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MUSIC

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Cover: The poet Attila József

János Kőbányai

Bosnia, Choices and Elections

Before the municipal elections could take place in Bosnia on September 13 and 14, 1997, a variety of political intentions, an even greater variety of institutions and organizations, with their different styles and languages, had to be brought into some sort of accord. After years of preparation and repeated postponements, one hundred Hungarian observers were sent to Bosnia in order to observe (not oversee) the elections. They had to fit into a machinery that was already going full-steam. Every moment of the week and a half, from the time we left for Bosnia to the moment the votes were counted, was spent within the cogs of an extremely complex and intricate mechanism.

The members of our delegation, also sponsored by the US Embassy in Hungary and operating within the scope of the OSCE (Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe), were chosen by the Elections Supervision Department. Made up, for the most part, by public administration professionals with a knowledge of English, the group also included university students, military officers with experience in foreign service, and teachers. These had joined the delegation mostly through personal contacts, or by responding to advertisements in newspapers. The US government and the OSCE provided 300 million dollars to ensure that the elections would go down well, and thus help bring peace to the Balkans. This meant that proper election procedures had to be guaranteed in 2,700 electoral districts. Polling station supervisors and observers came from all parts of the world. The 100-member Hungarian delegation was the second largest, after the 400-strong team from the US.

We had barely landed at the airport when strident American coordinators and their reliable Croat assistants checked our names off their lists and herded us into buses waiting to take us to our hotel near Zagreb. Like so many nuts and bolts, we were placed on a conveyor belt at the end of which (the "conveyor

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belt" included a strict head-count on and off the bus and a quick cram-course in courage and optimism), we were provided with identification tags produced by highly efficient computers and ID tag machines. These we had to wear at all times during our official stay in the region. We were also supplied with a per diem (165 DM per day), and highly detailed itineraries. Then we were on our way as international observers to the virtual land of a virtual Bosnia-Herzegovina, one and indivisible only as far as international organizations and the pages of international treaties are concerned.

It was at this point that we learned that the Hungarians had been assigned to the Republika Srpska, which is now a state unto itself—and at war. I was one of thirty-four who were assigned to a place called Prnjavor. We learned where the others were going—Doboj and Banja Luka—only thanks to the information shouted out to us through the windows of the other departing buses, as they left in the descending twilight.

We crossed the bridge at Okuchany in the dark, then spent several more hours winding our way through the dark and narrow streets, which often resembled a labyrinth. At last we pulled up in front of a dilapidated hotel, where a brisk young man with a strong French accent handed each member of our tired group a large paper box containing a hat and waistcoat with the OSCE logo, a sign for the windshields of our cars, armbands, military maps of the region, a list of its radio districts, emergency and break-down signs, should anything happen to our cars *en route.* The boxes also included a small first aid kit for everyone, plus notebooks, pencils, even pencil sharpeners. *"You'll get the rest tomorrow morning,"* the young man said. *"Now get some sleep!"*

It turned out that our energetic late-night host was Jerome, an economist from Dijon who, as our Core Supervisor (CSPV), was also responsible for the next phase of the induction. The ball room of the hotel was turned into a temporary seminar room, where from nine in the morning until eight at night, with hardly a breather in between, we came under a relentless barrage of information. We were given details on the political and sociological situation in general, and on how to deal with the population and the local participants. We were also given a hefty Xeroxed binder, *Welcome to Prnjavor Election Office,* which included, among other things, a short English–Serb and Serb–English dictionary, an article on hunting down war criminals, taken from *The Economist,* information on Serb culture, a short history of Yugoslavia, radio codes, plus everything you always wanted to know about the region; there was also an emergency scenario in case of evacuation, and the itinerary, broken down by the hour, for the next two weeks of our stay. Then came a slew of soldiers, all likable, and good lecturers too. A Norwegian lieutenant and a Danish air force captain lectured on the role and problems of the 35,000-man strong SFOR outfits, with special emphasis on those things that would help guarantee our work and personal safety. (For example, they mentioned five ways of asking for help from the local police, who

eyed us with something less than good will, to the helicopter that could be called in from the SFOR base at Banja Luka.) A mustachioed Indonesian from IPTF (International Police Task Force) lectured on the unarmed police and their function in conflict resolution (i.e., they act as mediators between the local forces and the foreign military), and assured us that on election day their men would show up at all the electoral districts at least once. Finnish soldiers instructed us on giving first aid and map reading, the British on sighting mines and other sundry work, as well as on how to use the radio. Concurrently with our "security" training, we were also introduced to our ITRN (International Trainer), Alberto Navarro, a friendly attorney from Barcelona, who spoke much too quickly for me to always comprehend and who, after a short introduction on public administration and constitutional law, set out to elaborate for our benefit the intricate story of the registration proceedings, from the pre-election Dayton accord to the present. After that, we were given our concrete assignments for the elections. He handed out a huge election manual which included the method of counting the ballot. With this, the detailed study of the electoral proceedings was begun, as well as the memorizing of and practice in the roles we would have to play, since—and this was repeatedly emphasized during our orientation course—though our role was to supervise the election proceedings, we would have the final say in any disputed matters and were to become intimately familiar with every aspect of the elections and their context. The idea of "sensitive material" was also illuminated for our benefit, to wit, any and all material that was called upon to prevent possible cheating or served as guidelines for recording the election results, and how they took shape. This "sensitive material" was also something that we would have to deal with, personally, if need be.

On the third day we were introduced to our personal interpreters and drivers, one to every two supervisors. They also gave us portable radios and car radios, and after a quick "radio check" around town, we left our hotel. Our group, joined by a number of Slovaks, Austrians and Americans, were scattered, some being sent to the Croatian border, to a small town called Srbac by the river Sava, while others went to the resort town of Laktasi, just outside Banja Luka. Those sent to Prnjavor headed in twos and threes to private houses rented especially for them. In this manner, we began to "plug" into local society.

The Prnjavor district is made up of five *obstina,* or local government areas, each with a town centre and surrounding agricultural villages and farms. The area between the Croatian border and Banja Luka, the present capital, has 170,000 inhabitants, not many fewer than before the war. Its composition, however, has changed, since the area, cleansed ethnically for Serbs, was settled by displaced persons from the Federation, as well as refugees from the *krainas* of Croatia.

Legally, a displaced person and a refugee are not identical. A displaced person is one whose homeland has been pulled out from under him, but no new

state will have him, while a refugee is one who has a virtual homeland, but for his own security, he cannot stay in the place where his papers say he belongs.

The inhabitants of Prnjavor number approximately 50,000. Before the war, the population was 70 per cent Serbs and 20 per cent Croats and Muslims. According to the census taken in 1991 with an eye to the elections (which also comprised the basis for the legal and political processes intended to reestablish pre-war conditions), 4,400 people considered themselves Italian, Polish, Czech, Ukrainian, Belorus and Hungarian (*pace* Austria-Hungary), as a consequence of which the city became known as "Little Europe". After the war, the Muslims and Croats numbered only a couple of hundred, while those who were not "involved" ethnically, numbered 1,400. Those who left the city were replaced, after the fighting stopped in 1995, by approximately 9,000 displaced Serbs. Just as in the Republika Srpska everywhere, here, too, the Serb Democratic Party, founded by Radovan Karadzic, was the major political power.

Prnjavor proved to be one of the few places unaffected by the war—unless, of course, we take into account the new, extravagant houses of those who became rich as its consequence, the newly built row of shops and the shopping centre under construction across from the hotel, financed by a businessman who had emigrated to Germany. One thousand men from Prnjavor were killed in the fighting, and so there are four women to every man. (In Banja Luka this ratio is officially 20 to 1.) 60 to 65 per cent of those who returned are unemployed. This is evident wherever one looks: in the morning, unshaven men crowd the centre of town, milling about and looking for work, then after standing in line for hours, they head for one of the many cafés, whose terraces remain crowded till past midnight. I saw what I had seen in Sarajevo some years back: men chain-smoking as they wait for something to happen for what must seem like an eternity.

The father of my personal interpreter, Dragana, lost a leg in the war. Her mother runs a small shop and, like most people in these parts, she is also a sympathizer—indeed, a candidate—of the Seselj *filia,* the Serb Radical Party. Dragana, an attractive blonde who, after the elections, will continue her studies at the Department of Philosophy of the University of Banja Luka, and till then is an assistant at the Prnjavor cable television station, inspires my confidence so, despite our handbook, which cautions us in no uncertain terms to steer clear of politics—"talk about the family or the weather instead"—I venture to ask what she thinks about the Muslims whose *djamis,* were demolished by bulldozers, and have disappeared without trace. *"I can't hate them,"* she says, as if hating them were a matter of course. *"My best friend is a Muslim. We correspond, even now. She's in Australia. But after what's happened, living with them is inconceivable." "But neither of you had any problems or bad memories." "Still, that's how it is. Now it is Serb against Serb, though. Pale and Banja Luka. If you weren't here, we'd have fallen on each other by now. This is our fate, the Balkan curse."*

Igor is only one year her senior, but he is her godfather. The two families have been friends and associates for over a century. He is one of the lucky ones; he was chosen to be on the OSCE staff. Dragana has been saved from the monotony of ubiquitous cigarette smoking, even if only for two weeks. Interpreters receive 70 DM per day, drivers 90 DM. Dragana will use the money to continue her education. Igor's English is not as good as hers, but his family has a car, so he was given a job as a chauffeur. Dragana and he kiss each other ceremoniously, as is proper between a godfather and his goddaughter. Igor fought in the war for the whole four years. He can't remember any bad thing either about the Croats and Muslims from his childhood, though he obviously disapproves of his goddaughter exchanging letters with a Muslim. *"So much has happened, I saw so much blood and so much horror, I can't see a Muslim sitting down next to us on this terrace,"* he says with a wave of the arm toward the noisy groups sitting around us. *"At least, not in our or our childrens' lifetime. I drove an ambulance, and except for Sarajevo, I've been to all the fronts. Once I drove a Muslim casualty. We gave him proper treatment." "What became of him?" "We handed him over. He probably ended up in a PoW camp."*

Our electoral district headquarters were up in a school room twenty or twenty-five kilometres away, in the village of Veliko Ilava. We were responsible for checking the radio contact. The landscape was a beautiful bright green, and hilly, dotted by groups of split-level houses, some quite luxurious. The asphalt under our wheels, however, quickly gave way to a dirt road. The country is poor, and the co-ops were kept going by the men who went to the West to work and came back with their savings. If we were to believe the official statistics on income, just staying alive here would have had to be the equivalent of the Miracle of the Loaves and Fishes.

When we reach the school, it is deserted. The teachers are on strike, they have not been paid their 50 DM monthly salaries since May. Alberto, my partner, will be responsible for setting up the ballot boxes in two different places on the two election days, in a one-room school atop a hill, in the middle of a group of farms, and in a tent to be put up next to a shop at a crossroads. As we wait for our radio contact, the middle-aged teacher offers me *rakija.* He makes do as best he can from money sent to him by his sister, who lives in Sweden with her family. His one big wish is a passport that would enable him to go look for work elsewhere. He is presently teaching twelve children. With its wooden floorboards, abacus and wooden compass, the school room looks as if we had stepped into a bygone age. The modern age is represented only by a map of the republics of Yugoslavia, and an icon of Sv. Sava.

Seemingly simple problems, such as the identification of the voters, carry within them the history of the past six cursed years. Instead of official ID papers—provided they were destroyed during flight or in other life-threatening situations—we could accept the following forms of identification: passports, mili-

tary papers, citizenship papers, papers proving a change of name (necessitated in huge numbers by sagacious self-interest, I might add), official proof of displacement, official proof of refugee status, a town hall certificate, birth certificate, driver's license, official health records, a foreign passport with proof of dual citizenship and, if the worse came to the worst, if none of these were available, a declaration by two citizens of the town. To complicate matters, the absentee ballot procedure underscored not only the tragedy of the elections, but also raised the question whether in fact it would accomplish anything. This procedure was based on registration sheets which (very rightly) did not take ethnic cleansing into consideration, so provided that the information was available, the registry of voters was compiled according to the 1991 census. This set the stage for chaos. In our district, which is now called Srpski Brod, but was Bosanski Brod before the war, 41 per cent of the population were Croats, 34 per cent were Serbs, and 25 per cent Muslims. In the municipal elections, the votes cast by the displaced Croats from the other side of the river Sava were expected to bring victory to the HDZ (Croat Democratic Community); however, the problem is that no living Croat could enter Srpski Brod.

After we went through role-playing on how the voting and the verification and counting of the ballots would proceed, Alberto declared us ready for action, and we were introduced to our Polling Station Committees (PSC) and their chairmen. (The Xeroxed "dissertation", entitled "The First Meeting between the Supervisor and the Chairman", had the following to say on this matter: "The most important task at this meeting is to ensure good relationships. Ask the Chairman's opinion on every single issue, have a drink with him, and don't be arrogant.")

My PSC chairman was Dragisha, a fellow with crafty eyes, a beard, and tattoos on both arms. He was also the owner of a café. I had my job cut out for me. He lives a few hundred metres from the village school, and oversees his café in Prnjavor and his restaurant in Banja Luka from here. Earlier, he used to work as a waiter at Dalmatian seaside resorts, where he picked up some words from Hungarian tourists. He can even count in Hungarian. He has also worked seasonally in a number of small towns in Austria and Germany. *"How did you become a PSC chairman?"* I asked. *"I was an election observer last year,"* he says. (The participating parties were allowed to send their own observers to the polling stations, so we were also told what papers they needed in order to be seated at a table set aside for them, and how to handle their observations.) *"Whose party delegate were you?" "The Serb Democratic Party." "Fine."*

We agreed on a time to meet in front of the Central Electoral Committee headquarters on the morning of the election, so we could pick up our "sensitive materials" together. At the end of the first day, we were to take the ballot boxes into town. Only the day after we were to open the boxes with the regular votes, the voter registration papers, the sealed envelopes containing the absentee bal-

lots, plus all sorts of other sundry paper work. The intricacies of collating, verifying and moving all this material (which was the task of the SFOR forces) from the Electoral Offices to the headquarters in Sarajevo, where the votes would be counted, was nothing less than daunting. During the 48 hours of voting, two people were responsible for guaranteeing that the ballots and papers were legitimate and not tampered with—the international election supervisor and the chairman of the local Polling Station Committee. These two individuals representing Bosnia and Europe (the world) were called upon to create—and, at the same time, to legitimize and embody—the legality of the proceedings and their democratic character, which could hopefully prevent further escalation of what had proven to be undeterrable aggression and lawlessness. We picked up all materials together, we signed for them together (which means approximately fifty different forms to sign), then they were placed in my car, but the car of the election chairman—part of a convoy—was close behind us, and this carefully elaborated choreography was repeated twice more there and back.

Street in Bosanski (Srpski) Brod. From János Asbóth: Bosznia és Herczegovina *(Bosnia and Herzegovina, Budapest, 1887.)*

(Yet before the long-awaited election day, the elaborate machinery designed with every conceivable contingency in mind collapsed like a house of cards. This was, in no small measure, due to the repeated dramatic postponements of the elections, and their consequence. For example, none of our instructors showed up for what was billed as a "Last Minute Meeting", at which we were supposed to receive the finalized, umpteenth version of the rules and regulations governing our acceptance of the ballots, this latest version being made up of nine packages, each affixed with various codes. Also, there was no one to turn to with our questions. Only an aide-de-camp was available to note down our queries, saying that he would try to have the answers the following day.

The next day we got up at 4 a.m., at the crack of dawn, but in vain, as it turned out. We were given no instructions, and several sheets of our "sensitive material", too, were missing, which seriously endangered the official opening of the polling

stations at 7 a.m. Another Hungarian observer, a student of cultural anthropology at the University of Miskolc, told us the following day that in his electoral district they were 700 ballots short, and none were forthcoming for hours. Nor was he given protection, although the rightfully angry crowd gathering in front of the polling place was beginning to act in a threatening manner, and his escape from their wrath was nothing short of miraculous. Accordingly, when we made our way outside in the early-morning mist, clutching our papers—checked and re-checked and supplied with intricate coding—close to our bosom—papers which were meant to be the props and guarantees of a future democracy—we quickly realized that we had no one to depend on but ourselves, and Lady Luck.)

Catholic couple from Herzegovina
From Az Osztrák-Magyar Monarchia írásban és képben *(The Austro-Hungarian Monarchy in Words and Pictures, Budapest, 1901).*

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During breaks in our training and in the five subsequent days, when we had to stay in Prnjavor as part of the huge OSCE armada, our drivers would take us to nearby towns for 30 to 40 DM, paid on the sly. My first such excursion was to Derventa, 40 kilometres from Prnjavor. I was accompanied by Stepan, personal interpreter to another observer. He was an assistant at the local television station, though eventually he hoped to go into journalism. He was enrolled at the University of Belgrade to study German and Greek and had seen much of the world, thanks to his father, who was a cook. (But he had never been to Sarajevo.) They lived in Libya for two years, where his father was head chef to Kadhafi, and was also the food-taster for the great Arab leader. For him, the presence of the supervisors served as a vital link with the world—a source of information, contacts, addresses. He had finished secondary school locally, where his Croat and Muslim schoolmates gradually disappeared from the classroom. Sometimes a siren would sound, and they could hear the artillery fire from the fighting in Derventa. The teachers did not talk to them about the war. The syllabus did not

change appreciably either, though history and literature were taught differently, and new holidays were celebrated in the school playground. He said that he would leave the first chance he gets. He does not want to live in isolation; he explained, he's young only once, he has only one life to live. He wanted to get away from Belgrade and move to a Western country.

I wanted to see Derventa because of a twenty-volume work, *The Austro-Hungarian Monarchy in Words and Pictures,* one volume of which is devoted to Bosnia-Herzegovina. It had beautiful old etchings of the folk costumes of its multi-ethnic population. It also showed the quaint, hilly landscape dotted with houses lying in clusters, and with minarets and church steeples rising above the river. The Derventa of today, however, resembles its former self only geographically. The narrow, picturesque streets, which have preserved the atmosphere of the Empire, today bear the mark of heavy fighting. In 1992, the population was composed of 41 per cent Serbs, 39 per cent Croats, 12.5 per cent Muslims, and 7.5 per cent "other nationalities". Recently, the Croats and "other nationalities" have been replaced by 13,000 Serb refugees from the Bosnian-Croat Federation. Only a solitary cross atop the burned-out frame of the Franciscan convent, now covered with weeds, bears witness to the former presence and worship of God in the town. The minarets, too, are gone, and the Orthodox church lies in ruins. At the foot of the temporary bell tower, a rusty sign states that the spot, covered in weeds and fenced off with wire meshing, will be the site of the new Orthodox cathedral. But nothing is being built in the city; wherever one looks, one is aware only of the dull immobility of the sooty walls of the houses, and the bullet-marked surfaces. A couple of cafés that have sprouted from the ruins and the new election posters—most bearing the likeness of Karadzic and Seselj—provide the only evidence that time does not altogether stand still.

Orthodox couple from the vicinity of Sarajevo
From Az Osztrák-Magyar Monarchia írásban és képben *(The Austro-Hungarian Monarchy in Words and Pictures, Budapest, 1901).*

Behind one of the renovated shopfronts, guarded by muscular patriots with forbidding countenances, are the offices of the Serb Radical Party. We try our luck and ask if we could talk to someone inside, and we are soon offered seats in a well-appointed room. Our host is a friendly, stylishly attired youngish (though no longer quite so young) gentleman. If it weren't for the huge poster showing the local leader Nikola Poplasen and Seselj embracing, one might think that this was a Western-type import-export company. In the front office, under an oil print of Drazha Mihailovic, the founder of the Chetnik movement, and under it black flags with crossing bones and skulls, fearful-looking men lounge around, waiting to serve their party. According to our Chetnik Yuppie, in Republika Srpska, the Serb Radical Party is the party of businessmen, and they expect to do well in the elections. In contrast to the Serbian "mother party", their programme emphasizes the reorganization of the economy and foreign trade. They consider their main task to be privatization. This constitutes the main difference in stance from the Serb Democratic Party, which is in the lead. The followers of Radovan Karadzic want privatization to take place slowly, through a gradual reduction in government-owned property, while the Radicals want a radical and immediate change. It is the only way to make up for time lost as a consequence of the war, our host explains. Only the clarification of the borders and clear property rights can jump start the economy. *"Which do you consider more important, the economic or nationality problems?" "The economic. I employed Muslim workers at my Banja Luka plant even during the war." "What do you consider the main reason for the war and the carnage?" "The regime. The communist regime. Tito's regime. It blurred the boundaries between everything, ownership, national boundaries, ethnic identity. It was the major cause of the massacres, for which both sides are to blame." "What did you do during the war?" "I fought, like everybody else. Now it is time to heal the nation. Clear-cut property rights and national boundaries will attract foreign capital, without which reorganization is inconceivable. After we have determined who owns what, we would like to establish economic ties with the Muslims and the Croats. Once, though the time is not yet ripe for it, we would like to live in one country with our Serb brothers."* But alas, before I could take a picture of him to record his tolerance, so much in step with the spirit of the new times, he had the flags with the skulls placed in front of Mihailovic's portrait removed from the wall.

I arrived in Banja Luka, the only large city of the Republika Srpska, just one day before the elections. In the town, which has a lively Mediterranean atmosphere and cafés mushrooming, there was no sense of the tension of the coming elections, nor the tension between Pale and Plavcic—in short, the tension between the two centres of the divided country. Yet it was only two days hence that Moncilo Krajsnik, the leader of the Pale "forces" and a member of the triumvirate of Bosnia-Herzegovina's leaders, fared poorly in the town. Krajsnik,

who represented the Serbs and tried to organize a local demonstration in favour of the Serb Democratic Party, was forced to flee for his life when the crowd threw stones at him, nor would they let him speak from the balcony of his hotel room. (IFOR forces had prevented a bus convoy of his gun- and cudgel-toting followers from entering the district.) The mistress is at home; the Serb Iron Lady's Mercedes is parked in front of the Presidential Palace, but the soldiers guarding the fancy building will not let us take pictures. The cafés and terraces located on the side of the white building, something like a small town theatre, are crowded with noisy young people bursting with energy, but with nothing to do.

On the spacious grounds across from the palace, they have started the construction of a gigantic cathedral with a huge dome; we know this from the drawings, with their dramatic perspective. Before, there were *djamis* in its place. This I know from illustrations found in handsome publications from the time of the Austro-Hungarian Empire I found in various second-hand bookshops at home. From them I also know that these *djamis* were older than those in the world famous Bacharchia district in Sarajevo. Under the Turks, the Bosnian *villayet* was first administered from Jajce, the centre of the then recently defunct Bosnian kingship, then from Banja Luka. Only later did the Turkish authorities move to Sarajevo. The gorgeous medieval building complex, which survived through the centuries, was razed; the new cathedral will be built over the ruins—provided the builders don't run out of funds. The nationalism that hallmarks the end of the second millennium is in a hurry to erase, as radically as possible, all traces of what had gone before, and is doing so at a speed that would put its predecessors to shame. It is erasing everything from human consciousness that is displeasing to itself; it is erasing everything from the face of the earth that it finds undesirable for its future. Ethnic cleansing claims its victims from inanimate stones as well as from the ranks of the living.

Like so many cities in Bosnia, Banja Luka also lies in the valley of a fast flowing river, the Vrbas, surrounded by a crescent of mountains. All that remains of Turkish times is the medieval castle on the river bank; it has somehow managed to avoid being wiped from the landscape. With its help it is possible to reconstruct through the wide-angle "picture postcard" which lies before us when we look out from the restaurant the unique, idyllic Bosnian landscape of old: the old mouldy walls, the silvery slip of a river, the dark green woods, the meadows, the bluish mountains against a background of swirling clouds.

In another small town we found a Catholic church—a rarity. Its tower reaches for the sky across from the partisan memorial, on its wall the graffiti, *"Jebo voss papa!"* (Fuck the Pope!), and *"Celite!"* (Move out!). There is a quaint presbitery behind the church, with laundry drying on its porch. *"When the war broke out, I had two nuns who saw to the housekeeping. They also helped me with reli-*

gious instruction. Since they fled, I must do everything myself," says the priest, in his fifties, with a sad sigh. He has me and my supervisor partner from the Vojvodina sit down out on the porch, then extracts a solemn promise from us that we would not reveal his name, and should the Hungarian Catholic priest, who disappeared from this Serb part of Bosnia and has not been heard from for five years, be found, we should still not write to him. He is even afraid of talking to us. They have broken down his door more than once, and he has even found primed hand granades at the side of his house. They have even broken into his church and placed 200 kilos of explosives inside. At the time, the authorities protected him. Even though his position may seem privileged, until the end of 1995 his life was in constant danger. Six priests were killed in the vicinity and one disappeared, and besides his church, only one other escaped destruction. His church had been renovated just before the outbreak of the war, to celebrate its centennial. The stained glass windows celebrate the ten Catholic communities of the region, three of which originated from before Turkish times. Most of the people from his native village of Derventa moved to Karlovac and its vicinity. Some members of his family were killed, the others dispersed. A Serb neighbour of theirs sent him a message to come and pick up what furnishings had remained in their house, and take them back with him, along with the cow that he was keeping in his stable. He went with a nephew, and most of the family's belongings were gone by then, but they found some of the furniture, some dishes and other mementoes—and of course, the cow. However, he needed to find a truck for his belongings, so he left, but when he was ready to go back for his things, a message came, warning him, *"Don't come back, it is not safe!... If you take as much as a nail, you are playing with your lives. Don't try to enter the village. When our Serb brothers, forced to flee, have nothing to eat and no roof over their heads, when they are living like beggars, it's best if no stranger shows up here, because everything belongs to the Serbs!"* This is the message that was sent by the inhabitants of the village who, during their first short visit, looked on from behind their fences with disapproving eyes.

Only half of the Catholics of the area are Croats, the remainder are Italian, Polish, Czech and Hungarian. According to the 1991 census, of 1,700 Catholics 500 were Italian, 206 were Czech. In 1939 there were 15,000 Catholics living in the district, and by 1941, 16,000. There were six Polish parishes. The Italians had come from South Tyrol, the Poles from Galicia. The original homes of the Hungarians could also be traced. Many of them were Calvinists. Their names are in stone in the abandoned cemeteries. The last of the Hungarians, an old lady of eighty, died a few months before we got there.

People came here from poor regions, since during the time of the Empire, they were given land. The first Catholic church was set on fire in 1942. During the Second World War, 450 Catholics were killed for their faith. In 1945, 6,000 Poles went back to Poland. The Italians struck deeper roots here. Yet they have

kept their language, their eating habits, and keep in touch with relatives. In 1960 they counted 2,200 Catholics; of these 600 were Italian, living in a nearby town. Today the Catholic missions are providing aid to 800 people. Many have turned their backs on religion, have left the Church officially, and have even changed their names. They changed sides, too. Or perhaps they fled. Those who stayed have turned in upon themselves. It doesn't matter who will be in power, just as long as they can come back. This is what they pray for. Of course, there is no justification for hope. Generations will have to come and go before the time of forgiveness will come. Before people's thinking will change. And even then one can't be sure; after all, since the time of the first Serbian uprising in 1804, 700,000 innocent people have been slaughtered in these parts.

The priest preaches forgiveness, but one must be realistic, he explains. He could not see eye to eye with the representatives of the Orthodox Church even before the war, only with the *hodja.* In the 1980s, he visited Israel, and even there, in that wonderful country, close to God, he saw hatred and strife. One could not reasonably expect the Messiah to come here before he came to Israel. The elections do not touch the soul, that garden where peace will once dwell and where, in this godforsaken part of the world, everyone is praying in his own way.

Thank God, at least we were able to open the polling station on time. But the members of the committee divided the work to be done amongst themselves without consulting me, then sat down behind the desks set up for them in front of a wall map of the mountains and waters of Europe. They had received the same training as we did. *"This is their election, not mine,"* I decided, *"so unless I see some serious irregularity, I won't interfere."* I spent the rest of my time trying very hard to keep awake; the knowledge that I would have to get up at 4 a.m. in the morning prevented me from sleeping the night before.

No sooner had we started than it it turned out that many of the voters were illiterate. In that case, the chairman or myself could sign for them. The real problem was that they could not read either. They could not read the twenty-page-long list of party and independent candidates. According to the rules, the person next in line was supposed to help by reading the list of candidates, or—according to a last-minute decision—the task fell to the chairman. Needless to say, the chairman—in the spirit of the oath taken with the rest of the Polling Station Committee in my presence, and to which they had signed their names—was supposed to be neutral in questions of politics. According to my interpreter, who sympathized with the Serb Radicals, however, Dragisha told the old women in thick knitted stockings and kerchiefs to vote for the Serb Democratic Party. In turn, these women were upset that they could not have their husbands in the voting booths with them, who would tell them what to do.

At this point, I took matters into my own hands, and appointed my interpreter to read the lists. Since I realized that these old people were as ignorant

about politics and the significance of their votes as they were about reading and writing, I did not consider this as cheating. They kept on saying that they wanted to vote for the Serbs; they did not understand that practically all the parties running in the elections were Serb. Without guidance, they had no idea who to vote for, since they were not only illiterate, but lacked the background knowledge needed to cast their votes.

According to my calculations, approximately 30 to 35 per cent of the voters were illiterate in the district, some of them forty, fifty years old. This ratio speaks volumes about how far this area lags behind Europe, and the difficulties of integration. One thing is certain: this sort of voting is not going to make it happen. Their nationalist-traditional culture on the one hand, and on the other, modern internationalism, which clashed most spectacularly here during this last century, and with the most blood shed, too, reveals its real nature in the ignorance I have just outlined. And it is revealed, too, in the abject failure of the to them foreign culture and the Western type of democratic institutions which have been forced upon this land—though with the best of intentions, one might add.

How could these two worlds merge peacefully? It certainly hasn't happened yet, perhaps because of a lack of what we might call "historical time". And this is as true of the Austro-Hungarian Empire as of Tito's Yugoslavia. The question is, what can the European Community do with its huge machinery, its money, its promises? What can it do in the uni-polar vacuum of a bi-polar world?

Gerrit Valk is a member of the Netherlands Parliament (he is on the foreign and cultural committees). He and another observer, a Spanish girl called Carmen (an expert in urban studies from the City Hall of Madrid who specializes in the social planning of housing estates), visited the election districts to check on our work, as well as the prevailing mood, and I took the opportunity to mention to them that the ballots, dropped into the boxes in front of our eyes, had no real "message" for the world. (I also noted this in what was called the poll book.) The answer of the sympathetic observer, who back home, when not in Parliament, is a historian specializing in the 17th-century and the political ideology of the turn of the century, assured me that elections such as these—and the democratic institutions that are born in their wake—will form the basis of European integration. Just think of the Hungarians, the Poles, the Czechs. (Thanks.)

Not being a historian myself, I just shook my head. The old, helpless women with their weather-beaten faces, their husbands who can't even walk without the help of a stick, the crafty glance of the chairman with his pseudo-friendly smile which spoke of an atavistic custom-memory-instinct complex—in short, the deeper dominions of the soul—constitute an obstacle that no amount of money, political power or democratic hocus-pocus can match.

Sure enough, the first confrontation was not long in coming. An elderly man who could read, nevertheless could not decide which box to mark with an x. He asked the chairman, who was from his village, whom he recommended. At this

point I stepped into the picture and told the man that if he didn't know who to vote for, he should return his ballot. After all, the rules made it possible to return a ballot without filling it in, and still have it count. *"Since he's come all this way on foot,"* Dragisha protested—and the five members of the committee backed him up, not to mention the Serb Democratic Party representative who never left our side—*"he must vote for somebody or other." "No."* The atmosphere—or so I thought—was suddenly over-charged, so I proceeded to explain that the old man's journey was not in vain; by coming here, he proved that he was casting his vote for democracy and democratic institutions, it's just that he couldn't find a party that represented his views. He added to the number of voters, which is an extremely important message to the outside world, and at the same time was saying that though there were many parties, there were none that represented him. *"In eight months, back home,"* I said, *"I may end up doing just what the old gentleman is doing now."* With this, the cooperation forced upon us seemed to be restored to some state of normalcy. But this was not to last.

Another conflict flared up when permission had to be granted for a so-called *"tendered ballot"*. This was a special ballot with an envelope meant specifically for those who received an invitation to come to vote, but were not on the list of voters. Their right to vote would be approved later by the Sarajevo headquarters on the basis of information furnished by the election committee and put in the envelope. When I mentioned the word Sarajevo (I made sure not to let on that I had visited the city several times during the past four years), the thinly veiled hatred surfaced. No way would they let the votes get in the hands of the Muslims, they would rather not vote. *"But* all *the votes will be counted and checked in Sarajevo... Besides—that's why we're here.—Sarajevo is the capital of the entire country, of your country." "Not ours."*

But hell broke lose in earnest when the votes were being counted, though it was not at my expense, thank God. It happened when Dragisha took the ballots out of the 100-ballot packs one by one, and read out the names of the parties x-ed out. A committee member sitting next to him confirmed what Dragisha was saying, while two other committee members sitting at the two ends of the table were writing down the results on official forms. The Serb Democratic Party and the Serb Radical Party were running neck and neck; the Serb Provincial Party and the Banja Luka Socialist Party (whose committee member was from Prnjavor, though his way of thinking was light years away from the others) were lagging behind. However, there was one wayward vote, and this was cast for the coalition which, like Sarajevo, wanted a united country. *"Bozhe moi! Now I understand, why the Americans bombed us,"* sighed Dragisha, and spat on the ground.

The voter turnout in my district was 92 per cent (even the dead, it seemed, had shown up, because they were running against the Muslims from the other side), and the Democrats won against the Radicals by only eight votes. Practising self-criticism, Dragisha explained his party's grievous loss by the fact

that the local government's repeated promise to fix the roads was just an election trick, they did nothing. Then he threw his arms around the Serb Radical Party committee member. *"Never mind,"* he said, *"we'll form a coalition."*

Now there was nothing left but to pay the participants, 100 DM to the committee members—more than two months' wages—and 150 DM to the chairman. The rules stipulated that they be paid in advance *"in order to boost morale",* but I thought it best to hold off until they had finished putting the "sensitive material" into nine envelopes, then stuffing these into two sacks, not to mention the ceremony of sealing them as proof against tampering. It was time to open the bottle of *rakija,* which I had a hell of a time keeping away from the polling station the last few hours of balloting. Then came the "courteous, not arrogant" persuasion practised upon the two gigantic local policeman, that instead of taking us back to our headquarters in *their* car, they should be the third member of our convoy, and we were off, at one in the morning, in a torrential downpour, on nearly impassable roads that would be repaired by the coalition now taking shape. By then, though, the schnapps had brought a sense of contentment, warming my innards.

Back at district headquarters, the situation was chaotic, to the eternal shame of the international observers as well as the locals, who followed their previous orders to the letter. There wasn't a single OSCE representative on the premises, only confused rumours that were circulating about what to do with the eight or nine types of envelopes we had brought back, and the colour and codes of the pre-printed forms—an incredible amount of red tape. The radios shrieked, the men cursed. The ballots were there for the taking. There was a moment when I decided that since there was no one to take the stuff from me, I would take it home as a souvenir. As we stood around, our nerves on edge, Dragisha pulled a button with Karadzic's likeness from his pocket, kissed it, and told me confidentially that Karadzic was the only man who could save the Serb nation.

At long last a man wearing a uniform turned up, but he was selling Swiss army knives with the OSCE logo. On the blade it said, "Switzerland for peace in Bosnia." They cost 22 DM, 30 DM with a case that could be attached to your belt.

Thanks to my "arrogant" behaviour, I managed to get rid of my "sensitive" bag and baggage, and within the hour was drinking Nektar, the local beer, in an all-night bar. Dragisha and I, along with two other members of my committee who tagged along, talked a lot of nonsense that night, the gist of which was the horrible realization that the killers were almost as human—and humane—as their victims. This didn't make me feel very proud of myself, or if it did, so much the worse. *"I have never killed anyone!"* protested Dragisha (which nearly made me think the opposite), *"but I fought for four years, and it was good to fight, because we Serbs won't sit by, we protect what is ours. I'd gladly pick up a rifle again tomorrow if called upon to continue where we left off. And I wouldn't be*

surprised if this happened real soon. We can't allow foreigners, the Americans and their associates, to come and go in our country as if it were theirs. They ruin our roads with their tanks, they forced my car into a ditch. Which free country would put up with this sort of thing? Karadzic, as the real representative of his people, wants what Milosevic, Tudjman and Izetbegovic want: to protect his country and his people. He wants to make sure there won't be another Jasenovac, where they tortured hundreds of thousands of Serbs to death. He wants to prevent what the Germans did to us from happening again, and before them the Austrians, who are no better than they should be, and then what the Russians wanted, except they didn't succeed. Look at my arm!" And Dragisha rolls up his shirt sleeve and points at the unsightly tattoo on his forearm. *"This red star belongs to Tito's army,"* he says, *"and I still say he had good intentions. I will not turn my back on my past. Nobody wants Yugoslavia? Fine. Then they shouldn't take it. But they shouldn't want to take our Serb homeland either. Why don't they let the Serbs live in their own country at last, and not live like helpless servants? In so-called peace time, too, they took everything away from us, everything. Raw materials, manpower, our intellectuals. Then they made us pay dearly for what was ours in the first place. For their superiority. After Yugoslavia came apart, there wasn't any toilet paper, because it was made by the Slovenes. Well, now they'll find out what it means to do without us. We had to buy their fridges for thousands of marks. Now they're available at the Italian and Austrian shopping centres for just a couple of hundred, and nobody wants them. Fine. Let them go to Europe and lose the shirt off their backs, the way they made us lose ours. We'll manage without them just fine as long as the world leaves us alone. There are a lot of Serbs in the world with capital. With their help we could build up the nation. If we draw up clear-cut national borders, we could negotiate who needs what. I do business with the Croats even now; I import stuff for my café through them. I used to fight them, now we're business partners. We're different sort of people, though, let's be honest about this. At first, we, the Croats from Derventa and us, we fought the Muslims hand in hand. The Croats played the devout. They went to church to pray before battle. For us this is not that important, we went to a café for a cigarette and a drink. The Muslims? The Croats took advantage of them, but in the end, they turned against us anyway. They razed their own cities, they massacred their own women, just so they could turn the world against us. Don't be taken in by the bloody pictures of Sarajevo, it's propaganda, just like the massacre at the outdoor market, which they committed themselves. They lost the war, but the newspapers and television are winning it for them. What sort of fighting is this? They brought the American bombers on us, who killed women and babies. And now they bribed Biljana Plavsic to betray her country, to betray all the blood shed for the country, for the Serbs. The world doesn't know what it's doing when it gives the Arab countries the green light to come here. And the Turks. We know, we've been at war with them for 600 years. They cannot come*

back here! I will prevent them coming back with my own two hands! Where are you going to put our people? Where?! Where will they find a roof over their heads? Where will they find bread, and work? My wife and I saved up, or we baked bread, I employ refugees in my café, so they'll have something to eat. What will become of us?" "What is the difference between the Serbs and the others? What would you say if your daughter were to marry a non-Serb?" "I'd throw her out of the house. I wouldn't accept her. But this can't happen. A Croat, maybe. After all, he's a Christian. But I'd rather not have him either. Our customs are incompatible, not to mention the holidays. Ours are different from everybody else's, especially on Sv. Sava's Day. If you could come here then, you'd know what it means to be a Serb. There's everything, there's sausage, and kebab, and cakes that we eat only then. We go to church, we sing, the priest blesses us. Anybody who doesn't understand this is different. He can't feel what we feel. Our house is open to everybody, they can join in the celebration. We hide the presents in the hay. When I was young, everybody came, Croats and Muslims, to look for the honeycakes and candy. If you come by then, you're my guest" "What if I'm a Muslim? You did say that a Serb's home is open to everyone...." "Don't ask stupid questions. Let him come if he dares..." and patting my shoulder, he finishes his beer, and puts a congenial end to the argument.

I got back to headquarters at five in the morning. All the supervisors and their committees and materials were still not accounted for. Apparently, the chairman of the district Polling Station Committee waited around the night before, then after a while he locked up and went home to bed, and people had to wait in the bar until the morning, when he showed up again. I, at least, had my sleep when, in the afternoon of the following day, SFOR finally showed up. In no time they organized themselves into a sort of military brigade, placed armed guards at the doors, and a soldier set up a makeshift signalling unit. *"Wouldn't you be surprised,"* I said to myself, gloating, *"if you went inside and found that the place was empty, and it was not thanks to you that nothing was taken."*

In the days that followed, a semblance of order was gradually reestablished. And as we found out later, because of a number of disqualifications in Pale, the people of Doboj were evacuated and taken to Zagreb on the day when I was there. We were warned by radio to keep off the streets. Leaving the premises and returning the radios went like clockwork. After we struggled across a patched up bridge over the Sava and, secured by barbed wire and checkpoints, we could even go so far—if so inclined—as to feel that we were now on the other side of Europe, for we saw looming up ahead the same ubiquitous advertising posters that are part of the street scene in Paris, New York and Budapest. The roads became wider, the petrol stations became more modern, with toilets, and except for the small souvenir stand in a parking lot which displayed the Holy Trinity of Ante Pavelic, the Virgin Mary, and the Croatia Zagreb soccer team, there was nothing left to remind us of the indigestible recent past. ❧

Péter Nádas

Nemesis and Fatum

I would like to recite some familiar words:

Defeat. Loss. Collapse. Failure. Destruction. Poverty. Hunger. Resourcefulness. Stench. Hopelessness. Helplessness. Sorrow. Sickness. Weakness. Pain. Regression. Torment. Chill. Dust. Gloom. Despondency. Suspicion. Doubt. Despair. Trickery. Joy. Embarrassment. Resignation. Repression. Forgetting. Humiliation. Isolation. Accusation. Guilt. Reproach. Grievance. Anger. Revenge. Self-deception. Mendacity. Satisfaction. Dependence. Cowardice. Defenselessness. Remembering. Audacity. Rebellion. Fiasco. Injustice. Disenfranchisement. Captivity. Tyranny. Restriction. Fear. Anxiety. Breathlessness. Shame. Reticence. Deficiency. Suffering.

I could mention several other, even more painful, words: Interrogation. Beating. Torture. Execution. And deathly silence.

Now I would like to list some other words:

Consensus. Construction. Progress. Hope. Development. Employment. Expanpansion. Order. Completion. Investment. Compensation. Profit. Success. Joy. Jealousy. Envy. Competition. Fraud. Caution. Attention. Ambition. Ability. Standard. Quality. Balance. Fragrance. Abundance. Well-being. Surplus. Selfishness. Enjoyment. Fullness. Greed. Pleasure. Moderation. Excess. Criticism. Consideration. Firmness. Ruthlessness. Openness. Strength. Cheer. Charity. Seriousness. Error. Renewal. Aloofness. Sophistication. Structure. Independence. Sterility. Cool-ness. Solitude. Isolation. Self-consciousness.

To which I could add a few more crucial terms: Creativity. Sovereignty. Spontaneity. Liberty.

No one person could be characterized with these word-clusters, for no one can separate his failures from his successes, his sufferings from his joys, his stink from his sweet smell. These two groups of words may nevertheless be used to describe the essential conditions, the techniques of social organization that set the pat-

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Text of a talk given (in German) in 1993 to the Alfred Herrhausen Gesellschaft für internationalen Dialog in Frankfurt/Main, Germany.

tern for our lives these past forty years—not the principles and ideologies by which we lived, but the reality of our daily lives.

The first group of words suggests someone at the mercy of his fate, the second group someone in control of his fate. One tries to endure and outlast what the other tries to shape and rearrange. The difference between the two is great not only on the level of daily experience, but also when it comes to personal desires and goals, the models and means one chooses for oneself in life. I have no doubt in my mind that in the coming decades of our common existence, it's in terms of this crucial difference that we'll keep misunderstanding one another.

I would like to discuss a class of phenomena that an ancient Greek, thinking along similar lines, may have termed predestination: action resulting from a god's will *(tyche),* or adroitness, craftsmanship, skill, cunning, wile *(techne).* Today we would use the words fate and technique to refer to these two categories. The person suggested by the first group of words lives his fate without being able to direct and shape it, he simply lacks the necessary technique for it, whereas the person implied by the second group possesses the technique, the know-how, but doesn't really know what it is he is shaping or directing. Within this single duality their priorities are very different: one sees too far, the other looks too close, so their chances of understanding the other are slim. I wouldn't say they have no chance: after all, they do perceive things in terms of the same duality; but their activities and thought processes will be guided invariably by their priorities. This means that not only will they have a problem understanding the other—their whole lives will consist of a painful series of logical misunderstandings. Which may lead us to the conclusion that what we are dealing with is not a simple communications problem but a type of miscommunication that stems from the fact that their self-knowledge and their knowledge of the world are so confused that they no longer see the duality—one of them gives preference to knowledge of the world, the other to self-knowledge.

