapest, 1969, pp. 333–357, in English, "Data on the Genesis of *Duke Bluebeard's Castle*", *Studia musicologica,* 1981, 79ff. "Unrealised Plans and Ideas for Projects by Bartók," *Studia musicologica,* 1970, pp. 11–27. "Két máig kiadatlan Bartók-partitúra. *A fából faragott királyfi* szvit-változatainak története" (Two Unpublished Bartók Scores. The History of *The Wooden Prince* Suite), *Magyar Zene* X/1, March, 1969, pp.76–89. "A fából faragott királyfi

keletkezéséről" (On the Genesis of The Wooden Prince), *Magyar Zenetörténeti Tanulmányok III,* 1972, pp. 289–296.

13 ■ "Nichtvertonte Libretti und andere Bühnenpläne Bartóks", *Documenta Bartókiana* 2, 1965, pp. 28–52. "Bartók egynemű kórusainak szövegforrásairól" (On the Sources of Bartók's Male and Female Choruses), *Magyar Zenetörténeti Tanulmányok II,* 1969, pp. 359–376.

14 ■ "'Per finire'. Some aspects of the Finale in Bartók's Cyclic Forms", *Studia musicologica,* 1969, pp. 391–408; *Egy sajátos formastruktúra az 1920-as évek Bartók-kompozícióiban* (A Peculiar Formal Structure in Bartók's 1920s Compositions), *Liszt Ferenc Zeneművészeti Főiskola Évkönyve 1970–71,* Budapest, 1971, pp. 31–36. "A Characteristic Culmination Point in Bartók's Instrumental Forms", *International Musicological Congress in Commemoration of Béla Bartók,* Budapest, Editio Musica, 1972, pp. 53–64.

15 ■ "Bartók als Interprät", *Beiträge,* Kassel, 1969, pp. 41–45.

16 ■ See "The Budapest Bartók Archives" in *Fontes Artes Musicae* 29/1–2 (1982), pp. 59–65 for details.

17 ■ The most important document of this type is *Bartók vázlatkönyve.* The published facsimile is entitled *Béla Bartók. Black Pocket-Book. Sketches 1907–1922. Facsimile Edition of the Manuscript with a Commentary by László Somfai.* Budapest, Editio Musica, 1987.

18 ■ *Magyar Zene* XIII/1 (March 1971) 3–6 (this quote from p. 5).

19 ■ The fate of the Bartók legacy and its influence upon research is dealt with briefly in the Introduction to Somfai's book under review,pp. 1–8.

20 ■ Originally an LP recording in two boxes: *Centenary Edition of Bartók's Records* (Complete). Budapest, Hungaroton, 1981. Then remastered and extended on CD: *Bartók at the Piano* 1920–1945, Budapest, 1991, Hungaroton HCD 12326–31; *Bartók Recordings from Private Collections.* Budapest, 1995, Hungaroton, HCD 12334-37. The original accompanying texts, with the exception of some new data regarding the new versions, are far richer in content than the ones accompanying the CDs.

21 ■ See, for example, "Über Bartók's Rubato-Stil. Vergleichende Studie der zwei Aufnahmen "Abend am Lande" des Komponisten", *Documenta Bartókiana* 5 (1977), pp. 193–201; "Die "Allegro barbaro" Aufnahme von Bartók textkritisch bewertet", op. cit. pp. 259–275. The most important conclusions are summarized in the volume under review, pp. 279–294.

22 ■ Somfai discusses this theme in his article "How to Handle Oral Tradition-Like Phenomena in a Critical Edition?", *Stockmann Festschrift,* Munich (to appear shortly).

23 ■ Pp. 153–193.

24 ■ *Bartók formatani terminológiájának korai forrásai* (The Early Sources of Bartók's Morphological Terminology), *Zenetudományi Dolgozatok,* 1979, pp. 7–17.

25 ■ "Bartók népzenei forma-terminológiája" (Bartók's Ethnomusicological Morphological Terminology), *Tizennyolc Bartók-tanulmány.* (Eighteen Bartók Studies), Budapest 1981, pp. 279–297. "Kisformák, egyszerű és összetett tételformák Bartók zongoramuzsikájában 1908–1930" (Minor Forms, Simple and Complex Forms in Bartók's Piano Music), op. cit. pp. 298–303.

26 ■ Ibid. pp. 31–72.

27 ■ *Bartók's Workshop. Sketches, Manuscripts, Versions: The Compositional Process. Exhibition of the Budapest Bartók Archives in the Museum of Music History of the Institute for Musicology of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences.* Exhibition and Text by László Somfai. Budapest, Institute of Musicology, 1987.

28 ■ Somfai writes about this turn of events in "A Bartók életmű gondozásának új horizontja", *Muzsika,*1988/6, pp. 4–7.

29 ■ See "Problems of the Chronological Organisation of the Béla Bartók Thematic Index in Preparation", *Studia Musicologica* 34, 1992, pp. 345–366; "Béla Bartók Thematic Catalogue: Sample of Work in Progress", *Studia Musicologica* 35/1–3, 1993–94, pp. 229–241; "Why is a Bartók Thematic Catalogue Sorely Needed?" in *Bartók and His World.* Ed. by Péter Laki. Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1995, pp. 64–78.

30 ■ The author of the book senses this methodological problem too, of course. See the reference on page 144.

31 ■ Ibid. p. 7.

32 ■ The Appendix to the book provides a list of sources for further research into the individual compositions.

33 ■ Ibid. p. 144.

34 ■ "Diplomatic Transcription versus Facsimile with Commentaries. Methodology of the Bartók Edition", *Festschrift Gerhard Croll,* Laaber Verlag, 1992, pp. 76–96.

35 ■ "A 4. vonósnégyes genezise: Bartók és a kottapapírok" (The Genesis of the 4th String Quartet: Bartók and Music Paper), *Magyar Zene* XXIV/3, 1988, p. 324.

36 ■ See the list in note 29.

Tibor Hajdu

Imre Nagy: A High Fidelity Biography

János M. Rainer: *Nagy Imre. Politikai életrajz* (Imre Nagy: A Political Biography), Vol. I, 1896–1953. Budapest, 1956-os Intézet, 1996. 533 pp.

The first of two planned volumes of the new Imre Nagy biography ends in 1953, with Nagy's first appointment as Prime Minister. Nagy was fifty-seven then, already past mid-life and thus the book covers the lesser known, earlier years of his career. What happened afterward—his two terms as Prime Minister, his captivity, trial and execution—is far better known. Indeed, most of the literature on Imre Nagy covers his last five years, even though there is still ample room for new research. Rainer's scholarly history of that period is still to come. This may, in fact, induce the first critical remark, namely that it may have been advisable to put the last, nearly 100-page-long chapter (1949–1953), into the second volume. Imre Nagy's dispute in 1948–1949 with Rákosi and others who supported Stalinist agrarian policies opened a new period in his life. That was when he turned from being an obedient Party soldier, a loyal instrument of Party policy, even if with private opinions of his own, into an autonomous political personality, one who does what he perceives as correct, and declines to do what he does not. In the Communist Party this was heresy and, as such, the clear starting point of his later destiny. It was from then that his attempt at a "national" Communism can be dated. I must add that this last chapter also bears some traces of haste, observable not so much in its scholarship, which remains of high quality, but rather in the lack of thorough editing: the overabundance of quotations and cited documents sometimes makes the author's train of thought difficult to follow.

