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*A Forty-Eighter's Vita Contemplativa*

*Translator, Editor, Publisher, Spy*

*The Transylvanian Question*

*Parties in the Run-Up  
to the 1998 Elections*

*Homage to Attila József*

*The Sinistra District  
Three Stories by Ádám Bodor*

*Hungary's Pillaged  
Art Heritage*





# <sup>The</sup> Hungarian Quarterly

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János György Szilágyi

# A Forty-Eighter's *Vita Contemplativa*

Ferenc Pulszky (1814–1889)

Ever since the mid-nineteenth century, a joint account of political life and the *vita contemplativa* has, in any form, been something of an utopian dream within the culture that has its roots in Europe. Be it Solon, the poet and legislator, who founded Athenian democracy, or Cincinnatus, the general, who returned to the plough after leading his army to victory, or even Thomas Jefferson, the third President and one of the leading figures of American Classicist architecture, all these men have become mythical figures of some kind. Sometimes the two aspects fit into a single life, but seldom in conjunction, and even more rarely maintaining a right of passage in both directions. Ferenc Pulszky was one of the exceptions. No one has ever tried to write up his rounded life; in scholarly works devoted to his person it is either the man of learning who disappears behind the politician, (whether he is judged positively or negatively as such), or the other way around.

It is not that the two could be truly divided; in fact the one makes sense of the

other. The explanation is much more likely to be found in the disequilibrium in the evaluation of the two types of activities, common in Hungarian culture, against which Pulszky fought all his life. But the story begins earlier, with Pulszky's uncle, Gábor Fejérváry.

Pulszky was born in Eperjes (Prešov/Bartfeld) in 1814, of untitled gentry stock. Four languages were spoken in the town, then in Upper Hungary, now in Slovakia, which had a population of seven to eight thousand. The first was German, after which came Hungarian; in addition, depending on the social position of the speaker, Slovak and Latin were also used. Pulszky spoke all four, but since his family thought that his Hungarian needed polishing up, he was, at the age of twelve, sent to Miskolc for one year. After that he returned to his hometown to complete his schooling at the renowned Lutheran College at Eperjes. Until the age of fourteen his reading had almost entirely been confined to Hungarian literature, then he was given a small library by his uncle, making a broad range of world literature available to him in German translation, from Tasso's *Gerusalemme liberata* to Calderon's plays, and from Walter Scott's novels to Voltaire, Lessing, Wieland and Hauff. At that time, it seemed that literature would become his main pursuit in life

---

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and although he sustained this affinity till the end, it showed itself less in his accomplishments as a creative writer than in his articulateness, both académic and political, and in personal communication.

The gift of books was merely a prelude. A year later the uncle, Gábor Fejérváry, whom Pulszky had hardly known before, came to Eperjes with the intention of returning to his family estate permanently. It was on his journey to Pest, when helping to wind up his uncle's home, that Pulszky first saw genuine antique art, a marble statue of Venus. After that experience his love for antique objects never waned.

The revival of interest in antique cultures, which found new forms of expression all over Europe in the eighteenth century, was slow to reach Hungary. Antique works from Greece and Italy first began to crop up in the collections of the aristocracy, and less frequently of the untitled gentry, only in the second half of the eighteenth century. They had a sporadic place among other oddities collected for their historical, aesthetic or curiosity value. One such "blanket" collector was Pulszky's grandfather, Károly Fejérváry (1743–1794), whose collection included weapons, jewellery and antiquities, as well as various deeds and manuscripts. The possibility cannot be excluded that his son, Gábor (1780–1851), also inherited one or two items. In his capacity as a lawyer, Fejérváry became acquainted with the outstanding art collectors of the first third of the nineteenth century. It filled him with revulsion to watch how the general revival of patriotism threatened a withdrawal into provincialism, so much so that his opposition to the mentality of those conservative and uneducated men who tried to make a false virtue out of Hungary's cultural isolation became an obsession with him. He thought that isolation from European culture was "the Hungarians' greatest defect",