The individual left to his fate looks upon events as natural occurrences; he is quick to universalize his own situation and sees his actions as the result of all-compelling forces, while the person in control of his fate carefully delimits the scope of his actions, individualizes his situation, and believes that through agreement and compromise events can indeed be controlled. The thinking of one who is left to his fate is regressive in character: he infers causes from effects, seeks explanations in the past, and as a last resort turns to justice. Whereas the thinking of one in control of his fate is progressive: he deduces effects from causes, seeks understandings in the present, and cites the law. The one left to his fate has a history but no individual life story; the one in control of his fate has an individual life story but no history. The former looks back to epochs preceding the French Revolution, if only because he needs to find morally justifiable models for his compulsively accommodationist strategies for sur-

vival, while the latter views the entire course of history as the story of individualization, and is not interested in periods prior to the modern age. One compulsively remembers, the other compulsively forgets. Accordingly, the language used by the one left to his fate is always personal, intimate, but not individualistic, while the language used by the one in control of his fate is invariably individualistic, yet he avoids anything that hints at intimacy or privacy. One likes to refer to tradition, the other only to what is timely. One is drawn to magic, mythic constructs, the other to intellection about myths. The diction of one is pervaded by a kind of irritating, archaic slowness, a provincial fustiness, while the other, just as irritatingly, flaunts his quickness, his facile knowledgeability and modernity. The one left to his fate finds his niche in a collective identity, the one in control of his fate finds it in an individual identity.

The communication difficulties of the two can be described fairly easily, one need only note the behaviour patterns and formulas of language behind each of the two different mentalities. It's not any more difficult than, say, remembering that Bulgarians shake their heads when they mean yes and nod when they mean no, or that the English drive on the left side of the road and pass on the right. The communication problem appears more serious, however, when we realize that the clash underlying these disparate behavior and speech patterns suggests not only differences in historical, cultural development and geographic location, but a larger confusion, having to do with both self-knowledge and knowledge of the world, that characterizes European culture as a whole.

It is this interrelationship that I would like to illustrate with a very simple example.

Somebody, out of simple courtesy, asks: "How are you?" The question is overused and hackneyed, of course, but never mind: behind it lies the duality of wellness and illness; the question implies not only curiosity but also the processes of cognition, control and self-control; and, depending on the nature of the response, truth and falsehood, sincerity and deception, rejection and sympathy, supposition and inference—in short, everything on which value judgments are based; everything that presupposes self-knowledge and knowledge of the world.

When two people left to their fate meet in the street and one of them, in response to that trite question, says: "I am fine," he may cause great consternation, for his answer implies that in that wretchedness which is their lives he doesn't feel like commiserating with the other. So if these two people want to remain civil, they must describe in great detail, and outdo each other in proving, just how miserable they are. And they will do so even if they happen to feel fine, because their collective identity, as expressed in this simple act of courtesy, demands that they do not burden each other with news of their well-being. Common courtesy requires just the opposite from two people in control of their fate. It's in their basic interest not to burden each other with their negative feelings, even if they happen not to be well. If they didn't do this, they would

impart to the other a piece of confidential information that would make it clear that they've mismanaged their fate, they have failed, they are losers, which in turn would bring into question the efficacy of the all-encompassing tenet on which their collective identity is based. In other words, the former engages in constant, compulsive acts of simulation, the latter in compulsive acts of dissimulation.

It shouldn't be too surprising therefore that when someone left to his fate meets someone in control of his fate, they are both shocked by the other's response to the commonplace query, for inevitably, they both get the impression that it's the other who is responsible for the breach of etiquette, even though their acts of simulation and dissimulation refer to the same thing: their fates. Yet neither one is able to recognize why, when confronted with a question of fate, he is forced to engage in acts of simulation or dissimulation. What to one seems like needless whining—for within the duality of wellness and illness he prefers the former—sounds to the other like unjustified boasting, because he prefers the negative half of the same duality. Their encounter becomes even more awkward when they try to give each other advice. That situation is a little like a confrontation between a dog eagerly wagging its tail and a cat with a stiffly upturned tail. It's inevitable that these two should pounce on each other, because what in the language of one means friendly interest, a desire to get close, in the other's language signifies mistrust and hostile intent

Until now I didn't mention, not even for the sake of simplicity, that one of these individuals could be an East European and the other a West European. Such a distinction would be justified only if the difference between the two would reside not just in their mentalities, or in the differing levels of their very similar development, in all the things that go under the heading, or are a consequence, of know-how, expertise, experience—if, in other words, I could say that we are dealing with two clearly distinguishable groups of people, who use different means to shape and rearrange their fate simply because they have different ideas as to what they should shape and rearrange. But in the case of our subjects, this, alas, is not so.

One of them knows what to shape and rearrange but lacks the technical know-how; the other has the technique but doesn't know exactly what he is shaping and rearranging with it. And for this reason it's not clear-cut differences that I see between them, but a system of distorted perceptions that stem from innate characteristics they both possess, and which they try to hide, from each other as well as the world, with acts of simulation and dissimulation, or by drawing simplistic contrasts between their geographical and political concepts.

I cannot consider it a mere coincidence that the national communities of people capable of shaping and rearranging their fate got ready to harmonize the legal and economic structures of their geographically separate existence just at

the moment when systems of power aimed at universalization collapsed —systems that had rendered the life conditions of people at the mercy of their fate hopelessly unmanageable.

Perhaps what really happened was that an ideologically well-established universality had called into being an ideologically well-established separation. But this brand of separation tried to preserve within set geographical borders the same ideals—ideals it still considered universal —that the other ideology tried to spread to all nations and continents. The former separated geographically, but in its politics tried to preserve the universal appeal of its original, shared principles, while the latter lost the legitimacy of its universality, for it had to separate politically. Their remaining common characteristic is the unbridgeable gap that exists between their theory and their practice, their ideology and their actual reality—though, to be sure, one tends toward simulation, the other toward dissimulation. What became fairly clear as a result is that to create a unified Europe from the very absence of conditions needed to achieve unity, i.e., by denying the existence of a broad-based cultural community, is no less impossible than to create equality from an absence of fraternity, by denying the essential prerequisites of personal liberty.

I suspect there *is* a connection between the two phenomena. For the national communities of people in control of their fate did see fit to break down the boundaries of their national existence, and on the bases of political and ideological commonality create a new identity within a brand new legal and economic framework, at a time when the politically and ideologically separated communities of people abandoned to their fate had just about exhausted the economic and mental reserves they had built up while being subjected to supra-national forms of societal organization—with the result that they were no longer capable of creating a new identity for themselves. Separation had no more validity; universality had failed.

What collapsed in 1989 was not only communism's attempt to bring about, by means of aggressive expansion and by putting a premium on equality, the kind of universal liberty that at the same time denied individual liberty and therefore could not ensure fraternity among individuals, either—what also suffered a severe blow was the attempt to put into practice, at the expense of equality and fraternity and under conditions of political and geographical separation, a social order based on the primacy of individual liberty. The difference between the two appears to be great, for the collapse seems to be chiefly economic in character, while the blow appears to be political in nature. If this were really so, we could still place our hopes in the viability of at least one of these systems.

But the final account presented by a system in collapse to a system that had suffered a blow was not at all economic. It became clear, moreover, that the universalist principles preserved in geographically separate entities had also undergone change: the concept of liberty had been replaced by the concept of equal

rights; the idea of equality had been supplanted by the notion of social equilibrium, and the dream of fraternity, in the practice of inevitable separation, had been totally forgotten. Precisely because their societies have become streamlined organizations run on principles of separation and reduction, the people intent on breaking down the boundaries of their national existence find it impossible to put into effect ideals they have proclaimed for forty years, and are still proclaiming—ideals the people in the Eastern part of the world would love to finally cash in on, except that they find themselves collapsing back into limited national existence just as fast as the people of the Western world find their universalist principles, adjusted to conditions of separation, to have become inoperative.

Everything that happened, and keeps happening, between East and West is a sign of the failure of European culture, or at least an indication of serious disorder. And in all likelihood, the economic collapse will not be remedied on one side for the same reason that the communication problems cannot be solved by political means on the other. For what looks like an unmitigated cultural disaster from Prague and Budapest and perhaps Berlin, seems no more than a communication mix-up when seen from Zurich, Paris or Frankfurt. Whoever considers this communication mix-up a sign of cultural breakdown is really thinking in terms of fate, and whoever considers the cultural failure a mere communication mix-up is thinking in terms of technical know-how.

Fate implies at once temporality and timelessness; that which does happen as well as that which may or could happen. And the original meaning of the word technique is cunning, wile, clever know-how, artfulness—all the things that make what Clotho had spun on her spindle usable, what Lachesis measured out manageable, and what Atrapos rendered inescapable, still comprehensible. Seeing a connection between *tyche* and *techne,* a Greek, thinking along similar lines, might have said that there are things in this world that owe their origin to destiny, like the things of nature *(physis),* and there are things devised by human know-how *(techne)* and rendered useful by human understanding *(nomos)*. But for the Greeks, *nomos* could never take precedence over nature, because they viewed the things of nature as being much more powerful. Similarly, it would never have occurred to them to give priority to *techne* over *tyche,* the way we do, or try to attain a true understanding of *tyche,* or an understanding based on skill and know-how, without being fully conscious of the power of nature.

For several thousand years the use of these overlapping twin concepts hardly changed, even though the role of destiny, in time, was taken over by divine providence. And while it's true that since about the seventeenth century there has been a significant shift in emphasis, we can still say that whether we use the word creativity, as do people in control of their fate, or inventiveness, as do people abandoned to their fate, we think more or less of the same temporality and timelessness that the Greeks had in mind when speaking of *Nemesis,* or the

Latins when referring to *Fatum.* An individual arranges his affairs, now favourably, now unfavourably, but always in ways that cannot be contrived or calculated beforehand. However, it's no longer destiny appearing in the guise of things tied to nature that gets in the way of our contrivances and calculations; and neither is it divine providence that steers them in its own inscrutable way.

This shift in emphasis may be characterized as the ascendance of *Nemesis* over *Fatum.* For about three hundred years, thanks to the ideas of the Enlightenment, we have come to think of fate as that which we receive according to our deserts, or rather, owing to the notion of *Bildung,* that which we ought to try to shape even if it is predetermined. Before that, thanks to divine providence, we had to think in terms of a fate that was our portion, rigid and immutable. Bearing this in mind, it is perhaps easier to understand why the person who is left to his fate has to look back on epochs preceding the French Revolution, and why the person in control of his fate is more interested in what happened afterward. And it may also make more sense why the person in charge of his fate is befuddled and panic-stricken when confronted with *Fatum*, which he exchanged for *Nemesis,* and why the person left to his fate believes that personal merit is nothing more than vain self-delusion, since his life in any case is governed by *Fatum.* What also may become more clear now is why the greatest wish of one is a fate in the hands of Nemesis, and why the worst nightmare of the other is a fate in the hands of Fatum. This very subtle difference is only forty years old. But then, even the crucial shift in emphasis has only a three-hundred-year-old history. The movement of these period-specific ideas is also part of a thousand-year-old continuum, a tradition which has used these same ideas to distinguish itself from other traditions and cultures, and which indeed, in the name of these ideas, has forced itself on other cultures.

As far as their concept of time is concerned, there is no difference between a Westerner at the mercy of his fate and a Westerner in control of his fate. Whether he goes in for simulation or dissimulation, his problem is the same. While still eating breakfast, he would like to know what's for supper. In other words, his ideas about the future is determined by a wish that cannot be restricted to the present. So whether he believes his destiny is in the hands of *Fatum* or in the hands of *Nemesis,* he ought to possess a vision of the future, the kind neither *Fatum* nor *Nemesis* empowers him to possess.

With regard to this vision, Western culture, at the present moment, has one very general and one very specific problem.

Its general problem is that while it succeeded in widening somewhat the very narrow opening that the *tyche* of a city, a state, or even an entire, economically and politically integrated continent allows for human resourcefulness, wile and skill, nature retaliated, reasserting its power according to the degree and kind of technical restructuring and sophistication achieved. And technical sophistication

by no means implies that the people of this culture are now in command of their fate; in fact they are far less in command than they had hoped three hundred years ago. They have forgotten about nature's power even as they succeeded in replacing divine providence with exclusively human arrangements.

And within this general context, the specific problem of the culture is that people at the mercy of their fate tend to think of *Fatum* when they speak of usable techniques for getting by, while people in control of their fate think of *Nemesis,* who portions out human lot according to individual merit.

I cannot say that man is in fact in charge of his fate and must therefore resist the destructive elements; nor can I say that he is not in charge of his fate, and thus in his struggle with these elements can only rely on tricks and wiles. I can't even say whether level of technical sophistication is in itself a criterion of quality, though I am fully expected to say that it is. Forty years of Cold War and peaceful coexistence have only exacerbated the problem that our common culture has been dragging around unsolved for three hundred years. It is rather telling that during these three hundred years two political systems collapsed for lack of cultural coherence, and what remained in their wake is no less telling.

The fascist utopia is merely one ethnic community's idea for the future; for all other nations and ethnic groups it's a method of destruction. The communist utopia is an idea for a common future without a method. And democracies that distance themselves from two catastrophic ideas are partial to the kind of pragmatic thinking that does not yield an idea for the future, only a method. So if we speak about communication problems that make interaction difficult between those left to their fate and those in control of their fate, we might say that what we have here is disgust with utopia staring at no utopia in the face. And to offer a lack of utopia to those who are fed up with all utopias but would still like to know what to eat for supper, is at least as meaningless as to fill a blankness with disgust.

The only way to remedy the communication problem is to bear fate in mind while trying to control methodologies based exclusively on human arrangements, and to consider only those arrangements acceptable that acknowledge the primacy of nature. But if a small group of people continues to prepare for its supper by endangering everybody else's meal, then not only will the communication gap widen, the ecological crisis will worsen, too.

Ecological crisis, together with a communications breakdown, is what produces a cultural disaster. ❧

Translated by Ivan Sanders

Miklós Györffy

On Péter Nádas

There has been no other Hungarian writer—with the one exception of Ferenc Molnár, perhaps, although his prose was, of course, in a different league—whose work elicited, either in the author's life or posthumously, the kind of international fame and recognition that Péter Nádas has enjoyed in recent years. His voluminous novel, *A Book of Memories,* which has been published in several languages despite the considerable difficulties presented by translation, has been listed among the greatest literary works of our age. In German-speaking countries the book first came to public notice in the early 1990s, receiving excellent and comprehensive reviews and collecting literary prizes en route. Now it is the American and British critics' turn to heap praises on the book's English-language version.

It will lessen Nádas's significance not the slightest bit if I point out here—what Nádas would no doubt be the first to admit—that many other Hungarian writers deserved similar international recognition (Krúdy, Móricz, Tersánszky, Kosztolányi, Nagy, Ottlik, to name only a few), for whom, however, it never came. The reasons are many, with linguistic isolation being the most obvious and the most notable. It was poets who were most seriously affected by this isolation, even though poetry has been the strong point of Hungarian literature ever since the Renaissance. Nevertheless, the national issue and cultural tradition, in varying shapes, yet essentially in an enduring continuity, left their marks on the works of the greatest Hungarian literary figures, poets and writers alike. In fact, these were the elements that created the symbolic and self-contained forms of national self-reflexion, passed onto subsequent generations. National identity, the great national issues and the common national language provided the melting pot in which the various worldviews, mediated by literary works rooted in noble, plebeian-peasant and bourgeois-urbanized outlooks, were fused. Still, this would interest foreign readers only as a curiosity, at best. To be able to discover the originality some of these works possessed, and to be able to appreciate their unique worldview, a foreigner was required to develop a thorough familiarity with the semiotics of Hungarian politics and culture. The people who were able to achieve this had, almost to the last, become "Magyarized" in their souls. The success of any Hungarian writer abroad

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is our regular reviewer of new fiction.

seems to have pivoted on his ability to break out of the national isolation into which he was forced not only by his native language, but also by his own self—not by choice, but by the constraints of history and the traditional mindset of Hungarians.

A historical turning point in the Hungarian mindset and intellectual development came with Nádas's generation; the seeds for this had been sown at the beginning of the century through the "western" orientation of the middle-classes, but had been forced into hibernation by the interlude of socialism. By this time, the national aspect and national rhetoric—along with other politically conceived ideals and ideologies—had more or less lost their appeal to those prominent in the arts. Of course, this development failed to cure the existing problems, which returned with a vengeance after the political transition of 1989–90, but now they were at least largely confined to the political arena. The intellectual sphere, and most notably literature, seem to have abandoned any direct, "militant" representation of these problems. Regardless of how we feel about this, the national angle now interests only an ever diminishing minority in Hungary.

Beginning with the late 1970s, trends in literature provided the first telling signs of this development. Admittedly, the supranational policies of the Kádár regime's doctrinaire "internationalism", which swept inherited problems under the carpet while adding new ones to them, was also necessary for the national issue to lose significance. After the fall of the Kádár regime, it was no longer possible simply to pull out these problems and give them a dusting-off. Nádas and his generation in the meantime had started to think differently about these questions.

This generation was the first to have no personal memories of the half-gentry and half-bourgeois Hungarian society before the Second World War, for whom the trauma of the Trianon Peace Treaty was a terrible blow. Nádas spent his childhood in the darkest days of the Stalinist dictatorship, and witnessed the brutal suppression of the Revolution in 1956 during the sensitive period of his adolescence. By the time Nádas and members of his generation grew up and started to work in the milieu of Kádárian consolidation, they were full of doubts and suspicions, just as they were surrounded by doubts and suspicions themselves. Since they had played no active and conscious part in the war, or in the dictatorship, or in the revolution, they felt responsible neither for the crimes and mistakes committed, nor for the losses incurred in these calamities. Still, they had to bear the consequences. It must have seemed to them as if they had been left out of history, and for this reason they disowned the world in which they lived.

As they could not find a place in the adult world, they continued to be treated as young for longer than usual: they were looked on as rebellious youngsters who must be integrated into society with paternal firmness and patience. The emergence of the "young writers" in the 1960s was met with distrust and hostility by the cultural authorities and the critics subservient to them. The publication of their works was constantly hampered or, if the situation required it, they were banned altogether. Although not a member of any of the literary coteries formed by his contemporaries, Nádas himself was considered as a "young writer" for an undue length of time, forced onto the fringe of literary life for his obvious intellectual and political sovereignty even more than his peers were. He published hardly anything in the 1970s.

Beginning with the early 1960s, Nádas's generation was fascinated by contemporary western art and culture. As a

gesture of softening the dictatorship, and with an eye to winning over the intelligentsia, the Party officials allowed artworks, influences and information, which left certain taboos untouched, to filter through. The impulses of Existentialism and Structuralism, the literature of the Absurd, the Beat movement and Pop culture came to exert a stronger influence on thinking and taste than did national traditions—not to mention the superficial effects of the stylistic ideals of socialism.

In any case, Nádas himself—interestingly enough—started out in the 1960s by writing short stories that showed no influences from the contemporary movements and fashions, thus distancing himself not only from the guiding principles of cultural politics, but also from the literary ideals of his own generation. He wrote classical, tightly-woven short stories, disciplined and well-balanced with regard to both form and style, in which he analysed, with unusual thoroughness, the interconnections between general human situations and behaviours and their social background. Set in the recent past and often inspired by autobiographical elements, the stories presented the public and political life of Hungary without recourse to the usual stereotypes of social criticism, at that time only possible anyway to a limited extent because of censorship. Instead, the stories focused on the psychological attitudes of their personae, many of whom were children, presenting the moral tensions and the tragic conflicts between the powerless and the powerful. The narrative was objective and seemingly impassive, yet aloof observation was fired by the emotive power of personal experience.

The hard core of Nádas's world, of the themes he later on expanded in different ways and, most importantly, at different levels, was already there in his earliest pieces. "The Bible", his first short story, written in 1962, was not published until 1965. Set in the early 1950s, the story was about a small boy, and was narrated by him in the first person. He lived in an expropriated villa in Buda with his parents, who were privileged party apparatchiks in Rákosi's Stalinist regime, and whose lifestyle emulated that of the villa's former bourgeois owners. They kept a domestic servant, a girl who aroused the boy's sexual curiosity. Through the boy's fault, the servant girl burnt an expensive nightdress of the boy's mother when ironing it and, to escape punishment, she hid the garment. Accused of stealing it, the girl asks for a few days off and fails to return. Mother and son visit her at her home, and find her living in abject poverty with her family. Here the mother discovers that the girl has indeed stolen something though not the sleeping gown but their family Bible, a cherished possession only in that they had used it to fool the authorities during their activities in the underground Communist movement. The boy had given the mysterious old book to the unsuspecting and naive girl, in whose hands it regained its original function.

The servant girl and the Bible embody an archaic world founded on faith, which in the boy's mind comes into conflict with the parents' values, throwing him into utter confusion. There are strange, prophet-like old men in some other of Nádas's early pieces to represent this ancient biblical knowledge, which has been destroyed by the crisis of values in the modern secularized world. In "The Lamb", for example, there is a lonely old Jew of undoubted dignity, who falls victim to an outbreak of anti-Semitic violence one Easter in a desolate suburban housing estate. The incident is, again, told by a boy, who is not really sure which side to take at first, before finding guidance in the old Jew's Easter sacrifice. The main characters of the short story en-

titled "The Wall" are the boy from "The Bible" and a wise old war cripple who survives by begging; they meet in the garden of a luxurious villa in Buda. Looming large over the horizon of the childhood games we have, as a memento of the era, the mysterious and sinister sight of the party leader's fortified mansion, surrounded by walls and guarded by his henchmen and their savage dogs. The central character of "Madame Claire's House" is, once again, a Communist martyr's widow, who, regardless of her bourgeois descent, receives a handsome house as a present from the one-party state as a reward for her husband's services in the underground Communist movement, and is even allowed to keep a domestic. This short story, which occasionally makes use of grotesque elements, portrays the crisis which the young servant girl, simple-minded and clumsy, yet impressively upright in her own way, creates in Madame Claire's life, locked up as she is in a world of lies.

Nádas ultimately found his own voice in his first novel, *The End of a Saga Novel.* Although written between 1969 and 1972, due to the censors' objections the book was only published in 1977. In this work, too, Nádas started out from the autobiographical motifs of his earlier short stories, but here he was able to enhance their function and message by embedding them in the multilayered plot of a novel. The interconnections of both form and content invest the novel with mythical dimensions and fill it with reflections on the history of the genre. *The End of a Saga Novel* tells the concluding part of the thousand-year history of a Jewish family, but does so in a manner that deconstructs the genre itself. Representing the Jewish-Christian tradition, the family's history comes to an end and this, in turn, symbolizes the final and hopeless failure of that tradition. The central character is, once again, a boy, who in the early 1950s in his family home learns about the world that surrounds him. His interior monologue unfolds the story in a non-linear manner, with segments running parallel in the timeless space of children's awareness, forming symbolical/mythical connections.

The naive viewpoint of a child's mind, the family legends told by the patriarchal grandfather, the motifs of the garden and the blood sacrifice, the symbols of the lamb, the fish and the snake—all these help to extend the concrete temporal and spatial dimensions of the novel into those of the general human condition, enabling Nádas to write a relatively apolitical novel on a subject which was, at that time, still considered as being rather touchy politically: the tragic ruin, ending in an odious betrayal, of a bourgeois family of ancient Jewish lineage, traced back—at least in the murky depths of mythical imagination—to biblical ancestors. The father, who is an officer in the State Security, bears false witness in a show trial, using the unexpected death of the grandfather, who is still alive, as an excuse; the grandfather dies when he hears of this and the boy ends up in a children's home, degraded into a nameless and rootless creature.

The evil nature of the Stalinist dictatorship, although barely indicated in the novel, is given a philosophical dimension by the biblical/mythical perspective, presented as the monstrous finale in the fatal process of secularization and alienation, which eventually cuts off a man from his roots and delivers him to an impersonal and totalitarian machine. Although the material of *The End of a Saga Novel* is evidently made up of concretely identifiable Hungarian situations and relations, through his narrative processes and cultural references Nádas has been able to create a fictitious world which any non-

Hungarian reader could easily relate to. In one or two of their works, Géza Ottlik, István Örkény, Iván Mándy and Miklós Mészöly, Hungarian writers of the previous two generations, have already shown examples of this; by the early 1980s Nádas joined them as one of the few contemporary Hungarian writers whose works were read and appreciated in translation by a small foreign audience, primarily in German-speaking countries.

Nádas's breakthrough, which truly came with *A Book of Memories,* regardless of the numerous translations of *The End of a Saga Novel,* has largely been founded on the rejection of most of the Hungarian literary tradition. Many of the writers emerging after Nádas, including Péter Esterházy, for example, were able to generate interest through translation by making use of the Hungarian linguistic and literary traditions, even by addressing the national issues, although admittedly often doing it in an ironical or even in a parodistic way, in a manner that had previously been thought inadmissible in view of the "gravity" and solemnity of the problem. Nádas received inspiration for his radical non-conformity (not only to the national traditions but also to the contemporary post-modern trends) from such non-Hungarian classic moderns as Proust, Thomas Mann and Musil. The point that he did not try to adjust his ideas and aspirations to the Hungarian milieu is well illustrated by the fate of his three plays, all written in the second half of the 1970s.

Respectively entitled *House Cleaning, Meeting* and *Burial,* the three plays were written to a new sense of theatre, alien to contemporary Hungarian play-writing and theatrical practice. "It is not the story that I am interested in in the theatre", Nádas declared in one of his writings. "Nor am I interested in so-called ideas. That is a matter for literature and philosophy. In theatre it is the system of relations emerging between live bodies that I am interested in. The image, although not in the sense of the word in which it is used in the fine arts. I am interested in the motion picture of live bodies. [...] I tried to rely on the musical qualities of language. I wanted to create a subtle linguistic medium, in which actors are required to speak with the inner connections of their entire bodies."

House Cleaning was based on the short story "Madame Claire's House". Claire is, once again, the widow of a Communist martyr; Susanne is a young cleaning woman and Joseph is Claire's adopted son. There is a major house-cleaning in Claire's house, which provides a good opportunity to clean the memories, the soul also. The past is being evoked not just by words, but by its ritual re-enaction too. Having adopted Joseph, the son of an ordinary couple living next door, Claire raised him, consciously or unconsciously, so as to resemble a former lover, long since dead. However, Joseph's desire is directed at Susanne, and although Claire is able to relive her old passion through Susanne and Joseph's longings, she is jealous of the girl, and for good reason too: the girl liberates Joseph from Claire's overprotective care, and he finally kills his step-mother.

Nádas meant *House Cleaning* to be an "opera of words": he composed the soliloquies and the dialogues as arias, duets and trios, to be performed *con amore,* or in a tone of intimate love, with the effect of washing away the difference between spoken words and unspoken thoughts on the stylized level of the play. In this way the actors' lines are only partly meant to create characters and situations. Like other theatrical devices such as choreographed movements, they help celebrate the performance as a rite. The Hungarian theatre was unable to make anything of it at all, its members felt comfortable only in Stanis-

lavsky's realist school or in the alienated style of Brecht and the absurd theatre. Although there were some isolated attempts to produce Nádas's play on stage in the 1980s, his theatrical ideas had no influence and have never really been tested in practice. It is hardly a coincidence that Nádas has long been a devotee of the German dancer Pina Bausch's movement theatre; her "motion picture of live bodies" creates the kind of theatrical effects that Nádas himself dreamed up in his plays.

Secluded in the country, Nádas worked on *A Book of Memories* from 1974 till 1985. When the book was finally published in 1986, the critics promptly hailed it as a masterpiece. The monumental, multilayered plot has been intriguing critics and literary historians ever since. Nádas not only opened a new chapter in the history of Hungarian fiction, but became one of the catalysts in the renewal of Hungarian literary theory and criticism. Similarly to the way he, the leading writer of his generation, cast aside the traditionally dominant national approach, the critics of his generation, precisely by analysing his works, have acquired a modern concept of literature, which has by now replaced that of previous generations, who thought either in plebeian-national terms or in Marxist categories. The critic Péter Balassa played a pioneering role in this change ever since Nádas first appeared. Balassa published a 500-page study on Nádas, in a way summing up, and also crowning, his previous critical work. The study itself, in a sense, came to form the counterpart of *A Book of Memories* in the field of criticism.

In his Foreword, Balassa points out that his work "has been made easier [...] by the fact that—unlike in the case of other important writers of the period—Nádas's work as a writer had, ever since the publication of *The End of a Saga Novel,* been the subject of intense and high-quality critical attention; in this instance we can talk of a genuine, although not at all homogeneous, interpreting community, which, after the publication of *A Book of Memories,* has assumed international dimensions. [...] In this sense I have also tried to give a picture, admittedly of a limited scope, of the past two decades of Hungarian literary criticism: I felt the need to show what it meant yesterday, and what it means today, that Nádas's art is present in Hungarian literature and in the entirety of Hungarian culture; in my endeavor I was greatly helped by the fact that—to put it quite simply—he has good critics."

An analysis of *A Book of Memories* takes up almost half of Balassa's book, making frequent references to comments by contemporary critics. In a section entitled "The Interpreting Community", Balassa devotes more than a hundred pages to quoting and commenting on the various readings of the novel, which have been put forward ever since its publication. In another, equally lengthy chapter he presents the "context": in other words, the place that Nádas's novel occupies among writers, works and cultures, together with the interconnections that link them together. Apart from its Proustian connection, the novel mostly displays German influences and connections (Thomas Mann, Musil, Hesse), which is hardly surprising, considering that the story takes place partly in Berlin and some of it on the Baltic coast. There are strong ties linking Nádas's thinking and style to German literature and culture, and that fact alone would justify the German environment, location and characters. The great response that the book generated in German-speaking countries has led some Hungarian literary critics to the view that *A Book of Memories* in fact has found its true cultural context with its German translation, a view that well illustrates the men-

tality of those who would like to specify what should form part of the national culture and what should not. According to this view, the complicated periodic sentences, with their abstract content, are more befitting to the German character than to the Hungarian. On the question of how Nádas's style is related to the German language, and on the truth behind the claim that the book merely had to be translated "back" to the language it allegedly originated from, we should really ask the translator, Hildegard Groesche.

Admittedly, *A Book of Memories* is not a Hungarian novel insofar as its problematics is European. It examines the final phase in the disintegration of personality which took place in Eastern and Central Europe under the rule of Soviet Communism, from the perspective of the history of European culture, of the humanity of the Greek and Christian world view and of the mythical texts of modern epics. The protagonist's childhood under the Stalinist dictatorship of the Rákosi regime; his experience of the 1956 Revolution; East Berlin of the 1970s; the mirroring of his character in the character of his German friend, who eventually betrays him and flees to the West; and his own violent death when the "memoirist" has already died in him—all these clearly mark those historical coordinates, with which this huge and complex collection of memories and motifs can be associated.

A Book of Memories describes a monumental attempt by the central character to extend, by way of recollections, his personality into the taboo regions: of himself, of his past, of his subconscious mind, of his instincts and of his body—in other words, into all the areas where he previously failed. Conceiving the personality not only as soul and intellect, but also as body, Nádas wanted to write the complete biography of the hero's body. However, the memoirist fails in his attempt to emancipate himself. He continues to be held hostage to his memories, which determine him, throwing him back into his childhood over and over again, locking him up in his mutilated and immature East European personality, until he finally loses all self-respect. The artistic and philosophical *tour de force* of the book is the way in which Nádas is able to demonstrate, reaching to the cultural historical preliminaries on the one hand and to the depth of instincts and gut feelings on the other, the interconnections between man's loss of identity and totalitarian oppression.

The great international success of *A Book of Memories* was probably helped by the fortunate timing of its publication abroad. The sweeping political changes of 1989/1990 enhanced the book's impact, placing the novel in the historical perspective necessary for its due appreciation. Of course, we can look at it the other way around: *A Book of Memories* was born precisely here and now, because the historical situation extracted it from the person able to write it. More than ten years have passed since the book came out: a mere blink on the time scale of history, and certainly less than the time in which a great novel is expected to exert its full impact. Yet, in the life of a man, of a writer, it is a considerable interval, especially if you spend it amids the dramatic changes that have taken place in this country.

Ever since publishing his great novel, Nádas has only been writing essays, in which he has been reflecting on these changes in his own, sovereign and profound way. It seems that the historical moment is not favourable for comprehensive and sweeping treatments such as that of *A Book of Memories*. The essays are consistently in line with the novel's approach: in them too, personal fate, the Hungarian milieu and the global perspective form a close unity. ❧

Attila József

Poems

Translated by Zsuzsanna Ozsváth and Frederick Turner

No Shriek of Mine

Nem én kiáltok

No shriek of mine, it is the earth that thunders.
Beware, beware, Satan has gone insane;
cling to the clean dim floors of the translucent springs,
melt yourself to the plate glass,
hide behind the diamond's glittering,
beneath the stones, the beetle's twittering,
O sink yourself within the smell of fresh-baked bread,
poor wretched one, poor wretch.
Ooze with the fresh showers into the rills of earth—
in vain you bathe your own face in your self,
it can be cleansed only in that of others.
Be the tiny blade upon the grass:
greater than the spindle of the whole world's mass.
O you machines, birds, tree-branches, constellations!
Our barren mother cries out for a child.
My friend, you dear, you most beloved friend,
whether it comes in horror or in grandeur,
it is no shriek of mine, but the earth's thunder.

(1924)

Here and in our next issue, we are publishing a selection from the poems of Attila József *(1905–1937), translated by* ***Zsuzsanna Ozsváth*** *and* ***Frederick Turner.*** *Their volume of translations of poems by* Miklós Radnóti *(1909–1944),* Foamy Sky, *Princeton University Press, 1992, has had two printings so far. (It was reviewed in No. 141 of* The HQ.*) Their József volume,* The Iron-blue Vault, *is forthcoming.*

What Will Become of Him...

Mondd, mit érlel

What will become of him, whoever
has got no handle to his hoe,
upon whose whiskers crumbs don't quiver,
who dawdles, gloomy, thrawn, and slow;
who would from half a furlong's hoeing
keep one potato out of three,
whose hair falls out in patches, growing
bald unnoticed—who'd care to see?

What will become of him, whoever
has but five acres under crops,
whose draggled hen clucks at the stover,
whose thoughts nest in a mudhole's slops;
when no yoke clinks, no oxen bellow;
when mother serves the family soup
and steam from a liquid weak and yellow
drifts from the bottom of the scoop?

What will become of him, whoever
must live alone and work alone;
whose stew has neither salt nor savour,
the grocer gives no tick nor loan;
who has one broken chair for kindling,
cat sitting on the cracked stove's shelf;
who sets his keychain swinging, jingling,
who stares, stares; lies down by himself?

What will become of him, whoever
works to support his family;
the cabbage-heart they quarrel over,
the film the big girl gets to see;
always the laundry—dirt's slow strangling—
the wife's mouth tastes of vegetables,
and when the light's off, silent wrangling,
gropings, eavesdroppings, darkness, rules?

What will become of him, whoever
idles outside the factory,
a woman meanwhile hauls the lever,
a pale-skulled child sets the fusee;
when through the gates he gazes vainly,
vainly humps bags and market-creels—
he dozes, they rouse him inhumanely,
and always catch him when he steals?

What will become of him, whoever
weighs out potatoes, salt, and bread,
wraps them in newsprint's inky flavour,
and doesn't brush the scales he's read;
and in the gloom he dusts, complaining,
the rent is high, the tax is keen,
the price—but what's the use explaining
the extra charge for kerosene?

And what will come of him, whoever
knows he's a poet, sings his fears,
whose wife mops up the floor forever,
who chases copy-work for years;
whose name's a brand-name, if he has one,
just like a soap or cooking-fat,
whose life is given, if he has one,
all to the proletariat?

(1932)

Without Hope

Reménytelenül

Slowly, musingly

I am as one who comes to rest
by that sad, sandy, sodden shore
and looks around, and undistressed
nods his wise head, and hopes no more.

Just so I try to turn my gaze
with no deceptions, carelessly.
A silver axe-swish lightly plays
on the white leaf of the poplar tree.

Upon a branch of nothingness
my heart sits trembling voicelessly,
and watching, watching, numberless,
the mild stars gather round to see.

In heaven's ironblue vault . . .

In heaven's ironblue vault revolves
a cool and lacquered dynamo.
The word sparks in my teeth, resolves
—oh, noiseless constellations!—so—

In me the past falls like a stone
through space as voiceless as the air.
Time, silent, blue, drifts off alone.
The swordblade glitters; and my hair—

My moustache, a fat chrysalis,
tastes on my mouth of transience.
My heart aches, words cool out to this.
To whom, though, might their sound make sense?

(1933)

ODE

Óda

1

I am alone on these glittering crags.
A sinuous breeze
floats delicious, the infant summer's
suppertime simmer and ease.
I school my heart into this silence.
Not so arduous—
All that is vanished is aswarm in me,
my head is bowed, and my hand is
vacuous.

I see the mane of the mountain—
each little leafvein
leaps with the light of your brow.

The path is quite deserted,
I see how your skirt is floated
in the wind's sough.
Under the tender, the tenuous bough
I see you shake out your hair, how it clings,
your soft, trembling breasts; behold
—just as the Szinva-stream glides beneath—
the round white pebbles of your teeth,
and how the welling laughter springs
tumbling over them like fairy gold.

2

Oh how much I love you, who've given
speech to both the universes:
the heart's caves, its trickweaving deepenings,
sly involute lonelinesses—
and starry heaven.
As water glides from its own thunderous fall
you fly from me and we are cleft and parted,
whilst I, among the mountains of my life, still call,
still kneel, and sing, and raise the echo with my cry,
slamming against the earth and sky,
that I love you, step-nurse, mother-hearted!

3

I love you as a child his mother's breast,
as the dumb caves their own bottomlessness,
as halls the light that shows them best,
as the soul loves flame, as the body rest!
I love you as we who marked for death
love the moments of their living breath.

Every smile, every word, every move you make,
as falling bodies to my earth, I press;
as into metal acids eat and ache,
I etch you in my brains with instinct's stress,
beautiful shapeliness,
your substance fills the essence they partake.

The moments march by, clattering and relentless,
but in my ears your silence lies.
Even the stars blaze up, fall, evanesce,

but you're a stillness in my eyes.
The taste of you, hushed like a cavern-pool,
floats in my mouth, as cool;
your hand, upon a water-glass,
veined with its glowing lace,
dawns beautiful.

4

Ah, what strange stuff is this of which I'm made,
that but your glance can sculpt me into shape?—
what kind of soul, what kind of light or shade,
what prodigy that I, who have long strayed
in my dim fog of nothingness unmade,
explore your fertile body's curving scape?

—And as the logos flowers in my brain,
immerse myself in its occult terrain! . . .

Your capillaries, like a bloodred rose,
ceaselessly stir and dance.
There that eternal current seethes and flows
and flowers as love upon your countenance,
to bless with fruit your womb's dark excellence.
A myriad rootlets broider round
and round your stomach's tender ground,
whose subtle threadings, woven and unwound,
unknit the very knot whereby they're bound,
that thus thy lymphy cellbrood might abound,
and the great, leaved boughs of thy lungs resound
their whispered glory round!

The eterna materia goes marching on
happily through your gut's dark cavern-cells,
and to the dead waste rich life is given
within the ardent kidneys' boiling wells!

Billowing, your hills arise, arise,
constellations tremble in your skies,
lakes, factories work on by day and night,
a million creatures bustle with delight,
millipede,
seaweed,

a heartless mercy, gentle cruelty,
your hot sun shines, your darkling north light broods,
in you there stir the unscanned moods
of a blind incalculable eternity.

5

So falls in clotted spatters
at your feet this blood,
this parched utterance.
Being stutters;
law is the only spotless eloquence.
My toiling organs, wherein I am renewed
over and over daily, are subdued
to their final silence.

But yet each part cries out—
O you who from the billioned multitude,
O you unique, you chosen, wooed
and singled out, you cradle, bed,
and grave, soft quickener of the dead,
receive me into you.

(How high is this dawn-shadowy sky!
Armies are glittering in its ore.
Radiance anguishing to the eye.
Now I am lost, I can no more.
Up in the world I hear it batter,
my heart's old roar.)

6

(Envoi)

(Now the train's going down the track,
maybe today it'll carry me back,
maybe my hot face will cool down today,
maybe you'll talk to me, maybe you'll say:

Warm water's running, there's a bath by and by!
Here is a towel, now get yourself dry!
The meat's on the oven, and you will be fed!
There where I lie, there is your bed.)

(1933)

Mama

Mama

On Mama now my thoughts have dawdled
all of a week. Clothes-basket cradled
creaked on her hip; she'd climb the stairway
up to the drying-attic's airway.

Then, for I was an honest fellow,
how I would shriek and stamp and bellow!
That swollen laundry needs no mother.
Take me, and leave it to another.

But still she drudged so quietly,
nor scolded me nor looked upon me,
and the hung clothes would glow and billow
high up above, with swoop and wallow.

It's too late now to still my bother;
what a giant was my mother—
over the sky her grey hair flutters,
her bluing tints the heaven's waters.

(1934)

My Eyes Jump In and Out...

Ki-be ugrál

My eyes jump in and out, I'm mad again.
When I'm like this, don't hurt me. Hold me tight.
When all I am goes crosseyed in my brain,

don't show your fist to me: my broken sight
would never recognize it anyway.
Don't jerk me, sweet, off the void edge of the night.

Think: I have nothing left to give away,
no one to have and hold. What I called "me"
is nothing too. I gnaw its crumbs today,

and when this poem is done it will not be. . .
As space is by a searchlight, I am pierced through
by naked sight: what sin is this they see

who answer not, no matter what I do,
they who by law should love, be claimed by me.
Do not believe this sin you can't construe,

till my grave-mould acquits and sets me free.

(1936)

The Scream

Kiáltozás

Love me wildly, to distraction,
scare away my huge affliction,
in the cage of an abstraction,
I, an ape, jump up and down,
bare my teeth in malediction,
for I have no faith or fiction,
in the terror of His frown.

Mortal, do you hear my singing,
or mere nature's echoes ringing?
Hug me, don't just stare unseeing
as the sharpened knife comes down—
there's no guardian that's undying
who will hear my song and sighing:
in the terror of His frown.

As a raft upon a river,
Slovak raftman, whosoever,
so the human race forever
dumb with pain, goes drifting down—
but I scream in vain endeavour:
love me: I'll be good, I shiver
in the terror of His frown.

(1936)

Tumble out of the Flood

Bukj föl az árból

Terrify me, my hidden God,
I need your wrath, your scourge, your thunder;
quick, come tumble out of the flood,
lest nothingness sweep us asunder.

I am the one the horse knocks down,
up to my eyes in dirt, a cipher,
and yet I play with knives of pain
too monstrous for man's heart to suffer.

How easily I flame! the sun
is not more prone to burn—be frightening,
scream at me: leave the fire alone!
Rap my hands with your bolt of lightning.

Hammer it into me with rage
or grace: it's innocence that's evil!
that innocence could be my cage
burns at me fiercer than a devil.

A fragment from a wreck I lie,
tossed by a cruel tempest frothing;
alone; I dare, and I defy:
all merely signifying nothing.

I'd choke my very breath, to die,
your rod and staff thus disobeying,
and look you boldly in the eye,
you empty, human-faced unbeing!

(1937)

Eagle

Sas

Eagle, gigantic, diving
heaven's echoey precipices!
What winged thing's this, arriving
from voids and nothingnesses!

His starry beak of azure
devours the vaulted cosm,
his talons of erasure
rip at its flesh-warm bosom.

The world's eyeball, transparent,
weeps at the the bloody capture,
the downy feathers errant.
This is the red dawn's rapture.

There is no height above it,
essence is torn and savaged;
there is no depth beneath it,
being itself is ravished.

One wing is my own aura,
the other wing is Flóra:
newborn, beyond all seeming,
each thus in each redeeming.

(1937)

Frederick Turner

The Ars Poetica of Attila József

When Attila József came to the edge of the world, as he did every time he sat down to write a poem, he saw all of reality laid out beneath him like a landscape, its coasts and fields and rivers, its wide sandy reaches, its bright green marshes. He rises like a shaman on his visionary flight into the sky; past and future, and the forces of the present that transform the latter into the former, are prophetically clear to him.

Eagle, gigantic, diving
heaven's echoey precipices!
What winged thing's this, arriving
from voids and nothingnesses!
(Eagle)

the dawns commissioned in their sky-fought wars,
the leaping suns and finely-trembling stars,
around my quiet and sleepy head are hurled,
my temperature's the glowing of the world— —
(Medallions)

At the heart of his vision is a majestic cosmology, and his most central work as a poet is to reveal it in words.

In heaven's ironblue vault revolves
a cool and lacquered dynamo.
The word sparks in my teeth, resolves
—oh, noiseless constellations!—so—
(Without Hope)

Attila József's work was interrupted by his suicide. He thus did not have the chance to lay out his cosmological vision discursively in prose where its philosophical importance can be seen for what it is—rather than as merely the mysterious and impressive metaphors used by a poet to decorate his observations and apostrophes. The last service of the translator is therefore to show the elegant logic, the scientific insight, and the formidably coherent organization of his

philosophical system. What was it he saw from that place of the halted breath, of fine and brilliant crystalline light?