What Rákosi, imitating Stalin as he so often did, called "the Year of the Turnaround" (the strategic turn in the policy of the Hungarian Communist Party in 1947–1948), also brought a change in the life of Imre Nagy. He had played an important part in carrying out the policy of the Party between 1944 and 1948, but what he had done was not contrary to his expectations as regards the new Hungarian democracy, and could thus be reconciled with his conscience. Rainer marks out his virtual and his real place in the Party hierarchy in those years with precision; he devotes 200 pages to the four years in question, practically as many as to the description of his life up to his return home from Moscow in 1944. Rainer establishes that at

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***Tibor Hajdu**'s books include* A magyarországi Tanácsköztársaság *(The Hungarian Soviet Republic, 1969) and a biography of Count Mihály Károlyi.*

the time of his return to Hungary on November 5, 1944 Nagy ranked fifth in the Communist Party hierarchy, in spite of which he became one of the three Communist ministers of the Provisional Government, and the one with the highest profile. As Minister of Agriculture, he was assigned the highly popular role of managing the long-awaited radical land reform. Not only because he had been studying the agrarian policy for a long time but also because, unlike those above him in the party hierarchy, he was not a Jew (this was regarded as important even by Stalin and Molotov), and his appearance, folksy style of speaking and jovial manners made him well-liked by country people, suspicious by nature. Rainer quotes the author and journalist Zoltán Szabó, who first met Nagy in 1944: "At the Bull Hotel, I came to know Nagy as a slow-moving, quiet man not driven by the urge to argue, to be centre stage. There was something reassuring in his character owing partly to his generosity and lack of ambition, and partly to a special Transdanubian variety of common sense... he seemed to be a sincere man... He was undoubtedly the only one in the group of 'Muscovites' who had a chance of being accepted by a Hungarian peasant or worker as 'our kind', someone whose thoughts were governed by the thoughts of his home country." At the same time, as Rainer succinctly points out, he became the senior Communist minister in the cabinet. Like many other Hungarian politicians of the left, he probably felt in the right place mostly between 1945 and 1948 (like István Bibó who, half in jest, asked "Lived from 1945 to 1948" to be engraved on his tombstone.)

After the elections of 1945, Imre Nagy was promoted to be Minister of the Interior, the most important position of all from the Communists' point of view. But hardly a few months later he was recalled by the CP which replaced him by its rising new star, the more energetic László Rajk. Nagy remained a Member of Parliament, the head of the rural committee of the CP, which was more important to him, and later became Speaker of Parliament. There was no political or other conflict in the background to that decision, and nothing could be farther from Rainer than suggesting an explanation of that kind for the sake of creating a heroic myth for Imre Nagy; although he was evidently motivated by a deep respect and sympathy for Imre Nagy to write this biography, Rainer takes meticulous care not to idealize his protagonist, and not to attribute to his earlier actions motives that would retroactively mirror his post-1953 stance. This commitment to facts is characteristic of the other chapters, too. According to Rainer, Rákosi and his clique condemned Nagy's style only, and they simply observed that he was "not one of us", an outsider in their narrower circle.

Political and ideological conflict only began in December 1947. Up to then, Nagy loyally carried out CP policy. In the autumn of 1947, as Speaker, he not only assisted in covering up the infamous "blue ticket" election fraud, but took part in an even more shameful action, the unlawful deprivation of forty-nine representatives of the opposition Pfeiffer Party of their parliamentary mandates. After that, however, he challenged Ernő Gerő, the prime economic policy-maker of the Party, then Minister of Transport and soon of Finance, who wanted to speed up the changeover to a socialist economic policy at all costs. Imre Nagy started out from the assumption that the Hungarian economy would remain basically capitalist for many more years, and in agriculture the small peasant farms, the cooperative and the state sector would develop side by side for an especially long time. This protracted dispute naturally ended with Gerő's victory, sanctioned by

Moscow. Nagy was dropped from the Politburo, and was left without a leadership position for some two years. He was appointed Professor at the University of Economics in Budapest and the University of Agriculture at Gödöllő, or rather banished there.

Older readers may have a feeling that the author (who was born in 1957) does not always feel the nuances of the dogmatic debate, reminiscent of the theological disputes of medieval scholasticism, the subtleties of arguments about the concept of the "capitalist sector" which had an entirely different meaning for Lenin to what it had in Stalin's oversimplified usage or in that of various Western Marxists. The real point of the debate was that Gerő wanted to achieve rapid success (and failed, since the "collectivization" of agriculture was hindered by the stubborn resistance of the peasants). On the other hand, under the auspices of the "intensification of the class struggle", Gerő and his associates wanted to incite farm hands and day-wage farm labourers against the old smallholders, who were declared to be "kulaks". The knowledgeable, of course, knew all too well that if someone who had never even run a smallholding were appointed to manage a large farm, the outcome would be a disaster—but only Imre Nagy had the courage to say so at the time. Rainer resists the temptation to skip this all by simply calling it ideological mumbo-jumbo. Quite to the contrary, he attempts to pierce the fog by meticulously detailing the debates and events. In the other chapters, too, he sometimes cites more evidence and detail than might be required to prove his argument (something we historians are inclined to do if the publisher permits it). A specialist is happy to investigate these, but the less knowledgeable general reader may find it a bit dull.

Imre Nagy was not driven to despair by his exile to scholarship, not only because it suited his passive and inquiring nature very well but also because, having spent nearly two decades in Russia, he knew what his successors in the office of Interior Minister (Rajk, Kádár, Zöld) did not, namely that in Stalin's empire an interior minister's is a very hazardous position. Although for some time the majority of former exiles had hoped that the frenzied purges carried out in the Soviet Union in 1936–1938 would not be repeated in Hungary, the year 1949 saw the conclusion of three major "cases": those of Imre Nagy, László Rajk and György Lukács. Rajk was executed, and Lukács was seriously censured by the Party. Nagy was the one who got off most lightly, partly because he knew when to withdraw, and partly because the former cadres of the Soviet Communist Party were treated with kid gloves, even by Rákosi who didn't dare to touch them without special permission from Moscow.

It is, in a way, odd that he was not allowed to live for teaching and studying for long; he was soon put into new and increasingly higher positions again. The answers as to why and how are found in Rainer's book. At the time of Stalin's death he was already one of Prime Minister Rákosi's deputies, hardly four months later he was Rákosi's successor in the Prime Minister's post. The first volume of the biography ends with an investigation of the secret discussions in Moscow, the government programme of July 1953, and the beginning of the "new stage".

The lesser half of the volume is devoted to the career of Imre Nagy until 1944, since up to then he had not played a major role in Hungarian history. The biographer, however, has done a huge and thorough job here too, exploring every detail of the life of the young Nagy and the exile which may have had a bearing on the development of an exceptional career and charac-

ter. Since a great deal has been written about the history of the Hungarian Communist movement but much of it untrue, Rainer oversteps the limits of the biographer and tries to fill in a number of blank or murky spots in the history of the Communist Party. The immense effort he makes to understand that which is so far from his own way of thinking, and not only in time, is especially commendable.

It is thanks to that effort that he succeeds in avoiding the trap so many friends and foes have got caught in: of depicting Imre Nagy as a Saul-turned-Paul, who rejected his former self at the turning point of his life. Nagy drew his huge strength in his battles with Rákosi or with Kádár's court from his own accepted, subjectively honest past and, relying on his own experience, he saw himself as a true, loyal Leninist and his adversaries as corrupt and unworthy. Whether he was right or if the question is relevant at all, is hard to decide. At any rate, it is undeniable that, beside his Hungarian patriotism, something which he retained throughout, and his loyalty to his people, that belief was what gave him the strength to play his tragic role to the bitter end.