and did everything in his power to try to counteract this. According to the evidence of a catalogue compiled in 1849, his library, beside works by the classical Greek and Roman authors, as well as an English-language *Arabian Nights* and the *Nibelungenlied*, and of course in addition to the books he had given to Pulszky, contained works by Milton, Pope, Byron and Shelley; Molière, Racine, La Fontaine, Le Sage, Balzac, Victor Hugo and Musset; Dante, Petrarca, Ariosto, Tasso, Aretino, Machiavelli, Castiglione, Alfieri, Goldoni and Silvio Pellico; Lessing, Herder, Goethe, Schiller, Heine and Brentano. Fejérváry was also familiar with the economic theories of Adam Smith and Bentham. From time to time he felt obliged to make journeys, so as "*to visit the land of other nations and to learn about different sets of ideas*", and thus to get away from an empire under Metternich's rule. As a young man, he travelled in Britain, Germany, France, Switzerland and Italy, and it was during these visits that the idea of collecting art treasures as a way of bringing Europe to his own home took root in his mind.

All these affinities were given a new meaning when Fejérváry decided to take a lease on the opal mines of Vörösvágás (mines that produced the best quality opal in Europe at the time). His decision to move into his sister's house in Eperjes was meant to make supervision easier. A confirmed bachelor, he rented out one floor in the family house, where he spent the remaining part of his life.

**T**he relationship was anything but one-sided. "*A new world of ideas opened up for me,*" half a century later Pulszky recollected the influence that his uncle's move to Eperjes had exerted on him. His passing encounter with the statue of Venus was followed by an ever-growing familiarity with antique works of art. While helping



his uncle to move to Eperjes, Pulszky had a chance to inspect the most important private collections in the country. His uncle was glad to see that Pulszky "*took a serious interest in antiquities and studied his collection in a scholarly manner*". This was a great boost to Fejérváry's habit of collecting works of art and specialist books. His collection of archaeological books, which he regularly added to with new works bought in Vienna, came to include almost every major book published on the subject up to his time (with volumes by Winckelmann, Zoega, G. B. Visconti, Millingen and Micali, the *Vasi candelabri, cippi* of Piranesi, almost every work by Gerhard, *Antiquities of Athens* by Stuart and Revett, all the great collections of reproductions, from Montfaucon and the eight volumes of *Le Antichità di Ercolano*, published between 1757 and 1792, to the *Museum Etruscum Gregorianum* and the first volume of *Élite de la Céramographie* by Lenormant-de Witte). He subscribed to the *Bullettino dell'Istituto and Monumenti*, *Annali* and *Archäologische Zeitung*, as well as the *Revue Archéologique*, from the moment that the first issue of the latter appeared in 1844. The majority of these works were only available in Hungary in the house in Eperjes, where Fejérváry had his rooms decorated with Pompeiian motifs, copied from Wilhelm Zahn's sheets and, after 1835, with small reproductions of the Elgin Marbles, made by his friend, J. D. Böhm in Rome.

That was the milieu, physical and intellectual, in which the Fejérváry-Pulszky collection took shape. Fejérváry, who always held decided views on matters of taste, was the first collector in Hungary to concentrate on the classical cultures of Antiquity. He took little interest in European art after the Trecento (in this respect only his collections of prints and majolica were of note), but the Greek, Etruscan and

Roman objects, which constituted the core of his collection, were primarily complemented by Egyptian and, to a lesser degree, by Assyrian, Achaemenidian and Sassanidian pieces, along with works by Indian, Chinese, Japanese and Pre-Columbian Mexican artists—in other words, he regarded the concept of Antique art, as defined by Winckelmann or his opponents, to be too narrow. His tastes allowed him to see that Antique Greek and Roman art belonged with the other great cultures of the Mediterranean and the Middle East. Merely by relying on his eyes, without any theoretical training, he went beyond accepted scholarly views, abandoning a Europe-centred concept and extending his interest to all the high cultures of the "Antique age" known to man at the time.

In this he may have been inspired by Romanticism, which was well represented in his library, mainly through German authors. It nevertheless shows that he was his own man: the rapidly spreading fashion of collecting gems and vases passed him by. So did the passion for "national relics", another fad inspired by Romanticism, which infected all his collector friends, in which he merely showed a faint and fleeting interest. Nor was he attracted to terracotta sculptures, and some of his Roman marbles were merely ornaments to his collection; it was bronzes, and especially small bronze sculpture, that were at the centre of his interest.