József's cosmology can be divided into five major elements: the universe of existent being; the great void that lies beyond the edge or shore or rupture that bounds the universe; the forces of collective human creativity and love that continue nature's own work of pushing out the boundaries of being into the future; the conscious self of the poet; the world-creating activity of poetry.

The existent world

For József the universe as it is is ordered, coherent, interdependent, and maintained through the dialectical tension of its elements. It has a necessity which is both beautiful and fateful. The image he uses is a homely one from a craft he must obviously have had to practice often: chopping and stacking wood. A well-stacked cord of firewood holds together and holds up, paradoxically, by the tendency of all of its components to fall apart and down:

Just like split firewood stacked together,
the universe embraces all,
so that each object holds the other
confined by pressures mutual,
all things ordained, reciprocal.
(Consciousness)

These lines also appear in "(Self-devouring...)," his moving apology to Mihály Babits, the elder poet he had previously lampooned in his cruel poem "On a Poet." There they serve as a demonstration to his distinguished former enemy of the seriousness of his philosophical views, and as an exposition of the way in which two poets of opposed tendencies, the flautist (Babits) and the piper (himself) might cooperate in a universal harmony. Like Pindar, József associates the harmony of music with the skill of joinery, which so arranges the joints of posts and beams in a roof, that storms make the bond tighter. The lines were obviously important to him, for he repeats them verbatim in "Consciousness," one of his most important philosophical poems, and elaborates them into an ontology.

If one were to characterize József's ontology in formal philosophical terms, one might call him a realist. But his differs from all the traditional brands of realism. He is not a common-sense realist, who accepts the world as it seems. He finds a higher and deeper reality in things than the illusions of habit, custom, appetite, opinion, and fashion:

Those other poets—why should I worry
how they defile their paunch and crop?
with gin and trumped-up imagery
let them feign drunkenness, throw up.

I leap the time's saloon, its liquor,
strive for intelligence, and beyond!
My brain is free, I'll not play sucker
and serve their fatuous demi-monde.

Let nature be your test and measure!
Let yourself eat, drink, sleep, embrace!
No pain shall make me serve the pleasure
of powers so crippling, vile, and base.

(Ars Poetica)

He is not a transcendental Platonic or Christian realist either, for he sees that deeper reality as immanent, indwelling in the physical immediacy of the world rather than suspended above it in a limbo of perfection, and as dynamic and evolving rather than fixed forever in an eternal present.

Time oozes down, and I no longer
suck the breastmilk of fairytales;
I quaff the real world in my hunger,
whose foamy head is heaven's pales.

(Ars Poetica)

For József reality is a river, like the Danube with its cargo of melon-rinds and pepper-parings like moons, and apples like planets. Its ideal forms are not static and eternal geometries outside it, but more like the pillars of fire and smoke in the book of Exodus that go on before us within the real world, leading us into the future, transforming themselves according to the conditions of the time.

But József is not a phenomenological realist either. He does not succumb to the great temptation of artists and continental philosophers of our century, to escape the drudgery of scientific knowledge by dismissing it as secondary to immediate sensory experience. József's scientific knowledge is astonishingly accurate; as a student he evidently paid much more attention to the sciences than is usual for poets since the Romantic period. He knows that nature constructs itself, and our constructions of it are only a part of nature's own continuous self-articulation. He knows that how we understand something intellectually can deepen and transform our experience of it, especially if that understanding has the surprise of genuine scientific fact. The experience of nature provides us with our intelligence. Nature teaches us not just in the Romantic sense, by the subjective just-so stories that tell us about the consequences of moral action, but as revealed by scientific research and instrumentation and perceived by an *informed* imagination on fire with love for the way things actually are in themselves. Our human experience does not transcend nature, but shares in nature's own self-transcendence as the species that nature evolved to know itself.

József schools his extraordinary sensorium into an experience that is both phenomenologically immediate and scientifically true. For instance, his understanding of genetics and cytology in the following passage is quite uncanny:

My mother was a Kun, my father Magyar
in part, perhaps Rumanian in full.
My mother's mouth gave me the sweetest nectar,
my father's mouth, the truth as beautiful.
If I but stir, they do embrace each other.
It grieves me sometimes when I think of how
time flies, decays. Such matter is my mother.
"You see when we are not! ..." they tell me now.

They speak to me, my being's patrimony,
in this my weakness, thus I may be well,
recalling that I'm greater than the many,
each of my ancestors in every cell—
I am the Ancestor, in my division
I multiply, blithely turn dam and sire,
and they achieve their double parturition,
many times many making one self fire!

(By the Danube)

Nature is our own heredity; the past is alive in us, in our genes, our cells, our muscles: the moment when our parental sperm and egg came together is recapitulated in every present moment as our cells divide in the process of multiplication. József's clear understanding of the physical reality of the world, even our own bodies, can be unsettling until we accept its beauty. He has no illusions about what is going on in his beloved's body; she is a physical world in herself, populated by her own society of living organisms:

Your capillaries, like a bloodred rose,
ceaselessly stir and dance.
There that eternal current seethes and flows
and flowers as love upon your countenance,
to bless with fruit your womb's dark excellence.
A myriad rootlets broider round
and round your stomach's tender ground,
whose subtle threadings, woven and unwound,
unknit the very knot whereby they're bound,
that thus thy lymphy cellbrood might abound,
and the great, leaved boughs of thy lungs resound
their whispered glory round!

The eterna materia *goes marching on*
happily through your gut's dark cavern-cells,
and to the dead waste rich life is given

within the ardent kidneys' boiling wells!
Billowing, your hills arise, arise,
constellations tremble in your skies,
lakes, factories work on by day and night,
a million creatures bustle with delight,
millipede,
seaweed,
a heartless mercy, gentle cruelty,
your hot sun shines, your darkling north light broods,
in you there stir the unscanned moods
of a blind incalculable eternity.

(Ode)

There is, however, nothing reductionist or materialist in József's realism either. After all, he was thrown out of the Communist Party partly perhaps for his reactionary love of traditional poetic forms and meters, as well as for the heterodoxy of his views. The spiritual and the imaginative are for him just as substantial a part of the world as are matter and energy—indeed, more so, because they are more immediately active and represent a further refinement of nature's evolutionary process.

But nature also is the past, and since its reality as past cannot be undone, it stands before us as law rather than choice. It is awesome, beautiful; it is our teacher; it is our heredity and patrimony. But it also gives us our drives and needs and desires, our hunger for food, sex, shelter, progeny, rest, comfort. It expresses itself in the laws of historical necessity, of technological momentum, economic inertia, the social system we are born into. The existent universe, as expressed in the constraints of history, is a prison:

And now I stand, and through the sky-dome
the stars, the Dippers, shine and burn,
like bars, the sign of jail and thraldom,
above a silent cell of stone

(Consciousness)

In his dark and sinister poem "Tiszazug", about a peasant village where a series of horrible crimes had been committed, József gives us a picture of the limitations of nature:

The hen clucks sadly in its roost
under the gutter's sheltered lee,
as if she were the old hag's ghost
that haunts the place beseechingly.

Indoors more freckled livestock lurk,
bluish old loonies, addledly,
who grunt aloud at times, and jerk,
to stop the flow of revery.

Because indeed there's much to brood
when there's no hoeing to be done.
The sweet soft gossip-pipes are chewed,
a thread in broken fingers spun.

For what's an old one worth? He drops
his spoon, he drools, is fed; so frail
that if he serves the piglets' slops
they knock him down and spill the pail.

And soft's the homestead, warm the pen.
The nightfall dangles from a star!
Hard is the firmament. A wren
limps peeping in a pine-bough's scar.

(Tiszazug)

It is natural for humans to rise above the rest of nature, and unnatural when they do not. Mere natural happiness, in "Consciousness", is a fat pig in its swill:

I've seen what they call happiness:
soft, blonde, it weighed two hundred kilos;
it waddled smiling on the grass,
its tail a curl between two pillows.
Its lukewarm puddle glowed with yellows,
it blinked and grunted at me—yes,
I still remember where it wallows,
touched by the dawns of blissfulness.

(Consciousness)

The fear and conservatism engendered by a life limited to natural drives is what puts the common man and woman at the mercy of the rich and powerful, who can play upon their weakness and thus gain their support against progress. If there is nothing beyond the realm of existent being, we are trapped within its laws. But for József there is indeed something beyond being: nothingness itself.

"Frost's glittering axe-head"

Who would this poem's reader be,
must know its poet, must love me,
sailing upon the vacuum,
knowing, as seers do, what's to come...

("Who would this poem...")

The poet comes to the edge or shore of the world. Beyond it there is nothing, a clean and glittering void, as untrodden as the very snow that will fall tomorrow, but not at 180 degrees to the line of the past, as the quotidian future is, but rather, so to speak, at 90 degrees. Sometimes he will set sail in that mysterious void. He comes to that place in ecstasy, extreme despair, exhaustion, at the end of his tether, in a contemplative trance, in the violent exhilaration of sexual joy. Often there is a strange flash of light and a soft whicker, like the sound and glitter of a blade, or a bolt of lightning before the thunder; the experience of instantaneity combined with a preternatural stillness.

(Slowly, musingly)

I am as one who comes to rest
by that sad, sandy, sodden shore
and looks around, and undistressed
nods his wise head, and hopes no more.

Just so I try to turn my gaze
with no deceptions, carelessly.
A silver axe-swish lightly plays
on the white leaf of the poplar tree.
Upon a branch of nothingness
my heart sits trembling voicelessly,
and watching, watching, numberless,
the mild stars gather round to see.

(Without Hope)

This place of emptiness and void is also the place that calls existent reality into being. Nothingness condenses into a world: József here anticipates the insights of quantum cosmology, which regards vacuum as an inherently unstable state which must generate fluctuations at some critical level of microcosmic indeterminacy, fluctuations that can balloon up into a physical universe. Aristotle's dictum, *ex nihilo nihil fit,* out of nothing nothing can be made, is as wrong for the quantum cosmologists and for József as it is for the book of Genesis. Here is one of József's uncanny anticipations of the quantum vacuum and the evolution of the initial singularity into a cosmos:

Nothingness so flits within it
as a something's dust, a minute
past its prime. . .

Nothingness so flits and dances
as if it a something were;
universe expands, condenses
to the future, floating there;
space, the sea, the branched tree-branches,

dogs whose howling avalanches,
sing its sphere...
I, my chair, each fry and phylum,
and the Earth beneath the Sun,
solar system, this asylum,
with the galaxies strive on—

("On Our Poet and His Time")

The experience of this place on the edge of everything touches off in him a wild beauty of poetic metaphor:

As fairy-glittering as thought, as bright,
twinkles the winter night.

Darkness' silver silence locks
the moon onto the Earth's still parallax.
A black crow flies across the frostcold sky;
silence cools in my mouth. Bone, do you hear it?
Molecules tinkle, crystals ramify.

In what glass case or cabinet
glitter such winter nights?

(Winter Night)

A few lines later in this poem he uses the metaphor we have looked at in "Consciousness," of the well-stacked cord of wood, to describe the *chora* or self-constituted container of the universe, glimpsed by metaphor in the cloud of sparks thrown up by a locomotive:

Across the plain,
like its own small winter night,
a freight train sets its plume of smoke alight
chora to contain
in a cord's bourne, infinite,
the turning, burning, dying stars' domain.

(Winter Night)

Nothingness, then, is the dynamic incompleteness that draws the universe on into new creation. But in his more despairing mode he recognizes that nothingness as his very own self; he is a hole in being, his poem only the bright corolla of radiation that is emitted as the matter of his experience plunges past the event-horizon of his engulfing emptiness.

Think: I have nothing left to give away,
no one to have and hold. What I called "me"
is nothing too. I gnaw its crumbs today,

and when this poem is done it will not be...
As space is by a searchlight, I am pierced through
by naked sight

("My Eyes Jump In and Out...")

And in this place József encounters a gigantic and terrifying ghost: God Himself, the Ancient of Days, the absent father whose corpse still feels full of the power to punish.

but I scream in vain endeavor:
love me: I'll be good, I shiver
in the terror of His frown.

(The Scream)

As Nietzsche knew, even the absence or death of God leaves in the language and the world an enormous and unnavigable God-shaped hole. Like Melville's Captain Ahab, József attempts to strike through the mask, to challenge this authority that has forever preempted the poet's power to create, the people's own self-evolution:

I'd choke my very breath, to die,
your rod and staff thus disobeying,
and look you boldly in the eye,
you empty, human-faced unbeing!

(Tumble out of the Flood)

That palpable absence demands of us an inhuman perfection, a renunciation of physicality that can tempt us toward suicide, and that can freeze up the loving sensuality of life:

O bony chastity of heaven—
starved hoarfrost of a feast ungiven!
Unwinking, imperturbable!
Trusting that I'll do what is noble!

I live on diamond-chilly herring,
etheric furniture my dwelling,
my nails grow sharp and curve and harden,
their roses whiten in their garden.

(Rime)

Yet at other times József recognizes the sweetness and the lovingness of the divine as it makes its presence felt in human history, calling us prophetically toward a world of human fulfilment. Perhaps his most charming and delightful poem celebrates with the swarthy Magi the birth of Christ:

In excelsis, Lord of Hosts, Lord of Hosts!
We are not some dry old priests.
What we heard was at your borning,
kingdom of the poor was dawning.

We looked in for just a glimmer,
heavenly king and our redeemer!
Caspar's what my name would be,
sort of earthly king, you see.
(The Kings of Bethlehem)

József's ambivalence about the fellow-occupant of that creative void is fundamental:

Terrify me, my hidden God,
I need your wrath, your scourge, your thunder;
quick, come tumble out of the flood,
lest nothingness sweep us asunder.
(Tumble out of the Flood)

Human creativity and love: the evolutionary dynamo

Between the beautiful and ineluctable order of the past and the chilly perfection of the empty *potentia,* József finds the vital forces of human creativity. In one sense they are the continuation of the dynamic dialectic of nature itself; in another sense they are nature's own transcendence of herself into a new kind of freedom, which because it is conscious of itself is uniquely self-determining. Today we would have different words for that dialectical process: we might call it chaotic emergence, bifurcation at the point of critical complexity, self-organization in far-from equilibrium conditions, the tracing out of a strange attractor by a nonlinear dynamical system. József intuits the process as the turbulence of a river, especially the Danube, and imagines the emergence of new natural and historical forms as the inundation of its banks. Life floods over the very boundaries it has set for itself:

Because the cosmos is a bonus,
gives more than is its due or onus,
life overflows death's final shore,
whelms the heart's margins in its roar...
(To Flóra)

He even seems to see in the sky the fractal attractor of the process, like a rich fabric in the process of its making and unmaking:

I stared from underneath the evening
into the cogwheel of the sky—
the loom of all the past was weaving
law from those glimmery threads, and I
looked up again into the sky

from underneath the steams of dreaming
and saw that always, by and by,
the weft of law is torn, unseaming.

(Consciousness)

Collectively, those vital forces of human creativity, that tear the old law apart to make room for new, act through the masses, nations, the world-spirit itself. The pressure of human technological and scientific progress creates the machinery that sets us free from drudgery, ignorance, fear, and early death. More and more of nature submits to human will; but since human will is itself nature's own most creative and mysterious voice, nothing is lost thereby. There is in József none of that nostalgia for forgetfulness, the mysticism of blood and soil that hated technology, cosmopolitanism, conscious intention, and economic productivity, the *Völkisch* yearning for a pretechnological world of unmediated Being that was as strong in Hungary as in Dostoyevsky's Russia or Heidegger's Germany. He sees the danger of these views as clearly as did his admired Thomas Mann. József has no trace of the widespread antisemitism of the time. He is enthusiastic about clean schools, rural electrification, industrial efficiency, and economic progress, and knowing at first hand what Marx called "rural idiocy," the short, brutal and greasy life of the peasant that has stunted human existence since the Neolithic, he has no illusions about the idyllic world of the Volk. Though the present economic system is its own kind of prison, controlled still by the dead hand of the old property-owners, and though its present inefficiency makes it a polluting menace to the rest of nature, it holds in a dialectical sense the potential for a new kind of society and a new natural/human world.

Not God, nor even thoughts, but coal
and oil and iron instead,

the real material, created us
and poured us, fiery-found,
into the iron molds of society,
the ghoul that holds us bound,
that we might be the conscience of the human
on the eternal ground.
After the priests, the warriors, and the burghers,
thus we became the true,
the ultimate, observer of the laws;
all Man makes that is new,
creation's essence, therefore thrums in us,
as deep violas do.

(At the Edge of the City)

In another, more basic way, the force of human creativity expresses itself through human sexuality and the urge to have offspring. Collective production is founded upon, and in turn, supports individual reproduction.

O you machines, birds, tree-branches, constellations!
Our barren mother cries out for a child.
("No Shriek of Mine")

József yearned for a wife, for a family, for the simple pleasures of an evening meal surrounded by people he loved and who loved him. His wild and pathetic longings for sexual union with the women he fell in love with are not so much a matter of sensual desire as of a need for family, for the opportunity to give his life to a wife and children.

For we'll beget a girl so pretty,
clever and good; a brave wise boy;
they'll save a shred of us, our pity,
like sunfire from the Milky Way,—
and when the Sun is guttering,
our princelings in their sweet machines
shall fly, and fearless, chattering,
find stars to plow the earthly genes.
(March)

Thus both on the collective level and on the individual level, the urge to new creation drives the emergence of a future liberated from the constraints of the past. The economic impulse toward production and the sexual impulse toward reproduction are at their base the same thing: they are the source of joy.

Lift up your heart,
set fire to heaven's domains!

Till it lights up our lovely sense of order,
that urge to shapeliness
by which the brain knows and acknowledges
finite unboundedness:
the outward forces of production and the inward
instinctive drive to bliss...
(On the Edge of the City)

But József was never able to enjoy the riches of either production or reproduction: he died poor and childless. Heartbreakingly, these were the first and last words of poetry he wrote:

I would like a lot of money:
I'd eat roasted goose and honey,
Cut the figure of a dandy,
Buy the fifty-dollar candy.

As I sucked my fancy candy,
I would brag from May to Monday,
In my fine clothes and my villa,
Just how well life treats Attila.

(Dear Joco—*c. 1916; he was about 11 years old*)

Spring, summer, autumn, all are lovely;
but winter's loveliest for one
who hopes for hearth and home and family
only for others, when all's done.

("And So I've Found my Native Country..."
November 24th, nine days before his death)

For József, the creative human power comes to its apex in the work of the poet. The poet hears and articulates the inchoate voice of the people as a whole, and shows to itself the process of production and liberation that animates nature and the human economy alike. This is from his grand and heroic poem on Ady, the Hungarian revolutionary poet:

...
Magyar on Magyar soil, poet within it,
he grasps in angry fists two clods of earth,
above his breast the cloud rears infinite:
but still his revolutions come to birth.

He works on, unforgetting, unassuaging,
there in the strange dark dwellings of the ground,
a thousand acres thunder with his raging,
he hunts the steppes, drives the winds round and round
...

(In Memory of Ady)

The poet, then, combines in his work the inventive ingenuity of the maker, the technologist, with the organic, loving, and nurturing role of the mother and father of a child. The force that is unleashed from the combination is creatively revolutionary, and when it encounters the fences and walls of tyranny, it can be violent. But its goal is harmony. The poet is to the half-conscious striving of humanity toward liberation, what humanity itself is to nature's unconscious struggle toward self-articulation.

The poet—the word may rattle on his lips,
but he (the engineer
who serves the magic of the given world),
seeing the future clear,
as you without, so he within—constructs
a new harmonic sphere.

(On the Edge of the City

The self

The self, for József, is a miraculous reflexive part of nature, the instrument by which nature comes to know itself. It is, indeed, based on primal animal needs that must be met, or else the self will starve, become warped, melt down, or turn toward its self-destruction.

> *My grapes, my purple clustering,*
> *turn now to peapods festering.*
> *Their tiny black eyes twirl and prickle,*
> *mixed with my tears they fall and trickle.*
>
> (Rimę)

But when the self is healthy it is more than a function of society or an economic unit: it is the leading edge of social change, the only place where true progress can begin. The poet in particular is charged with the construction, upon the base of nature and history, of a more humane world. But to do this the poet must first construct, or reconstruct, his own self.

In "Medallions" József gives us, in wild surrealist imagery, perhaps the most profound account in literature of this terrifying, heroic, and magical activity. He harks back to his childhood, when he had been sent into foster care with a peasant family without culture or true compassion, who gave him a different name than his own and put him to work as a swineherd. Here, instead of allowing his deprivation and yearning for home to destroy him, as some children might, he transformed his loss into what he calls "medallions", magical talismans or mandalas in which what is precious in the self can be preserved. Many children collect curious and pretty pebbles and watch with fascination the clottings of foam as they twirl in their cocoa. But for the child Attila they are spells or runes by which the self is simultaneously represented, hidden from harm, buried, and preserved. They are the child's self—that miraculous clotting or turbulence about a point-attractor of absence that creates a centric order from which the world can be seen and known. By means of these objectifications his inner person is given the power to resurrect itself from the dead, bring back the lost mother's breast, and metamorphose reality.

The images tumble out of him in amazing profusion: the rounded chunk of banded quartz, the green stag-beetle, the dew-drop, the jasper pebble shaped like a little pig or knuckle-bone, the fresh cowpat, the apple with a worm in it, the frozen apple-blossom, the spiral of foam on warm milk, the cold knife, the loose button, the galaxies, the green lizard, the roundel of scummy suds in the serving-maid's pail (his mother's), a scrap of stamped iron filigree, a fly in amber that looks like a thin little attorney in tails, a heron's feather, his own little boy-penis, a braided beard, cantaloupes like medieval crowns, and the faces of people of all races, black, red, yellow, and white. He even leaves a stanza blank at

the end, for each of us perhaps to add our own medallions, our own moment when the medallion transforms from private symbol of the psyche to universal archetype.

No biography could be as tragic and needy as József's, and indeed he must have been difficult to get along with, especially for the women with whom he fell in love. But there is a noble and magnanimous mind fastened to that pitiful life; he went on trying to serve a people and a language that had not given him the things he had needed to be a complete human being. He emptied himself again and again in poetry; and sometimes, depleted, insane, in despair, he begins to curse his analyst.

May insects walk upon your eye. May greenish
velvety mould befuzz your breasts. You flung
me into desolation and I vanish.
Grind up your teeth; devour your human tongue.

(Desolation)

But even in his virtual decay and death he leaves behind a mysterious residue of poetry:

in death, my beard of hundredweights grows yet—

And if my skin still twitches, heavens above,
it's all that trickles through from spine to nave,
the little fatties in their glowing swarms,
the stars and galaxies, the small white worms— —

(Medallions)

József achieved his learned and lofty metaphysics—one might almost call it a humane religion—in the teeth of appalling and cruel handicaps. They include his psychologically deprived and scarring childhood, together with literal hunger and malnutrition; an education cut short by prejudice and malice; the temptation of cheap Marxist explanations, and the pain of rejection by a party to which he had dedicated himself; the destructive effects of an evidently mismanaged Freudian psychoanalysis, by an analyst unable to handle her counter-transference; József's very powers of insight, that enabled him to know his own damage with terrible intimacy; his imaginative capacities for self-suggestion, that could, misguided by his therapists, cause him to dwell obsessively upon memories of cruel mistreatment; his dysfunctional sexual relationships, in which he sought a mother for a wife; his ruthless honesty and self-criticism; his courageous but foolhardy inability to resist a challenge, even when the challenge was to tinker with his own innermost mechanism; the threat of God as the authority of Being; and the incomprehension of many of his contemporaries, with the possible exception of Babits, whom he had insulted and antagonized.

This last handicap, of incomprehension by his public, is especially cruel; for I believe József to be an early victim of that ancient unconscious strategy for dealing with poets which has become so much a part of modernist cultural pathology. It is all right for a poet to be a self-destructive and pathetic monster, a victim, as long as he is not a teacher. The poet's role is to experience extreme emotional states in place of the ordinary person, preferably states which lead to sexual adventures and disasters, and to early death, suicide being the most poetic way to go. We have seen this syndrome in the lives of Dylan Thomas, Sylvia Plath, John Berryman, and many others whose suicides had cheering sections. The poet is used as sacrificial scapegoat, as the gold standard that backs the moral currency of existentialist impulsiveness, as the assurance that grandeur of mind and spirit and imagination are paid for by misery and early death—so that we can prudently ignore the new view of the cosmos the poet presents, and are absolved of the onus to comprehend it in ourselves and live out its challenging implications. Some of his more sympathetic audience, like his mentor, the orientalist scholar Bertalan Hatvany, thought József would have been better off without his dangerous metaphysics, especially in the the summer of 1937, when József's mental condition was clearly deteriorating:

Space is my soul. And to its Mother,
that great Space, it fain would fly.
Balloon to gondola, I tether
soul to body, to make I.
As neurotic sublimation
this my truth, or dream and vision,
they deny. . .

Come, my friend, let's face existence.
You must work here on the ground.
Empathy's become resistance.
Your wild fables are unsound.
Leave the former, leave the latter,
watch the twilight colours scatter,
melting round...

("On Our Poet and His Time")

József himself claimed to be a teacher, and we only read him rightly if we take his claim seriously. Oddly enough, that Antal Horger who expelled József from school recognized something about the intellectual role of the poet that many admirers of the self-destructive artist do not.

If Mr. Antal Horger's pleased
our poet's grammar-study's ceased—
folly's

jollies—
no high school, but a nation I,
although he like not, by and by
shall teach,
shall teach.

(For my Birthday)

Part of the tragedy is that his Communist "comrades" understood his threat to the agreed game of power as well as the conservative Horger did, and reacted the same way.

Poetry

For József the poet was an avatar of the ancient shaman-bard: a healer, a psychopomp, an explorer of new knowledge, the community's instrument of consciousness for apprehending its own dark realms of the spirit. He expresses what Shakespeare called "the prophetic soul/ Of the wide world dreaming on things to come." The poet is the trailblazer who marks the paths by which the historical and natural community can break its bonds and seek out wider freedoms and creative possibilities.

His body is the soil's. His soul the digger's,
whose hoe beats sometimes with a deep refrain.
His grave's the freehold of three million beggars,
where they may build, and plant, and reap the grain.
His verse is law; and to the drum of Ady
the hurled stones strike, the castle windows rend,—
the plough cuts one more furrow in his body
whose life will flower forever without end.

(In Memory of Ady)

The poet must therefore use the ancient shamanic devices of the drum and the pipe, which, like the lyre of Orpheus, are symbols and actual accompaniments of metrical form. Together with Radnóti and Babits, who resisted the new fashion of modernist free verse, József is a virtuoso of poetic meter and formal invention. His awareness of the need for formal control is explicit at the beginning of his magnificent "Winter Night,"—a poem composed in a very loose dithyrambic form, bridled only by rhyme and a consistent foot—where he exhorts himself: "Discipline, discipline!" József's metrical traditionalism was perhaps another reason why his leftist contemporaries were as suspicious of him as were those on the conservative right. He indeed marched to a different, and much more ancient, drummer than did either.

In my own work with Zsuzsanna Ozsváth translating József's poems, some of the greatest miracles occurred when I heard in Zsuzsi's voice the authentic ca-

dence of the Finno-Ugric Altaic shaman. József's songs, some of which are virtually nonsense verse if one tries to make strict rational sense of them, would have been untranslatable without the ecstatic beat of his metrical drum and the shriek of his almost Japanese pipe. It is in these poems that we hear his metaphysics most purely of all, for it is here that the language is molten, white-hot, like the scarlet babe of liquid iron that the foundryman pours out in "Night in the Outskirts." His more discursive poems give us language that has cooled and hardened enough, by his blowing on it, for us to taste it with our logical faculties; but in such poems as "The Last of Seven," "Sitting, Standing, Killing, Dying," "Chant," "Medallions," and "Beads," the words are still too hot.

Mortal dweller, may your mother
bear you seven times together!
Once within a house that's burning,
once in floods, the icefloes churning,
once in bedlam, yelling, yearning,
once in a wheatfield's soft turning,
once in cloisters bell-intoning,
once stied with pigs in grunts and groaning.
What though these six cry out to heaven?
You shall be the last of seven!

(The Last of Seven)

This poem is composed in the old Magyar trochaic tetrameter, the "ancient eight," the same meter as that of the magical *Kalevala* of the Finns (which József knew well). The meter survives the millennia of separation between the two related tribes far better than words themselves. We hear the same rhythm here, a primal celebration of living experience itself:

or just sit in silent numbers,
or burn Budapest to embers,
feed a bird with crumbs and butter,
hurl my stale bread to the gutter,
leave my loving sweetheart weeping,
grab her younger sister, groping,
and, if world is my accounting,
leave it, owing, unrelenting—
ah, you binding and dissolving,
you whose poem this is, evolving,
you, my laughing and my crying,
life, my choosing unto dying!

(Sitting, Standing, Killing, Dying)

In "Chant," the meter is a trochaic version of the old tetrameter-trimeter drum-dance rhythm of the English ballad, which also underlies the most archaic

Greek and Roman poetic rhythms: / - / - / - /; / - / - /. The old-fashioned and almost unintelligible peasant words of the song combine with the meter to cast us back to our common Nostratic-speaking ancestors, farming the plains and mountains of Asia and Europe:

Once I milked a soot-nosed bull,
foxtale, hide and seek,
in bull's milk my fate to tell,
foxtale, hide and seek.
In my seven pails' good steel,
foxtale, hide and seek,
milkfoam gan to flame and flail,
foxtale, hide and seek.
So to hide my flaming pail,
foxtale, hide and seek,
plucked I roses pink and pale,
foxtale, hide and seek.
People's rye rocks in the rose,
foxtale, hide and fell,
bailiff's heart in cabbage-rows,
foxtale, hide and fell.

(Chant)

And in "Beads," in the agony of frustrated sexual desire, József finds the same rhythm pumping:

Beads around your neck aglow,
Frogheads in the lake below.
Lambkin droppings,
Lambkin droppings in the snow.

(Beads)

The poet, for József, uses our instinctive drive toward beauty, which is both a continuation and recognition of the universe's own attraction toward self-organization, as a guide. He thus unites nature with history in his own significant personal experience, by means of the contemplative discipline of poetic composition. He discovers the ur-language that lies beneath all natural tongues, that is fully translatable across cultures, and that is the warrant of our brotherhood and sisterhood as human beings. And he articulates the world-spirit through a charged song, which, as in a dream, combines the archetypal past with the experiential present, and ancient public symbols with new private ones. ❧

Jenő Thassy

Dangerous Territory

Excerpts from an Autobiography

The cellar over at the building where Guidó's little girlfriend lived would easily have fitted into the set of any Hollywood action film. An imposing steel door led in from the basement. The first room one encountered, and it was a room, despite the wooden posts and beams, accommodated families. There must have been space enough for twenty or thirty to sleep, but it was far more comfortable in there, there weren't simply mattresses on the floor but collapsible campbeds, divans, sofas, and, what's more, a double bed with a silk quilt and surrounded by a folding screen, so as to ensure at least partial privacy towards the neighbours on the ottoman. Some stylish lady even brought down her dressing table, with hairbrushes and glass bottles strewn about before the mirror, which reflected the dim cellar.

It seemed that the residents of this shelter had been living there for some time already, and had tried to arrange things as comfortably as possible, with armchairs here and there, and even a landscape painting hung on one of the wooden posts. It turned out that many residents of the building, due to the proximity of the Danube, had already moved downstairs a week earlier. On entering, an older man stepped before us; he wore an elegant, dark blue overcoat, a fine wool scarf, an air-defence band on his arm, and a steel helmet.

"That's the building's air-raid warden," whispered Guidó, "a busybody, introduce yourself." I did so, too, respectfully. He shook my hand, and when I thanked him for receiving us, he threw back his head with chin upward, like a general reviewing his troops, looked me hard in the eye, and said they could always use a fine young man. He handed me a typed sheet, his own work: the house and cellar rules. Smoking permissible only in the area before the entrance, naked flames prohibited in the cellar, non-residents obliged to leave the premises by 21:00 hours, no loud music after 22:00 hours. There were some fifteen other points I can no longer recall. Having extended his creation with manifest pride, he introduced his wife, a fading, pleasantly plump, blonde tea-rose of a beauty. They were the proud owners of the double bed and the folding screen. Returning that night to my place, having smoked my final cigarette in the designated spot,

Jenő Thassy was born in 1919, just months after a gang of Serbian soldiers ransacked the family estate in the southwest of the country, killing his father and four-year-old brother. His pregnant mother was herself wounded but survived. The widow had to run the dwindling estate singlehanded, meanwhile trying to give her only child the best possible education. Under the circumstances, this meant a Jesuit boarding school, followed by cadet school and then by the Ludovica Military Academy in Budapest. By the time Lieutenant Thassy received his first posting in 1938 as an officer in the forces sent to re-annex part of former Northern Hungary from Czechoslovakia as a consequence of the First Vienna Award, the country had embarked on its fatal course leading to war on Hitler's side.

Dangerous Territory, *published in 1996, is an irresistible account of an extraordinary life spent in the Central European turmoil up to 1945, the end of the siege of Budapest and the beginning of the Soviet occupation. The young army officer soon discovered that he did not belong in an officer corps that was dominated by blinkered, racist, chauvinist, pro-German officers. His different outlook and his humane behaviour towards his men—natural to him but considered scandalous by his superiors—brought him into contact with like-minded officers in his unit and later in the general staff, where he served thanks to family connections. As the country entered the war and more and more family friends and acquaintances found themselves in trouble for their Jewish blood, Thassy found his place in the tiny circle of the organized resistance in the army. His landed gentry background and connections with the mostly Anglophile aristocracy and the highest circles around Regent Horthy, his uniform and derring-do enabled him to provide protection in one form or another to a large number of people. Wholesale production of forged identity papers, securing hideouts and safe houses, bringing food, medical aid and hope, carrying arms and news, trying to help and save and guide, certainly did more than armed resistance could have achieved under the circumstances.*

Thassy describes his life and adventures with characteristic modesty, mixing frankness with irony and self-reflection. The mural of Hungarian society as it was between the two wars that emerges is fascinating. The book combines hindsight with the young Thassy's feelings and outlook at the time. It is a book that all non-Hungarians interested in Central European history and society ought to read. Here in this country it has already run to two editions.

The excerpt chosen for translation is taken from the end of the book, describing the last days of the siege of Budapest. That catharctic experience brought to an end an era whose child Thassy was. At 78 he is now at work on a second volume, describing his life outside the country he loves so much. In 1947 he fled to Paris and eventually ended up in New York where he is still on the staff of the Voice of America's Hungarian Service. ❧

I passed before their bed. The wife, in a lace-adorned, pink nightgown, was already resting under the quilt, and the commandant happened just then to be removing the tin hat covering his curly grey hair. No sooner had he replaced the overcoat with a dressing gown, than the dear woman let out a whimper: "Hey, Bonbon, tuck in Kitty!", whereupon he gently pulled a blanket over the top of the quilt. A ritual it was, which may well have been repeated in their bedroom for decades, but which here in the cellar became everyone's prey. By "everyone" I mean such curious peeping Toms as myself. From that point on I saw the air-raid warden as "Bonbon", altogether more human and more bearable than when barking orders to everyone in that curt, soldierly way of his. Bonbon was a high-ranking official at the Hungarian General Credit Bank who had never done military service, so it was here that he indulged his concealed martial inclinations.

The other section of the cellar, where I got a place between Guidó and Pál Odeschalchi—as they'd promised, a mattress atop a frame of steel springs some three centimetres above the concrete floor—was reserved for the young. The girls stayed in the more protected corner, at the foot of the main back wall. Among them: Judit, the younger, gentler and, I think, far prettier sister of Guidó's true love—let's call her Bea, though that wasn't her real name; the girls' French governess, Mademoiselle Ginette, unfortunately with a weather-beaten face, who sighed to the good Lord after every explosion, "Oh, mon Dieu!... Mon Dieu!" Beside her, a pretty young woman, Viki, desirable and with cherry lips, likewise belonged to Bea's family, as it were, for she was household in one way or another, a lady companion or something along these lines; and her neighbours were two bobby-soxers bundled up in pullovers and tracksuits. The next row was that of the young men. Bea's three suitors: a big-nosed fellow, a German *Freiherr,* who looked rather like an ant-eater, a bank official under Bonbon and a prospective son-in-law; then a dark-haired offspring of the gentry from beyond the Tisza river, stranded in Budapest by chance, having come up only to take exams; and beside him, a German princeling, in his early twenties, who goggled at Bea with his porcelain-blue eyes, a tendency which had earned him Guidó's hatred. Further over, beside the other wall, were the three of us: Guidó, Pál, and myself. All of us were under 25. Both Guidó and I being 24, we seemed more mature than the others, but, all things considered, this was the *jeunesse dorée* section of the cellar.

Imre Biedermann, who came by that day, the evening of Christmas Day, remarked, "If we've got to live in the cellar like rats, we're in luck at least, seeing as how we're locked up together with young rats of standing." The princeling, who understood Hungarian, took offence at this, but the rest laughed, albeit Bea did so a tad hysterically, as if she'd been tickled. The assortment of folks was by and large her work; for at the age of nineteen she was determined to go far in life, assuming she survived the war. Perhaps she'd learned this from her parents;

her father, a Spanish diplomat, sold antiques on the side, and her mother was a high-stakes card player, mostly chemin-de-fer, who almost invariably won. The adjacent "adult room" down in this cellar included a card corner, where from morning till night they were playing with the paste-boards. Bonbon was among them, too, but Bea's mother was generally the banker; an Egyptian woman, she was a squirmy little worm who must have been beautiful way back, but now scrutinized her fellow players' expressions with stony insect-eyes, and couldn't bear having anyone standing and kibitzing from behind her. *"Allez-vous-en,"* she commanded. "Move over!"

Their guests were interesting. There was Csicsa, the son of István Bethlen,[1] who was in hiding; and his girlfriend, the actress Sára Déry. Imre had known the younger Bethlen since he'd been a boy, but had more regard for his elder brother, Bandi. Polite, happy-go-lucky, a real clown, said Imre even into Csicsa's face, with which Csicsa agreed wholeheartedly, perfectly satisfied. I hoped to hear him say something or other about his famous father, but he said only that the old man was in hiding somewhere or other, and they hoped he'd survive the war, for there would certainly be a lot of rebuilding to be seen to, and that, after all, was a passion of his. His mother, the famous journalist Margit Bethlen, was likewise in Budapest, "somewhere in Buda," he said, but Csicsa knew no more about her either.

Several of Bonbon's banker-friends called over as well from cellars in neighbouring buildings to the card parties. Juliska Perczel, wife of an under-secretary, Miklós Perczel, came over from 3 Petőfi tér; for decades now she'd led Budapest fashion, and I'd known her since my childhood, for she'd long known Bandi Kammerer, a bachelor and younger brother of my uncle in Elekpuszta, one of Hungary's famous equestrian guards. "Jusika", as she was known endearingly to her friends and in theatrical circles, was perhaps sixty, but was still a feast for the eyes in her chic ski-suit. She pecked Imre on both cheeks, while I got a lipstick-stained kiss on the forehead, together with a promise: "If we survive all this, we'll have things to write about, both you and I." Jusika wrote a fashion column for the magazine *Társaság* (Society), and said that a friend of Bandi's had informed her that I was nourishing secret literary ambitions. On leaving she whispered a bit of good advice into my ear: "Careful, and don't sit down to play cards with that woman; she fleeced me inside out, and I'm not exactly a little lamb. Flirt with her daughters instead, they're not as dangerous."

If Guidó had heard this, would he have agreed? Bea subjected her beaux to titillative teasing all day. The *Freiherr* with the ant-eater nose, whose unfortunate exterior saw him dwarfed amidst the others, was her supplier. It was he, that is,

1 ■ Count István Bethlen, Prime Minister 1920–31, was deported to the USSR in 1946 and later died there in unknown circumstances.

who brought her boxes from Gerbeaud.[2] Defying the siege, the famous confectioner opened for an hour or two after Christmas as well so as to sell off his stock, thinking to do so before the establishment was looted or destroyed by bombs. From somewhere or other the *Freiherr* conjured up goose liver paté as well, not to mention French red wine, sardines, and other enchanting treats on which the young people in our section of the cellar nourished themselves in those first days of the siege. When it came to supplying food, Guidó was no match for the *Freiherr*.

We'd arrived from Népszínház utca without food supplies and thus handicapped on the whole, even without the motor bike—which couldn't well be used anyway on the wrecked streets. Hardly anything else had remained in the pantry where Micu Kraisler and the others lived other than a bit of flour and sauerkraut, but now even that was impossibly far away. The first item on the agenda after the holiday was to procure more food supplies. Quite exceptionally, I had money, plenty of it, the only problem was it was well-nigh impossible anymore to obtain anything for it. Defying the heavy shelling, the shrapnel, not to mention the Russian aircraft, we walked about the area two days after the holiday and gathered up all of the few available victuals in a rucksack. Dried beans, pickled cucumbers; biscuits, which someone was selling after presumably having stolen them from the Germans; salted herring, and who knows what else. We stashed it all away in a wooden crate between our mattresses, which simultaneously served as a night-stand.

Guidó, who was much touchier than I when it came to the shelling—due to an all-round more sensitive nervous system, he explained—undertook these unpleasant excursions heroically indeed, twenty or thirty minutes of scurrying about when the flurry of war hit a relative lull. As for what he could demonstrate before Bea, however, well, that was well under the level of the *Freiherr*'s performance. Still, Guidó was incomparably more handsome and wrote poetry to boot, a pastime off-limits to me, seeing as how his older brother István and I had made fun of Guidó since his days as a cadet for his fiery, romantic soul. According to István and Ilonka Som, this heightened state of sensitivity lasted until the object of his affections allowed him into the bed where he yearned to be—only that there was no means for this to happen here in the cellar, so their relationship remained decidedly platonic. Yes, Guidó whispered tirelessly with Bea for hours on end, until she desired a change of place, ordered him back to his bed and replaced him with the princeling, who likewise didn't have to visit the neighbours for a bit of romance. Aside from his lofty rank, he contributed not a thing to Bea's well-being, having arrived in Hungary empty-handed, an anti-Hitler refugee, then down into this cellar also to become a consumer of the *Freiherr*'s generosity. Because he did not get too much, though, he began to lose weight, whereupon, seeing as how

2 ■ Among Budapest's most famous confectioneries, one that exists to this day.

he'd lost his babyish flab, his exterior was rendered all the more romantic, gradually reminiscent of a portrait of Alfred de Musset. To which the plump Bea reacted positively, nibbling away at treats from Gerbeaud.

And Pál Odeschalchi? Our other prince appeared immune to Bea's charms. He treated her like a buddy, and it was her younger sister, Judit, who goggled at his captivating Roman profile. Pál acknowledged this tendency of hers with friendly absent-mindedness, so that when he didn't have anything else to do, he chitchatted with Judit, but with far less passion than Guidó demonstrated for her older sister. If there was "business" to be seen to outside, Pál jumped at the chance, ever the first to offer his services. A steadfast resistance soul, he was—no, the forced idleness of life down in the cellar wasn't exactly him.

It was Pál's idea. We should save the Danube bridges before it was too late, for it was dead certain that, like they'd done with the Margaret Bridge, which had blown up accidentally, the Germans had mined them all, and at the given moment would blow them up as well. So it was that we made our way down Váci utca, from doorway to doorway. Soviet planes were circling about, and at regular intervals dropped those little bombs which were more apt to do damage, which is to say shatter and shred, than to destroy outright. Váci utca, where at one time we'd promenaded, was now an obstacle course, so it was through heaps of rubble that we made our way toward our objective. Pál was in civilian clothes, but carried in his pocket a card identifying him as a medical orderly assigned to a hospital. There was less reason to fear the prospect of identity checks on the streets of the bombed-out city than down in the cellar, which the "recruiting brothers" visited to collect deserters and to outfit children capable of holding weapons in the appropriate dress. We approached Elizabeth Bridge from the side of Petőfi tér, but saw even from afar that our initiative was hopeless. A German tank stood near the quay, and soldiers up at the foot of the bridge, Germans as well as Hungarians with armbands. What was even more surprising, however, was the spectacle of soldiers walking—running, rather—between Buda and Pest.