Imre Nagy was one of the many thousand young revolutionaries whose awareness was awakened in 1917 by the Russian Revolution. He joined the Red Guard as a Hungarian prisoner of war. After they returned home, captivity and revolution lived on in most of his comrades only as youthful memories of adventure. Imre Nagy, on the other hand, remained captive—right until his death. By giving a detailed account of the facts, the book helps us understand how Nagy, having become a member of the CP at the age of 22, was able to retain common sense and moral integrity, things often contradictory to his Party membership.

When he returned to Hungary in 1921, he was happy to be home in Kaposvár. If the Horthy regime had been more tolerant, and if the Social Democratic Party he then joined had made a stronger case for the peasantry, he could possibly have remained a provincial insurance clerk devoting his leisure to the workers' movement. But in Kaposvár, it took years for the turbulent aftermath of the stormy events of the revolution and counter-revolution to pass. Nagy joined the leftist opposition within the Social Democratic Party, and ended up as a suspect in a Communist conspiracy case. He tried to start an underground Communist peasant movement with little success, and since he held on to a peasant way of thinking, he became suspected of "rightist deviation" in the Communist Party. He was sent to Moscow, from where he could no longer return.

However, once there, he was able to get into the agricultural institute of the Comintern, where he could, at long last, do what had interested him most for a long time—study the agrarian question. He was already working on his thesis when the wave of purges hit him. In January 1936, he was expelled from the CP and lost his job as well. He struggled hard to eke out a living for years, like so many other exiles, until the War created a new situation for him, too: he was employed as an announcer by the Hungarian-language propaganda station of Radio Moscow. When the war ended, from a survivor of purges and from a suspicious "enemy alien" living in misery, he suddenly turned into a candidate for a ministerial position.

Rainer devotes a short chapter (entitled Files) to an ambiguous and controversial episode of the Moscow years. The majority of exiles were forced by the NKVD to write reports on their fellows. They included Imre Nagy, a pawn in this diabolical game from about 1933 to 1939. This was impos-

sible to refuse, and, as every exile's name turned up at least in a dozen or two such reports, the NKVD could pick out those it meant to arrest. This meant that some of those reported on by Imre Nagy were also deported—while others were made ministers or members of the academy. The file of Imre Nagy—or rather some tendentiously selected parts of it—were circulated by the KGB after 1989 for the purpose of discrediting him. That malicious intent is proved unequivocally by the June 16, 1989 report of KGB Chief Kryuchkov, published in America. The whole file is not accessible. What was leaked of it can only confuse the issue. Rainer nevertheless could not ignore this, and makes an attempt to objectively reconstruct what can be found of the truth. His scholarly propriety has meant that he has been attacked and his work hindered by many quarters, including the successors of the KGB, who are still unwilling to reveal the unadulterated truth. The daughter of Imre Nagy sued the historian, as if he were the cause of what had happened. The court was right when it refused to express an opinion on matters of history.

Family photograph. Moscow, around 1940.

As far as I know, Rainer is working on the second and concluding volume of the biography undeterred by these and other difficulties. ❧

Michael Heim

A Writer on His Head

Frigyes Karinthy: *A Journey Round My Skull.* Translated from the Hungarian by Vernon Duckworth Barker, with a preface by Mihály Sükösd. Budapest, Corvina Books, 1992, 288 pp.

In early May 1937 Budapest's dailies gave equal space to Addis Abeba and Stockholm: Benito Mussolini had invaded Ethiopia and Frigyes Karinthy had had a life-threatening tumour removed from his brain by a Swedish surgeon. Karinthy, an enormously popular Hungarian humourist, gave a detailed account of the progress of his illness and its cure in *A Journey Round My Skull,* published the following year in Hungary and the year following that by Faber & Faber in England.

The republication of Vernon Duckworth Barker's fluid translation of the work in Corvina's Hungarian Classics series is welcome both in and of itself and as a measure of certain changes that have taken place since the work's first appearance. Last year *The New Yorker* ran a moving personal account of a stroke and its cure. The author was the English novelist Robert McCrum, who also happens to be an editor at Faber & Faber and may well have been involved in the transfer of rights of the Karinthy book from his firm to Corvina. In other words, he may well have read *A Journey Round My Skull* a few years before taking his own analogous journey.

The most obvious difference between the accounts stems from the difference in the medical technology they depict. Given that in the thirties patients were less likely to die if they retained consciousness, Karinthy had his skull trephined—split open—with only a local anaesthetic. He could therefore detail the process, harrowing as it was, with chilling clarity. The chapter in which he does so, "Avdeling 13" (the Swedish for Ward 13), is enough to warrant the work a broad audience.

It is interesting for a completely different reason as well. McCrum's account—coming to us as an article in a periodical and immediately after the illness occurred—has the ring of fact to it; Karinthy's account, coming to us as a full-length book and more than half a century after his illness occurred—has taken on a literary patina. On the one hand, Karinthy insists that "reality as a genre requires no helping hand from the artist"; on the other, his is nothing if not a high self-conscious literary construct. He even inserts

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an entire short story (about a patient at an insane asylum, ("Moni") in the text.

If McCrum represents a possible descendant, the largely forgotten French writer Xavier de Maistre represents a possible ancestor. In *Voyage autour de ma chambre* (A Journey round My Room, 1795) de Maistre moves from a minute description of the premises where he was kept for several months under house arrest (for having fought a duel) to wide-ranging artistic and philosophical meditations (which the young Tolstoy found worthy of emulation). Karinthy gives a minute description of his "skull", a description that covers both the physical and psychological: the early giddy spells and the later excrutiating headaches, the attemps at denial and the realization that even after submitting himself to examination, he had unconsciously chosen doctors incapable of diagnosing the illness he knew was there. But he also incorporates his readings (Thomas Mann's *Joseph and his Brethren,* Scott's account of his journey to the South Pole, Jules Verne's *Michel Strogoff*) and a variety of philosophical musings.

Which does not make him particularly "heavy". Like so many of his Austro-Hungarian contemporaries, Karinthy was a denizen of, even a creature of the café, both writing and holding court at his *Stammtisch*, the table regularly reserved for him and his coterie. The narrator of *A Journey Round My Skull* couches his speculations in an insouciant, man-of-the-world chatter, taking special pleasure in debunking one and all, himself included. One of the reasons he waited so long to go to a doctor, he tells us, is that he feared fear of the illness more than the illness itself. True, the musings grow more serious as the action progresses (Karinthy is often quoted as having said, "When it comes to humour, I'm in dead earnest"), and they culminate in a disquisition on the subjectivity of time, but even here he maintains his engaging tone.

The writer Frigyes Karinthy on the terrace of the Parisette in Budapest. 1930s. Petőfi Museum of Literature.

In the end, the work is satisfying as much for the narrator as for what he narrates. What a pleasure to sit down with a witty, urbane, eminently well educated human being, to bask in his presence as he recounts to you something of vital importance to him. We could do with a few more Karinthys nowadays. ❧

János Vargha

Damming the Danube

John Fitzmaurice: *Damming the Danube: Gabcikovo and Post-Communist Politics in Europe.* Westview Press, Boulder, Colorado, 1996. 137 pp.