As shown by his surviving stock book, he still did not buy much on his two journeys on his own, of which one was in 1827 and another in 1829, the latter being a journey through Western Europe lasting almost six months. After moving to Eperjes, however, his acquisitions, along with purchases of specialist books, began to grow in number. The financial background for this was provided by a growth in his income. Fejérváry knew most of the



art dealers in the great centres of Europe, putting many of them on permanent alert to advise him of works up for sale. Among them were Joseph Daniel Böhm, an engraver born in Northern Hungary, a close friend in Vienna; there were also Migliarini and Rusca in Florence, Capranesi in Rome, the scholar and art dealer Wilhelm Zahn in Naples and Rollin in Paris, who later acted as one of the auctioneers of the collection. In a letter to Rollin, written in 1840, Fejérváry mentioned that at that moment he had 110 bronzes including "*une quantité de la première qualité*".

What he liked most of all, however, was going on journeys looking for things to buy. It was in 1833 that he first took along Pulszky, to reward him for having reached the *Iliad* in his study of Greek, but also with the professed purpose of training him as a judge of works of art and adviser when making purchases. In as much as it can be reconstructed from Pulszky's memoirs and Fejérváry's stockbook, their itinerary was the following: Pozsony (Pressburg), Vienna (meeting Anton Steinbüchel, the director of the Antique collection), Munich (meeting Friedrich Thiersch, one of the early topographers of Ancient Greece and a student of Greek vase, who gave Pulszky his "archeological blessing" for solving an iconographical problem; Como, Milan, Brescia, Verona, Venice (the meeting with Eduard Gerhard), Bologna, Florence, Cortona, Perugia, Terni, Rome. Here Pulszky befriended the two leading figures of the Instituto di Corrispondenza Archeologica, the first scholarly institute of archeology, which had only recently been established with Prussian support. One was Gerhard, responsible for laying the academic foundations, and the other Bunsen, Prussian envoy to the Holy See, who acted as chief secretary of the Institute for three decades. After Tivoli and Frascati, they continued their journey to

Naples, where they were welcomed by Fejérváry's old friend, James Milligan, an acclaimed student of antique coins, sculpture and vase paintings. Also, they were able to meet Sir William Gell, a gentleman studying the topography of Troy, Ithaca, Pompeii and Rome. They were given a guided tour in the museum by the scholarly Canon A. de Jorio; and finally, they explored the uncovered section of Pompeii in the company of Wilhelm Zahn, before returning to Eperjes by the same route. As an aftermath of the journey, Pulszky, in the following year, at the age of twenty, was elected as a correspondent of the Instituto (partly in appreciation for sending his drawings of works of art in Hungarian collections). In accordance with the wishes of the founders, the Instituto had a decidedly international character, with the exchange of views and information between scholars of various countries listed among the Institute's objectives (hence its designation). In fact, the organization preserved this character within the actual limitations of the times even after 1859, when it was renamed as the German Archeological Institute.

This was, however, not the main event of 1834 in Pulszky's life. That was also the year when he first attended the Diet at Pozsony, soon joining the law students demanding radical reforms. Pulszky early on made the acquaintance of all the prominent figures in Hungarian political life. From a "cosmopolitan", as he described himself in the early phase of his adulthood, he became an ardent supporter of national sovereignty and domestic reforms against Habsburg absolutism. Paradoxically, it was this patriotism that brought on his second extended foreign trip. In 1836 he was saved from Vienna's retribution at the last minute only by his uncle's decision to take him on a journey abroad,