"I've got to visit my mother and young brother," said Guidó. And later, in the cellar, Imre tried in vain to talk him out of the idea, arguing that only the Good Lord could help, and indeed, to take a jaunt across the river to Buda was to fly in the face of providence. But Guidó's stubbornness was stronger than his sense of danger. Although this isn't exactly a fair assessment, it might be said the Görgey[3] in him emerged, overcoming the Guidó who feared for his life. In accompanying him, I was driven, besides friendship, as much by curiosity as by courage. From the moment we moved into the cellar, I knew I was now in the middle of an experience so exceptional that, should I survive, I'd have material enough for a lifetime of writing. I resolved to keep a journal, in which I would

3 ■ Artúr Görgey, a general in the 1848–49 War of Independence against Austria.

attentively record what happened, when, and what I thought. However, I no more kept to this plan than I had the earlier, frequent promises I'd made to myself. Never before had I kept a journal for more than five days at a stretch, and the cellar was not the most suitable place for a new beginning. The light burned out soon after we moved in, whereupon the candles took to flickering, then a torch, which Imre had made with the help of an engineer out of floor wax, an abundant commodity in every cellar; this was no encouragement to writing either. Consequently I cannot even say exactly when it was we made our visit to Buda. But probably it was around the final days of 1944. For half an afternoon we packed our rucksacks, and we still had plenty to pack with: salami, canned food, cognac, cigarettes, and biscuits. We'd decided to go separate ways once we reached Krisztina Boulevard, Guidó up toward the residential hill Rózsadomb, and me, on a round of hospital farewells. This is why I think it was probably the end of December, for back then, such ideas still crossed our minds.

What an unforgettable excursion! A wounded horse, still with a halter, was galloping down Váci utca, neighing in pain; God knows where it had escaped from, wounded on its haunches, it left a streak of blood in the slush as it sped toward Eskü tér. A burned-out car made the going rough in Haris köz, debris and fragments of glass crunching beneath our boots. Artillery sounded from Buda, and so too from the direction of Váci út as Russian planes circled over the Castle and the Great Boulevard every ten minutes with clock-like puncuality, sprinkling tiny bombs. Should we turn back? I asked Guidó, who later asked me the same thing when an explosion sounded so close that we felt the blast on our eardrums. I left his question unanswered as we walked on, or, more exactly, jumped on and hopped on. At the foot of the Elizabeth Bridge on the Pest side, a mixed band of guards asked for our papers, and on seeing our Hungarian and German-language documents, they promptly let us pass, though a Hungarian corporal, speaking in a juicy accent, beckoned us to be careful where we stepped, for "there's more holes than bridge, Sir."

It seemed an eternity passed as we crossed, zigzagging like knights on a chessboard. Suspended between Pest and Buda, on Erzsébet Bridge, between the two smoking banks, the siege of Budapest brought to mind the bloody operations I'd seen at the No. 11 hospital where I'd occasionally helped out with the anaesthetics, half dazed myself by the chloroform I sprayed on patients' muzzles. Here it was fear that kept me in its intoxicating grip, and I prayed to overcome it. One after another I kept mumbling the Lord's Prayer, in Hungarian, then, *"Pater Noster qui est in coelis,"* and Hail Mary in French, *"Ave Maria, pleine de grâce..."* Perhaps Guidó did the same, for his lips were moving under the steel helmet pulled down over his eyes. At the foot of Gellért Hill we cowered on a pile of rocks, but stayed there for no more than two minutes, as the hill was shaking from the batteries firing from there across the river into Pest, and we

even saw hits in the direction of Vörösmarty tér, where Gerbeaud's was. We scooted away. At Krisztina körút, as we'd planned, we went our separate ways: Guidó toward Rózsadomb, whereas I turned left by the Karácsonyi Mansion. The proud building had been buffeted roundly, both wings having been hit and rows of windows boarded up. The apartment building, my first stop, was beside the Karácsonyi Mansion. This is where, along with her English husband, my "elegant auntie" had found refuge: Ily Csáky, my mother's favourite cousin and the shining light of her childhood. While it was still possible to send letters from Tamási, Mother had finished each by exhorting me, "Don't forget to look after Ily—take care of them."

The urging was superfluous, for, despite our brief acquaintance, this newly discovered relative was an answer to my avid yearning for the glitter of the West. An English uncle, what's more, who went by the name Reginald Villiers Forbes! He had a townhouse in Paris, a villa in Bretagne, he'd shot tigers in India, he'd played bridge with maharajahs, and his lovely wife, one-time daughter-in-law of the legendary Prime Minister, István Tisza, was now a grey pearl with hair touched with silver, the incarnation of the yearning of my youthful snobbishness! A lady châtelain, up in North Hungary, Comtesse Ily on the Rivièra; and even here in Pest, as a refugee, there remained enough of her charm and panache, for she was the aunt of our late Foreign Minister István Csáky (whom she didn't exactly fancy!), and when waiting for the tram, for she could no longer afford taxis, Krisztina körút glistened with her presence. Indeed, I'd seen this spectacle during my days at the Ludovika Military Academy, from the tram window as I proceeded out toward Üllői út.

No longer were there any trams. Nor did the Forbes live anymore in the second-floor, two-room little flat they'd been given of pity from Ily's nephew, Mihály Csáky. Like all residents, they too had moved down to the cellar. And when I dumbly asked a man who seemed to be a sort of concièrge, seeing as how he was shovelling debris beside the entrance out onto the street, where I could find Countess Ily and the foreign gentleman (I didn't dare say "English gentleman"), he growled in a not-quite unfriendly tone, "They happen to be at home—turn left at the cellar entrance, and you'll find the British gentleman settled beside the third column."

This cellar was darker and less amiable than ours. More crowded, too. But it couldn't have been easier to pinpoint the Forbes. The old gentleman was enthroned in an armchair by the third column, a black velvet cap on his head; his handsome, white walrus moustache meticulously combed; his face now covered by a white beard he'd grown during the siege—and all this now made him resemble St Nick, but admittedly a British St Nick, complemented as he was by a tartan overcoat, a woollen scarf, and, in his lap, a travelling-rug and an open book. Even in the semi-darkness I could see he'd been reading Greek while there had still been electricity in the cellar. Aunt Ily, wearing a black Astrakhan coat and flannel

trousers, stood guard in snow boots beside her elderly husband. When she heard that a soldier was asking for them, she gave a start, but on recognizing me, gave me a hug. Even down here in the cellar, her scent was Parisian.

"My dear! Have you gone mad? You come visiting on such a day of mad shelling? What would your mother say if she knew?"

"She's the one who sent me!" I settled down beside them on a suitcase, for they had just two chairs, Uncle Reggy's armchair and a fragile antique chair for Aunt Ily. In consideration of Reggy, it was in English that we began swapping experiences, but as my English was too halting, and the accent a mix of Budapest and that picked up from the wounded American pilots, too much of a hodgepodge to converse in English with this refined uncle of mine, so we shifted over into Hungarian, Aunt Ily interpreting for her husband in a summary way, like subtitles on foreign films. I told her about our cellar, the proximity of Gerbeaud, our visitors—she was a good friend of the Bethlens; about the spectacle on Váci utca, the bridge... but what interested her most was when this dreadful thing would be over. "It's not my own lot I regret," she said, going on to explain she had a guilty conscience over having lured her husband to Budapest and, albeit unintentionally, having exposed him to these hardships. She rendered even this in English. "Never mind, darling," said Reggy in reply, and gave his wife's hand a squeeze.

I was enraptured. The two of them in this infernal cellar, holding hands and happy to be together, was an image fit for a story by Somerset Maugham. Had Maugham seen this, surely he would have written about it. Before saying goodbye, though, I got even more. First, however, I unpacked the provisions. The old man was happiest about the cigarettes; Aunt Ily, about the chocolate. But this is an inaccurate picture, for she received everything that I conjured up from my rucksack with the sheer delight of a child unwrapping Christmas presents. Her dark, gleaming eyes widened ever-more round with amazement. And afterward, once she'd put everything away, she had a question for me.

"You said your mother sent you? But she, poor thing, is down in Somogy County, and in all probability the Russians are there already. So how could she have sent you?" Whereupon I explained that in her every letter she'd written, "Take care of Ily and her husband." Again she interpreted this for her husband, but then complemented her brief translation with something else, along the lines of how it was her poor relatives who were helping them while the wealthy ones turned their heads away. My writer's curiosity overcame the manners impressed on me over the years, so I asked her just what it was she'd told him.

"It's no secret. The lesson of being a refugee. We've received the most from those relatives and friends who are beggarly poor, like your dear mother or Lajos Windischgraetz, who's mired in debt. But my Csáky relatives with vast estates, why, they turned their heads if they saw me in the city, for they saw this relative of theirs as a traitor, one who married an Englishman, and so could pose them a risk."

"But darling!", beckoned her husband to keep her from speaking ill of the relatives. The shells took to plopping down nearby, and Aunt Ily urged me to get a move on, for who was to say if it would be even worse later on? Pecking me on both cheeks, she then made the sign of the cross on my forehead. Reggie shook my hand. "Good-bye, dear boy, and thank you." Bracing myself, I bid farewell in English, too: "Good-bye, Uncle Reggie... I'll return once more if possible, but can I do anything else before I go? Can I do something for you?"

To which the old man replied, "No, thank you. I am perfectly all right! All I miss is golf!"

Had he not been a phlegmatic Englishman, I would have hugged him as well. This response was exactly what I had expected. Leslie Howard would also have said this in the given situation, while shells were plopping down about us. My Anglomania had received confirmation.

Another shelter. This time, the 11th Garrison Hospital's. Until now I'd been unfamiliar with it. An operating theatre had been set up in the cellar, where Géza Stephaits was performing surgery with minimum assistance on a woman with a mangled leg who must have been brought in from the street. When I stepped in, he signalled with his eyes that he both noticed and welcomed me. I waited till he'd finished, only that it didn't finish, for two paramedics put a newer piece of human wreckage before him on the operating table, and he, washed with disinfectants, a blood-stained mask on his face, stepped closer to me. "So you see what's become of us, where we are now," he said from behind the mask.

"Thank you for everything, Géza," I said, "The Good Lord bless you for all your help."

We parted without a handshake, he signalled his farewell once more with his eyes. And he called after me: "Look up Ferenc Leitner, poor devil, this siege has been even worse for him."

I found him in the third cellar room. Wrapped up in a military cape, he shivered in a corner, dozing on and off in an uncomfortable government-issue chair. He jumped up when I touched his shoulder, and terror came over his scruffy face, a terror supplanted by joviality on his recognizing me. "Hey, young fellow... So you came to see us all the same? And I thought I wouldn't see you again in this life."

In front of him I unpacked those provisions meant for him, as well as those I'd meant to give Stephaits. The sight brought tears to his eyes. And the tears came all the more when I made a little speech about how, while our government, army, and nation had collapsed, officers like he and Géza Stephaits were the heroes of this tragedy, and time would prove that it wasn't in vain.

Perhaps I'd have done better to keep this to myself, for it only made his tears gush even more. "Don't mind me," he blubbered, "but I don't know when I last had a good sleep—my nerves are shot. Now, of all times, when the worst is

before us. Maybe tomorrow or the day after, the Soviets will be here. And what will become of us then? What will become of my poor patients?"

At this I carved out a new little speech, talking a whole lot of nonsense and suggesting that his role, his humanitarianism, heroism would not go unrewarded. The occupying forces would know, too, who they're up against. Not a hair on his head would be touched, and that I'd guarantee. And I had good reason to make such a promise. Don't worry about tomorrow, I said. He had no reason to!

No sooner had I said this than it struck me how irresponsible it was to have lulled this dear soul into a feeling of false security. All this was talking through one's hat. Irresponsible indeed! By way of excuse I might add that as soon as the words had slipped from my mouth, I knew also that Lieutenant Colonel Leitner needed this. He belonged to the ranks of timid heroes. Time and time again he gave a start of sheer terror, perfectly aware as he was of the danger lying in wait, yet still he acted when the situation demanded action. I identified with him, even if it is immodest of me to say so, given that I didn't help others a quarter as much as he did, and even the bulk of what I did do, I had him to thank for. Embracing him, I kissed each side of his tear stained, furrowed face, a gesture he returned. For a moment, as I held him in my arms, I was struck by how shaken and fragile he was, our one-time Ludovika medical officer, who, back then, had played tennis as well. Perhaps it was best, after all, that someone thanked him before he'd join the fate of his friend, Archdeacon Kálló, who had been killed by the fascists, or else a shell would wipe out him and his hospital, which he so loved, in one.

The book of fate, however, had something else in store for him. Yes, the shell did come crashing down on the 11th Garrison Hospital, destroying most of the doctors along with the building. But not Colonel Leitner. He'd survived this as well, and soon after the Soviet occupation they came and took him away. Not to Siberia, though, but to some military quarters in Pest where he was praised, an identification pass pressed into his palm, more precisely a protective document, in Cyrillic script, in gratitude for his having looked after Soviet POW's and for behaving humanely toward them.

In 1979, when I returned to Hungary as an American correspondent after a break of 33 years, I found him still alive. He was tottering around in his early nineties, had a lovely garden out in Hűvösvölgy, and had even lived through the Rákosi years without a scratch. On the afternoon I spent with him, he explained how delighted he was that my promise had come true, for the distinguished treatment he'd enjoyed at the hands of the Soviets in those days of terror. When I told him that, unfortunately, I had nothing to do with this, that it was news to me, he didn't want to believe me. He insisted that I was only being humble. I had promised that nothing would befall him, and had kept my promise. He was unwilling to believe the truth.

He let me in on something else as well. His Austrian wife, Anny, who was with him during my visit, was Jewish, but seeing as how few people knew this, she

managed to survive those trying, catastrophic days. This meant, however, that Ferenc Leitner was doubly brave despite all his timidity, for had it become known that he had a Jewish wife, his "list of crimes" would have sealed his fate all the more firmly.

My final stop in Buda was at the Red Cross Hospital. It must have been about eleven a.m. when I got that far. The sounds of battle grew so much stronger, and seemed so close that I feared Buda would fall that very day, whereupon I would surely fall into Soviet hands in uniform, alone, separated from my friends. I bitterly regretted the whole excursion as I ran from tree to tree in the large hospital yard toward the pavilion where my doctor-friend was quartered. The shelter door was half open. Standing by the entrance, holding each other, were a young medical orderly and a not-so-young and, frankly, not-so-pretty nurse. It was an odd place and time for flirting, but the siege, which we were getting used to, was a potpourri of singular events. I asked the lovebirds where I could find the doctor, Captain Imre Zárday. Everyone inside and downstairs is still asleep, they said; they'd had a busy night, and so were now taking advantage of the relative silence.

This was relative silence? The cellar on Vörösmarty tér was a peaceful oasis compared to this Buda morning! Since they didn't offer to lead me down to Zárday, I groped my way down on my own, and, stepping over dozens of mattresses by the flicker of my torch, looked among the sleepers for my doctor, one of my most recent friends, whom I'd known for less than six months, in fact, but all the same someone I felt warm friendship for. Among the singularities of these times was the burgeoning of human relationships. Finally I happened upon Imre; his tall, elegant frame was too long for the short mattress—though sleeping quietly, he'd drawn his knees up to his chest. Apparently exhaustion had felled him, for he'd forgotten to remove his gold-rimmed glasses before falling asleep.

Gently I placed a hand on his shoulder to rouse him. "I'm coming, I'm coming," he said mechanically like someone used to being startled from his sleep. On realizing who was looking for him, and why, he pulled on his cape, which had been doubling as a blanket, and suggested we step out into the yard for a bit of fresh air, for it was stifling down there in the cellar. Not that it was much better outside—fog was spraying about and, though it was nearly noon, the world was still grey, the fog pressed down all the smoke, amidst the clatter of shells, bombs, mortars, and machine guns; every now and then a bomb would scream somewhere and then explode like a clap of thunder. Skulking against the broad side of an oak tree, we talked, shouting above the clamour. "A little length of salami?" "You mean such things still exist? And cognac, chocolate!" He didn't need cigarettes himself, but they were a treasure when it came to swapping. He was very thankful, but would ask just one more thing. Would I go over to their

place on Üllői út? His pregnant wife was expecting their latest child at any time. They were both worried about each other, and unfortunately the phone had gone dead. The uncertainty was worse than anything! I should tell his wife that he's okay, and has got all he needs. He's surrounded by a great bunch of people, everyone's doing the job of three men. The Red Cross director, Countess Apor, is a classical Roman heroine, despite being in her seventies she's always on hand where needed, on her feet day and night; so she set a fascinating example indeed. It was an encouraging sign for the future, for where such people live, reconstruction would be a cinch, once the weapons fell silent. I promised him I'd go out to Üllői út the next day. It was but a stone's throw from me...

We spoke for maybe fifteen minutes, or tried shouting, rather, over the din of battle. He sent me away, saying I should start off before it got too late, whereupon I encouraged him to go back to their shelter, for it was, after all, just that much better down there than out here in the yard. We embraced, and parted. Given such circumstances, farewells were indeed farewells, an assessment that perhaps this would be the last time you'd meet. Imre's farewell to me consisted of a wry half-smile and the words, "And I order you to keep well away from over-excitement!" While I ran toward the front gate, dashing from tree to tree, he put his long legs to the test and scrambled back to the pavilion.

This meeting merits a postscript, however. On returning, Zárday found a crater where the pavilion's entrance should have been; a bomb had hit the shelter he'd been sleeping in. His neighbours had all perished, perhaps the lovebirds too, who on my arrival had shown me the way.

I learned of this only well after the siege, when I met my doctor friend on Kossuth Lajos utca.

"It was my guardian angel who saw to it that you should come and see me, and precisely then," he said, his calm voice faltering for a moment.

Guidó and I arrived back on Vörösmarty tér almost at the same time. One look at him, at his matted blond hair as he removed his helmet in the semi-darkness, said a great deal about his excursion up to Rózsadomb. Rather than his usual ponderous manner, he blurted out everything in straightforward sentences.

"Mama and Muff are getting by somehow, even at 6 Berkenye utca, though it's uninhabitable, all the windows are shattered... The villa next door was destroyed, along with the shelter... Mama and Muff moved up to the shelter in the villa at number 19... Four men took her up there on a stretcher, because she's got thrombosis, and has got to lie in the shelter with her legs bolstered up. Juszti nurses her best she can, but is angry with Muff, because he filched from Klári's library, though it's true he wasn't the first... Now he's reading from morning till night and ruining his already bad eyes... They're still getting by somehow more or less... but it's good I went, because their provisions were low."

This was Guidó's account of our latest visit to Buda. Both of us fell on our beds at once, exactly as we were, still dressed, not even pulling off our boots. I slept a good while from exhaustion, and when I awoke, Guidó was still lying there, and, although he made as if he were asleep, it was apparent from his wheezing that he was awake, that he, too, had been shaken by our Buda excursion. At such times he signalled this by shutting himself off from the world. But he couldn't do so for long. Bea's sharp voice summoned him from the third row.

"Guiiiido... Guiiidoooo, where are you?... *Viens ici...* You've ignored me all day... Not nice of you... the cocktail's ready... and supper'll soon be done." Surrounded by her suitors, Bea shook the silver cocktail shaker. There was no ice inside, we could easily have found some outside if we hadn't been afraid of infection, but as it was, ice was unnecessary, for the fog had lifted, giving way to a numbing cold. There was freshly fallen snow outside, so the princeling went upstairs with the shaker and cooled it in the snow.

That much must be granted, that Bea was a spirited Carmen, the sort of whom the French say, *"elle se croit belle."* The sort who convinces herself that she's a beauty, and turns beautiful as a result! She tied her dark, thick hair with a red velvet ribbon, then poured us each a thimbleful of the concoction she'd mixed, mainly cognac and some nauseatingly sweet liqueur, but not the cointreau needed, for there was none left. She was a tad more generous with herself, then wound up the portable gramophone. Hers was red, covered by a piece of provocatively red cordovan leather; her father had brought it from Italy in better days. And she put on the record which had become our anthem down there in the basement: a delightful American hit by Irving Berlin, *"Blue Skies"*... yes, the saxophone cooed on about blue skies, and who was to say when we'd last seen such skies? For even if by chance the sky happened to be blue, shells fell from it onto us.

It is difficult to express just how lulling that song was. Blue skies... nothing but blue skies... We all knew Irving Berlin. When there was a film with music by him, usually in the Fórum cinema on Kossuth Lajos utca, we, the gilded youth, swarmed the place. We'd sat through *Follow the Fleet* three times; all of Budapest had been dancing to his hits in 1936... Then in '37 and '38. The newer ones come to mind: *Top Hat, Alexander's Ragtime Band.* Budapest was a testing ground for Hollywood's films, all of Central Europe gobbled them up after we had... Until, that is, the door slammed shut.

But thanks to Bea, that good old Irving Berlin accompanied us down here into the cellar as well. *"Blue Skies"* every night, several times. A couple of times we even danced to it, there, in the emptied corner, where Bea improvised a miniature dance floor on the concrete, and where there was so little space that you could turn just twice.

Bonbon quickly banned this entertainment, explaining rather logically that all we needed was for some Arrow Cross patrol to happen upon us and take the whole lot of us away.

But *"Blue Skies"* lulled us even in the absence of dancing; afterwards, like after a dose of Novocain at the dentist's, you went numb on your mattress and left the cellar in the arms of Morpheus.

Péter Stephaich came over from the neighbouring cellar and invited us to lunch at the Hotel Ritz! This wasn't a joke, he said, no, yesterday after emptying the toilet pot he looked into the Ritz while on his way back along the Danube. The hotel was still standing, the guests having moved down into the cellar along with the restaurant. Since there were few guests, people having pretty much made a run for it from the riverbank, they would let in outside customers as well if, indeed, there were any to be found still in the mood for a walk now and again. Péter for one said he'd certainly go, and Imre Biedermann too. Would we go as well? Bea would have gone, but her mother wouldn't let her; Guidó, Pál, and I said yes. We would leave in ten minutes.

It happened to be a sunny winter day, Vörösmarty tér covered in wrecked cars. Lanky Péter and Imre's big, hulking, bearlike frame had already started off, jumping from wreck to wreck while scooting past the Gerbeaud. The Soviet planes circling above dropped their bombs further on, we ran, and when they machine gunned the area, we crept along the snowy, bloody, broken pavement. By the time we arrived in the Ritz, hardly a couple corners away, we looked as if we'd just come from the front line. The doorman was not there, and the main entrance was wide open, now only a jumble of broken glass; the mirror windows facing the Danube on the opposite side of the large hall had likewise disappeared, so that winter was streaming in, shaking the yellow silk curtains—it was a miracle no one had yet ripped them off. Peace reigned in the basement, where a red coconut-fibre rug swallowed the noise of footsteps, near the entrance to the gents sat the lavatory attendant with her dish, in a black dress, a white lace collar, and with an exquisitely marcelled white hairdo. She handed us towels and brushes. The water wasn't running there, either, porcelain carafes had been placed by the washbasins. In ten minutes we stepped into the restaurant in acceptable shape. There were some twelve tables, but only five or six were occupied, by men and women alike, mostly old and well-dressed folks. Everyone nodded toward us, as if we were acquaintances: links in the chain of survivors of the siege. Waiters in tails stood beside the silk-upholstered walls; there were one or two for every table. The maître d'hôtel knew Imre, called him baron, not captain, and brought him the menu: soup, hors d'oeuvres, main courses, salads and desserts, everything made with rice. While on Vörösmarty tér and elsewhere all over Budapest we lived on beans, it seemed the Ritz had a huge supply of rice. Silver lids covered the steaming platters, and we were served French wine

alongside rice and peas. We consumed a seven-course feast of rice from beginning to end, the only concessions on their part being the use of paper, not cloth, napkins; and a glass table-cover rather than a tablecloth. Nor were the waiters' white, starched shirtfronts as dazzling as at other times, though their manners were beyond reproach, as if guns weren't in fact thundering while they served the various courses. Péter drank the last drop of his second glass of wine to the Ritz, saying, "Dear old Ritz! Holding out to the last! If only it could survive, and fill up in 1945 with American, English, and French, so that they can save Budapest, or what remains of it!"

There were a few more toasts. We washed down the somewhat dry food with two bottles of wine—but I don't recall them. I recalled only Péter's face, because the young diplomat positively lit up on his return to the Ritz. No doubt more memories tied Budapest's young Don Juan to these walls than did Guidó or myself. We stepped over that threshold only when someone invited us, that is paid the bill. Now we paid, and gave generous tips. The toilet lady got 100 pengős—true, she worked more than usual to make sure that we became presentable.

The Ritz Hotel suffered a direct hit a couple days later, burst into flames, and that which remained inside and was inflammable, and had not yet been drenched by winter, burned away like a torch. Our final banquet of rice within those walls was in fact a funeral feast, one that we left by crawling away on our satiated bellies.

I have Péter to thank for one more excursion and farewell. Unfortunately I cannot recall the date, but possibly it was the second last day of 1944, that catastrophic year. It was a weekday, that much is certain. Péter dropped in at our cellar alone, took me aside into a corner, and whispered a question discreetly into my ear: would I care to spend the weekend with him at some friends of his nearby who have a flat overlooking a courtyard, in a made bed, and what's more, miracle of miracles, a place where there was water in the taps. They live almost as we all did before, in middle-class comfort. Nor was it out of the question that I could wash up from head to toe, not to mention change underwear.

Would I care to?! Never in my life had I received such a tempting offer, excluding Imre Andrássy's when he tempted me with the editorship of the newspaper. This time, however, I replied with a conditional yes, objecting only that it was still mid-week, so how could we go away for the weekend? "We're living from day to day," said Péter by way of rejoinder, "We haven't the time to wait for the weekend. The flat is still in one piece, and it's waiting for you! Who's to say what tomorrow will bring?" Discreetly he also informed me that by going along, I'd be doing him a big favour; for he couldn't go alone.

This added some mystery to the temptation of having a good wash, of a made bed, so I couldn't resist. As Péter suggested, I packed my things in a small overnight bag loaned to me by Imre, who knew of the plan but roundly disap-

proved; I took a change of underwear and, for our hosts, a box of Gerbeaud bonbons from our diminishing supply. I entrusted Guidó with explaining my absence should anyone enquire. Nor did he pry; the time he had, besides that spent worrying over those up on Rózsadomb, was occupied by Bea. With my overnight bag I went over to the cellar at the Wagons Lits building, where I received yet another rebuke from Imre, and a warning that on my return the four of us, including he and Pál, must sit down to seriously discuss the situation. I agreed.

Péter and I zigzagged amidst the once-elegant apartment buildings of the city's heart, their sides now open, toward our destination, which was relatively close by: an elegant basalt apartment building probably built around the beginning of the century for several generations—naturally without taking the siege into account. Even so, however, it was in good enough condition compared with those on Vörösmarty tér.

The residents were expecting us; the dining room was ready, the table set, complete with porcelain and silver, a Persian rug covered the windows, with intact panes. Pest patricians, our hosts seemed like peacetime vestiges, dressed normally, living up in their apartment, half of which looked out upon the courtyard, where all the windows were protected by thick rugs. They went down to the shelter, they explained, only when things got really hot; up till then they'd spent but a couple hours down there, sometimes by day, sometimes by night, but all in all they were more fortunate than many fellow residents of Budapest. Before supper we sat in the salon, where we were served vermouth as an aperitif. They were delightful: a distinguished father, a charming wife, a real lady; with two teenage girls. Why, they even had a parlour-maid, who served supper with a white bow in her hair. True, supper consisted mainly of beans and rice, but the cook worked wonders with cabbage, onions, this and that which she'd thrown together from the pantry. Supper with these new acquaintances was worth a trip to the moon, the difference being that here all was familiar, so that faded memories came to life. A trip to Atlantis, then, rather than to the moon. Dining room, armchair, then a made bed. I shared the guest room with Péter. Two splendid beds, silk quilts. The light wasn't working there, either, but a tall candle burned in a silver candle-holder, so that before falling asleep I indulged even in the luxury of reading. From their library I selected Sándor Márai's *Confessions of a Man of the Middle-Class,* of which I read a couple pages; my final thought before drifting off was of Budapest, the upper-middle class residents of 19 Berkenye Street before the Gestapo came and tore this world apart. So it was that I fell asleep, under a quilt, nestled amidst pillows, while Péter had long been fast asleep. Later, a door opened, then closed. I switched on my pocketlight. Péter was nowhere to be seen. I turned to my other side and went back to sleep. I dreamt that there was shelling.

But it was no dream. Péter was standing by my bed, completely dressed. "Come on down with me to the cellar, the family's already waiting for us down-

stairs. The shelling is really nasty today. They even cut short the cooking of breakfast; the cook and the parlour-maid are down there with them as well. Hurry up!"

A nearby hit punctuated the end of his brief speech. Dazed with comfort, however, I baulked at his entreaty. I'm staying up here, I said, I'll go to the kitchen and continue cooking breakfast, and meanwhile I'll see to the promised matter of washing with warm water. Péter objected, but then shrugged, led me out to the kitchen, where a pleasant heat was rising from a coal-fired stove, plus the aroma of fried bacon (Péter must have brought the bacon), and hot water was bubbling in a huge cauldron. "You just go on down," I said, "I'll stay here."

Left on my own, I designated a tub as a washbasin, half-filled it with hot water, knelt before it and washed my face, neck, then my hair. Then, having stripped naked, I stood in the tub and scrubbed myself from head to toe. What a magnificent feeling—it had been so long since I'd felt so good! Fortunately the lather from the soap obscured the colour of the water, but no doubt the poor liquid was grey. Having dried myself with a terry towel that was in the guest room. I slipped on clean underwear. Outside there was a hellish racket—guns, shells, mortars. I was frightened all right, but washing, and the sensation of drying myself with that towel offset the fright. Since the middle-class comforts at Micu Kraisler's, I'd hardly been able to slip off my clothes, and the morning's toilet was a cat's lick and a promise—Yuck!

Tapping my fingers all along my scruffy face, I decided, siege or no siege, not to forgo shaving either. I placed my hosts' concave mirror on the windowsill. The kitchen window also faced the courtyard, but it was light enough so I could see my face; having soaped it up nice and thick, I took to shaving away my bristles, which were several days old.

That's when the thunderbolt hit us. A deafening scream, a horrible clap, and the walls began to quake. In a leap I was in the narrow hallway connecting the main part of the flat with the kitchen. I leant up against the wall in the windowless hall to keep from collapsing in terror. The wall trembled, crackling and crunching both left and right, as if bricks were plunging down, as if the building, which only yesterday had appeared so secure and massive, were collapsing. A cloud of dust, which rendered breathing almost impossible, settled on my soapy face, while around me all was pouring and plunging and plopping down, only the wall I leant against remained standing, but even that shook amidst the destruction.

How long did I stand there in the biblical daytime darkness? Although it seemed an eternity, it lasted only until that which had to collapse, collapsed. Now only bricks and smaller fragments were plopping down, the cloud of dust was clearing, the vestibule this hallway led to became discernible, and, at its far end, the entrance door of the flat leading to the stairwell. I ran there only to find it bolted shut. My trembling fingers had a hard time of it finding the handle. I

opened the door, slowly, fortunately, for had I done so faster, I would have plunged into nothingness. The door opened to a crater. The stairwell had disappeared; that's what the bomb had hit. True, I was only on the second floor, but looking down, the chasm appeared deeper than even a well. What would become of me now? In answer, another explosion, though this time it wasn't this building that was hit, but something else, nearby... Running back to the kitchen as the dust slowly settled, I found the bacon sizzling, and, with a stupid, instinctive motion, I pushed the pan aside to keep the bacon from burning. Then I flung open the side door of the kitchen, to a balcony, which ran around the airshaft, which in turn, as I had hoped, opened to the servants' stairs.

Staggering down that still-standing staircase, I finally found the steel cellar-door. Locked. I took to pounding it with my fists. "Open up!" I shouted with all my might, as much, that is, as all the dust I'd swallowed would allow. Open up... But no one opened the door. Still pounding, I then started kicking at the door, beside myself with fright. The shells continued screaming. Surely we'd suffer another hit, I thought, having read somewhere that one strike is quickly followed by another. So I would die here, before the shelter door!... Open up!

And someone finally did open the door. Indeed, it opened inward, and so suddenly, that I fell inside. Strangers caught me before I fell flat, though; strangers now held me in their arms. So you are alive?... You are alive?

The overnight bag I'd borrowed had also survived the destruction of the staircase. Shaken, we trudged back to Vörösmarty tér once the bombing abated. Neither Péter nor I ever spoke again of this mid-week "weekend" excursion of ours. Even Guidó and Imre joined in the discretion. Perhaps, however, it wasn't even discretion. Quite simply all too much happened to everyone.

During nearly one month of the siege, Imre Biedermann and I spent only two entire days in the cellar. We spent at least one or two hours on each of the other days "scouting about" outside. I was driven by curiosity, not wanting to miss this "experience". A long time ago, back in Tamási, on reading in Stefan Zweig's biography of Balzac of how the great writer had blown on his fingernails in the ice-cold attic to keep the pen from dropping out of the frozen hand he wrote his robust novels with, I became convinced that I, born on the sunny side of life, could never become a writer until I too wound up in an attic, in a state of dire poverty. Well, now I was in a cellar, amidst adventure greater than anything Balzac had ever experienced, so it would be a sin to miss even a day of it. This conviction conquered my native cowardice, and indeed drove me out into the streets. As for Imre, he was driven by restlessness, not to mention a guilty conscience that we hadn't done enough to "save our country". He didn't put it in such high-flown terms, but as we ran this way and that trying to evade the shrapnel, falling shards of tile, and snipers, Imre, his huge frame swaying to and fro,

grumbled, "Everything that might be done is in vain, there's total catastrophe at the end of this."

What we saw was not exactly heartening. One morning a fine-looking mare was fatally struck by a bullet at the foot of the statue of Vörösmarty, collapsing just as we set out on Váci utca. In a matter of minutes, as if waiting precisely for this, people holding knives and hatchets ran forth from doorways and fell upon the carcass of the horse. (In the interest of truth, I must admit that even I ran back to the Wagons Lits building so as to notify Péter Stephaits and his coterie of young diplomats. That night cuts of roast stallion floated atop the boiled beans; we yammered, but ate it up all the same.) Once, in the half-light of dawn, we happened upon a man lynched on Apponyi tér, dangling from a lamppost, a note pinned to his chest: "This is the lot of black-marketeering, deserting, fascist aristocrats." Had he been one? A "black-marketeer", a "deserter", a "fascist", and an "aristocrat"? Never did we find out, for he didn't introduce himself; no, his violet tongue only lolled out the side of his purple-blue lips. They'd done a job of him all right! As for who had done it, that was no mystery.

Here and there we met up with young Arrow Cross men who, even in these final days, drove before them small groups displaying yellow stars. Sometimes, if a shell exploded nearby, one or two slipped out of line while the "brothers" jumped for cover in some doorway. At other times an older person would fall out of the marching group, hit by shrapnel, and a coroner wasn't needed to allow their guards to account for one fewer captive.

Their *ad hoc* kangaroo courts were still at work somewhere—rumours spread from cellar to cellar of raids, arrests, executions. Who was to say what, and how much of this, was true? There was no electricity, so the radios weren't working, and newspapers, if indeed there were any, didn't reach us. Like the town crier of the past, who, when he beat his drum and shouted, "Oyez... " a loudspeaker-equipped squad car propelled itself with no little difficulty along the dilapidated roads ordering young people of draft age to report for duty to the competent district board, and for healthy people to help construct barricades.

On Andrássy út, not far from the infamous number 60, where the Arrow Cross HQ was, we saw a small group of paramilitary youths erecting a barricade in the middle of the avenue. Not far away a loudspeaker was hooked up to a lamppost, from which the brazen voice of a notable writer-publicist associated with the fascist newspaper *Egyedül vagyunk* ("We're Alone") was urging Hungarian youth to resist to the end the godless Asian Bolshevist hordes. The problem was, the writer in question, so I'd heard at the Ministry of Defense, had fled to Austria at the beginning of December with the help of the military, leaving behind only that brazen voice of his to embolden his fellow countrymen: "Hungarians, young men, stand your ground!"

Imre planned the routes of our excursions. At first, visits to friends. We dropped in on Erdősi, the prelate, behind the Franciscan Church in the cellar of the Saint Stephen Society; the poor old man was a candle flickering out, lying on a stretcher and wearing a winter coat, a fur cap on his withered head. His voice was dying away as he lifted his transparent hand to bless us, a gesture which succeeded for but an instant before that hand fell back onto the stretcher. We visited Imre Zárday's wife in the cellar on Üllői út, her tiny children about her, too well brought up to cry loudly, Mrs Zárday expecting the next one at any time. A stout, well-built woman was readying herself for the role of midwife if a doctor was not to be had, which seemed a likely prospect indeed.

We paid a visit to the cellar of the large block of luxury flats at 3 Petőfi tér, where Annuska ("Somersault Annus", to malicious sorts from Somogy County), the wife of Imre's friend Ferenc Keresztes-Fischer, the Minister of the Interior, who'd been carried off, was enthroned in an armchair. "Her grace", which she remained, chided the Arrow Cross so loudly that Imre quieted her down to keep her from getting us into hot water as well. No, she didn't know anything about her husband; the last word she'd received was from Mauthausen, from the concentration camp where he'd been dragged off to. Among Annuska's neighbours in the cellar was the chic Jusika Perczel, now in a union-suit, nursing her dying husband, the Under Secretary, who lay on an improvised bunk composed of four chairs. Still recognizing Imre, a smile crossed his tormented face. "I'll die before the Muscovites get here," he announced almost jovially.

This massive apartment house, previously home to influential people, was now in not much better shape than the one on the more modest Üllői út, where the Zárdays lived. And it was much more in the line of fire. Aside from poor Keresztes-Fischer, the building was associated with another mournful memory. This was where the Gestapo had lured the young Horthy into a trap, where October 15th began, the Regent's "bail-out attempt" fiasco. God, how awfully long ago that was!

Having run out of acquaintances, Imre and I were now busy searching for the front line. So we headed in the direction of the artillery fire, naturally approaching it only from a respectable distance. At first we asked permission to hop aboard military trucks, but only for brief jaunts, so as to avoid getting stuck up there or being blown, truck and all, into the air. However tiring it was, walking was still safer. Naturally, we limited this groping about the front to Pest, not daring to venture to Buda. By this time it had already proven true that if Pest was hell, Buda was the inner furnace, where the devils were stoking the fire.

We chatted to everyone who came from the direction of the frontline. "Everyone" naturally consisted of Hungarian soldiers. A few frankly admitted that they were going home to change into civilian clothes. What was the sense in having the "bruders" drive them from behind into the slaughterhouse? Several

claimed the SS were shooting Hungarian soldiers to keep them from surrendering to superior Soviet forces. It was tormenting to know that we, who had been part of a wholesale operation that produced false military papers for deserters, were but helpless witnesses to the tragedy. Imre had already experienced this in Transylvania; myself at the beginning, in Kassa (Košice), and later in the hospital, but now that the fighting had reached outer Pest—Kőbánya, Angyalföld, and Thököly út, now that the noose had tightened around Pest itself, when the pedestrians were defeated Hungarian troops, the spectacle was more dispiriting than anything previously. I was distressed to think that two cousins about my age, neither of them professional soldiers like me, were confronting the Soviet steam-roller either somewhere here, around Pest, or in Transdanubia. Behind them, perhaps, was the SS, which this soldier had just spoken of a moment ago. And I couldn't do a thing.

"You can't do anything but pray," said Imre. He prayed. He always had his breviary at hand, similar to those which Jesuit priests carried about the Pius Garden. He read this when we found shelter somewhere and stopped, and at night by the light of the torch made from the parquet-floor wax. The last time we'd visited the Jesuits—the front was rapidly advancing toward József Boulevard. We even heard a mass in the Sacred Heart Church, under which Jaksi Raile had hidden 156 Jews. We prayed for them, too. Unable to pray as intimately as did Imre, my thoughts fluttered about here and there, one ear listening to the din of battle, though the larger claps returned me to the right track, namely, invoking God in prayer. Yes, I promised the heavens all sorts of things, if only I would live through this. I would write it all down, I promised, so powerfully and appallingly that such a thing could never happen again.

Now something was hit further off, whereupon my thoughts again began to flitter. Poor Doctor Kapolyi came to mind, who had had such undying faith in the twentieth century, in radio, in express trains, in aeroplanes, in progress, in medical science, in the English language, which, he said, would soon be spoken the world over, whereupon peoples would better understand each other, for everyone would be watching the very same films and plays, listening to the same music, travelling, refining themselves, so this would dismantle borders altogether. And what happened was that he was transported beyond the border in a cattle truck, if indeed he made it that far. This, compliments of the twentieth century, from which he had expected and hoped so much.

The Count of Monte Cristo had kept track of the passing of days, weeks, months, and years by chiselling notches into the walls of his prison cell. Our captivity was shorter, and our freedom of movement, insofar as the firing permitted, was much greater. Probably there was a calendar lying about in the cellar, too, although I don't recall having seen one, or meeting someone who kept track of the passing of time. Time plodded along, so that a week seemed like a month, and its passing was signalled by shifts in the danger level. Ever rarer

were the raids, the Arrow Cross patrols looking for deserters, Jews, and communists in hiding. The front crept nearer by the day. Then again, I don't recall sharp boundary lines in calendar terms. I've no idea, say, what New Year's Eve was like in the cellars at the Assicurazioni Generali and Wagons Lits buildings. What, after all, we were thinking as 1945 dawned?

All I do vividly remember is Imre Biedermann's "talk", which he'd been warning us about for a time, but finally did come to pass. This must have been sometime in the first week of January, for, using pickaxes, we'd broken through the wall between the cellars of the two buildings to be able to communicate without having to move above ground, thus endanger our lives. It had been Imre's idea, and he'd persuaded the young diplomats directed by Péter Stephaits to roll up their sleeves and knuckle down to the job. At first, however, high-level diplomatic talks began between Countess Anna Harkányi, owner of the adjacent building, and, from our building, Bonbon, the air-raid warden. Both sharply opposed the operation. The landlady, out of principle, reasoning, "Don't do further damage to my property, it's been damaged quite enough as it is." Bonbon was driven by higher principles: city regulations on alteration, responsibility toward the Assicurazioni Generali, seeing as how he was the building commandant... Imre, calling both of them blockheads, put pickaxes in the hands of the young diplomats, and in ours as well.

On our side Pál, Guidó and I beat the wall while Bonbon and Kitty expressed their distress behind us, and Bea made known her enthusiastic approval; she was rather curious about the gilded youth next door, but had not dared go to the surface in a while.

Finally we broke through the walls, and Péter Stephaits's golden-blond head appeared in the hole, sporting a broad smile. The work ended when the "gate" in the twin walls was sufficiently wide for Imre to squeeze himself through. Accepting a vermouth as a toast, he clinked glasses with Bonbon as a gesture of reconciliation, then summoned the three of us to join him. Not to his compartment, which he shared with Archdeacon Jusztin Baranyay, but to the coal cellar, to which he had a key, and which he used for his confidential talks. Monsignor Baranyay prayed there on Sundays with the faithful.

"Do sit down," said Imre courteously, pointing to the pile of coal. He himself sat on top, so as to preside over the meeting. "So we've arrived at the end!" Thus he opened his speech. "And what now?"

"In a couple days a Muscie will appear in that hole you had us cut," I said, not so much out of conviction, but rather to try to work up a scare, in line with an old habit of mine. And I scared myself most of all. Guidó seconded my point. It's quite probable, he said, that similar passages have been cut in the neighbouring cellars of Pest in recent days either by the residents themselves or by the advancing Russians. An argument ensued over whether opening the wall had been a good idea. It closed with the conclusion that, ultimately, it made little dif-

ference to the fate of Pest, whereas it could help our own, for now we were in direct contact with our friends.

"The appearance of the Russians," said Pál, "is not yet the end of the world. They're members of the Atlantic Alliance; they've signed a pact with Churchill and Roosevelt, and this binds them."

"But Churchill and Roosevelt are, unfortunately, not coming along with them," said Imre with a dismissive gesture. "Prepare yourselves for chaos, for that is what's coming next."

Thus closed the discussion over the "big picture" he liked so much to talk about. The bigness lay in the fact that we'd arrived at nirvana. The day after the arrival of the Muscies, if we were still alive, we'd go to the National Museum, as Sólyom had bid us. Then we'd see, but we shouldn't count on this too much.

"As for the 'little picture', we've got to say good-bye, emotionally and physically, to our uniforms," continued Imre. "Up till now they've protected us, but if the Russians arrive, they'd seal our fate. So civilian clothes should be on hand along with a little bag with room for our boots, greatcoats, uniforms, steel helmets, Sam Browne belts, and pistols... I'm warning you seriously, you've got to give up your pistols, too, and Jenő, the same goes for your favourite decorations, however much it hurts..."

At this we all laughed. Guidó's older brother, István, claimed that with my four, mostly inherited, decorations I was the cowardly lion in *The Wizard of Oz,* and this convinced me I had nothing to fear. We laughed, albeit a tad nervously, especially Guidó, a more ardent soldier than myself.

Imre cautioned us that this wasn't the time for foolish banter. He'd learned back in 1919 that one must prepare emotionally for the coming change. All three of us had done our duty. The failure wasn't our doing. From now on our new responsibility was survival, until which time the opportunity for reconstruction would arrive. He said all this a bit the way he'd spoken to the peasants in Szigetvár during the elections, where Bethlen and Eckhardt had been giving him a helping hand. I didn't mention this, but perhaps he, too, remembered, for he was really moved, and he finished his little oration by clearing his throat. Our final joint conference atop that heap of coal having ended, we parted.