In the 1950s, engineers laid down plans for a hydraulic power project between Bratislava (Pozsony) and Budapest, a stretch of the Danube which only drops slightly. The main elements of the project were a dam at Dunakiliti for the controlled enclosure of the Danube, with a 60 square kilometre reservoir below Bratislava, a power station at Gabcikovo, on the 25-kilometre side-channel forking off from Dunakiliti, and a barrage 100 kilometres further down river, between Nagymaros and Visegrád. The Gabcikovo plant was meant primarily for the generation of power in peak periods, and, with the flow of the Danube completely blocked, water would be stored in the reservoir. It is this procedure which requires a second dam, which would dam enough water in peak periods for vessels to travel below Gabcikovo. The environmental implications of the construction and operation of the scheme were not examined, and the planners played down or ignored particular risk factors in the interests of the scheme's construction. The Czechoslovak, Hungarian and Soviet engineers let the general design and details of the project play second fiddle to the amount of power it would generate, with the intention of convincing decision-makers of its competitiveness. In order to improve its attractiveness as an energy investment, negotiations with the energy sector saw the proportion of finance from other sources (that is, from departments other than the energy ministry) arbitrarily raised from about 17 per cent to 40 per cent. Hungary, lacking the funds necessary for the project, was eventually promised a substantial loan by the Soviet Union. After the Secretary-Generals of the communist parties reached agreement, the prime ministers of Hungary and Czechoslovakia signed a treaty in 1977 for the completion of the project.

The socialist era did not allow criticism of the plans of its leading decision-makers, which is how the authorities managed to keep top secret the detailed and devastating criticism of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. Inter alia, this warned of the danger of the destruction of flood area woods, and the pollution of the enormous reserve of fresh water in the layer of shingle adjoining the river. Although an environmental movement devoted to the protection of the Danube's natural qualities

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began in 1984, and its organizers, the Danube Circle, received the "alternative Nobel Prize" from the Stockholm Right Livelihood Foundation in 1985, it was only in 1989 that work on the project in Hungary was stopped by the Government. The environmental movement in Czechoslovakia had an even harder task. For instance, the prime minister of the second post-socialist Czechoslovak government and the managing director of the company in charge of the project's construction were brothers. This is one of the factors that helps explain the brutal beating handed to protestors against the scheme by Czechoslovak police in 1991. Czechoslovak President Vaclav Havel, himself formerly a subject of the socialist regime's brutality, did not deign to reply to the letter of protest against that atrocity. Meanwhile, Hungary's first freely-elected parliament declared that, due to the likelihood of economic and environmental damage, no part of the project should be built or brought into operation. In 1992 Czechoslovakia used a temporary barrage on its territory to dam and divert the Danube, which marks the border between the two countries. Hungary, alluding to the threats of diversion and the diversion's likely ecological crisis, unilaterally terminated the 1977 treaty in 1992, and sees the diversion as a serious breach of international law concerning multilateral treaties and territorial integrity. Slovakia, which had in the meantime split from the Czech Republic and become an independent country, considers the diversion to be legal, arguing that the 1977 treaty still holds, and insisting that Hungary must pay substantial compensation as well as finishing the construction of the project. Following pressure by the European Union on Slovakia it agreed to take the matter to the International Court of Justice in The Hague in 1993. Both countries stand by official positions they. have expressed in the thousands of pages of documentation the litigation has since generated.

The Gabcikovo-Nagymaros Dam trial began on March 3 1997 before the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in The Hague. The trial will naturally generate considerable interest in Hungary and Slovakia. The signs are, however, that the decision of the ICJ will also be widely scrutinized outside these two directly affected countries. According to the American lawyer and geologist Gabriel Eckstein, "International Law as it pertains to shared natural resources is being put to the test in the present dispute between Hungary and Slovakia. Both countries have claims upon the transboundary water resources of the region and both contend that the other violated the rightful use of their resources. Notwithstanding the lack of precedent, the dispute offers a prime opportunity for the application of international water law to questions of the use and ownership of transboundary groundwater resources. It also presents an opportunity for the development of international water law and for the application of an integrated approach to the management and protection of shared water resources. Such an approach requires cooperation and effective administration of these finite resources. Consequently, the question remaining is whether international water law will meet the challenge of scientific knowledge and societal needs, or whether it will continue to lag behind the times." (Eckstein, G: Application of International Water Law to Transboundary Groundwater Resources, and the Slovak-Hungarian Dispute Over Gabcikovo-Nagymaros. Suffolk Transnational Law Review, Vol 16, p. 67.)

Similar importance is placed on the trial in The Hague by a document drawn up by nine Slovak, Hungarian and international environmental organizations in or-

der to be presented to the International Court of Justice as an Amicus Curiae aide mémoire. According to the authors, "the significance of the issues now before this court cannot be overstated: the Court has never been faced with a case of this potential to shape multinational environmental rights and duties regarding shared natural resources (i.e. watersheds) and the human impacts of development. [...] As this case presents the first opportunity for the ICJ to clarify a state's obligation to protect the environment during the course of the development, use and allocation of a shared natural resource, the Courts' decision will have far-reaching implications for other regions of the world, in addition to those individuals and groups in the region. The decision will articulate environmental law that will have a permanent effect as well, guiding future developments in the field." (International Court of Justice, Case Concerning the Gabcikovo-Nagymaros Project (Hungary/Slovakia) NGO Memorial on Legal and Scientific Issues. Prepared by Slovak, Hungarian and International NGOs with Expertise in Environment and Development: Greenpeace, Slovakia; Human Right Advocates, U.S.A.; International Rivers Network, U.S.A.; Natural Heritage Institute, U.S.A.; Reflex Environmental Protection Society, Hungary; Sierra Club Legal Defense Club, U.S.A.; Slovak Rivers Network, Slovakia; SZOPK, Central Danube, Slovakia; WWF (World Wide Fund for Nature, Switzerland).

Some Slovak and Hungarian interest groups endeavour to cancel the case and encourage a deal between the two countries. These efforts contradict the Hungarian Parliament's decision to "confirm that the decision of the ICJ in The Hague concerning the case in front of them should be used to solve the legal dispute between Hungary and Slovakia instigated by the unilateral decision to divert the Danube." (25/1994. (IV.13) OGY decision)

If the case really is of such interest and importance, it is not immaterial which sources are used to gain information about the details of the international legal dispute between Hungary and Slovakia, the origins of the conflict, and its possible solutions. Clearly, only a few people have access to the documents submitted to the ICJ by both parties, and, apart from international lawyers and specialists in the field, most would probably have trouble finding their bearings in the thousands of pages of material. So what other sources are there? Slovakia is publishing propaganda trying to popularize its standpoint; material defending the diversion of the Danube and the completion of the dam according to the original plans can be found in every shape or form, from leaflets to the Internet. Hungary, it seems, is less industrious. Arguments supporting the official Hungarian position, as submitted to the ICJ, are more likely to be found in material published by environmental organizations or distributed on the Internet.

To my knowledge, there is only one readily accessible work presenting and attempting to compare the standpoints of the two parties and that is John Fitzmaurice's 1996 book Damming the Danube.

The author is professor at the Institute of European Studies of the University of Brussels and is administrator in the General Secretariat of the Commission of the European Communities in the Department for Liaison with the European Parliament. Thus the author is not just an academic, but a participant in the Brussels Eurobureaucracy. It is reasonable to assume, then, that his perspective on the Danube issue must be quite close to that of the European Union's politicians and administrators as a whole. This assumption is supported by the short description on the cover of the book: "Based on a

wealth of primary research, this balanced book considers the broad political, economic, social, legal, and environmental implications of the dam project—not just for Hungary and Slovakia, but for Europe as a whole". Although stretching slightly further than matter directly in hand, a Europerspective like this can be interesting for its own sake, and gives some help in understanding how the European Union views these countries, impoverished by Soviet rule, so keen to join it. The review only has scope for the examination of the main elements of the picture, and a handful of critical observations are sufficient to show where the Euromirror is chipped and where it distorts.

The author, relying on extensive support from the literature, and on the basis of visits to the locations and interviews with a wide selection of those affected, believes he has found the answer to the dam issue. After a short description of the situation, the introduction to the second chapter presents the claim that, "The key to the dam question lies in the difficult relationship between Slovak nationalism and the Czechs and Hungarians. Gabcikovo has become a symbol of Slovak national independence and pride, to be defended equally against Prague and Budapest. One might argue that if the relationships between Bratislava and Budapest and between Bratislava and Prague had been better, the dam project could have been cancelled in 1990 as both Prague and Budapest actually wanted. In that context, Gabcikovo became an almost unique Slovak victory over both the Czechs and the Hungarians." (p. 5.) Accordingly, he goes on to analyse in detail the development of relations between the three nations and states from 1848 until the present day. This study, which fills a good half of the book's 137 pages, is primarily one of political and diplomatic history. Much of this covers the three small countries' political ambitions, schemes and mistakes, measures of lesser and greater importance, but much less about how the great powers might be responsible for events in the inter-war period and afterwards. It is not just from a general perspective that this question can be raised. Previous to and immediately following the diversion of the Danube in 1992, for instance, the Commission of the European Union offered to mediate, although in practice this had little effect on the construction of the so-called version C, the building and operation of a dam serving the diversion at Dunacsúny. We are given no more than an outline of this event (pp. 104–105), from which it is hardly clear to the reader why the mediation was unsuccessful. Of course we cannot know much about secret diplomatic manoeuvering, but there is information readily available, albeit ignored by the book, which points to the two-facedness of the intermediators. For instance, Brussels selected a Danish hydrologist to lead the trilateral (EU-Hungarian-Slovak) committee who had worked directly with the Slovak side as part of an EU programme. An account of lobbying of the Danube-Main-Rhine Channel Association, the participation of Austrian firms in the construction, and the 200 million dollar loan, arranged by J. P. Morgan and provided by Western banks, for the completion of constructions where the Danube was diverted unilaterally, could have added much to the picture.

Even more badly missed is a discussion of how contradictory has been the behaviour of the Hungarian side. The book only touches on, as a secondary motive, the fact that Hungary remained divided over the issue after the change of regime. If the author had undertaken a deeper analysis of this question, he may have found the answer to lie partly, or even completely, outside the complex relations between the

Hungarians and the Slovaks. The hostility between the two peoples, the sensitive question of the almost half-million-strong Hungarian minority in Slovakia, and related issues concerning language rights and Hungarian-language education, are obviously and unambiguously related to the dam problem. But the nature of the relationship is debatable. Study of the subject has led me to a different conclusion: that the international hostility argument is just one of many used by the constructors of big dams and other hydraulic projects, primarily interested in their private profits, in trying to persuade politicians to spend public funds on such investments. Groups with interests in these investments (who, by dint of the crucial state role in preventing damage to water, are in any case on good terms with the powers that be) try to obtain public funds by stressing benefits of a political nature, and making their private gain seem in the interest of the common good. This is clearly displayed in instances like the diversion of the Rhine on the Franco-German border, or the construction of the Danube-Main-Rhine canal, to mention only the best-known European examples. A lesser-known example is that of the Hungarian hydraulic engineer Ödön Bogdánfy, who argued early this century that it was primarily the economic progress of the Hungarians that would be served by the potential hydraulic projects in areas inhabited by ethnic minorities in the Carpathians.

Sometime the world's most powerful of political forces have to withdraw from hydraulic investments. According to the authors of a paper on the social and environmental effects of large dams, "If the eagerness of politicians to bring home the pork is one side of the dam-building coin, the power of those institutions which build and plan dams and other water projects is the other. Handling vast budgets, and enjoying considerable political power themselves, they are well-versed in the art of lobbying. [...] Whatever the means used to obtain its influence in Congress, the US Corps of Engineers—together with the Bureau of Reclamation—undoubtedly wields considerable political power on Capitol Hill. When in 1979 President Carter tried to put through a bill which would have created a new department, the Department of Natural Resources, and made it responsible for reviewing water projects, his efforts were stymied by the Corps and its allied agencies. Later, in 1980, Carter was forced to lift his presidential veto on a proposed bill which would have sanctioned $4,200,000,000 worth of water projects - a bill he called 'a travesty, wasteful, destructive and expensive.'" (Goldsmith, E. &. Hildyard, N.: *The Social and Environmental Effects of Large Dams.* A report to The European Ecological Action Group (ECOROPA). Wadebridge Ecological Centre, Worthyvale Manor, Camelford, Cornwall, UK. Vol. I. pp. 262–263.)

It is my belief that the analysis of such approaches would have enriched the book. It is not my objection that the author intentionally remains as neutral as possible on such issues. He has rightly made every effort to accompany each argument with a counterargument. But I am still afraid that he has not succeeded in exploring the various nuances of the question well enough to give the reader more than just the basic story: not enough for him to develop his own judgement of the legal case, bring out new ideas, or decide what should be done to solve the unsettled question of the Danube. ❧

Tamás Koltai

Molnár and Anti-Molnár

Ferenc Molnár: *A jó tündér* (The Good Fairy) • *Az üvegcipő* (The Glass Slipper) • *Liliom*

On the 11th October 1930, the Vígszínház put on a new play by Ferenc Molnár, *The Good Fairy.* Apart from being a social event, the performance had also been preceded by a larger than usual publicity campaign focusing on the fact that it was to be the 750th performance of a Molnár play in Budapest's most fashionable theatre. The press spared no words on the preparations, including daily reports on the rehearsals, with much detail on how many times the playwright, who usually directed his plays, gave a good dressing-down to the leading lady, and what he ate in a nearby restaurant.

The greatest star in all Molnár productions was Ferenc Molnár himself. As a playwright he left a lasting imprint on the Hungarian theatre during the first half of this century. At his peak his plays were performed all over Europe and he is said to have made one million dollars in the 1920s alone. Many of his works went onto the screen; *The Good Fairy,* for instance, was adapted for the cinema twice in the 1930s and also had a Broadway musical version after the war, *Make a Wish.* Even more famous is *Carousel,* the musical based on the play *Liliom,* which reached stages all over the world, including the Royal National Theatre in London.

Molnár presents a dual challenge to the Hungarian theatre: he has to be done justice to and he has to be escaped from. This is a paradox so hopeless to resolve that it would probably have filled him with great satisfaction. The British theatre-goer, with an incessant succession of Shakespeare interpretations, probably displays more empathy towards the dilemma. While certainly not wanting to compare Molnár to Shakespeare, the point is that the changes that have taken place in the theatre and in the world in general in which he wrote his plays have to be reckoned with. Interpreting Shakespeare amounts to interpreting the world, since Shakespeare's plays reflect fundamental questions about the human condition. Unassuming Molnár contented himself with describing, with tenderness and on occasion badinage, his own middle-class world, urban life and the aristocracy; he used a simple, or perhaps seemingly simple, dramatic form highlighted by an easy-flowing, sentimental or frivolous plot and finely wrought, witty dialogue. The dilemma is whether the theatre should persist in cultivating a genre which is called, often in a deprecatory manner, "drawing-room drama", with conventions unchanged

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for decades, and which many critics claim has become worn out in the hands of Molnár's faithful yet less talented epigones, and which ousted the contemporary European avant-garde contemporary with Molnár from the Hungarian theatres. Or should the theatre experiment with alternative modes of production with a view to rediscovering Molnár's plays?

This is a case of changing receptivity and a reinterpretation of the relationship between the theatre and its audience in the wider sense. Some in the theatre world want to get away from the aura of the Molnár plays, the elegance of gilded Baroque auditoria with velvet-upholstered seats, the affected airs put on by the actors, the noise and gossip around the theatre, the intimacies and bedroom secrets—all of which was part and parcel of middle-class theatrical life à la Molnár. Those in the anti-Molnár camp hold that Hungarian drama can only be redeemed through a radical dismissal of Molnár's dramaturgy and that the Hungarian theatre can only be revitalized by rejecting its drawing-room traditions.