We waited for the Russians, but only a foal arrived. I was the one who found it, when one January morning I went upstairs to determine what the relative quiet meant. There it stood, the foal, before our steel door, as if it had asked to come in. It looked four or five months old, skin and bones, shaking all over, but otherwise seemingly sound. Rather than be deterred by my extended hand, it licked it with its sandpapery tongue, and whinnied. An icy wind was blowing outside, so I opened the gate and allowed it under the doorway. It rubbed up against me as if looking for warmth, and neighed bitterly. Removing my greatcoat, I placed it on the foal, like a blanket; he allowed this, but went on trem-

bling. Pál, who now appeared in the doorway, ran down to the cellar for a blanket and to get Guidó. Taking the greatcoat once again and putting it back on myself, I headed off to find some sort of food for the starving foal, which two of my friends were already pampering. I searched through the stores on Vörösmarty tér and those nearby on Váci utca whose windows had been smashed in and which had been looted, hoping to come upon something akin to straw. Nothing anywhere. I ran on, toward Petőfi Sándor utca.

The suffering of horses was among the most upsetting of the many horrors of the siege. A detachment of hussars was among the soldiers stuck in the city. I met up with them first in Buda, some eighty horses locked in a half-burned Catholic church, the hussars nowhere to be seen, perhaps casualties of the battle. The horses, chewing on the benches, pattered their hooves on my arrival and thronged about me. Slamming the door shut, I fled from the scene. The image haunted me for a long time even after the war.

It seemed as if this foal had stopped by Vörösmarty tér as their emissary. I had to find something edible. A half-hour later, out of breath, I arrived "home" in the nick of time with a doormat. By this time Pál and Guidó had been joined by Imre Biedermann, Péter, and the Rakovszky boy, all of them horsemen. They stood around the trembling little foal. And all of them helped tear apart the doormat, held together by wire so thick that even a bayonet had a tough time of it. Decades of dust issued forth as we beat the liberated knot against the entrance wall.

The foal watched and understood, but couldn't wait for us to finish beating the dust out of the doormat—it fell upon the shabby bunch of straw and voraciously gobbled it up.

Meanwhile, the conference regarding its fate had begun. What else could we do but decide on a *coup de grâce*? A bullet in the poor thing's heart, once it finished its last, loathsome meal. While the weapon was still ours, at least. But who was to volunteer for the job?

"You're the hunter," I told Imre. Not him! He wouldn't shoot a foal. I should call upon the younger nimrods. In vain, Péter, Rakovszky; Pál Odeschalchi, weapons enthusiast that he was, and Guidó, turned me down. Péter went down into their cellar to try his hand at recruitment. Not one of the young diplomats accepted.

The foal had finished the doormat by the time Péter returned with a Frenchman, among the POW's who'd escaped the Gulag to Hungary and who'd been granted asylum by Keresztes-Fischer, the Interior Minister, and been given bread by Franci Hohenlohe in the Wagons Lits building.

It was the Frenchman who finally consented to the task—if it must be done, well then, it must be done... *"S'il faut... il le faut!"*

He used Imre's service pistol to put the foal out of its misery, and he did so with real expertise, so that it was over in an instant. The animal collapsed under the arched doorway, on the remaining core of the doormat. This was our final act of arms. The next day, the Russians arrived. ❧

Translated by Paul Olchvary

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Regionalism, Competition and Geopolitics

A federation can be understood as "an institutional arrangement taking the form of a sovereign state, and distinguished from other such states solely by the fact that its central government incorporates regional units in its decision procedure on some constitutionally entrenched basis". (King 1982; Burgess 1993:4) But it is more than a type of governmental structure: it is a mode of political activity that requires the extension of certain kinds of cooperative relationships throughout the political system it animates. (Elazar 1985) Democratic federations are not the result of force or coercion imposed from above or outside and sustained by military power. One should distinguish between democratic federalism and multinational ethnic federalism, and, inside the rubric of democratic federations, between a mononational federal state and a multinational, multiethnic or multilingual federal state. (Linz, 1997) In this respect the former Soviet Union can be regarded as a non-democratic federation and there are also serious doubts about the "democratic" federative character of the former Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia (or even the 19th-century Austro-Hungarian Empire). Those structures had been conceived as non-democratic arrangements, so the disruption of these "federations" after 1989 was widely regarded in Central and Eastern Europe as a natural consequence of regained freedom and/or national sovereignty. Federalism and multiethnicity were in conflict with democratic sovereignty. (Fleiner 1997) Nevertheless, if non-democratic federations based on multiethnic reality did not work, there is no guarantee that the opposite, namely the ethnic homogenization of a democratic state based on a majority would work.

In the following, I shall discuss the relations between states in Central Europe after the collapse of communism and also their perception of "Europe". I offer an overview of the political history of East Central Europe and its subregions (Baltic region, Central European region, South Eastern European region), focusing on the Central European countries, before, during, and after communist rule.

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Finally, I shall discuss some obstacles to integration concerning the internal conditions of these countries, the chance of regional cooperation and a number of scenarios for the integration of Central Europe in the wider European structures.

Regime change and the image of Europe

One of the symbolic events triggering off the 1989 regime changes in East Central Europe was the breach in the Iron Curtain through which East German tourists in Hungary left for the West. It was generally believed at that time that getting rid of the communist regime would be enough for the West to welcome back countries kept hostage for decades. The declared intent of the regime change in the Central European countries was "to join Europe". Hungarians, Czechs, Poles, and Slovaks all felt euphoric, notwithstanding the disappointment they had suffered on previous occasions when they felt, as the Hungarians did in 1956, that the West had failed to keep its promise to help them.

This euphoria showed itself first in Hungary and Poland, since these two countries pioneered the changes; their negotiated revolutions started at almost the same time. In Poland the round table discussions were held between February and April 1989. Following the provisional pact between the two elite groups they resulted in a relatively free election in June 1989, with a sweeping victory for Solidarity. The negotiations in Hungary took place between June and September 1989. This three-month shift in time was enough for the Hungarians to avoid the Polish provisional pact with the communists. Gaining an impetus from the accelerating revolutionary process in the other countries, they succeeded in insisting on entirely free elections. In these two countries almost all the newly formed parties, though with some slight shift in emphasis, included in their programmes the idea of joining the European Community. NATO, however, was handled more cautiously as Soviet troops had not left these countries yet and the Warsaw Treaty Organization (WTO) still existed until the summer of 1991. First, the idea of "Finlandization", that is to say neutrality, had been popular, later, however, this was replaced by a more open policy of Westernization. When President George Bush of the United States visited Poland and Hungary in the summer of 1989 and the process of change started also in East Germany and Czechoslovakia, the whole region found itself in the limelight of the international press. The opportunity had to be seized, things had to be got moving while Gorbachev was in power in the Soviet Union. The idea was not to miss this "period of grace" to opt out of the WTO and the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (Comecon), and to make a decision on the withdrawal of Soviet troops as well as to sign association agreements with the European Community.

From this point of view, the disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1991 slowed down rather than accelerated the rapprochement of Central Europe to the West. The European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) was estab-

lished and the "Poland Hungary Assistance for the Reconstruction of the Economy" (PHARE) programme was launched in 1989 when the Soviet Union was still one country. The disintegration of the Soviet empire, however, dampened "Euro-enthusiasm" in the West. The enemy had disappeared and thus it was no longer urgent for the Western countries to sustain the previous fast pace of the rapprochement process. Now the issue became more complex. It was not only a question of some East Central European countries being "transposed" to the Western camp but new definitions had to be given to the most important Western organizations (NATO, European Union). The Cold War consensus came to an end at a time when there were no practical terms to define the "post-Cold War" identity.

From buffer zone to Sovietized belt: A historical overview

The histories of East Central European countries have little in common. The Baltic states, Poland and Prussia have their own history. The Central European countries, which once made up the Habsburg domains and then belonged to the Austro-Hungarian Empire have their separate history, and so have those Southern European or Balkan countries which had been under Ottoman rule for centuries.

East Central Europe is made up of the countries East of the former Iron Curtain and West of Russia (and most of the Ukraine). According to Jenő Szűcs (1988), there is a historical basis for speaking of Western Europe, Eastern Europe and a third historical region between the two, East Central Europe (also called *Zwischeneuropa,* literally Between-Europe). According to Szűcs, the historical co-ordinates were as follows:

> The first expansion of the Barbarian peoples, having engulfed the western heritage of Rome, led to the birth of the notion of the 'West' (500–800); the first great eastward and northward expansion of the West (1000–1300) then enlarged the bounds of Europa Occidens (to include Northern and East Central Europe), and South Eastern Europe took shape under the sphere of influence of Byzantinum, which had inherited Rome's mantle in the east. [...] Modern times arrived from two directions: one was the second great expansion of the West (1500–1640) which, by stretching over the Atlantic, connected America to itself (and later absorbed Scandinavia too); the other was the great expansion of "truncated" Eastern Europe, which created a "complete" Eastern Europe by annexing Siberia, which stretched to the Pacific. East Central Europe was squeezed between these two regions. (Szűcs 1988:294)

This latter region has been the historical intersection of Western and Eastern elements: the bourgeoisie was weaker, there were fewer free towns and territorial autonomies, absolutist monarchies came into being later and bourgeois society took longer to develop. (Anderson, 1979) Contrary to their Western counter-

parts, in these countries modern, bourgeois, capitalist and feudal societies, which were the leftovers of feudalism, survived together. (Erdei, 1943). In East Central Europe, however, society was not exclusively controlled by the state as it was in Eastern Europe (Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova). Independent social autonomies, networks and hierarchies existed alongside state hierarchies.

Therefore East Central Europe is to be considered as a 600–700 km wide belt rather than as a historically homogeneous region. Its borderline in the West is the river Elbe and its borderline in the East is described by Szűcs as follows: "It stretched from the region of the lower Danube to the eastern Carpathians and further north along the forests that separated the West Slavs from the East Slavs, reaching the Baltic regions in the thirteenth century. The comprehensive term used as early as the twelfth century for the region west of this line was Europa Occidens (Occidentalis)." (Szűcs 1988:292)

This geographical zone of East Central Europe is divided into three major groups of countries. The first is in the North including the Baltic states, which were members of the Soviet Union for 50 years and where large numbers of Russians live (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania). The second region is that of countries in Central Europe, which were partly or wholly under German or Austrian influence and where Roman Catholicism has always played a decisive role in defining the cultural profile. In effect, this region was cut in two by the Iron Curtain. The major part of it (Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Slovenia, Croatia and a part of Romania) lay on its Eastern side, while the German and Italian speaking territories of Central Europe (Bavaria, Austria and the North-Eastern provinces of Veneto, Alto-Adige, and Friuli) lay on its Western side. Finally, the third region is South Eastern Europe, the Balkan states, which were hardly or not at all reached by the tide of industrialization and where the decisive influence was played by the Orthodox Church and in certain areas by Islam (Bosnia-Herzegovina, Yugoslavia, Bulgaria, Macedonia, Albania, and a part of Romania).

This large middle region between Eastern and Western Europe, from Finland to Greece, had a *cordon sanitaire* function and this function was strengthened after the First World War when the Austro-Hungarian Empire disintegrated and Poland regained its independence. At Versailles an attempt was made to create a buffer zone between Germany and Soviet-Russia. The revised Poland included large disputed territories in the east, Romania was enlarged by Transylvania and they also called into being state complexes such as Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia that had never existed before. The multiethnic, non-democratic, but constitutionally based dual system of Austro-Hungary was favourable for the Hungarians and the Germans of Austria and (to a certain degree) to the Croats; the system, however, because of its narrow-minded ethnic minority policy, was not acceptable to the Czechs, Slovaks, Romanians and Serbs.

The unacceptable nature of Austro-Hungary to its national minorities also created resentment against any other federal plans and consequently all of them

in Central Europe remained an abortive effort. The concept of confederacy of the Danube peoples, first advocated by Lajos Kossuth in the 19th century, then by Oszkár Jászi after the First World War, was a "highbrow" utopia entertained by intellectuals. The idea implied freedom and cooperation for the small Danube riparian nations. It was interpreted in two different ways. One was that the co-operation was to take place to include Austria. This interpretation was received with suspicion by the anti-Habsburg theoreticians of states that had just regained their independence. According to the other interpretation, co-operation was to rely on the small nations outside the German speaking territories, which, in reality, was nobody's desire. The third was substantially different from these two. It was the idea of a *Mitteleuropa,* formulated in Germany, projecting the image of a Central Europe with German hegemony. This last was received with suspicion and resentment both by the elite of East Central Europe and the monarchists or Habsburg legitimists.

In reality, the Wilson principles, originating in 19th-century liberal nationalism and aiming at realizing the concept of "national autonomy", created a vacuum in the region and this vacuum was filled by aggressive ethnic nationalism, revanchism of the small nations turning against each other, that is by the desire to revise the peace treaties or to resist such desires. "The region's historical states and the framework of historical nations have broken up, and all of the borders dividing the nations have become disputed." (Bibó 1991:58) In Romania, the idea of a homogeneous national state aiming at assimilating the national ethnic minorities gained ground. In Czechoslovakia the idea of "Czechoslovakism", and in Yugoslavia the idea of "Yugoslavism" was considered to serve the purpose of establishing the identity of a new and multinational state. As a result of the Versailles peace treaties, not only Germany, but also Hungary and Austria were defeated states and these latter two were forced to form a small state each, replacing the great power Austria-Hungary. (Lengyel 1996) In these countries the fight for international recognition of independence and state sovereignty was associated with the shock of defeat and territorial loss. Hungarian political and public opinion looked at the Trianon peace treaty as a *Diktat* inflicted upon them by the victorious countries. As Péter Kende pointed out, the Trianon-syndrome survived and dominated the lives of Hungarians and their neighbours alike. For Hungarians the Trianon decision that placed one third of Hungarians under the control of a foreign state, lived on as an indigestible affront for a long time. For their neighbours it perpetuated fear and suspicion stemming from the assumption that the final aim of Hungarian foreign policy cannot be anything but territorial claims. (Kende 1995)

The Little Entente, formed by Czechoslovakia, Romania and Yugoslavia after the First World War with the support of France, was formed to resist Hungarian, Austrian and German revisionism. The Little Entente aimed at preventing a possible restoration of Austria-Hungary. France, however, was not able to gain a

firm hold over the region and, therefore, the Little Entente had lost its significance by the late 1930s. The vacuum was filled by a strengthening Nazi Germany through the three-power pact, the Anschluss and the Munich agreement. Forces supporting the sovereign Austrian state were weak and isolated and Czechoslovakia was not considered of primary importance by the Western allies. The *cordon sanitaire* was finally wound up by the Molotov–Ribbentrop pact in 1939 which was followed by the division and German-Soviet occupation of Poland. East Central Europe first became a German sphere of influence. Then, after the Second World War, it became a part of the Soviet zone. Stalin did not keep the obligations assumed in the Yalta agreement and the East Central European *pax sovietica* not only put an end to the sovereignty of these countries but it also forced the Soviet model onto their internal politico-social systems. Soviet supremacy and compulsory membership in Comecon and the WTO was most detrimental for those countries that were relatively the most developed. The Cold War and the nuclear threat drew a more clear-cut demarcation line between East and West than any previous one and linked Central Europe to the East for decades. Austria, its neutrality recognized, was the only exception. In view of economic and political developments in East Central Europe for the greater part of the 20th century (between 1920 and 1990), one can agree that: "As all Central and Eastern European countries had similar export and import patterns, they were unable to increase mutual trade. Radial and unilateral patterns prevailed until the end of the Second World War." Later, being in the Soviet zone of occupation, "unilateral trade orientation was accompanied by unilateral infrastructural development", which led to infrastuctural dependence. (Inotai 1993: 508–9)

Following the decades of forced cooperation in the East, the disintegration of the Soviet system and that of the Soviet Union, East Central Europe regained its "in-between" status. At first the thus created vacuum appeared to be filled up fast by the West. This was, however, only fully realized in East Germany as a result of German unification. Western countries took a more cautious political approach towards the other countries and they did not show any desire to enjoy their victory in the Cold War. Newly born, newly independent or newly sovereign states had to cope with their own economic inefficiency.

The nations of East Central Europe are at present only connected by two things, their common history, including the negative legacy of communism that had been forced upon them for decades, and a feeling of belonging nowhere, a sour memory similar to the previous *cordon sanitaire* position. They wish to be rid of both: they wish to free themselves of fears that what was the Eastern empire may revive and also of the possible implications of the historically coded geopolitics of neighbouring countries due to the uncertain *cordon sanitaire* position. Most of the countries have taken their cue from the West, being impelled by the desire for political security. The psychological moment for these countries, when they set themselves free from communism resulted in a competitive

rather than a co-operative political strategy, due also to the confinement they were previously forced to live in. Most recent developments, that is the invitation extended to some countries to join NATO and the European Union, may change this situation. This could create new dividing lines in Europe.

Regional cooperation or national competition: Contradicting tendencies in Central European politics after 1989

Following the collapse of communism, the history of East–West and East–East political relations can be divided into three periods. In the first, between 1989 and 1992, Western states concentrated on the main reform countries and urged them to co-operate. The Central European states were willing to do so, this being in keeping with their own preferences. In the second period, between 1992 and 1994, partly as a consequence of wars and partly as a consequence of a peaceful parting of ways, the political map of not only East Central Europe but also that of Eastern Europe was re-drawn. These changes strenghtened competition between the states at the expense of the earlier cooperation. The third period started in 1995, with the end of the war fought in the former Yugoslavia, when the Western countries formulated more concrete concepts on how to proceed with the process of integration and how to chose the countries to be included. This process took a more definite direction in 1997 with the beginning of the NATO enlargement process (entering negotiations with Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic), and when the European Union also declared its willingness to start negotiations with six applicant countries (Estonia, Poland, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovenia and Cyprus). By the third period, both regional cooperation and individual competition had been replaced by bilateral cooperation between the states in order to speed up their European (e.g. non-regional) integration.

The policy of cooperation in the first period between 1989 and 1992 was encouraged by the West, though there were intra-regional reasons as well. One new organization was the Central European Initiative, the successor of the Alps-Adria Initiative (1978), later Pentagonale, and later still Hexagonale, established in November, 1989. It aimed to cross the east–west divide by embracing Italy, Austria, as well as the Central European post-communist states. Institutionally it was a loose cooperation between states, with limited goals, centred mainly on infrastructural projects. Far more important was, however, the establishment of the Visegrád alliance which aimed to promote economic, political and security cooperation between Poland, Czechoslovakia and Hungary. These post-communist democracies had just regained their sovereignty and they did not wish to return too quickly to the bonds of close cooperation they had objected to before. The Hungarian (led by József Antall) and the Polish (first led by Mazowiecki then by Bielecki and Olszewski) centre-right governments as well as

the Czechoslovak (led by Marián Calfa) centrist government coalition were engaged in taking the first steps in transforming their countries and in getting political support for the new democratic identity. In Poland, Lech Walesa was elected President in 1990, who took great pains to enlarge presidential power by openly assuming Pilsudski's legacy. In Czechoslovakia, Václav Havel became President, someone who considered himself the man to realize Tomás G. Masaryk's dreams. In Hungary, Prime Minister Antall, even before forming his government, announced that he considered himself "in spirit the Prime Minister of fifteen million Hungarians", which was a message (at least to the neighbouring countries) proclaiming that the identity of democracy was to be based on the legacy of the pre-communist era. What brought, however, these leaders and states together was that they all shared some basic purposes: to promote economic growth, to distance themselves from the legacy of communism, to consolidate capitalism and liberal democracy, to stabilize the region, and, finally, to integrate the eastern half of Central Europe with the western half. (Bunce 1996)

Resulting from the pressure exerted by the West, but also from their common interests, in February 1991 the meeting of the heads of states and prime ministers of the three countries took place in Visegrád, Hungary, a symbolic venue where the kings of these three countries had met over 600 hundred years earlier. The resulting agreement reflected the importance of an economic opening towards one another and the coordination of political action as part of a process leading towards European integration. More concretely, the parties encouraged inter-state cooperation (in fields like internal security, law, education, the economy, military reform and migration policy), and promoted regional stability (with special attention to the problem of national minorities, but also to the geopolitical status of a region: between a disintegrating Soviet Union and a potentially strengthening Germany). Most importantly, the negotiators agreed on speeding up the process of European integration and on coordinating their actions toward the European Union. (Bunce 1996) Western journalists started to call these three countries the "Visegrád group". The Visegrád summit was followed by two others (Cracow, October 1991, and Prague, May 1992) but then the participating states slowly turned away from each other and cooperation has been complemented or, rather, replaced by competition. Retrospectively, the major institutional achievement of the Visegrád group was that it established a regional customs union, the Central European Free Trade Area (CEFTA) in December 1992. CEFTA started to operate after the break-up of Czechoslovakia (in March 1993) and proved to be attractive to other countries such as Slovenia. It had also served as a pattern for multilateral trade for another region in East Central Europe, when the Baltic Free Trade Zone was established.

As early as 1991 it became obvious that political development in the new democracies of Central Europe (including Slovenia) took a different course from that in South Eastern Europe. In Central Europe the communist parties and their

successors obtained only a maximum 10–20 per cent of the votes at the first elections and they were pushed into opposition. In Romania, Bulgaria, Albania, Serbia and Montenegro, however, it was the (former) communist parties that won the first multi-party elections. The impression of a neutral political observer of the time was that while the Visegrád countries had made a clear break with the old regime, other post-communist countries still had to face a long transition being burdened by powerful continuities.

Interestingly, the emerging political borderline between the two subregions came about along the historical politico-cultural borders. It was the borderline which divided Western Roman and Eastern Orthodox Christianity and where the spheres of influence of the Habsburg and Ottoman empires abutted. In the former region the tradition of parliamentary democracy was stronger, only half of the population depended on agriculture and the working class movement could look back to social democratic traditions. It was in Central Europe that liberal, pro-independence, anti-communist movements developed in 1953, 1956, 1968, 1976 and 1980–81. It was only in those countries that underground and organized opposition came into being with the political strategy of "new evolutionism" and "civil society against the state". The party system in these countries was basically divided into left and right wings after 1989. In South Eastern Europe, however, the parliamentary tradition was weak, the rural population made up three-fourths or four-fifths of the inhabitants. Consequently, the working class movement was not organized along social democratic but along communist lines. Most members were unskilled workers of rural origin. In South East Europe there was no tradition of democratic opposition. Consequently, the newly formed party system was based on the opposition between communists and anti-communists. (Körösényi 1991) In 1991 it was obvious that Western political organizations differentiate between their political "favourites" (the Visegrád group) and "stepchildren" (South Eastern countries) along the line of historically developed cultural-political differences. The "Visegrád package", as a reward for the "good guys" among the new democracies, was well marketed and well sold in the West.

Further political differences have been brought in evidence by other political scientists discussing the emerging party systems in East Central European countries. Herbert Kitschelt, for instance, (1995) attributed more importance to the legacy of communism than to the traditions of the pre-communist era and took this as a basis to outline a trichotomous typology. Firstly, in the countries of former bureaucratic-authoritarian communism (East Germany, Czech Republic) the main political division line was formed around socio-economic questions, and a revival of the classic left-right division took place. Secondly, in formerly national communist countries which had a negotiated transition (Poland, Hungary, Slovenia) the economic policy divide between market liberalizers and socialists is less sharp, therefore the party system is tripolar (socialists, liberals, conser-

vatives) and the main division line was around cultural issues, such as morality, family values and religion. Finally, in former patrimonial communist countries (Romania, Bulgaria) "where the old elites are still entrenched in key positions in all walks of life, the big issues are law and order and de-communisation". (Kitschelt 1995:461-2) In these countries the communist–anti-communist political opposition proved to be stronger and longer lasting than elsewhere. This approach, however, does not provide a convincing explanation of thedifferences between the first and second group of countries after the regime change.

By the end of 1991, several events considerably confused the initially clear picture of similarities and differences among the countries of East Central Europe, marking the beginning of a new period in the region. The abortive putsch in the Soviet Union in August 1991 was followed by a shift in power from Gorbachev to Yeltsin. The Baltic states became independent in Gorbachev's time. Yeltsin recognized that the collapse of the Soviet monopoly and the process of democratization would sooner or later raise the question of an end of the Soviet Union, arguing that democracy cannot keep the Soviet Union together but, with the Soviet Union kept together, there would be no democracy. Bearing this recognition in mind, Yeltsin himself urged a speed up of the process of breaking up the empire, which was finalized by an instrument signed at a meeting with the Ukrainian and Belorussian presidents in Minsk in December 1991. Around the same time, the East-Slavonian conflict broke out between the Serbs and the Croats in Yugoslavia. This soon escalated into a war. A peaceful process involving democratic elections and referenda voting for secession which started in 1990–91, was not able to retain its "velvet" character. The series of bloody conflicts leading to war initiated the final disintegration of post-Titoist Yugoslavia, which had functioned more like a confederation than a federation from 1980 onwards. This was followed by the 1992 Czechoslovak election, which resulted in the victory of the conservative right-centre Civic Democratic Party of Václav Klaus in the Czech Republic and in the victory of the economically left of centre and politically nationalist Movement for Democratic Slovakia (HZDS) led by Vladimir Meciar in Slovakia. Klaus and Meciar in their 1992 negotiations were unable to agree on the future of the confederate state: Meciar demanded more preferences within the federal framework, Klaus, however, refused to give in and, as against confederation, he preferred the idea of "velvet separation". Finally, this was realized on 1 January 1993. In short, the exit from communism was presented by the national elites as an exit from the former, non-democratic (con)federative structures. Contrary to their original goals, these non-democratic federations were not able "to hold together" their nations. (Stepan 1997) This was probably the only way out for the former political elites to maintain their political power as well.

The changes in 1991–92 not only re-drew the borderlines between the countries in East Central Europe but also caused a fundamental change in interna-

tional opinion, not to mention the foreign political situation and the character of democratic transition in this region. The new or revived national states were based on a policy of ethnic identity which gave an ever growing impetus to nationalism and relegated political co-operation to the background. The war in Yugoslavia meant that the East Central European states were not looking for co-operation and a peaceful resolution of conflicts but for the patronage of great or medium powers. Geopolitics, once considered obsolete, turned up again in the political dictionary. The Croats appeared to find their patron in Germany, the Serbs in Russia, the Bosnian Muslims in Turkey. Ethnic cleansing tore apart and turned against each other communities that had cohabited for hundreds of years. In this war armed troops did not fight against each other but against defenceless civilians. Western countries were not able to enforce a lasting peace. In East Central Europe, "coalitions of instinctive attraction" were formed on the one hand among the Ukraine, Hungary and Croatia and, on the other, among Slovakia, Romania and Serbia. Hungary was the first to recognize the independent Ukraine and to sign a bilateral basic treaty. Hungarian foreign policy was supposedly haunted by a fear of a revival of the Little Entente.

Things got easier for the Czechs when Czechoslovakia was divided in two. On the one hand, they got rid of Slovak political uncertainties and also some tensions between Hungary and Slovakia over the issue of the Gabcikovo–Nagymaros dam. On the other hand, becoming an ethnically homogeneous nation, the Czechs were largely exempted from the acute problem of ethnic minorities. The idea of cooperation begotten in Visegrád had never been unconditionally welcome by Vaclav Klaus, the Czech Prime Minister, who later distanced his government from this regional cooperation. He refused to mediate between the Slovaks and Hungarians in conflicts in connection with ethnic minorities or in resolving problems such as the construction of the Gabcikovo hydroelectric power station and the much disputed unilateral diversion of the Danube by the Slovaks. (His individualist stance was particularly visible in January 1994 when US President Clinton visited Prague to meet the national leaders of the Visegrád group.) Around this time, the Polish economy started growing at an ever increasing rate. Poland that was considered a mere "third" in the cooperation initiated in Visegrád in 1991, had become less interested in close cooperation by 1993 partly because of its economic achievements and partly because Russian troops had been withdrawn from Poland. In sum, at that time the Czech Republic, Poland and Hungary looked like individual competitors running to come in first in the European Union rather than collaborators in the same region. In 1994–5 all three countries submitted their application for joining the European Union race in Brussels and all three declared that they wished to join NATO.

The war in the former Yugoslavia and the separation of Czechs and Slovaks considerably changed Hungary's international position. Hungary was not only looked upon as the one-time reformist country, a member of the Visegrád group

but also as a potential threat because of the Hungarian minorities in Romania, Slovakia and Yugoslavia. If observers with insufficient background knowledge had looked at the region at that time, they may have rightly thought that all of a sudden the Balkan border lines had been pushed to the North. Hungary, however, is not a newly formed national state and therefore the European federation is a much more popular idea here than the idea of an independent national state. The Antall government, which associated itself with Christian national principles, had a clear preference for a Western orientation; also because Christianity was considered a Western idea. It can be assumed that the Visegrád countries would have proceeded much faster towards a Western integration if it had not been for the disintegration of the Soviet Union, Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia. But given the situation that developed in 1992–3, the region changed into a confused territory impossible to handle because of national and ethnic conflicts, which the Western powers started to approach with much more caution and uncertainty. At first, Yugoslavia was not as important for Western policy as the pacification of the post-Soviet states and ensuring that nuclear weapons be held only in Russia and preferably under central control. That is why initially they were not so eager to enforce peace in that troubled region. Later, nonetheless, the war in the territory of former Yugoslavia, as well as a reactivated Russian foreign policy supporting Serbia, drew Western attention to a region in turmoil and strenghtened a commitment to peace and stability in Europe.

The phase of a race for West-oriented politics in East Central Europe coincided with the changes in US politics following the election of President Clinton. In 1992–93 US politicy was not really in a position to deal with Eastern Europe or to offer options to the East Central European countries. Because of the instability in the East, the countries in the region started to attribute much more significance to NATO, which they considered as the only guarantee of security. Feeling the increasing uncertainty of the "race", Viktor Orbán, a Hungarian opposition politician, stated in 1994 that joining NATO is more urgent than joining the European Union because security is more important than welfare. The regional foreign policy of collaborating neighbour states was, as it were, replaced by a "European policy" and "NATO-policy". To sum up the developments of the second period, Valerie Bunce was right when she claimed that "the major reason why regional cooperation among Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic and Slovakia declined after 1992 was that the structure of power in the international system changed and, with that, the interests of the Visegrád states and the incentives they had to cooperate with each other." (Bunce 1996:31)

In 1994–5 the beginnings of a new political stage were delineated in East–West international relations. This was already the third since 1989. Both NATO and the European Union decided to expand eastward though without any commitment to a time-table. Western policy partly aimed at sustaining a normal relationship with the Russians and also at encouraging East Central European

countries in the "no man's land" to establish a closer relation with the West. A part of this policy was the extension of East–West military cooperation within the framework of the Partnership for Peace programme, from 1994, and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) from 1995. The European Council was also extended and Russia was invited to join. The Western European Union (WEU) offered associate membership to some ECE countries. It was at the January 1994 NATO summit that a commitment to a future NATO enlargement was first announced. Developing the conditions for minimal co-operation also facilitated a more definite attempt to create peace in Bosnia. In Dayton, in November 1995 the US insited on a peace agreement between the representatives of Croatia, Yugoslavia and Bosnia-Herzegovina. All this made it possible to send peace Implementation Forces (IFOR) to Bosnia and Croatia which also relied on international co-operation. The Balkan war came to an end.

A more active US presence and a policy relying more on persuasion and "gentle force" also played a part in the conclusion of the Slovak–Hungarian bilateral basic treaty in March 1995, which was ratified by the Hungarian Parliament as early as in the spring of 1995 and by the Slovak Parliament at the beginning of 1996. Further bilateral treaties have been signed between Romania and the Ukraine and between Hungary and Romania. Multilateral regional cooperations have been overshadowed by the newly initiated policy of bilaterial treaties. Western pressure also played a part in these events, encouraging competition and divison, but also in others. Greece recognized Macedonia and the Bosnian war did no escalate to Kosovo and the Sandjak or to Romania where the extreme nationalists were forced out of the ex-communist government coalition. With the victory of the non-communist centre-right parties in Romania (November 1996) and Bulgaria (April 1997) the "long transition" of these countries ended as well. In March 1997, the European Commission approved the new orientations for the PHARE programme (a project originally created to support reform in Poland and Hungary, which now has 14 members) in order to change it from a demand driven programme to an accession driven one, preparing the countries of East Central Europe for membership in the EU. Together with the "Technical Assistance to the Commonwealth of Independent States" (TACIS), which is a programme for supporting reform and promoting stability in the post-Soviet countries, the PHARE/TACIS Democracy Programme for Central and Eastern Europe amounted to 27 million ecus in 1996 to strenghten democracitic institutions and policies. (Skuhra 1997)

After the decision of the NATO summit in Madrid, in the summer of 1997, to open the doors for three newcomers, Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic (note that all are from the Visegrád group), efforts for cooperation have been revitalized among the three. Their governments quickly agreed to hold regular meetings for foreign and defence ministers in order to harmonize their steps. This

could certainly not have happened so fast without their previous cooperation inside the Visegrád framework. Other countries, like Slovenia and Romania, continue their efforts to get closer to acceptance by NATO in the second round of enlargement. Opponents feared that the NATO decision might further divide the region and cause unnecessary tensions. However, this proved to be untrue since both the invited and the uninvited are equally interested in the maintenance of the process of enlargement. NATO and the European Union are still popular in most of the East Central European countries. Many think that NATO guarantees peace and the European Union (in the long run) will ensure welfare. Notwithstanding pessimism, which is undoubtedly present in these countries, the United States and Western Europe are still popular, the IMF and the World Bank, however, much less so. (Greskovits 1996) The East Central European reconciliation and cooperation process urged by the West has a good chance to come to fruition, particularly if we bear in mind the developments of recent years. But this process is still in an inchoate stage and it is too early to judge its outcome.

The problems of integration

The obstacles to the integration of the European structures have different sources. The countries of East Central Europe are still struggling with the establishment of an effective administration. They have to establish a modern, meritocratic civil service employing well-paid professionals who are able to implement the policy of the government in an efficient and impartial manner, following rational-legal bureaucratic norms. The creation of an efficient system of local and regional government seems to be crucial as well. (Eatwell et al. 1995:38-9) Democratic federalism requires full internal democracy, while democracy cannot be maintained without a functioning state. Linz and Stepan are right when they argue: "Democracy is a form of governance of a state. Thus, no modern polity can become democratically consolidated unless it is first a state." (Linz and Stepan 1996:7) State-building, however, requires a growth of social trust in the state. Without such trust the reduction of the level of corruption and the establishment of an efficient taxation system cannot be achieved. These elements, and others, are crucial in economic stabilization as well as the popularity and legitimacy of a new democracy.

A period in which state building occurs in conjunction with the process of nation building, as is taking place in Croatia, Slovakia, Macedonia, Estonia or Moldova, is not particularly conducive to the construction of new federative structures. Nation-builders are not always tolerant of pluralism. Among the advantages of federalism are more effective conflict management, a potential to protect minorities and territorial interests better, respect for diversity, the search for balance between autonomy (diversity) and sovereignty (union), and a better

representation of interests in the society. (Gagnon 1993) But these ideas have not been implemented in East Central Europe so far. Most governments in the region are tending to homogenize their population's cultural and political identity, rather than supporting diversity through "federalizing" national politics. Instead of conflict management, most governments seek to resolve conflict along majoritarian principles. Instead of defending and supporting minorities and including them in the body politic, they emphasize the national dimension of statehood by extremely strong domestic nationalist policies. (Flores Juberias 1997) The idea of consociationalism or power sharing (crucial to the realization of all federal ideas), as Schöpflin (1996–7) points out, moves in the direction of deterritorialization. However, examples from different parts of Europe show that sometimes consensual approaches, due to the different local political culture and other factors, do not work and this might lead to aggressive, exclusivist "solutions". (Raymond and Bajic-Raymond 1997)

In this situation, ethnic minorities (and especially the Roma) will clearly remain on the loser's side. In the context of state policies which were described as "nationalizing states" and "external national homelands" (Brubaker 1996), the newly independent states try to strengthen their identity trough the combination of two principles, *ethnos* and *demos*. (Bozóki and Sükösd 1993) These "ethnodemocracies" (majoritarian democracy based on ethnic principles) or "ethnocracies" (semi-democratic rule based on ethnicity) do not even seek to assimilate their minorities, as liberal nationalists in Europe tried to do in the 19th century: instead, they simply desire to exclude them from the "nation". Consequently, by identifying nation with state, these countries do not offer equal social status for their fellow citizens (Kis 1996), as citizens of the same state of a different ethnic origin. The sad fact in post-communist Europe is that as long as the idea of an internally multinational state is not accepted by the governments of the region (replacing the idea of ethnically homogeneous nation-states) the federalist idea will remain a dream. Presently, the major impetus for federalism comes not from internal but from external, Western pressure. Federalism, in the eyes of many, is a negligible part of the attractive "welfare package" the European Union is seen as representing.

This situation underlines the importance of a vital civil society and the need for a democratic political culture. First, for internal reasons: because citizens can thus control their own state; secondly: for international cooperation, because in the temporary absence of an effective state, local or regional governments can be pushed into working together with their counterparts in a country across their own borders. Probably the most successful cross-border regional cooperation can be found along the German–Polish border. (Illés 1997) To bring another example, though on a smaller scale, there is such a cooperation between Western Hungary, Eastern Austria and Eastern Slovenia. Apart from labour relations, created by Hungarians daily crossing to work in Austria and by

Austrians investing in Hungarian agriculture and in the service sector, there are inter-regional plans to develop road and train links and infrastructure in general. Almost all post-communist democracies in Central Europe are eager to build major road links as quickly as possible in order to get "closer" to, or to feel "closer" to Europe. This has helped Győr–Moson–Sopron in Northwestern Hungary. This region has the lowest rate of unemployment (about 4 per cent), and one of the highest rates of economic boom in Hungary. Local firms in Hungary's Western Transdanubian region are profiting from cross-border business. With Austria's entry into the European Union, cross-border cooperation has received even more encouragment and the INTERREG 2– PHARE CBC programme offers Győr–Moson–Sopron, Vas and Zala counties new, coordinated developmental opportunities. "Many microregional developmental and cooperational organizations can be found in the region, which also extend over the county borders. With changes in large and small towns in the region, their dimensions are rearranged as well." (Rechnitzer 1996:27) Hungarian–Romanian regional relations, involving Eastern Hungary and Transylvania, are beginning to show increasing similarities, especially since the ratification of the bilateral treaty between the two countries (Linden 1997) and the change of government in Romania of November 1996. The main obstacles to further regional cooperation in East Central Europe are the following: 1) the relationship is unclear between East Central European regionalism and European integration, so East Central European countries are not willing to establish forms of regional cooperation which may be used as an excuse by the West to exclude them from the EU; 2) decentralization and self-governance in East Central Europe is far from the West European standard, and thus local authorities have much less scope to act independently; 3) up to 1996 joint members of the EU could not use PHARE financial support for their own regional development. (Illés 1997:58) In addition, national minorities outside the borders of their "homeland" still seem to produce political tension between the given countries rather than a potential for developing economic exchange across borders.

Decentralization, regionalism and regional cooperation are not to be confused with federalism. Decentralization or regional cooperation may be an efficient tool for a central power to implement federalization in the future, but one cannot predict this outcome. Moreover, the European Union itself is a "moving target" with competing and shifting identities. (Hueglin 1997) Despite the efforts towards federalization, Europe today is not a federation of different, democratically organized territorial units but a confederation of sovereign, democratic states. The problem of EU enlargement and integration lies not only in the relative backwardness of the East Central European countries, but also in the willingness of the states in the European Union to modify their decision-making structures to create room for the newcomers. (Schmitter and Torreblanca 1997

European Union: What sort of integration?

Notwithstanding the desire for European integration and all the discussion about it, one question is still not clear: what kind of Europe is this about? Will it be a union of states, nations, or citizens? As Pierre Manent (1997:96) puts it: "Does 'Europe' mean today the depoliticization of the life of peoples—that is, the increasingly methodical reduction of their collective existence to the activities of 'civil society' and the mechanisms of 'civilization'? Or does it instead entail the construction of a new political body, a great, enormous European nation?" Can there be sovereignty other than that of the nation-state? Is supra-national democracy viable without nations? Contrary to confederation in practice, the original idea of European integration was that "federal institutions were to relate direct to the citizens, not just to member governments. The main powers were to be defence, currency, trade and enough tax to sustain the necessary expenditure. Other powers were to remain with the democratic institutions of the federal states: 'self-rule' as well as 'shared rule', now known as the principle of subsidiarity." (Pinder 1993:45–46) In practice, however, the EU has a dualized system of governance: it is a "multilevel bargaining system" with its principles of subsidiarity and solidarity, and, it is a "market-regulatory regime", where monetary policy is strictly insulated from the political bargaining system. (Hueglin 1997: 15) The structure of the European Union, into which the East Central European countries wish to be integrated, is still not clear.

The Single European Act ratified by the countries of European Community in 1987 made an attempt to form a political community out of the member states so as to prepare them to bring about a future European political union. (Kulcsár 1995:27) The Maastricht Treaty has had the purpose of both accelerating and deepening this process. In the meantime, the East Central European countries have become associated members of the European Union. The nature and dimension of the Union, however, has not been clearly defined and there are still different views as to the future of the Union. Those who are skeptical about a unified Europe believe in a European federation divided in terms of space, time or content, while others try to cling to the original idea. In what follows, I shall outline five major approaches as future perspectives.

In one influential concept, the Union will have a "hard core" of those member states that can meet the requirements defined in the Maastricht Treaty, and an outer ring of those countries that can only join later. This is the "concentric circles" concept of Europe. This is viewed in East Central Europe with skepticism, as it is understood as a new version of "first class" and "second class" Europe. The newly independent and democratic states in East Central Europe will need to be persuaded to give up some of their recent achievements in order to go "beyond the nation-state" as the EU is presently envisaged. (Holland 1993)

Another concept is one in which more time has to be given to the countries that need to catch up in a way that does not prevent the already ready countries

from deepening their integration. This is the "multi-speed" concept of Europe which has received a more positive reaction from the aspirant countries, as this concept might allow them time to readjust the least competitive areas of their economy.

The third approach is to leave it open for every member state to choose from the "menu" of the European Union programme, depending on the content of agreements they wish to participate in. This is the *"à la carte"* concept of Europe. This, however, is hardly sufficient for the newcomers or for the present members of the EU. Without commonly accepted regulations, this approach could easily lead the Union toward disintegration.

The fourth concept is somewhat similar to the third but on the whole, it can be seen as a compromise since it lays down that the Union should be a unified market for all its member states. As to the other issues, it will be up to each country as to whether it participates in separate agreements such as those on policing, visa or refugees policies (Schengen Agreement), the European Monetary Union (EMU) or the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP). This is the "flexible integration" concept of Europe. From their point of view, the countries of East Central Europe are in an ambiguous position as to this concept: on the one hand, they want to reach full membership status in order to be "on the safe side", on the other hand, they are not able to meet all the membership criteria.

Finally, the advocates of the fifth concept, though now fewer in number, still emphasize the importance of rules that are valid for all member states. Some candidate countries would prefer this solution whatever the cost, others are more cautious. All in all, it has not been decided yet to what extent the European federation will mean an international (between states) or supranational (above states) organization. If the latter, the question of "stateness" (namely, how to preserve democracy beyond states) will again come to the fore.

For the time being, these issues are being discussed above the heads of the future member countries with no information for public opinion. In the member states themselves, contrary to expectations, national governments and bureaucracies are more "pro-Europe" than their citizens. Indeed, the latter express their reservations and disappointments by regularly sending "anti-European" representatives to the European Parliament. For many, voting for the European Parliament is simply a protest vote against their own government. The very concept of representation is questionable in the lack of a responsible vote. What people do know in the East Central European countries is that the initial Western enthusiasm has abated and once again decisions which concern them are to be made without them. (Tolnay 1995). Countries aspiring to European Union membership are not fully concerned with issues of federation: that will probably come only when they become full members. By joining the European Union, and other Western interstate organizations for that matter, these countries are seeking long term solutions for their economic and security concerns.

Jean Monnet's observation of fifty years ago on Western Europe (quoted by Wistrich 1989:24) seems to be valid today for post-communist Europe as well. "There will be no peace in Europe if states reconstitute themselves on a basis of national sovereignty [...] European countries are too confined to ensure prosperity and essential social developments for their people. It follows that European states should form themselves into a federation or a 'European entity' which would make them a joint economic unit." ❧

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Victor Határ

The Secret Knowledge of Emigrés

Cœlum, non animum mutant qui trans mare currunt.
Horatius: Epistolae

What am I doing here, for God's sake, sitting in my Victorian library, facing a sixteen-foot Victorian bookcase full of English volumes up to the ceiling, feeling cosy and warm, writing in an adopted language in which I feel somewhat insecure, just like seamen on dry land? Why am I not back in the Old Country of the language and literature I belong to, instead of disconcerting myself with all these questions, after having spent two-thirds of my adult life in the British Isles?