Of recent revivals of Molnár's plays, the production of *The Good Fairy* is the most conventional. A rarely played comedy, it is performed in the Radnóti Theatre, a small playhouse in the Inner City of Budapest, generally perceived as "middle-class". The plot is banal. Dezső Kosztolányi, who happens to be one of the greatest of Hungarian writers, summed it up eight days after the première in 1930:

> Once upon a time, in 1930, there was an orphan girl in Budapest who wore a yellow coat and a red skirt and made her living by ushering late-comers into the darkened auditorium of a cinema holding a torch—a sort of "fire-fly", a "familiar insect" of metropolitan life. She meets the chairman of an American trust who woos her fervently but she lies to him claiming she is a married woman, the wife of a lawyer. The millionaire is willing to employ the non-existent husband as legal adviser at an annual salary of 140,000 pengős—an opportunity not to be missed by the girl. She is doomed to make others happy. She thumbs through the telephone book and she picks a lawyer's name at random. He is a maverick. He writes articles on legal matters and is a rotten businessman. All the assets he has are his knowledge of the law and his complacency, in addition to his huge beard which he scents with lily-of-the-valley scent. This is the man to whom the girl directs the American who, thoroughbred Yankee as he is, contracts him on the spot. The "foundling", forty-eight years of age, has his day of glory, makes plans, wonders at the stroke of luck he has, which brightens up grey reality, only to realize soon that the "bargain is off" and he is down and out as he was before. This is how fairy tales are born.

The *Good Fairy* is not Molnár at his best. It is in fact two plays rather than one, with the two never coming together. The good fairy of the cinema and the hobgoblin of a lawyer have nothing whatsoever in common. Nor does Molnár want them to have. So much so that an epilogue that takes place ten years after tells us that the good fairy has in the meantime married a minor character who appears in Act One—incidentally, an undersecretary in a ministry. A Molnár in good form would probably have offered some justification as to why this cinema fire-fly, who aspired to be like Shakespeare's Puck or Titania, had become hardened to match the dull reality around her. But this structurally redundant epilogue fails to disclose one.

In his direction István Verebes, connoisseur of the stylish, the playful and the facile, has confined himself to evoking onstage a taste of bygone ages. The acting is informed by refinement and elegance and the original text is unchanged except for the addition of a couple of puns. An invention of the director's is a small statue of Justitia standing in the lawyer's office, always ready to topple under the effect of

the vibrations created by traffic passing outside and always saved by the secretary. When the lawyer "sells himself," the statuette inevitably is shattered and is replaced by a small copy of the Statue of Liberty, a symbol of unlimited opportunity.

The protagonist in *The Glass Slipper* (written six years before *The Good Fairy*) is Irma, who calls herself a maid servant fairy, another in the long line of Molnár's whimsical and potty servant girls, a "literary fairy" attracted to Shakespeare who goes to "have fun" in the National Theatre where Shakespeare has such a wonderful name, Cycle. By day she cooks, waits on, washes and cleans for Mr Sipos, the lodger. He is a cabinet-maker, a middle-aged bachelor and the lover of Adél, the landlady. Irma is also in love with the man she calls "Angry" to herself. She is more or less content with this state of affairs until the aging Adél decides to marry Sipos, once she recognizes that her affair with Pali, another lodger and much younger, has no future. Difficult as he is to get out of the rut, Sipos is easily duped. Not so the amorous servant maid who takes to the field to win her "Angry" back and manages to create a rumpus at the wedding party. In Act Three, after an encounter with the police, the odd couple set out on their way, hand in hand.

An alloy of urban folklore and virtuoso stage technique, *The Glass Slipper* is one of Molnár's prime works. Life is presented in a tearful and smiling lyrical vein, just as affectated and mannered as theatre-going urbanites like to see the life of "folks" somewhat alien to them. It calls for firm intentions on the part of the director. He has to decide on the exact proportions of reality and theatricality, of the conventional saccharine to be left in the play and the no-nonsense reality to be admitted.

The Csiky Gergely Theatre of Kaposvár is a guarantee for the success of the modern, pithy theatrical style which is closer to our day. For about twenty-five years now, Kaposvár has been a centre of the theatre of disillusionment and realism. It was the cradle of the reform of the Hungarian theatre. *The Glass Slipper* is directed by one of the leading actors of the company, Zoltán Bezerédi. His direction is in the spirit of his earlier work, displaying a feeling for the easy and natural and lifelike detail. The originality of the production unfolds from Act Two onwards. In Act One the director is still busy scraping off the sugar coating, to show Irma "la Douce" as a facetious slovenly hoyden instead of the bewitching maid. After the first intermission the *Gesamtkunstwerk* of the company starts to get going. The wedding party takes place on two planes. The "second" on the laid table backstage, with non-stop wining and dining, music, singing and dancing, taking of snapshots, highlights as it were the "close-up" of the trio of protagonists. When the scandal culminates, it starts raining on-stage, the electric wires flash and Irma, soaked through, suffers grave atrocities. Act Three takes place at the police station and is more turbulent than envisaged by the author. Iron bars of prison cells rattle, those arraigned are taken to be interrogated upstairs by lift, and a Gypsy fop—brought in for God knows what reason—is escorted to detention by a bunch of wailing Gypsy girls. Molnár's storyland is expanded and soaks up the nurturing juices of our everyday reality. Without abandoning the lyric quality of a transparent and light comedy, the production shows up timelier truths in the play.

The most famous of Molnár plays set among "poor people" is *Liliom,* written in 1909. The story of the little maid servant and the fun fair barker first had the floss stripped off it in Kaposvár, in a László Babarczy production fifteen years ago. This tale is easily told with a measure of

syrup. Juli follows Liliom at his first word, the "showman nobleman" born free, adored by both the customers and the lady owner of the merry-go-round. The owner of the merry-go-round sacks her former lover. Liliom is too proud to take on the job of a caretaker. He would rather not work at all, and takes out his bad conscience by beating his wife. When he learns she is pregnant he decides to go to America because there is "manufacturing industry" there with jobs available. To raise money he turns to robbery, on the advice of a thuggish crony. The robbery is a fiasco, and Liliom turns his knife on himself before he is arrested. After death Liliom is taken before the magistrate in Heaven, as all suicides are, who condemns him to Purgatory and bids him to return to Earth for a day on his daughter's sixteenth birthday. Liliom brings a star as a gift, but when she is obstinate he hits her on the hand. However, it does not hurt—simple, good-willed souls, especially when dead and pure of heart, can't hurt people. And this is how Liliom is remembered by Juli who brings up their daughter in decency.

Babarczy hit upon the idea of exchanging two scenes in his production, putting the famous scene in Heaven as a "flash forward", a vision Liliom has before his death. The carousel barker was taken to the Heavenly police on a roller-coaster, looking exactly as how an uneducated showman would imagine it. Molnár's "legend from the outskirts" met with the more pithy poetry of the modern age.

The Hevesy Theatre of Zalaegerszeg invited an Italian to stage *Liliom.* Paolo Magelli works primarily for South Slav theatres and is unaffected by the Hungarian Molnár tradition. He has no idea of the associations attached to the amusement park, the Liget in Budapest, nor is he familiar with typical figures in the Pest underworld or maid servants speaking a peculiar slang, Molnárian cockney. Magelli may have had a whole fun fair built up around the venue—a disused factory transformed for the purpose—but his direction lacks any claim to realism.

The set is a self-contained world among raw concrete walls and operating autonomously. A stunted tree, a pool, rail tracks with a rail-car provide a surrealistic set that offers itself for montage. No natural atmosphere can be created here. "You're sitting here with me in total darkness," Liliom says to Juli in bright lights. The production is based on elements of the avant-garde group theatre. Juli is not allowed near the dying Liliom and is instead turned around on a small table by the cast. The actors take their clothes off in order to dress in "ritual" mourning for washing the dead body, which takes long minutes. At other times ritual theatre is replaced by bizarre ideas. Police arrive on bicycles even though someone has spoken about their horses earlier. They beat up the mourners and, after the intermission, yell at the audience to get back to their seats. They let the underworld character escape who planned the murder and robbery and who tries to rape the mourning Juli—something entirely out of character in this play. In the Heaven scene several hundred candles are lit at the same time, a spectacular effect that draws audience applause. A haloed heavenly orchestra plays operetta music. The music hall atmosphere is again a twist in style.

Unfortunately, the acting is poor. This Liliom has no mystery, he is simply a large oafish male who makes his first entry carrying two girls on his back and who on meeting Juli starts pulling down her knickers. It seems you cannot do justice to Molnár in a "contemporary" manner, using a chic theatrical idiom which is internationally convertible and may still bring success at third-rate festivals. Nor can you escape him. For that you need a new dramatic concept and new conventions in acting. ❧

Erzsébet Bori

Life and Literature

Sándor Sára: *A vád* (The Prosecution) • György Molnár: *A rossz orvos* (The Bad Doctor) • Lívia Gyarmathy: *Szökés* (Escape)

Sára is the filmmaker who has done most to disclose recent Hungarian history on film, most notably through his documentary series about the Hungarian Second Army, annihilated in 1943 on the Soviet front, about Hungarians who had been American POWs (treated in the fifties as possible spies), about women taken to the Gulag at the time of the Soviet liberation/occupation.

A by-product of this heroic documentary work has been one or two feature films by Sára. *The Prosecution* is one of these, although the script has literary origins. The novelist Nándor Gion (from Vojvodina, Yugoslavia, now resettled in Hungary) tells a true story that the director came across during his documentary work. The subject is, to say the least, sensitive. If the film had been made before 1989, it would have stayed in cans waiting for freer climes. A Hungarian peasant family, the father invalided out of the army, two unmarried daughters, a young married daughter and her son and the mother who rules the family, withdraw to a remote farm hoping to wait there for the war to pass over them. When the soldier son comes home on a short leave, the mother will not let him return to the Russian front. They succeed in deceiving the gendarmes who come looking for the deserter, but the family does not escape the arrival of the Russians. They immediately requisition all the stock of food and butcher the livestock. The soldiers set eyes on the girls, two come back that same night but the girls' brother comes out of his hiding place and prevents the rape. One Russian dies, the other escapes wounded. What follows brings the historical feature film close to the genres of horror and pornography: the familiar perversions of political pornography (blackmail, manipulation and show trial) are piled onto mental and physical torture and gang rape. The outcome of the story is familiar too: death or the Gulag.

The Prosecution is, however, a shining example of how even such an honourable intention can work against itself. Sára forgets that he is not making a documentary but a feature film, and hence the formal rules are different. He forgets, too, the warning by the poet describing the trip wires on the passage between fact and fiction: "tell the truth not just the authentic". What makes a documentary believable is that it keeps faith with the participants' own truth. But, a feature film is not legitimized by the fact that it is based on a true

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Erzsébet Bori
is our regular film critic.

story. The documentary has always been Sára's stronger suit.

György Molnár has set himself the goal of getting Hungarian literature onto the screen. His last film adapted the novel *Hrabal's Book* by Péter Esterházy. This time he has transferred to the screen a short story, "The Bad Doctor," by Dezső Kosztolányi, the great master of the first half of the century. (Kosztolányi was a master in practically every genre and form, as poet, novelist, short story writer and essayist, not to mention translations, articles on language, theatre criticism).

The choice of material is spot on, but not the execution. Molnár can be praised for his portrayal of the milieu, the middle-class of the thirties, but falls down in representing the characters' inner life. His adaptation is accurate but superficial.

The short story is not in fact about a bad doctor, despite the presence of a Dr Gasparek who has a successful practice in a fashionable neighbourhood in Buda. In the corner grocery, legendary stories are told of his good deeds, of miraculous cures—the butcher's wife's headache, the carriage driver's cold. If, God forbid, a patient should die, the doctor still gets his share of respect. Even Gasparek could no longer help him, they say piously. Gasparek is a sort of successor to the surgeons who pulled teeth in the market place and swore by expectorants and enemas (the predecessor of today's natural healers), who bases a successful practice on the belief that most patients get better by themselves anyway.

Three year old little István does not get better. The cause of his death is not our bad doctor but a lack of parental love. Vilma and István live in a bad marriage, a relationship built not on feelings but on a rational choice with a certain undercurrent of self delusion. Vilma was afraid she would stay single, István was getting bored with his bachelor existence. They meet, deem each other a suitable match, quickly marry. The Italian honeymoon is pleasant, they settle down, enjoy the new situation a little and then, with lightning speed, get bored with the whole thing. They both look for new relationships and in a quiet and civilized manner agree on a divorce. The only thing they do not agree on is István. There is no room for the child in the life of his mother and her new husband, or time for him in the life of the father building his career. Until things got settled, they give István a few new toys and engage a German nanny. While the divorce proceeds, Vilma prepares her new life, István looks up old flames and, in the office, achieves his life's ambition: the desk of a department head. It is only little István's problems that are not solved.

Until he comes down with a fever, and dies within a few days. The couple mourn, divorce, start a new life. Vilma's new husband advances slowly in his profession, they live modestly. István moves into a hotel and takes to playing cards. Unexpectedly, incomprehensibly, at the card table, he remembers his son. Not for two years had he remembered him so vividly. From then on, the couple start to seek each other out again, as an addict after a fix. Together they suffer, remember, make excuses and accusations. The word love is heard again, a word for a secret feeling that only shows itself by its absence. István and Vilma suffer from a deficiency of love, the disease that killed their little boy.

The subject of *The Bad Doctor* is the emptiness and loneliness of most big city dwellers, the unbearable narrowness of lives stuck in a groove, from which the only escape is work, cards, drink, new loves, anything, so long as for a time we can feel that at least we exist.

In Budapest between the two wars, in the capital of a more or less modernized country, it was Kosztolányi who described and diagnosed the age with unerring accu-

racy, ahead of internationally respected psychologists and sociologists.

The Bad Doctor does not make pleasant reading, with its findings weighing heavily on the soul. Yet what it contains was just the beginning. György Molnár's situation at the end of our century is very fortunate. He is in a position to study the age in its highly developed state, with whole libraries of technical and literary works to assist him. But he draws no conclusion, he could not live up to his chosen material.

Since the beginnings of narrative, escape has been one of the grand themes of literature. Odysseus escaped, so did Casanova, the Count of Monte Christo, Papillon and Lassie. Escape is still popular in Hollywood, with island prisons established and unknown galaxies discovered almost every week to keep the genre going.

Escape, the latest film by the filmmaking partnership of Lívia Gyarmathy and Géza Böszörményi, is a romantic historic adventure. In keeping with the period depicted, the costumes display a sober elegance and favour natural materials—rough canvas and foot rags. Two basic styles are cut: prisoners' garb and soldiers' uniform, the latter in a version with blue collar tabs. (The cut signifies the Soviet influence and the blue is that of the secret police).