Cornered by my own cross-examination and feeling guilty, I am trying to cast my mind back to the days when I ran away. Did I want to? Never. I felt at home, so much so that the question of going to live anywhere else had never arisen: and if "language is the house of Being", I have been housed in, even ensconsed in, my native language and literature. I still remember the terror I felt when I was forced to flee: twice imprisoned previously, I had to escape from being jailed a third time. At 42, which is not exactly young, not even youngish, where am I going to live, to earn my bread and how? How many times am I going to be hated, execrated, challenged, called *bloody foreigner* or *sale métèque?*

All of these, of course, by now are academic questions. I found a comfortable habitat, friends, peace of mind, managed to publish my books: all past history. Yet there is one thing I still do not find easy and that is to explain to Westerners what being or having been an emigré means to Easterners. By Easterners, this time I mean all those people living or having lived behind that, now defunct, Iron Curtain.

That I was "born in exile", the way I have put it in my autobiography, much to the bewilderment of my readers, because the turn of my mind was so pronouncedly "Western" and that settling down in England for a philosopher felt like "coming home"—that's beside the point. In a way, my case was an exception and not the rule. In those Eastern Parts, well before the inception of the Soviet Union, the rule was that if anyone fancied living anywhere else, dreamt about it, or had the cheek to go away—the dice was

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heavily loaded against him or her. If he made good and became famous on whatever account, his "glory" was reclaimed by the Motherland and credited *de rigueur* to her assets: but the large majority of those in exile were branded *exiles* and looked askance at. That vagabondage won't do—said the Elders of the tribe: suspected of treachery, eyed with a mix of jealousy and hatred, his or her final lot was, many a time, shame and/or oblivion.

Even while I am writing these lines, I am shaking in my shoes as to what some censorious Catos of my tribe will say. For it is not easy to explain to a Westerner that the Easterner's outlook is drastically different. They do not say aloud *once a Catholic always a Catholic*—but they do think all the time, *once an emigré always an emigré.* And, in a droll sort of way they would never ever guess, they have a point. In the West—be it the self-contained Anglo-Saxon, Francophone, Spanish or Portuguese cultural expanses—there are and always have been *expatriates:* writers and artists called "tax-exiles" trying to escape the claws of the Inland Revenue and its exorbitant income tax claims. No reader in his right mind would hold it against them that the book they've just bought was written in Deya or Monaco, in Trieste or in Rome. By and large, readers never knew if one of their favourite authors, Lawrence Durrell or Graham Greene, James Joyce or Anthony Burgess were living abroad, in Cyprus, in Paris, on the French Riviera, etc. They couldn't care less. These authors, were they ever branded *emigrés*?

I recall John Osborne who, once, in a Paris interview, heaped a plethora of abuses on his fellow-countrymen calling them prigs, bastards, phoneys, pharisees, frauds, etc. Had he been from Eastern Europe and would he have done the same to the nation he came from, a hidden *fatwa* would have befallen him; when home again, he might have been lynched or summarily shot. He would never anywhere be safe from the ethnic cleansing of chauvinistic intellectual fundamentalists. As to Osborne, he stepped ashore, came home and put on his slippers. He has not been stripped of his citizenship, nobody asked him awkward questions. He wasn't boycotted, nor was he libelled. He wasn't branded a traitor and, just because he lived a while in Paris, was never blotched as an *emigré.* He had his say, that's all.

If there was such an electronic gauge to measure this quaint metamorphosis, my reading would still be ambivalent: after forty years in the West, I have become 90 per cent westernized yet, at the core I am still as died-in-the-wool Hungarian as any ancestry-boasting aristocrat or chip-off-the-old-block peasant. But between the one who stayed put and the one who ran away, there is a world of difference. And that's the crux of the matter. Let me spell it out.

Someone who, by mishap or by stupidity, falls headlong into prison, qualifies for a dunce's cap. An ass is an ass is an ass. But once he went through his hell and became acquainted with the inside of dozens of the jails of the Land, he or she will cherish his misfortune which, in retrospect will prove an experience as

unmatchable as it is unique: for an author a goldmine for which there are no substitutes in textbooks or references. It's the same with emigration. Once you went through its hell, you come out of it a different man. The difference is a secret knowledge, an *Arcanum* which, in your homeland, is impossible to get at. The keys to this double lock are nowhere to be found, no indication, no arrows to point at, no access to it.

Myriads of people live in their homelands deeming themselves absolutely safe, feeling *at home.* Their *at home* feeling is their carapace.

Everyone feels safe in this armour to which a matchless warmth is given, the warmth of the hearth. For *la Patrie,* the fatherland, any fatherland spreading itself around one on the map, by its borders and within its boundaries gives the impression of a giant cocoon. In this cocoon a citizen who stays put from the cradle to the grave, feels doubly safe, and *at home* on the planet.

Once you run away you lose your carapace, that vast cocoon which was your country melts away. It may be true to say that everything around you becomes risky, dicey, chancy—yet it's more than that. The discovery of your utter defencelessness reveals the extreme vulnerability of us all, a thought which has philosophical vistas never to be lost from sight. A discovery which is as shattering as it is manifold in its inferences.

All "Lands", "Homelands", "Motherlands," "Fatherlands," are illusions on the Mercator World Map. All "vast cocoons" are delusory. That we are welcome to this Earth and, in fact, that it was created for our convenience, is a figment of our imagination. Our species is an upstart and a belated newcomer, just partially successful in its "conquest of the Land"; in a state of non-belligerent unease, we are tolerated by the rest of the biosphere and the planet, but only just. Our compatriots, left behind in their imaginary cocoon, though never budging an inch, are, in fact virtual *runaways* just the same as we all are, without having an inkling of it, six billions of r*unaways, itinerants* and *emigrés* on Earth.

last night it was internment prison cells
tomorrow brings expulsion somewhere else
I envy those who are obliged to stay!
it's not the old stork with the swaddling band
it's not the house the street and not the land
it is the planet where I went astray
the other tramps will make their journey back
why was I made a white-pigmented black
whose smile and smell are strange and different...
should I have risen from another source
is there a sea destined to end the course
the last song of a lost itinerant?

Translated by Peter Zollman

The title of the poem was "The Emigré". In the life of an *emigré* there are ups and downs: and this was written when I was down, a few days before being admitted to hospital, after a nervous breakdown. For it might come even to that when one realizes how inhospitable this planet can be, the notion of *homelands* where we could be at home a mirage and that in the last analysis we all are, with no exception, *run-aways* and *roam-arounds* on a clump of earth we fancy was botched up for us but, in fact, could easily well do without our bustling termitary.

This is a tenet with which my interpenetration is complete, it became one of the sheet-anchors of my philosophy. Some of my readers shook their heads in disbelief. Can one live with such a disheartening discovery at the back of one's mind all the time? Your inmost being permeated with that sentience that from now on you have been expelled from your Paradise and there is no going back to that safe cocoon, not even for the happy escapade of a conducted tour...?

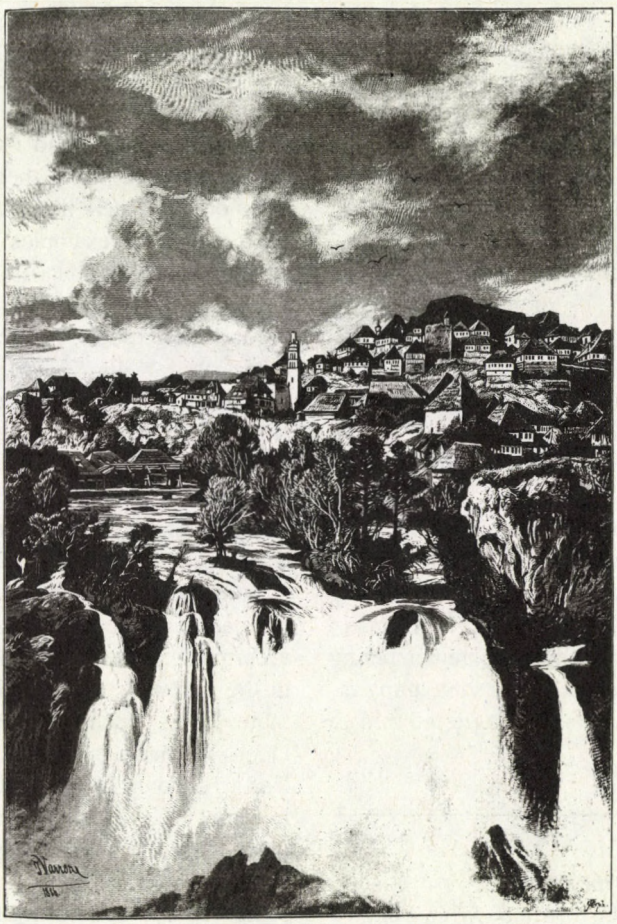
I can answer all these questions in all serenity, easily, composed and undismayed. *Si parva licet componere magnis,* just as Socrates gave to this his standard answer, I am not an Athenian or a Greek, but a citizen of the world. Thus, we are in good company, and although for some backwoodsmen in the East *cosmopolitan* is still a dirty word, I let it pass unruffled and unflappable as ever. It's true that there is no going back for us, yet not because we are lacking in will or longing to be back, but because by now we know that *that cocoon* was an illusion. And this is not where our secret knowledge ends. For invisible as it be for those safely *at home* in their giant cocoon, and depressing and overcast as it may seem to them, we still have, on our sky, a hope on a colossal scale, bigger than they even thought possible. Granted that no silver lining comes without a cloud, that secret hope we entertain is that, by and by, the confraternity of *emigrés* will grow out of all proportions and will become *"la Condition Humaine".*

Apart from the centuries of the *Völkerwanderungen,* the Doomsday mass hysteria on the Continent and the crusades, the general pattern was that all and sundry spent his or her life where he or she was born; villages, townships stayed put. Local pilgrimages—yes; world-wide tourism—no. Highways—yes (very few, sort of; infrastructure—no.) No trace of it in the vocabulary. To roam about rootlessly was absurd and as suspicious as to be a pedestrian "prowler" and not on wheels in the States. In Antiquity, the flight of Simon Magus over Rome was *magic,* the flight of angels—a *miracle.* With the world net of air routes and with the tourism explosion all this has changed out of recognition. There seems to be a Gypsy instinct abroad, awakening and with drifters, "travellers" banding together, families who embrace the new lifestyle and prefer the change of setting and scenery. Newcomers on our doorstep are no longer suspect or, in principle unwelcome.

Swaying and inveigling as a mirage in the heathaze and remote it may be, but there may come to be a *future* when nearly all the world will be *on the move,* people who do not budge, a minority and *emigrés* the majority. To the extent the world economy, under the sway of multinationals, becomes increasingly global-

ized, to the same extent the significance of national frontiers seems to be decreasing. If not mine, a generation of Methuselahs born today might live to see the receding of all gut reactions of the past, the furore of chauvinists and fundamentalists ebbing away and ethnic cleansing just a mention in the annals, like the memory of Genghis Khan's pyramids of skulls; and then, one day the miracle might happen: people in Central and Eastern Europe will come to accept the notion of *expatriate* authors as long as they stick to the outlandish lingo they call their mother tongue.

All these things will come to pass—one day when it will dawn on us that we all are runaways on this planet Earth. A midgety little perch allotted to us in the Cosmos which, however inhospitable it may be out there, it behoves us to make our foothold more hospitable. ❧



Jajce. From János Asbóth: Bosznia és Herczegovina *(Bosnia and Herzegovina) Budapest, 1887* .

Tibor Frank

Friend or Foe?

The Changing Image of Hungary in the United States

The United States is a huge country and Hungary is far away and of low priority in the American scale of interests. At first sight the very possibility of an integrated image of Hungary in any sense of the term seems doubtful, yet the American political élite, and even American public opinion as such, have registered the dramatic turning points of recent Hungarian history with surprising precision. The recent history, over the last century and a half, of the image of Hungary in America is a tragic palimpsest of the perception of such dramatic turns of events, mostly volatile, sometimes lasting, and of effects that were often delayed and dragged out.

Before 1848 they took scant notice of Hungary in the then youthful United States. "The name of our country is rarely mentioned in journals abroad", Sándor Bölöni Farkas complained in 1834 on the closing pages of his *Útazás Észak Amerikában* (Journey in North America), remembering his shame and shock that *"some unpleasant news spoiled our visit"*. He referred to an 1831 news item in the *Pennsylvania Inquirer* of Philadelphia—copied from the London press, about the cholera outbreak in Upper Hungary. "The bloody cruelties in Szepes and Zemplén counties forewarn what the barbarously oppressed, ignorant masses can do in blind hatred when momentarily freed from their chain."[1] This news of the cholera in Hungary was one of the first typical examples of the building blocks which made up the American stereotype of Hungary, blocks, crystallized around major social movements and their reflection.

Things really got underway with the close but cautious attention paid to the 1848–49 Revolution and War of Independence. It was at that time that Hungary emerged as a reality—no longer simply an exotic curiosity—in the United States. The U.S. Minister in Vienna would have liked to have acted as an intermediary in producing an armistice between Austria and Hungary in the winter of 1848–49, but Secretary of State James Buchanan—the future President—warned against any step that could lead to a confrontation with the European Powers.[2] Yet, as the fighting continued, meetings expressing sympathy with the Hungarian cause grew in number, and press reports became more extensive.[3] A campaign within the small but—by the summer of 1849—enthusiastic Hungarian colony

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led by Professor Leopold Breisach, himself of Hungarian origin, also had its effects. It seems that Breisach was able to influence the U.S. government, and his arguments included the opening up of the Adriatic port of Fiume (now Rijeka) to the American merchant marine.[4] It also helped that, in March 1849, the liberal John M. Clayton replaced Buchanan as Secretary of State.

At that time Hungarians were not really persuaded of the importance of the United States. From April 1849, Kossuth made great efforts to obtain diplomatic recognition for the independence of Hungary. Count László Teleki, Kossuth's envoy in Paris, wrote: "I could speak with the American consul, but in my opinion his recognition would, on the one hand, arrive pretty late, on the other it would not have any great effect. I think that now that the whole of Europe grants us deserved admiration, it might be dangerous to be recognized merely by a power in another continent that would be of so little material help."[5]

On June 18th 1849, A. Dudley Mann was appointed U.S. Minister to Hungary, evidence of a recognition that came too late,[6] and the appointment of a Hungarian Minister in Washington was definitely mooted. In 1850, in the aftermath of the surrender at Világos (Siria), American legislators attacked the administration for providing insufficient assistance to the Hungarians and for not recognizing Hungarian independence in due time. Senator Lewis Cass and his friends argued outright that the delaying tactics of the American administration had played a part in the Hungarian collapse, and that the absence of determined support for the Hungarian cause was contrary to the essence and political philosophy of the United States.[7]

Although the diplomatic efforts of Kossuth and Count Casimir Batthyány—the Foreign Minister—had proved vain, they nevertheless soon bore fruit indirectly. What the U.S. did in the interests of Kossuth's liberation from exile in Turkey, and his later reception in America, was a continuation of the delayed and interrupted process of diplomatic recognition[8] and could, in a sense, be interpreted as amends. (There is an obvious parallel with the absence of U.S. political and military assistance for the 1956 Revolution, and the welcome given to the Hungarian freedom fighters who had left the country.) Kossuth received recognition *pars pro toto* in place of Hungary. Neither before nor afterwards was any public figure so completely identified with his country as Kossuth was in the United States in the six months he spent there. I think it is no exaggeration to say that Kossuth placed Hungary on the political map of the modern world, in particular, of its American version. When the President of the United States, empowered by Congress, despatched the U.S.S. Mississippi to the Dardanelles with the commission of transporting the "nation's guest" from his Ottoman detention to the New World, showing him every sign of courtesy, what indeed happened was that a nation that had fought for its freedom found itself lit up by American floodlights.[9] I would venture to state that no Hungarian has ever been accorded such publicity, such celebration, or comparable respect, and that goes not only for the U.S. This non-pareil reception anointed Kossuth as the symbol of the Hungarian nation fighting for its liberties and independence, indeed as the symbol of liberty and independence itself. *"... that we recognize in Governor Kossuth of Hungary the most worthy and distinguished representative of the cause of civil and religious liberty on the continent",* declared a meeting held in Springfield, Ill., in a resolution that may well have been drafted by Abraham Lincoln in person. *"A cause for which he*

and his nation struggled until they were overwhelmed by the armed intervention of a foreign despot, in violation of the more sacred principles of the laws of nature and of nations—principles held dear by friends of freedom everywhere, and more especially by the people of these United States."[10] How much Kossuth's reception helped the Hungarian cause was even recognized by his Hungarian critics. "Many keep on calling on Kossuth", Colonel Miklós Perczel noted in his diary at the end of 1851. "Delegations keep on coming from every northern and western state, with addresses of welcome and full of declarations of sympathy for our cause. Most of them with donations to aid the Hungarian cause."[11] A few days later, however, Perczel added: "General Sandford welcomed Kossuth and, with emphatic stress, us too, as participants in the honourable fight. No doubt this was an intended hint that this and the other demonstrations were not merely Kossuth's due but ours, and chiefly, our cause's."[12]

News of Kossuth's visit was spread nation-wide by the press and even to regions which he never visited, such as the Pacific Coast, where Americans read about it with enthusiasm. The *Star* (Los Angeles), *Daily Union* (Sacramento), *Herald* (San Diego), *Oregon Spectator* (Oregon City), *Weekly Oregonian* (Portland) and *Deseret News* (Salt Lake City) all reported regularly and in surprising detail on the reception of the Hungarian visitor in the Eastern States. Kossuth as Hungary's symbol stayed on. When Aurél Kecskeméthy visited North America in 1876, he found a Kossuth Street in Cincinnati, adding: "Our famous compatriot enjoys great respect in America, streets have been named after him in a number of large towns. In Saint Louis too, there is a Kossuth Avenue, and the Kossuth mine in California is one of the most distinguished."[13] Monuments were raised to Kossuth as the symbol of Hungary, first in Cleveland, later in New York, and, most recently, on Capitol Hill.

An interesting feature of the 1848 Hungarian Revolution, much valued by some Americans, is that those who had taken part in it and who in America fought in the Civil War, all did so on the side of the Union. *The New York Times* emphasized this on November 26, 1864, when it published the High Command's expression of thanks to Lieutenant General Sándor Asbóth, who quit active service after being wounded.[14] The large number of former Hungarian Honvéd officers fighting for the North, their personal courage and devotion a bare fifteen years after 1848, conformed to the romantic American vision of the heroic Hungarian nation ever ready to fight for liberty and social equality.

Migration from the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy

An odd feature of the image of Hungary in America—not the only one—is the basically unfriendly reception given in America—even in Kossuth's lifetime—to Hungarian immigrants or, rather, migrant workers. America did not trust and in the last resort rejected the new immigrants from Czarist Russia, Central, East Central and Southern Europe, including those from Hungary.[15] The U.S. around 1900 needed cheap labour and therefore, at first, encouraged migration. But political leaders and articulate demagogues felt increasingly that the "divine mission" of the Anglo-Saxons had to be protected against the ignorant migrant hordes that rejected assimilation, including the Hungarians. Around 1900, a crusade of sorts, inspired by an Americanized Social Darwinism was under way against Slav, Jewish, Southern Italian and Hungarian johnny-come-latelys.

A lead was taken by Harvard University and the Boston Brahmins. Senator Henry Cabot Lodge of Massachusetts (a disciple of Henry Adams) and his friend, Theodore Roosevelt, had already warned back in the 1890s that *"immigration of people of those races which contributed to the settlement and development of the United States is declining in comparison with that of races far removed in thought and speech and blood from the men who have made this country what it is."*[16]

The fight against the "lesser breeds" came in many shapes and sizes.[17] A bill to apply literacy tests to would be migrants should be mentioned.[18] This was only enacted weeks before the U.S. entered the War in 1917, in the midst of xenophobic hysteria, Congress finally overruling a third presidential veto, but the Act proved an overture to the 1921 and 1924 quota legislation which, in the name of the protection of the race, in practice put a stop to "new" (including Hungarian) migration.

Thus, seen from an Anglo-Saxon angle, the Hungarian "race", hastening to American shores, within a single generation lost all those much appreciated qualities: love of freedom, ready to lay down their lives for the independence of their country, nobility and chivalry, and turned into poor immigrant "hunkies". Their poor American reputation was recorded by a Hungarian observer in 1905: *"...Americans today loath migrants from Italy or Hungary, a large proportion of whom, lacking all skills, just trusting their luck, are ready to take on any kind of job for any kind of wages... A scum, sticking like ticks to the host of those who come to the commercial emporia of America in search of an honest living from every part of the world, there too boost the host of those wretches who ravage the country at the expense of honest employees. Unfortunately, many of these dubious characters in America originate in Hungary."*[19]

It should be stressed, however, that various sociological and anthropological surveys of this "new" immigration from Europe, which were prepared for the U.S. administration, generally accord high marks to the inhabitants of Hungary. Between 1891 and 1907 immigration commissioners were sent to Hungary on three occasions, with the confidential objective of studying the concrete causes and conditions of migration. The observers clearly recognized that migration from the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy was caused by the extraordinarily low level of wages and—chiefly in Galicia—by grinding poverty. All this—especially in Eastern Hungary, Romania and Serbia, led to *"moral and mental degeneration"*. The American observers in no way blamed any innate anthropological property of the "Hungarian race" for the "quality" of migrants from Hungary. Terence V. Powderly, one of the highest ranking American immigration officials, explicitly attacked the literacy test in his report to Washington after his visit in Hungary. He wrote around 1906: *"I looked into the faces of men and women in Hungary, Austria and Italy, who could not read and write a line in any language. They were honest looking, they were clean, healthy and active. While they were illiterate they were equally as intelligent—perhaps more so—than others I met who could read and write... An educational test will do a rank injustice to some of the most deserving people and may do an injustice to our own country by admitting men and women who know how to commit crime in five or six languages, read and write in all of them and trace their record in blood... While I never was in favor of the educational test I am more opposed to it now than ever after meeting the people of Italy and Hungary."*[20]

A Congressional Immigration Committee operated between 1907 and 1911 under the chairmanship of Senator William P.

Dillingham. The 42 volume Dillingham Report, which it produced, was probably the largest social science research project in the history of the United States. One of its most interesting volumes was the work of Franz Boas, the German-American anthropologist. He examined around 18,000 "new" immigrants, including several hundred Hungarians and Slovaks, and concluded on the basis of their anthropometric data, that these, within a single generation, shifted in the direction of a new "race" that bore an American character. This astonishing result, controversial for many decades albeit repeatedly confirmed by independent data, pointed out to Congress and the Administration that there was no reason to fear the "new" migrants, including the Hungarians. After landing, the new hygienic, dietary and housing conditions, the changed natural and social climate, and democratic politics, transformed even the skeletons of migrants.[21]

"Just shot hares..."

What was responsible for the extreme deterioration of Hungary's image entertained in America were not the numerous and basically sceptic research projects of the American administration but the Great War. At first, President Wilson felt more lenient towards the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, holding Germany solely responsible for the war. Austro-Hungarians in America, unlike Germans, were given the chance to express their loyalty and to continue with naturalization procedures. Although diplomatic relations were broken off on April 18, 1917, Austria-Hungary only declared war on December 11. The delay was fully exploited by Slavs of various kinds who had migrated from Austro-Hungary and who tried to persuade the American administration of the desirability of carving up the Monarchy.[22] The President and his advisers proved particularly receptive to this idea in the Spring of 1918, when various peace missions failed (including efforts by Congressman Fiorello LaGuardia, later Mayor of New York, and earlier American Consul in Budapest, Trieste and Fiume, Count Mihály Károlyi, the Emperor Charles I [King Charles IV in Hungary], and the businessman Julius Meinl).[23] Both a conference of the oppressed nations of Austria-Hungary arranged in Rome by Tomáš G. Masaryk (April 9–11, 1918) and the presidential advisers headed by Colonel House, codenamed Inquiry, influenced Wilson against maintaining the integrity of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy.[24] At the end of June, a dramatic turning point for American policy, Secretary of State Robert Lansing established: *"The Austro-Hungarian Monarchy was organized on the principle of conquest and not on the principle of 'self-determination'. It was held together after its formation chiefly by fear of the power and greed of the Russian Empire. When the Czar was overthrown, the dread of absorption by the Muscovite power disappeared and the desire for national independence became dominant."*[25] Lansing added that the new Kingdom of Hungary would be the home of those who spoke Hungarian.

If we accept Wittke's view that *"Czechoslovakia was 'made in America'"*,[26] we could also go on and maintain that Admiral Horthy's Kingdom of Hungary was conceived and kept alive to just about its demise with American help. The new strongman of Hungary was placed in the saddle with the help of peculiarly American means, and America supported him practically to the end.[27]

The reason for the support given to Horthy in 1919–1920 was given by his opposition to a Habsburg restoration. That is what General Harry Hill Bandholtz stressed in his six months in Hungary. Band-

holtz, the American representative on the Inter-Allied Military Mission took an increasingly favourable view of Horthy and his forces and informed his H.Q. in Paris accordingly. He took every chance to paint the Hungarian Habsburgs in grotesque and lurid colours, as anachronisms, totally unsuitable as rulers of post-Trianon Hungary. The impression Horthy, the man of law and order, made on General Bandholtz no doubt counted in the former's election as Regent, a few days after the final departure of Bandholz.[28]

American diplomats between the wars continued to take a favourable view of Horthy. The Budapest memories of Captain Nicholas Roosevelt, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt's cousin—are typical. He was well aware of the enormous social tensions of the 'thirties, of *"the disparity between... [the] sub-slum living conditions [of the Magyar peasants] and the hundred-room country houses of the landed nobility"*, thinking of the Hungarian aristocracy as *"survivors of a social system which was rapidly dying"*. A typical example was a Count Czernin who, allegedly, on his deathbed, preparing to face his Maker, muttered *"Just shot hares, Lord. Shot hares. Shot hares. Shot hares."*[29] As against this, Minister Roosevelt considered Horthy and his brother to be *"men of force, energy, and character—simple, practical, and intelligent at the same time that they were well bred and courteous."*[30] As Roosevelt remembered in 1953, any conversation with Horthy always turned on two perennial subjects, *"shooting, and the terrible threat to Hungary from the Russians."* In the early 'thirties Roosevelt thought Horthy's fear of the Russians excessive, it was only retrospectively, in the Cold War days, that he recognized the prophetic nature of Horthy's words.[31]

The longest serving (1933–1941) American Minister to Hungary prior to the Second World War, John F. Montgomery, was second to none of his predecessors in his glorification of Horthy. He did more than his share to ensure Horthy's high standing in America and his popularization by the American press, not to mention the establishment of a personal relationship between Horthy and President Roosevelt. A collection of his posthumous papers and his 1947 *Hungary—the Unwilling Satellite,* however, shows that he did his best to present Hungary in a more favourable light in his book, despite his having been less than impressed when *en poste* in Budapest.[32]

Not many know that it was Montgomery who arranged for Horthy's financial support in his post-war exile in Estoril (Portugal). Two other families contributed, apart from his own, and that of the industrialist Manfred Weiss, who had moved to the United States.[33]

Nor should it be forgotten that the American image of Horthy only looked favourable in comparison with that of the Habsburgs (first, Archduke Joseph and later Archduke Otto), whom just about every witness at the time (or looking back) thought completely hopeless and whom everybody, without exception, described in ironic tones.[34] It is also true that all efforts on the part of the left-wing Hungarian-American press proved in vain. They were unable to unmask Horthy who presided over ruthless reprisals following the Hungarian Soviet Republic, or the rightly criticized socio-political structure of a semi-feudal Hungary, or to present the dark aspects of the country.[35] This message, largely in Hungarian, was not really able to reach its targetted American audience, nor were Americans interested in the in-fighting of emigré groups led by Rusztem Vámbéry, Oszkár Jászi, later Tibor Eckhardt, and others. What they published had little influence on U.S. Hungarian policy between the wars.

Around this time a trend that went back to around 1900 showed itself again. Hungary once again had a double image in America, on the one hand the image of Horthy Hungary which concerned only a few, and fewer still directly, and on the other how more and more Americans as such perceived the Hungarians who lived amongst them. The image of Hungarians in Hungary and Hungarian Americans began to differ greatly. Around this time Americans began to think of Hungarians as extraordinarily talented, with unique minds, who always fell on their feet. It was often said that Hungarians entered a revolving door behind you and left it ahead. This was when the Hungarians in Hollywood legend started, the age of Michael Curtis, Alexander Korda, Béla Lugosi, Lya di Putti, Miklós Rózsa, Szőke Szakáll, to mention but a few.[36] The mathematicians, physicists and chemists, whose genius so impressed the world, and who were described as Martians by their colleagues, such as John von Neumann, Leo Szilárd, Edward Teller, Theodore Kármán, Eugene Wigner and others, appeared later, at the time of the Second World War.[37]

The last question to touch upon here is the American view whether Hungary conspired with Hitler or whether the country was Hitler's victim. A secret State Department document put it aptly at the end of the Second World War: *"The Hungarians have failed to take any realistic action to withdraw from the war, though they have repeatedly avowed their desire to do so. The difficulty has been their hope that the 'Anglo-Americans' would protect them against Soviet Russia, and their unwillingness to part with territories acquired with German aid."*[38] There were few in post-war America who agreed with the sympathy which Montgomery expressed for a Hungary which found herself on the losing side. Writing in 1947, he said: *"in a war of coalitions... every belligerent can find himself fighting on the right side and at the same time on the wrong side. As Soviet imperialistic designs are now revealed, it is apparent whether or not we wish to admit it that, by sending a few troops against Russia, Hungary fought on the wrong side as Hitler's ally, but on the right side as an opponent of Soviet Russia."*[39]

With the spread of Stalinist rule, this image was strengthened and given an extra emphasis in 1956, when the people and government of the U.S. cheered the champion of the anti-Communist fight, even though they did not provide any appropriate support. At that time Hungarians once again appeared as brave and freedom loving. James A. Michener's *The Bridge at Andau,* a novel about 1956, with the support of the American press, created a long lasting image of a Hungary as the victim of Communism, raising the country and the people on a moral pedestal. In 1958, Kossuth's portrait appeared on an American stamp, in the Champions of Liberty series, thus creating a link between the ideals, heroes and victims of 1848–49 and 1956.[40]

In conclusion I should like to warn against the illusion that the image of Hungary I have outlined has in any way been lastingly imprinted on the American mind. It all reminds me of Charles à Court Remington's diary *After the War*, published in Boston in 1922: *"It is pathetic how all the Magyars confide in the legendary justice of England,"*—and, we could add later, also of the United States—*"and in her power to put matters right. I tell them all that the mass of our people were too much preoccupied with affairs more vital to them to worry about little Hungary, and that I felt sure that few outside the official classes knew of the measure meted out to her and what it all implied".*[41] ❧

NOTES

1 ■ Sándor Bölöni Farkas: *Journey in North America.* Translated and edited by Arpad Kadarkay. Santa Barbara–Oxford, ABC–CLIO, 1978, p. 213. Cf. András Gergely: *A magyar reformellenzék kialakulása és megszilárdulása* 1830–1840 (The Birth and Consolidation of the Reform Opposition in Hungary, 1830–1840), in: Gyula Mérei, ed.: *Magyarország története 1790–1848* (A History of Hungary 1790–1848), Budapest, Akadémiai Kiadó, 1983, Vol. 2, pp. 674–678.

2 ■ William H. Stiles: *Austria in 1848/49.* New York, 1852. Vol. 2, pp. 404–406. Cf. the report by De la Cour, the French Minister in Vienna, December 14, 1848. Wien: HHStA, Berichte aus Paris. Both quoted in: Eszter Waldapfel: *A független magyar külpolitika 1848–49* (Independent Hungarian Foreign Policy 1848–49), Budapest, Akadémiai Kiadó, 1962, p. 81.

3 ■ As for the U.S. press coverage, see the collection by Béla Dezsényi, National Széchényi Library, Periodicals Section, 1848–49 Newspaper Copies.

4 ■ Waldapfel: p. 245.

5 ■ László Teleki–Lajos Kossuth correspondence, May 14, 1849. National Archives, Kossuth Collection. II,V,I b. pp. 369–371. Published in: Waldapfel: p. 243.

6 ■ Jenő Pivány: "Mann Dudley Ambrus jelentései" (The Reports of Dudley A. Mann). *Századok,* 1910, p. 377. Jenő Pivány: "Amerika és Magyarország követei 1849-ben és a Hülsemann-levél története" (American and Hungarian Envoys in 1849 and the History of the Hülsemann Letter), *Budapesti Szemle,* 1907, pp. 321–346.

7 ■ Waldapfel: pp. 242–248.

8 ■ Waldapfel: p. 248.

9 ■ Dénes Jánossy: *A Kossuth-emigráció Angliában és Amerikában 1851–52* (The Kossuth Exiles in Britain and the U.S. 1851–52), Budapest, 1940–48, Vol. I, pp. 206–387; John H. Komlos: *Louis Kossuth in America,* 1851–52, Buffalo-New York, 1973; Laslo E. Tako: *Louis Kossuth, Hungary's Advocate, and the American Response.* (Phil. Diss., 1972); Tibor Frank: "Az emberiségnek közös sorsa van. Kossuth az Egyesült Államokban, 1851–52" (Humanity Has a Common Fate. Kossuth in the United States, 1851–52), *Rubicon,* 1992/2, pp. 33–36; Tibor Frank: "'Give Me Shakespeare'. Lajos Kossuth's English as an Instrument of International Politics", In: Holger Klein and Péter Dávidházi, eds.: *Shakespeare and Hungary. Shakespeare Yearbook,* Vol. 7. Lewiston, N.Y., The Edwin Mellen Press, 1996, pp. 47–73.

10 ■ *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln.* Ed. Roy. P. Basler, New Brunswick, N.J. 1953–1955, Vol. 2, pp. 115–116. Quoted in György Szabad: "Kossuth on the Political System of the United States of America," *Studia Historica Acad. Sci. Hung.,* Vol. 106, Budapest, Akadémiai Kiadó, 1975, p. 16. Cf. Tivadar Ács: *Magyarok az észak-amerikai polgárháborúban 1861–1865* (Hungarians in the Civil War in North America 1861–65). Budapest, Pannónia, 1964, p. 8.

11 ■ Miklós Perczel: *Naplóm az emigrációból* (My Diary in Exile). Budapest, Tankönyvkiadó, 1979. Vol. 2, p. 83. (December 9, 1851).

12 ■ Miklós Perczel: p. 89. (December 16, 1851).

13 ■ Aurél Kecskeméthy: *Észak-Amerika 1876-ban* (North America in 1876), Budapest, Ráth Mór, 1877, p. 76.

14 ■ Tivadar Ács: p. 125.

15 ■ On the American response to the "great" Hungarian emigration wave, see Julianna Puskás: *From Hungary to the United Stated (1880–1914),* Budapest, Akadémiai Kiadó, 1982, pp. 116–125; Tibor Frank: "'Race' as Value: Social Darwinism and U.S. Immigration", in: Tibor Frank, ed.: *Values in American Society. Topics in American Studies,* Vol. 2. Budapest, Eötvös Loránd University, 1995, pp. 125–148.

16 ■ Immigration: Speech by the Hon. Henry Cabot Lodge of Massachusetts in the House of Representatives, Thursday. February 19, 1891. Washington, D.C., 1891. p. 4. Quoted in Mark H. Haller. *Eugenics. Hereditarian Attitudes in American Thought.* New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1963, 2nd printing, 1984. p. 56. Cf.: Tibor Frank: "'Race' as Value", p. 128.

17 ■ Albert Tezla, ed.: *"Valahol túl, meseországban..." Az amerikás magyarok 1895–1920* ("Someplace over there, in fairyland..." Hungarian Americans 1895–1920), Budapest, Európa, 1987, pp. 15–16.

18 ■ Tibor Frank: "From Nativism to the Quota Laws: Restrictionist Pressure Groups and the U.S. Congress 1879–1924", In. A. F. Upton, ed.: *Parliaments, Estates & Representation,* Vol. 15. Variorum, 1995, pp. 146–152.

19 ■ Emil Zerkowitz: *Amerikai kereskedők* (American Merchants), Budapest, Singer & Wolfner, 1905, pp. 101–102.

20 ■ Terence V. Powderly–F.P. Sargent, n.d. National Archives, Washington, D.C.: RG 85, 51411/26, p. 55. Quoted in: Tibor Frank: "Genius Welcome: Patterns of Intellectual and Professional Immigra-

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22 ■ Sándor Taraszovics: "American Peace Plans and the Shaping of Hungary's Post-World War I Borders", in: Béla K. Király, Peter Pastor and Ivan Sanders, eds.: *War and Society in East Central Europe, Vol. 6: Essays on World War I: Total War and Peace Making. A Case Study on Trianon.* New York, Brooklyn College Press–Columbia University Press, 1982, pp. 232–234.

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24 ■ Sándor Taraszovics: p. 237; Laurence Emerson Gelfand: *The Inquiry; American Preparation for Peace, 1917–1919,* Yale University Press, 1963.

25 ■ Robert Lansing: "Memorandum for the President, June 24, 1918". In: *The Papers of Woodrow Wilson,* Vol. 48, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1985, p. 436. Cf. George Barany, p. 166.

26 ■ Carl Wittke: *We Who Built America. The Saga of the Immigrant,* New York, Prentice Hall, 1939, pp. 417–418.

27 ■ Tibor Frank: "Isolationism and U.S. Immigration Policies: The Case of Pre-War Hungary", In: Daniella Rossini, ed.: *From Theodore Roosevelt to FDR: Internationalism and Isolationism in American Foreign Policy*. European Papers in American History, Vol. 2, Ryburn Publishing–Keele University Press, 1955, pp. 134–137.

28 ■ Harry Hill Bandholtz: *An Undiplomatic Diary.* New York, Columbia University Press, 1933. I have also used Bandholz's papers in the Bentley Historical Library, Michigan Historical Collections, the University of Michigan and those in the late Lajos Szathmáry's private collection in Chicago.

29 ■ This anecdote first appeared in a book by Henry Wickham Steed, pre-World War I Vienna correspondent of the London *Times, The Habsburg Monarchy,* London, Constable, 1913, p. 133, from where it was taken by Nicholas Roosevelt in his *Front Row Seat,* Norman, University of Oklahoma Press, 1953, p. 201.

30 ■ Nicholas Roosevelt, p. 200.

31 ■ Nicholas Roosevelt, p. 193.

32 ■ John Flournoy Montgomery: *Hungary, the Unwilling Satellite,* New York, Devin–Adair Co. 1947. I have also drawn on the Montgomery papers in the custody of his family, which I secured for the National Széchényi Library.

33 ■ Confidential information from the U.S.

34 ■ Tibor Frank: "The American Perception of Interwar Hungary 1919–1941", In: Waldemar Zacharasiewicz, ed.: *Images of Central Europe in Travelogues and Fiction by North American Writers.* Tübingen, Stauffenberg Verlag, 1995., pp. 204–205; cf. Tibor Frank in Daniella Rossini, ed.: pp. 137–143, and Zsuzsa L. Nagy: "Amerikai diplomaták Horthy Miklósról 1920–1944" (American Diplomats on Miklós Horthy), *Történelmi Szemle,* 1990/3–4, pp. 173–196..

35 ■ József Kovács: *A szocialista irodalom dokumentumai az amerikai magyar sajtóban 1920–1945* (Documents of Socialist Literature in the Hungarian American Press 1920–1945), Budapest, Akadémiai Kiadó, 1977.

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38 ■ Ignác Romsics, ed.: *Amerikai béketervek a háború utáni Magyarországról. Az Egyesült Államok Külügyminisztériumának titkos iratai 1942–1944* (American Peace Plans for Postwar Hungary. The Confidential Papers of the State Department 1942–1944), Gödöllő, Typovent, 1992, p. 245. The original document first appeared in: *Foreign Relations of the United States. The Conference at Quebec,* 1944, Washington, 1972, p. 214.

39 ■ John F. Montgomery: p. 128.

40 ■ Tamás Magyarics: "James A. Michener's *The Bridge at Andau:* Michener's Fictional Representation of the Revolution in Hungary in 1956 and the 'Reality' of the Memoirs and Studies on the Topic", In: Waldemar Zacharasiewicz, ed.: pp. 212–225.

41 ■ Charles à Court Remington: *After the War.* Boston, 1922, p. 168. Quoted in Konrad Krüger's Introduction to Harry Hill Bandholz: *An Undiplomatic Diary,* p. XV, note 5.

Gábor Murányi

Twice a Victim

Iván Lajos, a Forgotten Historian, who Predicted German Defeat in 1939

Should Hitler's Reich start a war, it would necessarily lose it. That was argued two and a half months before the outbreak of the Second World War by a historian barely known beyond his home town in southern Hungary. Within a month his book was seized, and what he eventually got out of it in 1944 was thirteen months in Mauthausen concentration camp. Not long after his liberation, Iván Lajos (1906–1953?) was carried off by Soviet State Security. He was a brave man, and it was presumably his support for a Habsburg restoration that caused all his problems.

> That tendentious and altogether vile Pécs Grey Book appeared more than a month ago, published not by some hole in the corner printer but by a press closely connected with the Royal University in Pécs. It is up to the government to establish how it proved possible to distribute this book without let or hindrance for a whole month. Who was the Chief Prosecutor in Pécs who licensed a pamphlet which obviously threatened Hungarian foreign policy interests? The Minister of Education will have to initiate an investigation. Can this gentleman called Iván Lajos continue for a single moment as a lecturer at the Royal Hungarian University in Pécs?

Thus thundered Kálmán Hubay on July 23rd 1939 in a leader in the daily *Magyarság*. A year earlier *Magyarság* had become the mouthpiece of the "national right," that is of the Arrow Cross Party, the Hungarian equivalent of the Nazis. Kálmán Hubay was not a rank and file right wing journalist, but Deputy Leader of the Arrow Cross Party and a member of Parliament. The leader, Ferenc Szálasi, was behind bars at the time, and Hubay exercised all his functions. The article headed "Grey Books, Evil Intentions" was not the first attack he directed against the short (a hundred pages long) book *Németország esélyei a német szakirodalomban* (Germany's Chances in the War in the Light of German Scholarship) which—because of its cover, was usually referred to as "the Grey Book."

Before publication Iván Lajos was only locally known as the author of a book on the last monarch of Austro-Hungary, the Emperor Charles I, King Charles IV of Hungary, and as such was reputed to favour a Habsburg restoration. The Grey Book, published in the middle of June 1939, had a stormy reception and sold thirty thousand copies within a month.

> It is not my intention to examine whether a war can in fact be avoided, but I note with growing despair that a section of our press,

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indeed most of it, artificially prepares public opinion for our participation on the side of Germany in a war that may break out.

Lajos wrote in the preface. Hubay was wrong, Lajos was not a university lecturer but a minor clerk in the educational administration. He was astoundingly prolific, bearing in mind that he only wrote history in his spare time. He published his first book, *Ausztria-Magyarország különbéke kísérletei a világháborúban* (Austro-Hungarian Attempts to Conclude a Separate Peace in the Great War), in 1926, while still a student, and followed that up with a work just about every other year. The most important was undoubtedly the 1935 *IV Károly élete és politikája* (Charles IV: His life and policy), which ran to over five hundred pages. But it was this barely a hundred pages long pamphlet that assured him a national reputation. Guided by his conscience, aware of having to face the judgment of history, he tried to draw the attention of an intoxicated public to the fact that "Germany had policy objectives which could not be reconciled with the Hungarian interest," and that Hungary's ally, Hitler's Germany, would lose the war.

An openly anti-German stance created a scandal in a Hungary which, starting with the mid-thirties, had ever closer ties—motivated by enthusiasm, revanchist hopes or necessity—with Hitler's Reich. The author of the Grey Book was branded an "intellectual and spiritual poisoner of wells" and an "Anglophile hireling of the Jews," not only by enraged right-wing publicists but, as a result of forceful German pressure, even by an establishment which from time to time also made eyes at the Western Powers, took action against the book.

The Grey Book is an odd amalgam of a political pamphlet, a scholarly historical analysis, and a prophetic homily. The preface, headed "Everyone is Responsible," makes use of historical parallels but is in essence a raising of the alarm, a tolling of the bells, replete with emotive language. Iván Lajos mentions that, in 1914, Hungary imagined the German giant to be invincible; such pipedreams led to bitter disappointment. The result was the Trianon Treaty and a truncated Hungary.

> We must be clearly aware that each and every Hungarian capable of thought, the well-educated as well as the illiterate, the old and the young, men and women, rich and poor, powerful or insignificant, bears a terrible responsibility for what is happening in our fateful days.

After this emotive introduction, Lajos devotes ten sober chapters arguing that, if Hitler's Reich starts a war that war will be lost. Hungarian public opinion is adressed through a large number of quotations. Tens of thousands of copies of Hitler's *Mein Kampf* were sold in Hungary but few readers noticed that Hitler declares outright that he would conquer the eastern territories and reduce their inhabitants to subjection. Iván Lajos also evoked a 1933 lecture by Benno Graf, who was once reckoned an authority, in which this ideologue of Hitler's Reich, whose name no one remembers any more, expounds that this "hating, small, miserable, Balkan Hungary" has no claim on the Germans living there since anything worthy of the name of culture is truly German, therefore what is "German cultural soil ought to become a land of the German *Volk* as well."

Iván Lajos provides many more quotes to show that Hungary was one of the objectives of German *Lebensraum* expansion and then goes on to write deal with Germany's chances of winning the war. He declares the *Blitzkrieg,* much vaunted by German propaganda, to be a pipedream. He argues that the Soviet Union, with a

much boosted war potential, stood in the way of the conquest of the eastern territories. Overcoming and occupying that huge country would prove impossible. Following the failure of the *Blitzkrieg,* there would be an anti-German alliance between the Soviet Union and the British and French, who still entertained illusions that peace could be preserved. Arguing from history, Lajos also predicted that in the war America would be forced to abandon the isolationism of almost two decades, and that America's entry into the war would unambiguously tip the balance of power in favour of the Allies.

It cannot be argued, of course, that Lajos—in 1939!—soundly estimated the prospects in every respect. He may have outlined the major trends with surprising accuracy, but be went awry in his prediction of the sequence of the theatres of war. He did not reckon with the Ribbentrop–Molotov pact, which took everyone by surprise; he overestimated both French and Polish military strength, and somewhat underestimated German military strength; nor did he reckon—having no historical precedent to go by—with the mobilizing power of a totalitarian system based on fanaticism. He therefore presumed that a state authority based on an order established by the police alone could be overthrown from within, and he assumed that Himmler's anxious 1937 declaration made to the cream of the German officer corps that the fourth battlefield of the war would be within the German borders bore a much greater importance than it did.

Apart from its errors of judgment, the pamphlet nevertheless proved to be astoundingly prophetic. Iván Lajos provided a paradigm of personal bravery by acting openly as a Cassandra in Germanophile Hungary. On July 21st 1939 three government ministers, Count István Csáky (Foreign Affairs), Ferenc Keresztes-Fischer (Home Affairs) and András Tasnádi Nagy (Justice), acting *in lieu* of the Prime Minister, Count Pál Teleki, who was absent abroad, gave instructions that this book, which put the country's foreign policy interests in jeopardy, should be seized, and that criminal proceedings should be initiated. The causes of dissension within the Hungarian government have not been properly studied yet. There is no doubt, however, that Count Teleki, who wished with German help to reannex territories Hungary lost after the Great War and, albeit continuing as Hitler's ally, wished to stay out of hostilities. This desire to eat your cake and have it too was bound to fail from the start. His suicide on April 3rd 1941 was, as it were, a recognition of this failure. As he explained, he could not agree to a breach of the recently concluded non-aggression pact with Yugoslavia by participating in the German attack on that country.

Dissension within the government was reported in a news item by the daily *Magyar Nemzet*, which fully backed Iván Lajos. They referred to an anonymous competent source. *Magyar Nemzet,* started in August 1938 and notorious for its hostility to Germany, stood alone in defence of Lajos, who found himself at the centre of a barrage directed against him by the press and politicans. Sándor Pethő, the editor, had himself been known as the supporter of a Habsburg restoration up to the mid-thirties. He not only offered space to Lajos, but on the very day (July 30th), when Lajos was charged in Pécs on nine counts with spreading false rumours in print, published a leader under the heading "Gratitude and Other Matters" in which he summed up and repeated what the Grey Book was accused of. This coincidence cannot be attributed to chance, since informal contacts between Count Pál Teleki, the Prime Minister who tried to put a brake on the alliance with Germany, and the people

who backed *Magyar Nemzet,* first and foremost a former Prime Minister, Count István Bethlen, and Gyula Szekfű, the historian are now known to have existed. Drafting the sixteen-page prosecutor's case in ten days was phenomenal, even if haste was backed by the request of three ministers. At the same time, it was leaked by circles close to the Prime Minister that the charge rested on rather shaky legal foundations, a piece of information promptly cabled to the Wilhemsstrasse by Otto Erdmannsdorf, the German Minister in Budapest.

The Deputy Chief Prosecutor in Pécs must have been aware of this, since he informed the Presiding Judge that the specialist literature refuting what was maintained by the charged book would only be presented at the trial itself. It will, of course, have to be established whether the Pécs official was aware that—at the request of the National Front of the Hungarian colony in Berlin, three young Hungarians, István Arató, Béla Török and Béla Csikós-Nagy, Reich scholarship holders in economics in the German capital, were working flat out to assemble evidence to deny chapter by chapter what Iván Lajos maintained in a book "that poisoned the soul of the Hungarian nation."

Csikós-Nagy was to achieve renown as Chairman of the Prices Office and economic guru of Reform Comunism under Kádár, and as such he was a contributor to *The NHQ* right up to the end of the eighties. The first copies of this 75 page counterblast printed in Berlin, *Válasz a szürke könyvre* (Response to the Grey Book), reached Hungary on August 15th 1939. Vilmos Szigethy, the Berlin Managing Chairman of the Hungarian National Front, stated in a publisher's preface, that the three young authors had enthusiastically and unselfishly provided the denial of a book that had basely tried to hinder the resurrection of the Hungarian nation, requiring no royalties and charging no fee. Three weeks after seizure they already expounded that it was the duty of Hungarian state authority to silence Iván Lajos who, frivolously toying with Hungary's political fate, was not loath "to have recourse to the writings of Jews and Marxists who had fled from Germany, spreading this contagion to Hungarian public opinion." They thought it odd that the Pécs pamphleteer found evidence in *Mein Kampf* that the Führer intended to conquer large territories in the East but even presuming such a reading, it was "certainly mistaken to identify such eastern objectives in the region of which our country [formed part]". (A directive was issued in February 1945 by the first Provisional Government of Democratic Hungary headed by General Miklós Béla Dálnoki, placing this counterblast on the index, this time of prohibited Fascist, Anti-Soviet and anti-Democratic publications.)

This counterblast to the Grey Book in many respect argues along the same shaky premises as the prosecutor's plea. It may therefore be surmised that the two sets of authors were somehow in touch. What is certain, however, is that the noisy protests of the Right, and particularly German pressure—of which there is evidence in foreign policy documents—proved effective. After the autumn of 1939, even the pages of *Magyar Nemzet* were closed to Iván Lajos. He had started proceedings against all who had accused him of plagiarism, treason or of being a hireling of the Jews, but this never came to court. Early in 1940 he was dismissed from his lowly post. True, there was no trial in the proceedings initiated by the three ministers either. A footnote in a collection of documents published in 1968, György Ránki et al, eds.: *A Wilhelmstrasse és Magyarország* (The Wilhelmstrasse and

Hungary) states (without evidence to back this) that the government helped Iván Lajos to spend a few months abroad. He did travel to Paris in the Spring of 1940, but was, however, soon forced to flee home when the Germans occupied France.

We know very little about what took up Iván Lajos's time after his return home. All there is is a denunciation disguised as a news item in *Magyarság útja* (an Arrow Cross paper) of February 28th 1941:

> Some weeks ago drawing rooms in the Lipótváros [the Budapest district of fashionable rich Jews], where *Magyar Nemzet* serves as a solace, were loud with whisperings that the "great" Iván Lajos is once again in Budapest and is at work on a revamped edition of the Grey Book.

That article also allows one to conclude that Iván Lajos, who had moved to the Budapest home of his parents after his return, had established contact with pro-Habsburg circles, including prominent aristocrats like Count Antal Sigray and Count Iván Csekonics. On March 19th 1944, the day of the German occupaton of Hungary, he was arrested by the Gestapo in their company and taken to Mauthausen, where prominent people were held. Only fragmentary information is available on the thirteen months he spent there. Károly Rátkai, formerly an editor of *Esti Kurir,* an evening paper, tells us more than most in his memoir *A két torony* (The Two Towers, 1946). Once Rátkai said to Lajos that, had Lajos been right, the Germans should have lost the war long ago, but here they were, in 1944, the prisoners of the Germans. Rátkai also mentions that Lajos had spoken of German cardboard tanks. On hearing this charge, familiar from earlier Arrow Cross attacks, Lajos became angry and agitated, and, in his spidery handwriting, started on his response on a long piece of paper.

Si non e vero e ben travato, for "I Am Asking for the Floor" was the title under which Iván Lajos published his last political writing in the early spring of 1946.

"It is as a sad Cassandra that I now confront public opinion," he wrote as an apology for what he had maintained in the 1939 book which had defined his fate, freely admitting that what he had said would not have allowed one to predict that the Reich would be able to carry on for so long although its essence, that the Allies could not be defeated in a *Blitzkrieg* and that the Americans would enter the war, had come about. He also admitted that he had been surprised by the pharisaical cynicism which had prolonged the war, that is by the fact that Hitler had concluded a pact of eternal friendship with the powers that be in Russia whom he had abused so much.

This reminder of the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact was obviously somewhat uncautious in a Hungary occupied by the Soviet Army. One cannot tell whether this was later added to the catalogue of his sins, nor do we know anything about his activities in the post to which he was appointed in the Ministry of Education. His papers, however, kept by the family and made available to *Heti Világgazdaság,* the economic and political weekly, allow one to conclude that Lajos took part in the work of the Peace Preparatory Committee. It was vital that the victors should recognize that Hungary, once again on the losing side, had been so truncated by the Treaty of Trianon that, also taking into account geopolitical factors, it was just about inevitable that she should end up on Hitler's side. To avoid new fuses of war being lit—thus ran the Hungarian argument—it was advisable that regions where Magyars dwelt in Slovakia and Transylvania, which had been re-annexed in 1938 and 1940, should not be lost again. Staff selection by the Foreign Minister János Gyöngyösi in

preparation for the Peace Conference had this objective in mind, and this explains why Iván Lajos was recruited. His job was to study secret archival material for the years preceding Trianon.

Lajos, known for his photographic memory, wrote a book-length study, *Az első válaszút* (The First Crossroads), within a few months. It was meant to be the first in a series which never appeared, planned by the Teleki Pál Institute. There is no doubt that Lajos did not write in the spirit of the policy outlined above. He had, indeed, come to the conclusion that the Allies had done a great deal to try and get Hungary to change her pro-German stance, but this was never appreciated by those in Hungary who were in charge of foreign policy.

A copy of a letter addressed on April 12th 1946 to Dezső Keresztury, the Minister for Religious Denominations and Education, responsible to Parliament for the Teleki Pál Institute, found in the family archives, explains why the publication of a paper already set in print, with the pages made up, and about to appear, was aborted:

> To my great surprise I was informed yesterday by the management of the Teleki Historical Institute of your decision, running counter to what had been agreed earlier, that you do not consider my paper fit for publication because certain people on the Left had read it and put it into view that because of certain pro-Habsburg tendencies which it displayed, they would attack it, should it be published. I do not know who those people on the Left are who threaten attacks, I do not fear such attacks, I did not fear them in the past, and I shall not fear them in the future either. Back in 1939, when I had to write the Grey Book, I was looking for those people on the Left everywhere but unfortunately I did not find them. I venture to hope that these are not the same people who back then wrote the counterblast to the Grey Book but who are now, as a reward for their "democratic valour" occupying important posts at the Economic Supreme Council.

The reference is unambiguous. It was at that time that the general Secretary of that Council, the Moscovite Communist Zoltán Vas, who enjoyed almost unlimited powers in economic matters, recruited financial and budgetary experts with a dubious political past, including Béla Csikós-Nagy, Lajos's old adversary in Berlin, who was soon promoted to be Vas's deputy. Csikós-Nagy had transferred his allegiance from the extreme Right to the extreme Left, to the Communist Party. A possible explanation for Lajos's disappearance on June 18th 1946, following a "friendly conversation" with a Soviet major (general?) can perhaps be found in the continuation of the above letter and in the never published paper which has only survived in galley proof, in two copies. At a time when all those officially preparing for the peace negotiations did their damnest to prove that the reactionary Horthy regime achieved power thanks to an Entente policy hostile to Hungary, Iván Lajos, relying on the secret documents he had recently obtained access to, continued to argue in a manner since branded pro-Habsburg, that a blindly pro-German foreign policy systematically rejected numerous *bona fide* approaches by the Western Powers.

It also appears likely that Lajos had already earlier come under the notice of the Soviet authorities. That accords with what his brother, Professor László Lajos, a gynaecologist, remembers.

> In December 1945, a Russian major called on him in his Budapest home and suggested a friendly talk in the major's Hunyadi tér billet. At the major's request, this was repeated on several occasions. He was always fetched by car by an interpreter called Natasha. On

June 17th 1946, Natasha once again invited him to a friendly chat with the general. The next day Natasha called on him by car at the appointed time and we have not clapped eyes on him since.

Iván Lajos went missing at the age of forty. His brother has written numerous letters since, asking for help: in 1946 to Ferenc Nagy, the Prime Minister, and to Gyula Szekfű, the historian, at that time Ambassador in Moscow, in 1947 to the Legal Aid Service of the Foreign Ministry, in 1948 to Gyula Ortutay, the Minister of Education, in 1956, once again to the Legal Aid Service of the Foreign Ministry, in 1962 to the Foreign Section of the Hungarian Red Cross, in 1964 to the Soviet Embassy in Budapest, to Bishop János Péter, the Foreign Minister, and Géza Szénási, the Director of Public Prosecutions. He did not receive a single meaningful answer from any official source. In 1955, however, he received an anonymous letter which revived hopes for years. The typed message read:

> I have arrived recently. I spent much time with your brother. He is reasonably well in body but there is something wrong inside. He speaks of kings. Take good care of him when he gets home. He regrets having meddled in politics! He too will be home by January. True, his hair is white, but he is in reasonable health. He'll have to spend some time in a nursing home! A former Staff Officer.

The family later took a different view of that anonymous letter. In the mid-sixties a dentist, who had returned to Tamási, called on them and told them that Iván Lajos had died in 1953 in the Gulag, in Karaganda, in Kazakhstan. He had not met him, but his source was impeccable, he said. ❧

The Castle of Doboj. From János Asbóth: Bosznia és Herczegovina *(Bosnia and Herzegovina), Budapest, 1887.*

János Breuer

"Ritorna vincitor!"

The Early Years of Sir Georg Solti

The child born on 21 October 1912 was registered as György Stern, the son of a far from well-to-do Budapest Jewish couple. Needless to say, in his early years he could hardly have dreamt that he would be knighted by the Queen of England. Rather than setting out a family history, a form with which, however, I am not conversant, I will try to outline the story of Solti's early years as a musician. The setting for those years were the Academy of Music, which was founded in 1875 by Ferenc Liszt, (it has borne his name since 1925) and the beautiful building of the Opera House, which opened in 1884 as the successor of the Hungarian Theatre of Pest, founded in 1837. These were the only two musical institutions owned and maintained by the state in the period between the two world wars. Since constitutionally the country remained a kingdom—a kingdom without a king—both the Opera and the Academy of Music included the word "Royal" in their names.

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According to Solti himself, he gave his first public recital at the age of twelve, when he also played a compositon of his own on the piano. Where and when exactly this took place will perhaps never be known, nor the works that featured on the programme. We also know from Solti himself that he was thirteen when he decided to become a conductor and nothing else, influenced by a performance of Beethoven's Third Symphony at the Academy of Music conducted by Erich Kleiber. This concert was on 7 February 1926, and Kleiber conducted the Orchestra of the Budapest Philharmonic Society.

György Stern, the fourteen-year-old secondary school student, commenced his studies at the Academy of Music in the autumn of 1926 in the piano and composition departments (there was no separate department of conducting at the time) and spent altogether eight years there. Even as a teenager he displayed a legendary working capacity and the annals of the Academy record him as a talented and diligent student. As early as his first year there, he was exempted half of the tuition fees; from his second year he was exempt from tuition fees all through his studies. "Exemption from the full tuition fees or half of them can only be claimed by well-behaved and truly poor students of un-

remitting zeal." (Regulations of the Academy of Music concerning studies, disciplinary procedures and service procedures, passed in 1922).

As a pianist he was admitted to the second preparatory form, in composition he skipped the preparatory course and commenced right away at the first academic grade. His piano teacher was Arnold Székely (1874–1958), who headed the piano master class. Székely's students included Antal Doráti, Annie Fischer, Andor Földes and Louis Kentner. By that time Székely had retired from the concert platform and at most accompanied his students at student recitals, on the second piano, when they played concertos unaccompanied by an orchestra. Székely earned a place in music history by being the first pianist to play Bartók—apart from the composer himself—when on 9 December 1908 he gave the first public performance of the last piece of Bartók's Fourteen Bagatelles (Valse. "Ma mie qui dance"), which at the time had yet to be published.

Solti studied composition under Albert Siklós (1878–1942), a conservative composer now completely forgotten. He was, however, a notable teacher and the author of the first Hungarian textbooks on composition. He certainly did not engage in stylisitic and aesthetic disputes with his students, some of whom became distinguished modern composers.

His most important teacher must have been Leó Weiner (1885–1960), the composer who taught the "minor subject" of chamber music from 1918 up till his death. Weiner was unique in the history of music teaching, as he could only play the piano modestly, and played no other instrument at all. His personal experience on the concert platform was restricted to a single occasion when, in 1905, he took part in a performance of Tarantella, a composition for eight hands on two pianos he wrote for his final examination, hiding behind three eminent pianists (one of them called Fritz Reiner, who was to precede Solti at the Chicago Symphony Orchestra between 1953 and 1963). Weiner was not a practicing instrumentalist and yet he knew everything about phrasing, accents, timbre, form, in short the very essence of the art of musical performance. He was also able to teach this "everything". He did so with a seemingly cruel rigour, tormenting the young musicians under his hand for a whole hour with four-bar and eight-bar phrases. (As a matter of fact, Solti, who made no secret of how much he owed to Weiner, did exactly the same when he rehearsed with a Hungarian orchestra some sixty years later.) The effectiveness of Weiner, the professor of chamber music, is borne out by all the many soloists with dazzling international careers who owed the skill of supreme music-making to him, and by the leading position Hungarian chamber music has achieved—suffice to mention just the Léner Quartet, the Róth Quartet, the Végh Quartet and the Hungarian Quartet. The Budapest Quartet had no Hungarian members during the last thirty years of its existence, yet it retained its name, for the special cachet the Hungarian capital and Weiner's seminar room at the Academy lent it.

The annals of the Liszt Ferenc Royal Academy of Music include the first documentation of the public performances of Stern the pianist. At student's concerts, he played "Dr Gradus ad parnassum" and "Galliwoog's Cake-Walk" from Debussy's *Children's Corner* and Allegro classique by the 19th-century French Revina on 27 February 1927; Schumann's Novellette in F sharp minor on 21 March 1930 and a three-movement sonatina by György Lukács (a namesake, not the philosopher), who was graduating from Siklós's class, on 31 March of the same year; The Symphonic

Variations by Cézar Franck (with his teacher, Arnold Székely playing the piano arrangement in the absence of an orchestra) on 10 March 1931; Beethoven's Piano Quintet, op. 16 in Weiner's coaching on 18 December 1931, and Bach's Prelude and Fugue in D major in Busoni's transcription on 26 April 1932.

The curriculum of the fourth grade of the composition faculty included chorusmaster training as a compulsory minor. The teacher himself was not much of a conductor but the subject still meant a great deal to Stern—Solti that is—as it was for an examination on this course that he first conducted an orchestra, the student ensemble of the Academy, on 12 June 1931. He conducted the trio and one of Dorabella's arias from Mozart's *Così fan tutte* (the annals do not mention which it was but I feel it may have been the grand aria introduced by a *recitativo accompagnato* from Act One, as this offers a more exacting conducting task.)

In the 1920s, the Academy of Music annals were fairly reduced in size, but the chronicle of the academic year 1930–31 again included the marks of the students as well. Here, we find that Stern was awarded the top mark in composition as a principal subject, orchestration, score reading, liturgics and chorusmaster training, as well as for piano as a principal subject, and chamber music.

From the autumn of 1931 Stern attended for three years the short-lived master class in composition held by Ernst von Dohnányi (1877–1960). Meanwhile, he received top marks for his principal subjects of piano and of chamber music in 1931–32 (when he was exempted from the study of music history); he then skipped one term as instrumentalist. In 1933–34 he enrolled for the first year of piano teacher training, in conjunction with the composition master class. I think he was not particularly enthusiastic about this subject (even if, while in Switzerland during the war, he was reduced to teaching for a living), because he was given a rather poor mark and did not even attend the second, graduating class. He earned his diploma as a composer, graduating from the master class, in the spring of 1934. He presented his works at a qualifying concert on 7 June 1934, the violin and piano transcriptions of the *Andante* and *Allegro* movements of his orchestral Suite; three songs (two to poems by the Hungarian poet Endre Ady and one to a poem by Walter von der Vogelweide) and his three-movement Piano Sonata *(Allegro moderato, Andante rubato, Presto);* he played the piano parts, the violinist was Sándor Salgó, who was eminent in the modern musical scene of the period. The tenor was Lajos Laurisin, of the Opera House. The student who matriculated appeared in the alphabetical list as György Stern; the programme of the diploma concert featured the name György Solti.

The diploma concert featured works by two Dohnányi students, Sándor Kuti and György Solti. The following day ten Budapest daily papers carried reviews of the concert. To the best of my knowledge this was the first occasion in Solti's life that his name appeared in the press. The reviews were appreciative though, according to the critics, Sándor Kuti—who in 1945 died in a concentration camp in Germany—was the more talented.

According to Kálmán Kovács, the associate critic of *Pesti Napló,* a middle-class daily competent in musical matters, *"György Solti is the more dramatic talent. His rhythmic and forceful formal construction undoubtedly shows the influence of Béla Bartók, but these impressions only serve to launch and not to provide the final expression of that obviously rich and definitely individual conception which is reflected in György Solti's music."* Sándor

Jemnitz, a member of Arnold Schoenberg's circle, noted, *"György Solti is already a man of practice, unlike Sándor Kuti, who is of a much more abstract disposition."* (*Népszava*, the morning paper of the Social Democratic Party.) István Péterfi, the noted music critic, emphasized, *"Each of the works bore out the young composers' thorough and considerable attainment, their sense of form, stylistic knowledge and exquisite taste." (Magyar Hírlap)*

But why did Solti attend Dohnányi's master class when he had no intention of becoming a composer? I think he sought for, and found, closer contact with that extremely versatile musician, recognized internationally as a phenomenal pianist, a popular conductor, a conservative but inventive composer exceedingly well versed in formal matters—and obviously with Dohnányi the man as well. Just one example of how Dohnányi acquitted himself as a man: around 1938–39 it was he who used his great prestige to prevent the setting up of a Chamber of Musicians, on the Nazi model, involving the expulsion of all Jewish musicians. This, and a good many similar acts of his were later "duly acknowledged", when he was declared a fascist war criminal in the spring of 1945 on a trumped-up charge based on petty jealousy.

In Hungary, as elsewhere, the conductor's rostrum could be mounted from two directions. It could be reached by orchestral players with a flair for being in charge (as was the case with Arturo Toscanini, to mention the greatest), or by good pianists, who also coached in an opera house. What was specifically Hungarian, however, was a fairly underdeveloped musical scene due to the late appearance of a middle class, and thus these openings were greatly limited. The first professional symphony orchestra maintained at public expense was not formed until 1940, and during Solti's younger years the Royal Opera House offered the best stepping stone towards conducting, since the country had no other permanent opera house.

It was this stepping stone Solti set out on as an eminent pianist who played no orchestral instruments. According to the documents of the Royal Opera House, he started to work as a coach in 1933. His real start, however, was in 1930, when he was entrusted with work, but without receiving any pay. To engage young coaches without pay may have been specificially Hungarian too. *"Volontőr"* (from the French *"volontier"*) or "volunteer" was the name given to a musical slave who was paid some cash if he played a keyboard instrument in the orchestra or conducted music in the wings. The latter served as a splendid school before the invention of television, the monitor cameras, when soloists, the chorus and the instrumental ensemble behind the scenes had to be conducted without seeing the conductor in the pit. Solti's years of apprenticeship somewhat dragged on, as he first conducted a proper performance only in his eighth year at the Opera. But this is to anticipate.

The 18-year-old youth became a tiny but indispensable cog-wheel in the machinery of a musical factory. The repertory contained sixty operas, and new productions were staged every three to four weeks. Thus the coach had the chance to become acquainted with a huge repertoire and to work with great guest conductors (Fritz Busch, Kleiber, etc.).

Naturally, I cannot know which operas figured in the rehearsals where Solti participated as a coach. The one exception I do know for certain is that he coached Mussorgsky's *Khovanschina* for the conductor Issai Dobrowen who left the Soviet Union in 1922. The Hungarian production on 29 December 1936, of which Dobrowen

was both the conductor and a co-producer, had tremendous success and signified a turning point in the reception of Russian opera in Budapest, as the work was brought into the repertoire (previously Tchaikovsky's *Eugene Onegin* and Mussorgsky's *Boris Godunov* had yielded no such positive response). Uniquely in the history of Hungarian musical criticism, István Péterfi, a noted critic, made special mention of him: *"Last but not least, let us mention György Solti, the coach. This highly gifted young musician did exemplary work in coaching the parts. Though he held no baton as yet, by coaching* Khovanshchina *he has proved that as a private he carries a fieldmarshall's baton in his pack."* (*Magyar Hírlap,* 30 December 1936.)

Solti also owed his first engagement abroad to Dobrowen, who, in the autumn of 1938, invited him to Oslo to coach Mozart's *Le nozze di Figaro.* (His acting as assistant to Toscanini for *Die Zauberflöte* at the 1937 Salzburg Festival was due to a lucky coincidence.)

It was only a few days after the production of *Khovanshchina* that Solti could take charge of an orchestra. On 7 January 1937 he conducted Schubert's Symphony No. 5 in Budapest's largest concert hall at what was called the concert to safeguard talent in a subscription series of the semi-amateur Metropolitan Orchestra. This annual concert provided an opportunity for young composers and performers to make their *début.* At the first such concert, at Christmas 1926, the 12-year-old Annie Fischer played the piano. Aladár Tóth, the greatest Hungarian music critic of the time, responded to the event with an indulgence due to beginners:

> The only exception was György Solti, the young conductor who this time made his first appearance at these concerts. Actually he is not unknown to the musical professionals: as the répétiteur of our Opera House he rapidly called attention to himself with his outstanding coaching, and indeed, recently, after his work on *Khovanshchina,* Dobrowen, the world famous guest conductor of the production, spoke with the highest admiration of his work. Now at last the young musician was able to justify the high expectations regarding his gift. He conducted Schubert's Symphony No. 5 with a really surprising wealth of imagination, and an as yet somewhat over-ebullient but convincing and gripping temperament, in an elegant, tasteful interpretation exhibiting a healthy musical instinct and sincere poetic empathy throughout. But Solti is not only an outstanding musician, he is also a conductor *par excellence:* he has a sure grip on his orchestra and the lack of experience can at most be felt in minor trappings and never in the essence of music. In short, he is an artist who, for all his youth, could be of valuable service to our Opera House in the conductor's place as well. (*Pesti Napló,* 8 January 1937)

Given the high acclaim he earned with his début, it took a fairly long time, a full year, before he was again asked to conduct. This time it was a full concert. The orchestra which performed under his baton on 12 January 1938 had been established in the autumn of 1936. It lacked experience, and was actually disbanded after two seasons. To quote Aladár Tóth once again:

> Début of a Young Talented Conductor
>
> György Solti, the outstanding young coach of our Opera House, appeared in his maiden concert as the conductor of the Magyar Orchestra. He conducted a colossal, exacting programme: Bach's Brandenburg Concerto in G major, Mozart's Symphony in G minor, Debussy's Little Suite, the delicate orchestral accompaniment to Schumann's Piano Concerto and finally the ouverture to Rossini's *La Gazza Ladra.* When you realize that the Magyar Orchestra is still a new en-

semble, we can only speak with the highest esteem of the splendid energy with which György Solti, right on his first full-night appearance, prompted his musicians to a faultless artistic unity of execution. Such a *début* really calls for a musician who has the score at his finger-tips and who is an out-and-out conducting talent, cut out for the conductor's platform.

This young musician is full of rhythm and burning ambition. Of course, one can feel in his purposeful, resolute gestures, how much he has learnt from Toscanini, for whom he coached in Salzburg. But Solti is one of the students who not only does his homework but when it comes to the exam, can also do splendidly. It is true that in the fluster of the trade, the joy of conducting, the youthful zeal of the vocation, he still has not arrived at the immersion required by the great classical masterpieces and therefore we could not yet feel in the ebullient organism of his interpretation the pulsation of the innermost noble organs of music. But one who can strike up the march of *La Gazza Ladra* with such an irresistible swerve and splendid brio, who can hold his orchestra together with such a firm hand and find such a lively and immediate contact with the audience, is a true conducting talent, a man with a career to look forward to, who must be reckoned with both in the concert hall and the opera house. György Solti has scored a resounding success. (*Pesti Napló,* 16 January 1938)

The concert was organized by Imre Kun, the most important Hungarian impressario of the day. In his memoirs *30 év művészek között,* (Thirty Years Among Artists, Budapest, Editio Musica, 1965, p. 150) he quotes from the reviews of two daily papers without giving the dates or the names of the authors: *"The young chorusmaster of our Opera House has come up to the vanguard of young orchestra conductors with this concert." (Pesti Hírlap).*

On 12 March 1938, the eve of the Nazi occupation of Austria, Solti at long last made his début as an operatic conductor. It is inexplicable why he had to wait eight years for this. (János Ferencsik, five years his senior, was assigned a conducting job in 1930, in the third year of his coaching work.) His superiors could not be accused of a lack of a sense of quality nor of mean anti-Semitism. Solti might have been suspicious of the latter when, in a portrait documentary co-made by the BBC and Hungarian Television on the occasion of his 85th birthday (which I saw on 18 October 1997 as a memorial programme in Budapest), he mentioned that he had been the first Jewish conductor in the Opera House. This, however, does not tally with the facts, as between 1920 and 1939 Antal Fleischer, who was also Jewish, was an honoured conductor of the company, and up till the late 1930s no form of discrimination was evident in Hungarian musical life. (In this context it is well worth noting that between 1920 and 1926, when the *numerus clausus* for Jewish students was five per cent at universities and colleges, 40.9 per cent at the Academy of Music were Jewish.)

The first opera Solti conducted, and indeed acquitted without any orchestral rehearsal, was Mozart's *Le nozze di Figaro,* for which he could rehearse with his soloists only for a single morning. And how little experience he still had as a working conductor! Although I have no evidence, I surmise that he was engaged as a last minute replacement. This seems to be indicated by the fact that the Budapest press, which had done a great deal to further his career in the Opera House, made no mention at all in the days before about Solti's *début* as a conductor. Another sign is that the House was not in the habit of confronting young talent with such impossible tasks. Finally, my supposition is also backed by the fact that Solti's was the last *Figaro* performance of the

season and the opera was not to stage it more again before the end of May; thus it was not meant to embark the 26-year-old conductor on his operatic career, but rather to save the performance on the night in question. Regardless of all this, the bravura can clearly be gathered from Aladár Tóth's review:

> A new Hungarian conductor made his *début* in our Opera House in the production of *Le nozze di Figaro:* György Solti, the highly gifted young *répétiteur* of the Opera House, who had already drawn the attention of musical circles at the Salzburg Festival as one of Toscanini's assistants. To face the audience for the very first time with one of the most exacting works of the repertoire, and indeed with the limited preparatory work of a single rehearsal, entails an onerous task whose assignment cannot be approved of in theory. This time, however, practice luckily denied theory: György Solti's splendid technical aptitude with a brilliant musical comprehension was able to win the day, where in a similar situation most young conductors would have failed.
>
> And so we could enjoy Mozart's masterpiece in an animated and appropriate, graphically delineated interpretation bursting with youthful verve. A born conducting talent has come to the fore here, who in the future can safely be depended upon as he was able not only to conquer audiences at one go but also the realm of Mozart. (*Pesti Napló,* 13 March 1938)

Thanks to politics, part of the prophecy ("who in the future can safely be depended upon") was not, unfortunately, to come true. In fact he had conducted his first opera practically at the last possible date. The first anti-Jewish law, reflecting the spirit of the Nazi Nuremberg laws, was already being drafted. The government submitted it to Parliament on 8 April 1938 and it was promulgated on 29 May. In vain did a great many prominent Hungarian intellectuals and artists, including Béla Bartók, Zoltán Kodály and Aladár Tóth, the music critic quoted here, repeatedly protest in an appeal published on 5 May. As a sign of deteriorating conditions, the second anti-Jewish law was passed on 5 May 1939; this declared that no public office could be held by persons of the Jewish religion. Since Solti, as a coach of the Royal Opera House, counted as a state employee, a public servant, his tenure was automatically terminated. It is highly questionable whether he would have survived the war had he not sought asylum in Switzerland.

Accordingly, after such a promising start Solti fell victim to collective discrimination and was not to take a conductor's baton in hand for six long years. Even then he became victim of a form of discrimination aimed directly at him. At the end of the Second World War, he reported in writing to his former place of employment, the Royal Opera House. As belated restitution, a contract would have been due to him both morally and legally. Nevertheless, the acting director, Pál Komáromy, who had been a vocal soloist, notified him that his services were not required. This unprecedented affront hurt him for decades, even though if one comes to think of it, in all probability he had this to thank for the very quick arrival of international fame. However, the painful memory went on to tick within him like some psychological time-bomb.

The road to fame was opened up before him by Edward Kilényi (1911–1968), an American pianist of Hungarian birth. He had attended Dohnányi's piano master class somewhat earlier than Solti did the master course in composition. In any case, they knew each other. During the war Kilényi served as an officer of the US Army and after 1945 he acted as a music commissioner with the rank of captain in the American zone of Germany, with the brief of reviving the musical scene there. It was

in this capacity that, in 1946, he allotted to Solti the post of Music Director at the Munich Opera.

As I have heard Solti conducting on ten occasions at most, I am not at all qualified to delineate the continuation of his career. But with that, the early years of the 34-year-old conductor had came to a close. By way of an epilogue, let me add here that at the time the relationship of the Generalmusikdirektor of the Bavarian State Opera House with his homeland had not yet finally deteriorated. During the first years the mechanism of the psychological time-bomb mentioned above had not yet functioned.

Imre Kun, the impressario for Solti's first ever concert, invited him to make a guest appearance, and also extended an invitation on behalf of Aladár Tóth, who was appointed General Director of the Opera in the summer of 1946. Solti answered on 17 March 1947:

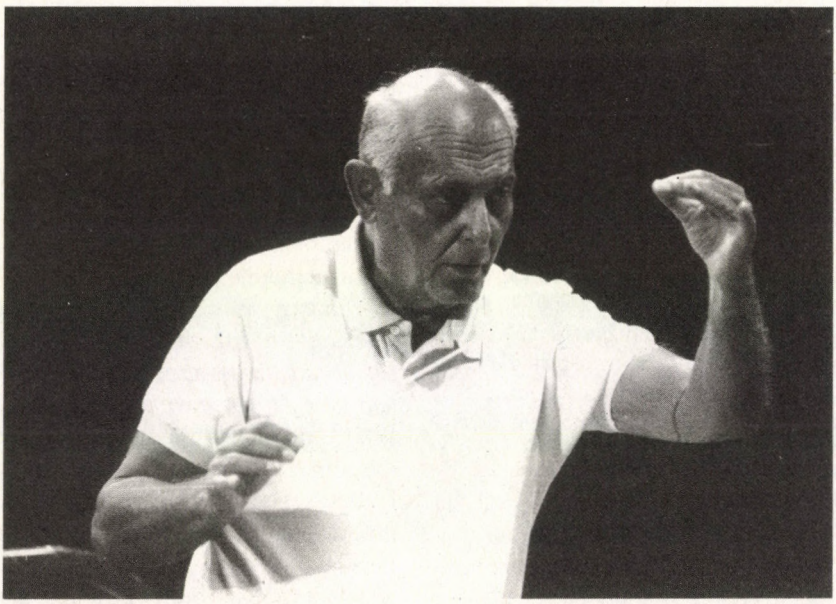
> I am very pleased to learn that both you and the Opera take an interest in me, and it is my pleasure to make preparations for going home. I could be in Budapest at the earliest around May 20, because I am rehearsing a new production here and will then conduct a concert in Berlin. I could conduct in Budapest between May 20 and June 8. Please propose *Otello, Carmen, Fidelio, Die Walküre,* and perhaps *Don Giovanni* to Aladár Tóth. For Kun's concert programme I shall choose from among the following pieces: Beethoven's Sixth, Schubert's Fourth, Mozart's *Haffner,* Brahms's Fourth, and Richard Strauss's *Don Juan*. (Kun, op. cit. pp. 150–51)

Everything turned out differently in the end. The dates Solti suggested could not be used because the spring programmes had already been drawn up. On 15 January 1948, he conducted a Beethoven night in the Masters subscription series and in the next few days two performances of *Aida* in the Opera House. "Ritorna vincitor!"—the words of the choral ensemble in Act One provide my title—Solti really returned victorious. (I was present in the gallery for his *Aida*.) The next occasion was on 13 and 14 January in 1978, when he conducted the Vienna Philharmonic. (He had spent a single day in the 1960s in Budapest, in the strictest incognito, to attend the funeral of his adored mother.)

During these thirty years Solti had became a legend in Bayreuth for his *Ring,* had been appointed Music Director at Covent Garden, become Sir Georg (the only knight among Hungarian-born musicians), and chief conductor of the Chicago Symphony. He became one of the most sought after of Decca's performers, with a truly legendary discography.

Solti got over the dual discrimination, but not over the dictatorship in Hungary. Or rather the two together set off the psychological time-bomb. After all, he had lively memories of how, in 1939, he had been driven out by a dictatorship of a different hue. In the spring of 1970, when he returned to Munich, the site of his first successes abroad, where he was given a princely reception as the musician who had resurrected the phoenix of the Bayerische Staatsoper from its ashes, a reporter of the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* asked him whether he would accept an invitation to Hungary as well. Solti's reply was, *"I give concerts only in countries where I can safely walk in the street and do not have to fear being arrested without a moment's notice."* I myself felt indignant reading this at the time, because by 1970 his fear no longer seemed to be justified. It took a great many years until I realized that Solti had put his finger on the pulse because, just as a woman cannot be a little bit pregnant, so too a social structure cannot be a little bit of a dictatorship and a modicum of democracy as well.

Solti's relationship with his native land had in fact promised to be different had history not intervened. The State Opera House commissioned him to conduct four productions in January 1950. At that time he still held a Hungarian passport. In the autumn of 1949 he asked Aladár Tóth, the General Director of the Opera, to intervene to get his passport extended. I cannot know whether he had been warned not to come to Budapest or whether he simply read the papers. Whatever was the case, he fortunately did not come for this second guest appearance after 1945. Had he done so, he would have come to the same fate as Sándor (Alexander von) Svéd, the eminent baritone and a celebrated star of the Scala and the Met, who weathered out the war in America, but did not take up U.S. citizenship. In vain was he warned in 1950 by the U.S. legation in Budapest to urgently leave Hungary as long as he could do so, since they could not protect him as he was not an American citizen. Svéd stayed on for what he planned as a few appearances, but this turned into seven years of forced residence, after which his voice quickly declined. ❧



Sir Georg Solti in rehearsal with the Hungarian State Symphony Orchestra at the Budapest Convention Centre, 7 September 1987. Photo by István Cser, MTI Photo.

László Győri

Coming to Terms

"He adored Hungary, which he had to leave as an adult, at the age of twenty-seven. He was always asked in interviews why he left. He answered that he had to escape from fascism, and the communists didn't want him back. 'I'm not going to knock for the third time just so that I can be thrown out once more.' However, we went to Balatonfőkajár recently where his family has lived since the 16th century. We sat out on the shore of Lake Balaton, and something happened there. It was fantastic!"—Thus György Petőcz quotes Lady Solti in his "Letter from Italy" in the daily *Magyar Hírlap* (November 15, 1994). In a few sentences Valerie Solti recalls what Sir Georg said in the course of many, many interviews about the ambivalence of his relationship with his homeland.

To become a member of the Royal Opera House he had first to produce a certificate proving that his Jewish ancestors had lived sufficiently long in Hungary. After 1939, even that wouldn't have saved him from losing his job, or from forced labour. He was in Switzerland when he received a telegramme from his mother telling him not to return home. In spite of winning a significant piano competition in 1942, the years spent in Switzerland during the war counted as time lost for a young man whose ambitions lay in being a conductor. The other affront mentioned by Valerie Solti about which her husband spoke in almost every interview was that in 1945 Pál Komáromy, director of the Royal Opera House at that time, rejected his offer to rejoin them. György Solti, as he has always been known in Hungary didn't feature in his plans.

Before his emigration he was a coach at the Opera, and had only conducted one production, *The Marriage of Figaro.* During his years in Switzerland he mainly gave piano lessons. He was not able to conduct, couldn't build up his reputation. As to the grounds on which the director of the Royal Opera House turned him down, it is difficult now to throw light on the subject. We don't know whether Pál Komáromy was aware of the fact that in 1937 Toscanini took on the young coach as his assistant in Salzburg and that Dobrowen borrowed him to help with his own *Figaro* production in Oslo. But we can presume that he knew this, as he must have known about the superlative press Solti had received for his conducting in Budapest. We do not know whether personal dislike lay behind

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the rejection—which we only know about from Sir Georg Solti's statements—or possible intrigue, or was it genuinely a case of no vacancy for the position of conductor. In 1945, with the help of a former pupil of Ernst von Dohnányi, the pianist Edward Kilényi (then a counter-intelligence officer in the American army), he had the opportunity to conduct and, at the age of 34, he was soon "discovered". It transpired that everything he conducted—with tremendous success—he was conducting for the first time. He talked about this and the attacks following the exposure with appealing self-irony in a speech he gave on receiving an award for his musical achievements from the city of Frankfurt in 1992.

It is interesting to speculate in an unhistorical way on what would have become of György Solti had the Royal Opera House—as it was then called—given him a contract and had he become part of the Hungarian musical scene. What would he have done when the borders closed around him as they closed down around everyone else? In 1948, when he was the celebrated Generalmusikdirektor in Munich, he spent a few days in Budapest visiting his family. On that occasion he conducted a performance of *Aida* and a Beethoven programme. After thirty years, in March 1978, the Hungarian public were able to hear him live again at two Budapest concerts given by the Vienna Philharmonic, with Mozart's *Jupiter* Symphony and Brahms's First and with Beethoven's Eighth and Strauss's *Ein Heldenleben.* Thereafter he came ever more frequently. In 1985, he conducted the orchestra of the by then State Opera House in the *Figaro* Ouverture—this time on the stage of the House—Kodály's *Psalmus Hungaricus* and Liszt's *Faust* Symphony; in 1987 he conducted a Tchaikovsky–Haydn– Bartók programme with the Hungarian State Symphony Orchestra; in July 1991 he made a stopover with the Chicago Symphony to conduct Bartók's Dance Suite, the Concerto and the Third Piano Concerto with András Schiff as soloist; and in May 1995 he conducted Bartók's Concerto and Brahms's Fourth Symphony at the first concert of the first great tour with the Budapest Festival Orchestra.

The frustrating experiences, however, affected his relationship with Hungary for long decades. *"Those two blows were enough. You can understand, can't you. I came to Hungary fifteen years ago and they introduced me on television as a British conductor. So I don't feel like a Hungarian. What still touches my heart as far as this country is concerned is the Academy of Music. That's why I've come back again... What I do hope is that Hungary can finally link up with the West now. Believe me, it's the only way,"* he said in his last television interview in Hungary in June 1997.

On the other hand, twelve years before, in a profile by Marianne Gách in the Budapest journal *Film, Színház, Muzsika,* he claims that *"Wherever I live, I'm still Hungarian."* In all his statements to the press these two contradictory claims recur.

It strikes one reading the interviews in the press archives that, when talking about his feelings and likes, Sir Georg Solti nearly always used the same formulations. On a few occasions I was present at his press conferences. It was obvious that he considered it "part of the game" to meet the press, but he was always careful not to let the situation slip out of his control. At times he punished unprepared journalists with ironic answers, but even for the less foolish questions he produced conspicuously preformulated set phrases.

It may have bothered Sir Georg that, with such a command of the language of music, he found it difficult to put his thoughts into words. His knowledge of Hungarian was a little shaky, and he spoke

English with a strong accent. I can illustrate this to an extent with a personal memory. At a press conference in Germany in 1992, the organizers informed him that someone from Hungarian Radio was present. *"Which of you is the Hungarian? Come and sit beside me, I'll give an interview afterwards."* he said. However, when we spoke together in Hungarian afterwards, much to the envy of my German colleagues, his answers were still at the level of generalities, as they were in all the other interviews of his I have read.