The Gyarmathy–Böszörményi main theme is the fifties and the Recsk forced labour camp. They have already made a two-part documentary on it and had one of its famous residents, the poet György Faludy, talk about it. Even in an earlier Böszörményi film, *Laura,* rock guitarists strummed away in the quarry at Recsk. Their obsession is understandable: Böszörményi himself was a prisoner in the camp.

Not surprising then, they realized that a major (successful) escape story was lying unused in the Recsk chapter of recent Hungarian history. *Escape* does not just deal with a new portion of the story, which has already been told in different ways, but sticks to the rules of the escape genre in a full blooded feature film. Exactly as much is said as is strictly necessary about the circumstances, the harsh security, the camp's everyday life and the everyday horrors for the heroic enterprise to be appreciated. Gyula Molnár, (modelled on the actual protagonist, Gyula Michnai), comes from the Desmoulin family, which settled in Hungary and is well known to history. He is no tyro in the art of escape. Scars on his neck—the traces of the entry and exit points of a bullet—demonstrate his leanings to notoriety. This wound will also figure in the thorough plan to which Molnár devotes the cunning of a snake, the gentleness of a dove and the patience of an ox. His own behaviour is the height of playacting, for he has to deceive his fellow prisoners (liberally dotted with informers) as well as the camp's governors and guards. The camp commandant himself (Gyula Bodrogi) is not an enemy. This Spanish civil war hero is now a pathetic alcoholic. His wife long ago left him, he is bringing up his children alone and the camp is effectively governed by a political officer (Daniel Olbrychski), inferior in rank but his superior in terms of power. What follows is the outwitting of this cunning and vicious ÁVH (secret police) officer, who operates according to the basic principle that you cannot trust people but you can rely on their cowardice and baseness. The hardest test is, that to go through with his plan, Molnár has himself looked on by his fellow inmates as an informer: they despise him, spit on him, play tricks on him.

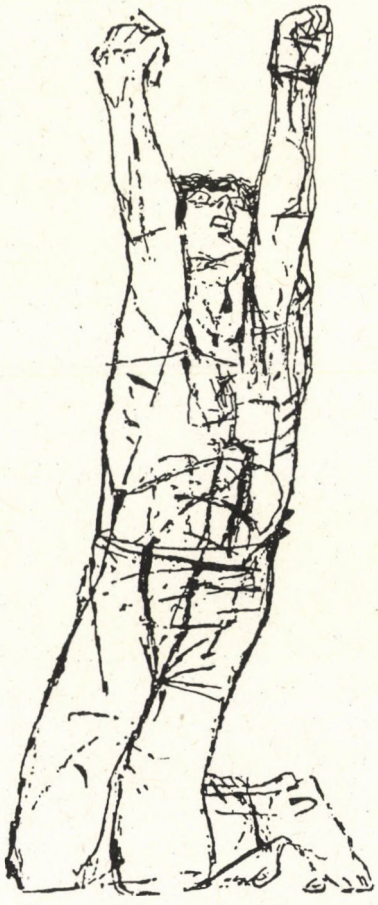
György Faludy also remembers the escape in his autobiography, *My Happy Days in Hell,* translated into several languages, which appeared in English in 1962. Gyula Michnai—according to Faludy—was a pleasant young man, a graduate of a school for officers; his plan was brilliant.

He carved a wooden machine gun in the carpentry workshop, substituting pieces of tin cans for the appropriate steel parts. On May 20th, a Sunday morning, in the tailoring and shoe-making workshop, where the ÁVH officers had their uniforms ironed and ordered extra boots for themselves made from the leather which was supposed to be for the repair of inmates boots, he dressed from head to toe in an ÁVH guard's uniform. Then, with his flat hat tilted down over his eyes, he drove seven friends in front of him to the fence gate. There he yelled to the soldier on duty to let them out. The commander of the shoe-making workshop, a sad faced, dark man, who was a bookseller in civilian life, got frightened and called back "I am not going!"—whereupon Michnai kicked him in the backside with all his might, so that he flew out in front of the barbed wire fence. With this gesture, Michnai dispelled all possible doubt. He marched out through the gate with his seven mates and disappeared into the depths of the forest. In a Hollywood production, the end titles and triumphant music would now follow. But for Molnár and his friends the worst is still to come. All they have done so far is to get out of the innermost circles of hell into a wider prison. No helicopter, car, secret bank account, buried treasure or intrepid heroine awaits them; nor can they turn to family or friends. Dictatorship is not only felt in the bleak outside world but also in people's souls and in their behaviour; more difficult than the simple and splendid escape is wrestling with the faint-heartendness, suspicion and stupidity of one's companions.

Géza Böszörményi and Gyula Maros have written a masterful script based on the true story of this Recsk escape, although the same cannot be said for the camerawork (Gábor Balogh), or the directing. There are some fine and powerful images there, as well as a few glaring false notes struck (such as a close-up filling the whole screen of two hands letting each other go), arty slow motion and freeze frames typical of bad action movies. The uplifting denouement is interrupted by the screaming of a second-rate rock star, whereupon the audience, completely disregarding the cathartic ending, leave the auditorium in a panic. Neither music and these images are appropriate to the period described or to the rather traditional style of narrating this Hungarian success story.

Although I have mentioned romantic adventure, *Escape* keeps historic accuracy in sight throughout (despite well fed actors making belief difficult in the dreadful starvation punishments). Gyula Molnár is not Barrymore putting the enemy to the sword all on his own, evading the state's entire police force, galloping to freedom on his magic steed. His companions fall out one by one, and without help from outside and an effective French connection, he would not have made it either. The film does not show, but Faludy tells us, that the effect of the successful escape was a long time coming. The world did not know, perhaps did not want to know, about Recsk. It took months for the CIA to check Michnai's assertions before he was finally given a Radio Free Europe microphone to recite the names he had learned by heart of the several hundred prisoners held at Recsk. Michnai's recitation of the roll call not only brought news to relatives of their loved ones who had disappeared without trace years before, but it also made the world aware of the existence of the Hungarian concentration camp.

If my hunch is right, Lívia Gyarmathy's film should do well on the international festival circuit. There are dozens of political thrillers and melodramas around which use a historic background. Taking a successful film like *The Killing Fields,* winner of three Oscars, as a benchmark, *Escape* stands out in its field. ❧



THE LEGACY OF THE 1956 HUNGARIAN REVOLUTION

Five participants
forty years later:

Andrew P. Fodor
János Horváth
Béla K. Király
Károly Nagy
László Papp

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HUNGARIAN ALUMNI ASSOCIATION
1996

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HUNGARIAN ALUMNI ASSOCIATION
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Let us pick any moment, say the evening of July 3rd 1935, to visit the Café Budapest. It is a fashionable coffee-house. Elegant, spacious, well-lit, clean, with fine, large windows —everything there is to say about it must be said in its favour. That it is expensive only means that everything it has to offer is perfectly delicious. It is L-shaped. Not like a normal, everyday L, but like a stylized one, the stems of which, but especially the lower, horizontal one, are quite thick. From this reference to the L-shape of the coffee-house it is obvious that it is in a corner building. Yes, the windows of the longer, narrower part open onto a side street, and the windows of the shorter, wider part open onto the boulevard. On this July 3rd it is summer, it is hot, the temperature in the noon hours—according to the meteorological report—peaked at 30° Celsius, therefore most of the windows of the coffee-house are open, with the entrance door on the boulevard side left open also, to serve as a large open window itself. On a weekday, a Wednesday, there are few in the coffee-house. All the more easy to survey the forty-odd people collected here, of whom thirty-six are on the terrace.

From Lajos Nagy: Café Budapest, pp. 44–67.

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