In any case, during this very brief conversation (at the beginning of which he told me that he had very little time and frequently looked at his watch) Sir Georg, whose attitude to his homeland had now softened, spoke of how he would like to support Hungarian musical life. *"My dear"*—he addressed everyone that way—*"I don't think the best way for me to help is to conduct as much as I can in Hungary. It would be far better to make sure of scholarships and study trips abroad for young musicians."*

It is worth examining Solti's relationship with Hungary not through his words, but through his deeds. He arranged scholarships for a whole bevy of young musicians. With the fees he earnt in Hungary he financed study trips for young conductors. From the proceeds of his 1985 concert in the Opera House György Győriványi Ráth and Géza Gémesi gained scholarships. Solti entrusted the Liszt Ferenc Academy of Music with the selection of candidates for scholarship, but in 1987, when he met them, he gave them personal advice as well. He invited several orchestral musicians to his Chicago orchestra for longer or shorter periods. Apart from the invitations, he helped them to get hold of better instruments. For his concert in Geneva to mark the 50th anniversary of the United Nations—at which he conducted a "World Orchestra"—he chose four members of the Budapest Festival Orchestra.

In these generous acts a large role is clearly played by his feelings for Hungary —and especially for his *alma mater,* the Liszt Ferenc Academy of Music. It doesn't detract in any way from all this that young British musicians and musicians of other nationalities also benefited from his charitable gestures. He contributed the money from many of his awards to musical institutions and future musicians.

Sir Georg Solti's acquaintance with the Budapest Festival Orchestra brought a sea change in his relationship with Hungarian musical life. Tamás Körner, Executive Director of the orchestra, recalls that time: *"When it was first suggested that the Festival Orchestra might operate as the permanent orchestra of the capital, Iván Fischer, Musical Director, wrote to Sir Georg Solti asking him to put in a good word and help convince the Budapest authorities that they needed the orchestra. Sir Georg sent an open letter to the city fathers, asking them to consent to making the orchestra permanent. From 1992 on, when the orchestra was officially founded, we were in constant contact with him about possibilities for collaboration. Before agreeing, Sir Georg wanted to consider whether the conditions were right for the planned programme and if they met with his demands. In May 1993 the first meeting took place—without any obligations—at a rehearsal. Sir Georg Solti "sampled" the Festival Orchestra during his stay, but he worked with other orchestras too. Only after these soundings did he accept his first work with us. We gave our first concert together on May 8 1995 in Budapest. Sir Georg was so pleased that our collaboration had succeeded at the right level that it was he who proposed we should go on a West European tour. In May we gave con-*

certs in Italy and Switzerland, then in June we set out on another tour to Spain and various musical centres in Italy. We held ten concerts in two months and it was on the second tour that Solti first came up with the idea of making a recording together. He wanted to record Bartók's orchestral works. By that time we had signed a contract with Philips, which included the recording of all Bartók's orchestral works. After lengthy discussions the decision was made that Solti would make with us and the Hungarian Radio Chorus the Hungarian disc of a three-disc album, which should have been released on his 85th birthday, with Bartók's Cantata Profana, *Kodály's* Psalmus Hungaricus *and the* F Minor Serenade, op.3, *by Leó Weiner, whom he always mentioned as his master teacher and main influence at the Liszt Academy of Music.*

Fortunately, the recording was completed on the maestro's last visit in June 1997. We are going to perform the same programme next March—in his memory. It's sad, but at the same time wonderful, that he made the last recording of his life here in Budapest—with a Hungarian orchestra and chorus.

A part of the story of Sir Georg's relationship with the orchestra is that after our successful Budapest concert and two tours together we asked him to be our conductor emeritus. He said yes immediately... He was very pleased that a Hungarian orchestra was so keen to work with him. This also gave him the opportunity to reconsider his love-hate relationship with Hungary. Even if it came at the very last moment, this was a genuine reconciliation. He could demonstrate his love for his country, but didn't have to give up his principles. He could feel he was Hungarian again, he could work here again, but he remained his old self with all the loyalty he felt towards England. We who had the chance to meet him could feel this strange ambiguity, but—fortunately for us—it was through the Festival Orchestra that he wanted to show the world that he was ready, willing and able to do something for Hungarian musical life... I have in my possession an unpublished letter which he sent to the Budapest municipal authorities shortly before he died. In it he asked for help in improving the orchestra's financial situation. When he learnt about our worrying financial problems, he asked if there was anything he could do for us."

During his last recording he worked with the Hungarian Radio Chorus which he considered an outstanding chorus. Sir Georg Solti had given his first concert with them in Berlin in February 1997. Kálmán Strausz, the Chorusmaster recalls the contradiction he noticed between Sir Georg Solti's public statements and his personal behaviour.

"At our first rehearsal Sir Georg Solti apologized for his rusty Hungarian. After all since 1945 he had rarely had the chance to instruct musicians in his mother tongue. It was typical of him that within ten minutes he was only speaking Hungarian. The situation was comical. The most natural language for him at rehearsals was German but then and there a Hungarian member of the Berlin Philharmonic translated Solti's instructions into German. His gestures were paternal and collegial. Solti, who appeared so much in public, didn't show his true feelings, he didn't let anyone get close to him. He had a reputation for bashing musicians, but he didn't show anything of that during those rehearsals and concerts. He was surprisingly well-informed on Hungarian culture. He probably kept abreast of cultural developments here on the quiet. And though I said just now that he didn't show his feelings, he was very moved when he chanced to come across Hungarian culture. In Berlin we gave him a copy of the

Bartók anniversary CD-ROM, an overall documentation of the composer's life and work, released by Hungarian Radio. He received it with genuine enthusiasm, saying that he had heard about it and had been wanting to get hold of it for a long time. 'And I've got a computer for it,' he said. During the recording sessions in June we invited him over from the nearby Italian Institute, where we were working, to the Marble Concert Hall of Hungarian Radio. For his coming birthday we bought him the facsimile edition of Kodály's Psalmus Hungaricus. *He insisted that every member of the chorus write his name on it. He was obviously moved too as he listened to Kodály's choral work 'To Ferenc Liszt' that we sung for him. The music was written to a poem by the 19th-century poet Vörösmarty which begins: 'Famed musician of the world...' We so rarely get the opportunity to size ourselves up, to work with the truly great and receive real feedback. I don't mean to criticize conditions here by saying this of course, but what we felt at the concert given at the Berlin Philharmonic meant more than anything: Sir Georg Solti seemed to be proud that it was with Bartók's* Cantata Profana *and Kodály's* Psalmus *and a Hungarian chorus that he achieved such success."*

A television crew accompanied Sir Georg on his last visit to Budapest. They went with him to the Liszt Ferenc Academy of Music too. They visited the classroom where a small plaque declares that Sir Georg studied there. Solti was visibly moved by the piano in the rector's office, a present from Bartók's widow, Ditta Pásztory. At one time Bartók used to play on it. He asked Franciska Ispán, Secretary of the Academy, what he could do for the school. *"Tell me, would it help if I bought the Academy three Steinway pianos?"* he asked. He made one condition, that the pianos should be put in the classrooms and played by the students. When I approached the Minister of Education, Bálint Magyar, he said that Sir Georg had come to talk to him about the pianos for the Academy of Music. Since then the minister had discussed the gift with Lady Solti, who assured him she would honour her husband's last wish.

At the Budapest Spring Festival in March 1998 there will be a memorial concert to commemorate one of Hungary's most famous musicians. It is now certain that, in accordance with the wish of his family, his ashes will return to his homeland. The pity is that he didn't receive the conciliatory gestures from home earlier. The loss is ours, Hungary's. Who knows, he might have got over his affronts sooner and built up stronger ties with Hungary. After all, where are those people now who made him feel twice that he wasn't wanted? ❧

Csaba Gy. Kiss

Sarajevo–A Tragic End to a Tragic Century

János Kőbányai: *Szarajevói jelentés* (Report from Sarajevo). Budapest, Pelikán Kiadó—Múlt és Jövő Kiadó, 1996. 247 pp.

On a famous map of Hungary from before the First World War, the town of Sarajevo appears on the lower edge outside the country proper, (Bosnia was part neither of Austria nor of Hungary but jointly administered by both), intercepting the ornamental border of the frame. The name of the town was to be engraved forever in 1914 in our grandparents' memories. My father, who visited the town in 1964 as a tourist, was told by one of the locals that the Hungarians were cowards because they put up with the Russian occupation. "This could not happen in our part of the world," he added. My grandfather was in the town as a soldier in the First World War. Bosnia was not without its perils, he would tell us, in the hills you could be an easy target for the bullets of the *komitatchi*.

Whatever takes place close to Hungary would be closely followed by the Hungarian media, you would think. This was not to be so. But I share János Kőbányai's view: "The fate of Sarajevo or Bosnia and Herzegovina is also a Hungarian issue" (p. 269). It directly affects us, for the horrible war has substantially changed the international community's image of our region. The UN, CSCE, the European Union or NATO, all proved incapable of managing crises of this kind; they entertained false generalizations on the history of the Balkans and the consequences of communist totalitarianism. The ignorance displayed by the West, the misconstrued policies that demanded the lives of tens and hundreds of thousands, have been truly shocking.

Here in Hungary, with rare exceptions, coverage of the Yugoslav war either followed the lead of the major Western sources, or alternatively invited comments from Hungarians living in the Vojvodina. While the goodwill and knowledge of the Vojvodina Hungarians cannot be doubted, they speak in the shadow of a power that has had a lion's share in initiating this war. The performance of the Hungarian mass media as regards this South Slav war has altogether been poor.

This is one more reason to appreciate János Kőbányai's undertaking. Led by curiosity, a journalist's instinct and a determination to help, he has been to Sarajevo —the town besieged for months, for years— several times. His motivation was to give an account of the tragedy taking place near us; you had to see for yourself what

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was actually happening there because this was all about us Central Europeans. The nemesis at work there is bearing on our fate as well, he feels, and is closely linked to our future, not just to our past. Yet even though he is aware of this common past, Kőbányai speaks about the present, clearly defining the angle from which he views events he, as a Hungarian and as a Jew, experienced in Sarajevo. His investigation of the Bosnian tragedy has nothing of the coolness and distance of a neutral observer, nor does he wish to do justice at all costs. He calls his work a report; I would call it a testimony. His aim is to give an eye-witness account of what he has seen in Sarajevo. He frequently allows his contacts to speak—residents of all ranks and titles, the man in the street, military and civilian leaders, artists and journalists, all Bosnians. He uses the word Bosnian in the same sense as most of his interlocutors do: citizenship, Bosnian fate, the common identity of those living within the tragically shrunken territory of a small country, and not as nationality or religious faith.

Kőbányai insists, as do his Bosnian interlocutors, that the country is an organic part of Europe, while Islam means centuries of tradition. The reminiscences the locals entertain, whether of the Yugoslav period or of earlier times, take on idyllic traits. They speak of common weal, living together, a time when neighbours had respect for others and had no idea of the ethnicity of the people next door, or whether they went to worship and if they did, was it to a mosque, an Orthodox or Catholic church or to a synagogue. Viewed from the war, the world of peace understandably looks desirable, and the near or distant past more enticing than the present. Yet the recurring questions—where does this unbridled hatred, where do these horrendous acts of almost irrational cruelty spring from—remain unanswered. János Kőbányai does try to provide explanations, descending into another and yet another circle of Hell. One great merit of his account is his avoidance of generalizations. The hatred and cruelty that erupted with the force of a volcano cannot be attributed to a single cause. While we deplore, as he does, intolerance, nationalism and the horror of ethnic cleansing, an unreserved condemnation of these is simply not enough. What has to be examined is the web of causes, from a mental heritage right through the contradictions of the Yugoslav states—the three successive Yugoslavias all showed differing values by any major indicator—to the distorted images entertained by the outside world.

It is not at all certain that the state that came into being at the end of 1918 was doomed from the start. It did fail to show a pattern for how diverse peoples and civilisations could live together. The Serbian and, in part, the Croatian and Slovene political elite were led by the chimera of the pre-1918 experiment of the Hungarian nation-state. A "three-stemmed nation" was the fiction. Macedonians were considered to be Southern Serbs; the administrative division of the territory was so created as to ignore traditions in the different provinces, such as the continuity of Croatian law, and non-South Slavs were treated as second-rate citizens both in the Kingdom of Serbs and Slovenes and, later, in the Yugoslavia under a royal dictatorship. The great-power factor was an important element that came into play for the country's cohesion. Yugoslavia was regarded as the corner-stone for the stability of the Balkans, especially by French diplomacy after the Great War. Yet mutual intolerance and hatred did not abate in this period. And the inflammable material had been accumulating in Bosnia-Herzegovina for centuries; the Balkan volcano was active in

the 20th century too. (Ivo Andrić's works are evidence enough to this.)

The Yugoslavia that was reborn at the end of the Second World War came into the world under the aegis of terror and atrocity. A complex civil war saw more butchery between the South Slavs than at the hands of the Germans. To the unprecedented savagery of the fascist Croatian state, Tito's totalitarianism responded with equal brutality. The view that Tito's communism was the more humane of the two, as voiced by one "Uncle Pista" in *Report* (p. 177), is sadly among history's myths. Most definitely not so in those first few years, when tens of thousands were massacred, including those conscripted even into the Croatian state army were cynically handed over by the Western powers, alongside Slovenes and innocent Hungarians in the Vojvodina. In 1945, this new Yugoslavia was responsible for a large-scale ethnic cleansing, in the course of which hundreds of thousands, among them most of the Italians of Istria and Dalmatia and the entire German population of the Bačka and the Banat, were expelled. After the communist schism of 1948, Tito was just as vicious in his elimination of his adversaries as his Soviet comrades, by then his antagonists. The island of Goli, mentioned in the book, and the other concentration camps in Yugoslavia, in no way differed from those of the Gulag archipelago.

Yugoslav *cevabcici* communism of the 60s and 70s is another story. It is about relative welfare, about the possibility of being able to go to the West to work and about intellectual life much freer than in the Soviet sphere. Still, one cannot ignore Uncle Pista's words, this time true: "...everyone's salary was higher than their performance" (p.193). In many respects it was a world in which appearances were kept up. Loans from the West were being lived up to and used to raise living standards, the unusual role-playing in foreign affairs within the non-aligned movement was glamorized. The international political background against which all this was taking place was the special in-between position the country occupied in the bipolar power structure. When one pillar of the structure, the Soviet Union, toppled, the forces that had kept Yugoslavia together from the outside cracked fatally. Add to this the economic crisis unleashed in the 80s in a country that had consumed its own future, plus the death of Tito—and the second Yugoslav state was inevitably sucked into the vortex.

"The indigestible past has now taken control," Tvrtko Kulenovic, president of the Bosnia-Herzegovian PEN Club, tells Kőbányai (p. 248). An unclear past and the unburied dead always wreak their revenge. Bosnia-Herzegovina's immediate past includes not only a unique cultural atmosphere but also the fact that in communist times the republic was shot through by an intricate network of political-economic clans and an intolerance for totalitarianism more marked than that in the other Yugoslav constituent republics. It would take a study in itself to show how, in such circumstances, civilian society was being destroyed and the consequences of the introduction of the category of Muslim nationality in the early 70s.

For me, too, the extent to which the Titoist brand of communism, with its peculiar political balancing act, contributed to the souring and repression of nationalist emotions, secreting poisons for the future, is a moot question. Another question is whether the process of growing into nations, a development that has always brought about violent reactions in the Balkans, has reached a point of balance or not. It should not be forgotten that the Macedonian nation came into being after

the Second World War. Bosnia-Herzegovina seems to remain a fault-line. At the time of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, not even Benjámin Kállay, the Hungarian governor who managed to achieve some consolidation, was able to create a regional patriotism. No one could say what was going to happen to the Muslim Bosnians—Kőbányai calls them adjective-less Bosnians—who, in the process of growing into a nation, have found themselves in a vacuum. Their identity once tied them to the Ottoman Empire and Islam, only a few chose to become Serbs or Croats. They were left with a patriotism for the province, for the republic. It was they who clung closest and for longest to the idea of Yugoslavia. The state may have been maintained, I recall a 1990 article saying, if the seat of the federal capital had been moved to Sarajevo. Which was not done. What is then going to happen to the Bosnians? Will there be Croats and Serbs among the cinders for whom Bosnia-Herzegovina will be a common homeland? This is a difficult question to answer.

One thing is certain though: this part of Europe cannot be viewed through the lenses of an American melting-pot or through multicultural illusions. It is a part of our continent where European civilization has suffered a dismal defeat—not in the least under the very eyes of, and with the ministrations of Euro-Atlantic politicians. I do not believe a solution can be found if its starting point is a confrontation of general and particular human traits. ❧

Travnik. From János Asbóth: Bosznia és Herczegovina *(Bosnia and Herzegovina), Budapest, 1887.*

Tamás Koltai

Eight Plays in Search of Relevance

Pál Békés: *Pincejáték* (Cellarplay) • László Márton: *Anatómiai teátrum* (Anatomical Theatre) • Csaba Kiss: *Animus és anima* (Animus and Anima) • András Nagy: *A sevillai, a kővendég és a szédelgő* (The Sevillean, the Stone Guest and the Impostor) • Zsolt Pozsgai: *Szeretlek, színház* (I Love You Theatre) • János Bródy–Mátyás Várkonyi: *Will Shakespeare* • Péter Szentmihályi Szabó–Levente Szörényi: *A kiátkozott* (The Outcast) • György Spiró: *Kvartett* (Quartet)

The Cellar Theatre, aptly enough, has given us a production called *Cellarplay*. Currently new Hungarian plays stand their best chance of being produced in cellars or lofts, in small spaces and for small audiences. For quite a time now only the studio theatres have been able to afford the luxury of small runs. The Cellar Theatre used to be a place for drama students and young amateur performers; now it is a venue for alternative theatre. Subsidized by the local government and without a company of its own, it acts as the occasional host for freelance or non-contracted actors.

Pál Békés has had a number of theatrical successes over the years. This particular play, which he wrote as a young man in the early 80s and which shows the influence of the theatre of the absurd, is relatively unknown. At the time it was written, both its political message and theatrical idiom were thought to be menacing. Yet there is hardly anything threatening in the play; it contains the dramatic clichés of its time. The scene is a closed-off space which allows no way out for the actors—after the fashion of Sartre's *Huit clos*. Its protagonist is a young man who goes down to the cellar to bring up some firewood—wood burning stoves in a capital city apartment house: there's East Central Europe and "existing socialism" in a nutshell—never to emerge again. For the ghosts of the house keep him down there. These "ghosts" are earlier tenants of the house, several generations of them, who know the protagonist's ancestry. They have all created a little nook for themselves and filled them with their own possessions—whether furniture or ideologies. A soldier from the First World War, a trade unionist printer, a Holocaust victim, a Communist Party functionary and others are down there, with their odds and ends, their spirits indelibly permeating the walls. A Russian and a German soldier have been playing an interminable chess match since the Second World War. For a time the protagonist puts up some resistance to the situation, yet he cannot free himself even though no one is restraining him and the way up and out is apparently open to him. In the end he himself remains a captive, entombed among memories, another shadowy part of the past for evermore.

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Confinement, lack of freedom, a suffocating present created by the sins of those who have gone before did indeed invite the play's banning at the time. However, the discreet charm of the allegory has now gone and there is an inevitable sense of *dejà vu.* Nor does the production do much to rectify this. Zoltán Ternyák in his directing debut (he has never really fulfilled his promise as an actor) barely does more than bring his actors on and off stage, and he fails to capture the essence of the play.

Current avant-garde drama is still metaphoric, but harsher, more grotesque. Young László Márton's *Anatomical Theatre* is, to put it in a fashionable idiom, "a bitter parable of postmodern existence". The Body is dead, tyranny comes to an end. The Parts of the Body, to their ecstasy, are emancipated and dream of a freer, happier life. The Head is properly qualified to assume leadership; however, in order to consolidate its position it has to resort to the Stomach for help. And so the Head does, even though the Stomach has compromised itself by digesting all that delicious food and by helping to suppress the other Parts of the Body. With the Body fallen apart, the Stomach devours all the Head's enemies—the Bowels, the Feet, the Hands. In the end the Head is left on its own; by the time it realizes it has been duped it is too late: it cannot escape its fate.

The author has borrowed the rebellion of parts of the body from Shakespeare's *Coriolanus,* and aims at conjuring up a nightmarish vision of a society disintegrating, without control by the state. The nightmare, the disintegration of international communism, became reality in the recent past, and Márton's play is a grotesque allegory for this. The death of the Body is indicated by a funeral march from the labour movement; the Parts of the Body, delighted to find themselves free, sing of their own qualities in the way any social class, party or organization does in propagating their ideologies. With the play being staged in the Kolibri Theatre whose company is well-versed in puppet-theatre techniques, the production, directed by József Ruszt, cleverly combines actors and puppets. Centrestage is a dissection table, where various figures wearing various protheses of the Parts of the Body produce entertaining jokes and parodies. The text combines verse and songs, and even those left behind by the sophisticated play's intellectual humour will find its brilliant ideas entertaining.

Csaba Kiss's *Animus and Anima* is more traditional in its dramaturgy. Kiss is better known as a director, and his play is directed in the Budapest Studio Theatre by Géza Tordy, better known as an actor. It is a stage adaptation of a medical study, *"Egy elmebeteg nő naplója"* (Diary of an Insane Woman) by the writer Géza Csáth (1888–1919). Csáth was a doctor with an interest in physical, mental and bodily aberration. (A morphine addict, he analysed himself with merciless acuity.) His work has had a renaissance in recent years; *The Witman Boys,* a film based on his short story *Anyagyilkosság* (Matricide), has just recently won a number of awards on the international festival circuit. (Csáth's selected short stories, *The Magician's Garden and Other Stories,* were published in 1980 by Columbia University Press, and reprinted as *Opium and Other Stories* in 1983 in Penguin's "Writers from the Other Europe" series).

Animus and Anima is set in the home of a poor Jewish family. The father is dead, mother and daughter depend on one another in their loneliness. The mother is ill and before she dies she makes her daughter promise to marry a decent widower who could provide for her out of the pro-

ceeds of his small business. A delicate, dreamy and unstable creature, the daughter is enthralled by the doctor, a mysterious and reserved man, who visits her mother. Her devotion is sexless and inhibited, she cannot get involved as a woman. After her mother's death the doctor, something of a Géza Csáth self-portrait, occasionally visits the young woman, but no deeper relationship develops between them. Gizella increasingly takes refuge in fantasy. Since she cannot fulfil the promise she made to her mother, her divided soul creates a phantom figure who makes an appearance before her and slowly drags her down into the vortex with him. Animus, the dark figure to step from behind the curtain, is madness incarnate, who seduces, overpowers and in the end entirely controls the girl.

With a peculiar lyrical mood and strands of psychoanalysis, the play balances between a realistic drawing-room play and poetic surrealism. This production stylishly accentuates the former, with carefully selected sets and costumes and a cinematic use of lighting and music. "Anima", the representation of the female soul, is perfect; however, the same does not apply to "Animus". The phantom figure created by madness has neither the demoniac attraction nor the endearing magnetism which could be expected to sweep Gizella off her feet. So this strange case study eventually refuses to turn into poetic vision and surrealism.

The archetype of the demoniac, or rather sensual, seducer is Don Juan, the hero of András Nagy's play. *The Sevillean, the Stone Guest and the Impostor* is an adaptation of the time-honoured story with the twist that it is not the great seducer who creates his own myth but myth which is his creator controlling him as a puppet on a string. In other words, Don Juan is a captive of his own role, which gives play to a number of clever thoughts. András Nagy is an intelligent writer with a philosophical bent, a deftness with dialogue and a definite vision of the theatre. The way the servant Sganarelle keeps extracting Don Juan's "puppet theatre" from his bag and his ribald histrionic comments on events are fascinating.

However, more knowledgeable audiences will recognize that this has all already been written up by Molière. Apart from a few sentences of philosophical intent and self-reflection to explain the plot, as it were, from the outside, nothing happens that we had not known from before. "Classic" Don Juan is blasphemous too, he challenges God to respond to his deeds and hastens his own damnation. He knows full well he plays a role in which he cast himself without coercion, as a mere challenge, simply by putting provocative questions on his own existence and doggedly repeating them. András Nagy's questions might be more drastic, simply verbally: he formulates them with an abstract intellect known in his works of unrestrained obscenity.

The play is performed in the Merlin Theatre by the Thália Company, formed by some actors from the old Thália Company which the Budapest Municipality had dissolved. (The theatre itself was closed for reconstruction and will open in the spring of 1998, but not as a rep theatre.) The Merlin has poor technical facilities, creating problems for Imre Csiszár, a director generally very attentive to the visual. Here, he has decided to stylize the play, creating the impression that the production itself is a puppet play. The actors are all in black and white and their movements are those of puppets, which is not exactly conducive to presenting abstract thoughts.

Zsolt Pozsgai's *I Love You Theatre* is about the marginalization of Hungarian drama through lack of interest and finance.

Pozsgai takes an example from theatrical history in the 1820s; the play is about a provincial lawyer rehearsing the play he has written with a seedy travelling company in the town of Kecskemét on the Great Hungarian Plain. The lawyer is József Katona, and his play is *Bánk bán* (The Ban Bánk), now a Hungarian classic, the most famous of Hungarian plays alongside Madách's *The Tragedy of Man,* written some fifty years later. The circumstances are ignominious. The town refuses to provide money towards building a theatre, so that playwright and actors are reduced to haggling with the corrupt local butcher about using his meat store for the purpose. The production never got off the ground—indeed *Bánk bán* was never staged in the playwright's own lifetime.

Pozsgai depicts the miserable condition of the Hungarian theatre with passion. What is paradoxical in all this is that his own play has not escaped the dismal fate that fell to its predecessor. Though staged by the Madách, one of the largest companies in Budapest, *I Love You Theatre* is performed not on its main stage, nor even on its chamber stage (the venue mainly for commercial American comedies) but in a little hall in the Vigadó, a venue totally unsuitable for any type of theatre. Lacking facilities and even depth, its stage is completely unable to produce any spatiality; however flexible our imagination may be, it is still something of a strain to picture cattle carcasses hanging on hooks, of which the actors speak while looking around so expressively. Thus Pozsgai's play on the plight of Hungarian theatre exemplifies the relevance of its subject through the circumstances in which it has been staged. Both authors, the real and the fictitious, struggle with the circumstances. In the play Katona fails to produce his play, in real life Pozsgai fails too—both are denied the chance to show their mettle in the face of insurmountable obstacles.

In Pozsgai's play, Katona fulminates in despair that empty spectacles are what is popular—and he promptly proceeds to give an example through a musical revue on a Greek mythological theme. The Madách Company is apparently insensitive to parallels: the first night of Pozsgai's play coincided with the première in its large auditorium of a new musical, *Will Shakespeare*, a spectacular and expensive production, with scenery representing the Globe Theatre, lavish costumes and heralded by an advertising campaign.

The topic is, naturally, relevant. With a down-to-earth, businesslike attitude, a moderation that balances excess with pithy content, the eponymous hero is the ideal theatre-maker. Serving the powers-that-be and at their mercy, seeking the queen's benevolence and suffering the city's anti-theatre measures, he was protected by central power but under attack from the local authorities. Writer and businessman, actor, director and share-holder, he thrived on success and created quality. A vivid story presents itself, a tale rich in known facts but with enough gaps to allow full rein to a creative imagination.

János Bródy, who wrote the book and lyrics, and Mátyás Várkonyi, the composer, content themselves with the clichés on schemes and treachery and love. Christopher Marlowe, philosopher and tavern brawler, appears as a cheap playwright and a one-day success, the model set before Shakespeare, a plaything of those in power, to be first exulted and then destroyed. Essex's revolt is a theatrical attempt by the transvestite Lord to gain power. There is a healthy maidservant in the play, who inspires the dramatist to write a sonnet and who, at the end, is carried off by cholera. Other figures or mo-

mentums are: an obsessed, puritanical poet, a great fire, the burning down of a theatre, a court procession complete with dogs. Behind all of this is a confession of a narcissistic form of theatre. In the scene designed to be the climax, director Viktor Nagy places two characters in two adjoining dressing-rooms, who sing of "the miracle of the theatre". One is a man changing for a female part, the other a girl disguised in male costume as boy actor—Lord Essex, who should more aptly be called Lord Bisex, and Darklin, whose name refers to the Dark Lady—or man—of the sonnets. Trying to penetrate into the secrets of Shakespearean androgynic acting is to show off an insider's knowledge and, with the additional cheap handling of the mystery of theatrical transfiguration, just contributes to the kitschy smell.

If duly monumental and supplied with appropriately fashionable music, new Hungarian historical plays can find their way onto the big stage. *The Outcast,* written by Péter Szentmihályi Szabó, music composed by Levente Szörényi, with lyrics by János Bródy, who is also responsible for the lyrics of *Will Shakespeare,* takes its subject from medieval Hungarian history. Its hero is the Hungarian king, Ladislas IV, called 'the Cumanian"'. The Cumanians were living in Hungary as a minority ethnic group, as we would say today; their warlike behaviour and free spirit created a certain amount of problems in contemporary political life, one being the true affiliation of the king himself. Hungarian history has often produced similar examples of the "too Cumanian for a Hungarian, too Hungarian for a Cumanian" king. Presumably, with the minority issues of today, this is why the authors felt the subject was topical. The factualness of the play is genuine, if it was the heroic provincialism of this historical issue that was the aim, but it may not elicit despondency or a resonance to the toleration of ethnic otherness as a "message". True artistic messages are never that didactic.

Yet the play does contain some singable tunes and the production, directed by István Iglódi in the National Theatre, manages to reach the young, who mostly need trendy music to help thoughts get across, especially with the several references made to events or figures: thus to the founder of the Hungarian state, King Stephen "Superstar" and Attila the Hun, who both appear on stage. They are dreams, of course, enshrouded in the usual stage fog.

Known both as an outstanding novelist and a playwright, György Spiró is one whose intent is to clear up obscurities, rather than create them. His new play, a four-handed *Quartet,* went on in the Harmadik Színház (The Third Theatre) in Pécs—a small studio. The Woman is the daughter of the Old Man and the Wife. The Old Man had saved the Guest's life in 1957, that is, after the suppression of the 1956 Revolution. They had spent their boyhood playing football, and at one time the Old Man had just told the Guest to get away. He knew that in 1956 the Guest had stood guard at the factory gate, with a gun in his hand, that the authorities were rounding up all those on their lists, the Guest included. He got to Vienna and from there to the US. Now he is back to show his gratitude to the Old Man.

The formula is simple—four persons confined in a small kitchen, trying to sort out a situation which is none too simple. Yet this is exactly what proves to be impossible. The Guest is searching for childhood memories—the house in an outer suburb that has been pulled down, traces of his parents who died without his seeing them again. He wants to quit the bustle of

the West and his alienated family, to use his savings to build a new home just like the old one, with a courtyard, human-sized, suited to a quiet life—and to find a new family in the Old Man's family. The Old Man, his "saviour", remembers nothing about the Guest nor his own good deed. He had been a trade unionist and head of a personnel department up to 1989 and thinks that currently the country is being stolen and sold out to the capitalists. He believes that the Guest must also have been sent by them to keep an eye on him, for they know the Idea will be resurrected in a purer form. He either sits and watches a TV sports channel or sits in the library copying out old newspapers in an exercise-book before "they" make away with the past. The Wife's coordinates are the stove, the sink, chicken paprika and pasta. In the end the Woman, a tired and worn-out mother of a 17-year-old girl, is maddened by the credit card the Guest has offered as well as an expensive car as a gift; lured by the prospect of wealth, she desperately tries to tie the frustrated do-gooder to her through business and family bonds.

The four of them obviously speak different languages. Though apparently all express themselves in the mother-tongue, they have different obsessions; they have been ruined in four different ways by the world's madness. Four distorted minds are disgorging thoughts in words that have no chance of ever meeting. Four pathetic prayermills keep reiterating things, and the more grotesque and tragicomic the situation, the more we sense that they are far from stupid. It is the world that fails them, for it is no longer livable in and has turned the survivors into distorted self-deceivers going through the motions of living.

Spiró's violent, coarse, "unliterary" play is shaped according to the classical unities of time, space and action, and is staged very successfully by director János Vincze. He reduces the stage to a 6x7 square metre kitchen, reducing also the auditorium to give the audience the feel of being in a small panel-built estate flat. Even though the sound of the television in the adjoining room is heard all the time, true to the author's instructions, the acting never deteriorates into mere naturalism. The actors don the costumes that Spiró offers them with ease—for some time now he has not bothered to give individual features to his heroes, here he omits even to give them names, thereby entrusting his characters, who are differentiated stylistically, to the imagination of the audience—and they do fill them up as best they can, using their bodily warmth and mental capacities to the maximum.

This cacophonic *Quartet* is the music of our day, a sort of *Zeitstück* really topical at the time of its première. Sadly it will remain so for quite some time. ❧

CORRIGENDUM

Unfortunately, the Open Society Institute and the American Council for Learned Societies, both of New York, were omitted from the list of sponsors of the Women, Gender and the Transition project, on which the research on "Small Town Women" by Monika Mária Váradi and Katalin Kovács was based. The article appeared on p. 78ff of the Autumn 1997 issue of this journal. We wish to apologize for any inconvenience caused.

András Csejdy

Exciting Times, Blank Screens

The silly season is, for the press, traditionally the summer months, in which nothing of importance happens in the life of a community. For Hungarian filmmaking, the entire year of 1997 qualifies as a silly season—or almost. Now in the last month of the year we can see better that, as we approach the millennium, any resolution of the crisis in Hungarian filmmaking remains as distant as ever.

The facts are well known. While the cinema remains profitable, with multinationals putting a great deal of money into new gigantic cineplexes, and while the big international hits and attendances for independent or semi-independent masterpieces and cult films show that Hungarian viewers are no different to their counterparts elsewhere, what Hungarian filmmakers offer has left mass audiences cold for years now. Some figures for the last financial year, most characteristically on *Stracciatella,* a much-touted film by the popular actor and director, András Kern, and which was given all the publicity in the world, bear this out. A mere 140,000 actually bought tickets to see the film, albeit the profession as a whole gave its public backing and even Postabank mobilized its own formidable contacts, to achieve maximum exposure in the print and electronic media the bank owns—a Hungarian specialty. The interest generated, however, soon subsided and the film played to half-full houses. Eventually the state television gave it the *coup-de-grâce* by broadcasting it about a year ago.

True, the discouraging statistics are counterbalanced by some successes on the festival circuit, and complaints were aired and responsibility denied. Yet there is one thing we cannot afford to do, and that is to fail to draw the conclusions from all this, as these are crucial for the entire profession. Many have openly criticized the situation. Some deplore the high number of films made, others claim the seniors ought to give way to the champions of the future, others again point out that in the dire economic circumstances support should be given exclusively either to reliable artists whose work is in demand, or will stand the test of time, or to promising beginners.

To compare the rewards of a celebrated artist or a media star to those of teachers is as demagogic as is to couple the closure of hospital wards with the cost of works of the high arts. It is passé to expect social justice or cultural profitability from sovereign artists, just as it is asinine to use eco-

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nomic indicators when examining the productivity and significance of the arts. Yet, at the risk of gross simplification, we have to face the fact that artistic quality must somehow be measured, and in the welcome absence of totalitarian aesthetics we are left nothing more suitable to do this than the market.

The market, which is manipulated, neutral or even largely hostile to values, is also complex and flexible, antidemocratic and asocial. As long as the transition period continues to drag on and the scarcity of effective demand seems to be becoming permanent, it is cynical to expect self-regulation from the cultural market. There is a need, therefore, for budgetary support for the arts, and taxpayers rightly expect the state, which handles their money, to defend and nurture the work of those who meet minority demands, at the same time as respecting the freedom of agents on the entrepreneurial scene. Otherwise the entire edifice will come tumbling down, the structure of education, shaky as it is, will collapse, and Hungarian film-making may even come to an end.

Facts and contradictions such as these have presented themselves even more explicitly this year than ever before.

By way of a working hypothesis, let us point out that while not subscribing to generation theories, the younger generations, more than any others, are expected to make films which do depart, in their choice of subject, their use of cinematographic idiom and their creative attitudes, from what is customary in Hungarian film-making. If anyone at all, they may indeed notice that we Hungarians, as we lurch through these political and economic changes, live in a highly interesting part of the world, and our everyday, however abominable it is, is very complex and replete with excitement. The many extraordinary cases and turns of fate should prove a gold mine for artists. If film-makers and scriptwriters were to make a creative selection, and dramaturgs to clothe the elements of an exciting reality in a modern form, the editing suites would surely be putting out films which would surely capture the interest of the audiences. Such open attitudes are, however, hardly ever found in the work of noted or tyro feature film-makers and very rarely in documentary film-makers.

So then, do film artists have an idea of the world we live in, do they want to tell us something, do they have the drive to share their stories with us and disclose what they think of human relationships, dramatic situations, historical turns, social pitfalls, emotions, passions, typical and eccentric figures? Do they have a vision at all? Based on what we saw at the last national film week in February 1997, the answers to these questions were all negative. And this is the point as regards the crisis in the profession, and everyone involved has his or her share of the failure.

We have not heard yet of anyone committed to this reality here, of ambitious, talented, unknown people and brave attempts. We have not seen a Hungarian Tarantino, Almodovar or Boyle; we do not know where the Hungarian Kassowitz lives, or what audiences will be able to scrape off the heavy make-up on the face of Hungarian film industry, much in the way that those who produced the nouvelle vague did on academic tastes. We hardly have any idea as to who is capable of addressing Hungarian teenagers, or who can write dialogue on life on the housing estates, or who can draw an authentic picture of us, of the new-sprung small and large entrepreneurs, managers, billionaires, yuppies, mafiosos, communists repainted as capitalists, and other fascinating figures—about us and for us.

I wish those who have so far attempted this had practised self-restraint.

Árpád Sopsits, for one, in his third film *Lost Leading Man* (Derengő), aims to tell the story of a quest in present-day Hungary, for a fugitive, invisible, Christ-like superhero who admits to a murder his lover committed—a genuine superstar, *homo moralis* and *Übermensch,* too good to be true. Pál Erdőss also opts for a pseudo crime story in his *Last Seen Wearing a Blue Skirt* (Gyilkos kedv), a case straight from a tabloid, about Turkish or Serb truck drivers who kidnap a teenager, rape her and set her to work as a prostitute all over the country—a xenophobic film, if ever there was one. After this film, the topic will not be tackled in the Carpathian Basin for a long time, no matter how much the world press picks up the name of András Pándy, paedophile, psychopath and incestuous Hungarian-Belgian Calvinist pseudo-pastor, and no matter how many child pornographic film rings have been exposed. At least as false and unbased on reality is the story of a training centre for gladiators, a tourist bait functioning in a skanzen-like environment, in Ádám Rozgonyi's television film *Stable* (Istálló). Refugees hide in the dark of the stable, a black man without residence papers, a kind-hearted fugitive from a state orphanage, a Gipsy who has got something to hide, and a déclassé misfit. When Zsolt Balogh's *The Szelíd Brothers* (Szelídek) opens, one can believe at least there is someone with an idea what it is like to be a teenager outsider, what it all comes to when three teenage brothers grow up on videos. They recite Brando's lines from *The Godfather,* and when their mother is killed in a street in Budapest before their eyes, by thugs driving a Mercedes, they sell off everything they own and wander around the country. But in the end no perspective on the country is provided, for the structure is shaky, the narrative limp, and the imagery is no more than the Euro-metal clips that the Viva Music channel, a German MTV wannabe, puts out.

Stories about the turbulent past, by Sándor Sára, Lívia Gyarmathy, Ferenc Kardos and Sándor Simó, appear no less misguided, if for different reasons. All take place in the Hungary of the Stalinist years and are probably made with the aim of providing a more complex and deeper statement on the kind of country which was inhabited by those we still live together with. What else could be the reason why, after all the outstanding investigative documentary and feature films of the past fifteen years, this theme is again tackled? The question sadly goes unanswered. *The Prosecution* (A vád; Sára) is about atrocities Soviet soldiers committed against innocent civilians during the war; its vision is one-sided, the historical aspect biassed and repeated to boredom. The message of this feature film adaptation of a true story is that the good, in this case a rural peasant family, suffer unjustly amongst inhuman circumstances, while the evil, i.e. the Soviet army that arrived as liberators and stayed on as invaders, went unpunished, whatever their sins. *Escape* (Szökés) by Lívia Gyarmathy, is a misstyled old wives' tale about the Hungarian Gulag. Few have known that in the fifties a Siberian-type forced labour camp was set up in an ore mine near Recsk, in which intellectuals and "class aliens" tried to survive in inhuman conditions. Scriptwriter Géza Böszörményi was one of the inmates, which makes one wonder all the more why the story of the unique attempt to make a group escape turns into such a boring film, when there could be no better raw material available on which to base an exciting and absorbing depiction of the age. István Kardos's *The Smallest Foundation in the World* (A világ legkisebb alapítványa), on the founding of a shelter for dogs, an undertaking by the wife and orphan son of

László Rajk, a Communist Minister of the Interior executed in 1949 in the course of the most important of the Hungarian show-case trials, and the widow of the leftist Count, Mihály Károlyi, would have made a proper low-budget television film if only the director had anything to say through the real historical characters. The slow-paced story is about not much else than the complete blank that is the director's mind. *Every Sunday* (Franciska vasárnapjai) by Sándor Simó is more ambitious, aiming to present horrid circumstances through authentic and credible relationships and flesh-and-blood characters.

These films are reminiscent of the conscience-stricken American films on the Vietnam war. Hackneyed works fail to offer a complex view or an explanation for the events, nor do they shape our picture of, and personal responses to, them. They are indeed likely to alienate us from the material. Anyone setting out in this hard and dangerous direction is in a difficult position, for it is easy to lapse into self-repetition—think of the flood of Soviet war propaganda films—or miss the chance, for want of proper motivation, of confronting audiences with the myriad of horrors we committed or suffered, the monstrous ideas which more or less survive in us to this day, and the far from independent mass we remain in our heart of hearts, longing to be controlled. The truth—and the shame of it—is that some ten to fifteen years ago more interesting, more complex and far more disturbing works were produced about this very period.

It would be unfair if in examining this latest crop of Hungarian films the exceptions that confirm the rule were not mentioned too. Markedly conspicuous among the weak or mediocre films in the disappointing scene, are several important films made in 1996, the mille-centennial of the Magyar Conquest. Attila Janisch's *Long Dusk* (Hosszú alkony), Péter Tímár's *Dollybirds* (Csinibaba) and Felix Prize winning János Szász's *The Witman Boys* (A Witman-fiúk) are of a markedly different quality. These are demanding and determined film-makers who can, like and want to work hard, an attitude which shines through every single shot. Far from impeccable, their films nevertheless indicate clearly that you do not necessarily have to go along with the current. *Long Dusk* is a film adaptation of a short story, *The Bus*, by the American writer Shirley Jackson, who is not well known in Hungary. The plot is built up with a firm hand and is placed in a transitional, half-Hungarian, half-American environment—much to the benefit of this surreal and sub-real tale.

Tímár started out as a member of the independent filmmakers' movement and is by now the most demanding and scrupulous filmmaker in Hungary. He is not afraid to experiment with sound and visual techniques. In *Dollybirds* he hit upon a theme that matched his experimental drive in an ironic presentation, scattered with video-clip inserts from the rock music of the early sixties. Three years after his *Woyzeck* achieved international acclaim, János Szász has come up with an implacable film based on a short story by Géza Csáth, a writer who flourished at the beginning of the century. The road of the fatherless teenage Witman brothers who are brought up in an unloving, rural small-town milieu leads from torturing animals straight to matricide. Confident of the atmosphere the director and his faithful cameraman Tibor Máthé, can create, the film is this year's Hungarian nominee for an Oscar.

Whether there is a way out of a very critical state is too early to say. More and more people think that things cannot go on like this any longer. This is borne out

by several developments—a new committee has been chosen to manage state funds, 500,000 went to see *Dollybirds,* and producers' viewpoints are now given preference in the specifications for new script competitions. The tendency is also evident in the introduction of a new category—the low-budget film, the first funded example of which is *The Orb* (Országalma), to be shown at the next film week in February 1998. Equally promising is the fact that, emboldened by his earlier success, Tímár has finished a new comedy, *Zimmer Feri,* and that the Hungarian-born Hollywood producer Andrew G. Vajna has made a film, *Out of Order* (A miniszter félrelép), strictly on a commercial basis, from a Ray Cooney play, with popular actors, on release just before Christmas.

Patiently or impatiently, cinephiles are waiting for a breakthrough. We keep our fingers crossed; it is in our best interest too. We love film, and above anything else we want to see good Hungarian films. ❧

Stolac. From János Asbóth: Bosznia és Herczegovina *(Bosnia and Herzegovina), Budapest, 1887.*

After we struggled across a patched up bridge over the Sava and, secured by barbed wire and checkpoints, we could even go so far—if so inclined—as to feel that we were now on the other side of Europe, for we saw looming up ahead the same ubiquitous advertising posters that are part of the street scene in Paris, New York and Budapest. The roads became wider, the petrol stations became more modern, with toilets, and except for the small souvenir stand in a parking lot which displayed the Holy Trinity of Ante Pavelic, the Virgin Mary, and the Croatia Zagreb soccer team, there was nothing left to remind us of the indigestible recent past.

From János Kőbányai: Bosnia, Choices and Elections, pp. 3–19.

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