a plan probably organized expressly for his rescue. This time the destination was Western Europe. Passing through Prague and Dresden, they headed for Berlin, where they spent time in the company of Gerhard and Panofka (the other founder of the Instituto) and the architect Schinkel, before continuing their journey through Hamburg to London, Oxford, Manchester, Liverpool, Dublin, Glasgow, The Hague, Leiden, Cologne, Mayence, Brussels, Liège and Paris. Pulszky's attention was mainly attracted by the collections of gems and cameas in The Hague, and by the Punic antiques held in Leiden. He met many politicians, scholars and art collectors in Paris, including de Clarac, the publisher of a monumental treatise on classical sculpture, and de Witte of Antwerp, who played a leading role in the life of the Instituto and in the publication of its collection; N. Révil, Durand and Count Pourtales-Gorgier, whose large collection of antiques was scattered in 1865. In 1840 Pulszky went to Munich on his own, where he met the philosopher Schelling. Then he went on through Karlsruhe and Stuttgart to Heidelberg, where he met Friedrich Creuzert, the famous and controversial editor of *Mythologie und Symbolik der alten Völker*.

Although still as eager to learn as ever, throughout these years Pulszky somehow drifted away from Fejérváry, who did not really take an active interest in the political events around him. Now Pulszky devoted most of his energies and time to the great national issues. He took part in the Diet of 1839 as a representative, and his opinions began to count in political circles. In 1838, having just been elected as a corresponding member of the Academy, he published in the journal *Athenaeum* an article "On the Use of Public Collections", which was his first major paper on the subject of museology and an opportunity to voice some of his political views. At that time he

looked on public collections solely as instruments for strengthening national feeling and identity. "However, it would be a small-minded interpretation," he added, "if anyone derived from this that only collections of national art and antiquities served any purpose, as the ancient relics excavated in Hungarian soil had also been produced in this geographical area; and since our nation and our country cannot be separated, everything that is the historical relic of the country is also a souvenir of the nation." Such rash and one-sided overestimation of "national antiquities" had a certain academic timeliness at the time the essay was published. Rising nationalism, a reaction to Winckelmann's ideas, rejected as cosmopolitan, had consequences both positive (i.e. the extensive collection of local relics and the intensification of excavations in Hungary) and negative (the incorporation, and thus also the appropriation, into nineteenth-century national history of those peoples and civilizations which in their own age produced their own material culture on Hungarian territory). Pulszky's development followed a direct line from the essay of 1838 to the criticism he published in 1847, in which he rebuked the poet Petöfi for his enthusiasm for worldwide freedom. Before that, however, he was engaged in the deliberations of a parliamentary committee drafting the penal code, in addition to making preparations for the Diet of 1843-44 and, as he wrote, still finding time to read into the archeological literature extensively, so as to keep his hopes for an academic career alive.

As the developments at the Diet were not to his liking, he gladly seized on Fejérváry's invitation to travel to Italy, this time accompanied by J. D. Böhm. In the course of the four-month journey in 1844, which was to be their last, they followed their earlier route to Naples (this time with a little detour to Civitavecchia to visit



Stendhal's antiquarian friend, Daniele Bucci) and back. Beside being able to add considerably to the collection, it was during this trip that Pulszky matured into an expert thanks to his committed and methodical study of the material he inspected in art collections, at the same time developing an interest in the practical problems of archeology. In Rome he learned from Depoletti, among others, how to fit together potsherds to make up a vase; before that Zahn instructed him in the technique of fresco painting; then he learned from Böhm how to recognize modern copies of Antique coins and niellos, developing an interest in fake engraved stones, which at the time grew in number at a proliferous rate. Böhm guided him to appreciate Renaissance painting, a school that failed to move Fejérváry. Pulszky's marriage in 1846 only provided a brief break. In 1847 he was elected a full member of the Academy and with his involvement in politics becoming increasingly more intense, he grew into one of the leading figures of the 1848 Revolution. As Prince Pál Esterházy's second-in-charge, Pulszky played an important role in the preparation of the revolution in Vienna.

**P**ulszky arrived in London in early 1849. His disembarkment was reported in the *Daily News*, the journal of which he was soon to be a correspondent, thus continuing the political campaign he had already begun to wage for the Hungarian cause in the pages of the *Allgemeine Zeitung* when he was still in Hungary. Due to the versatility of his interests and skills, he soon became a welcome guest in the highest political circles as well as among scholars, writers and journalists. His relentless propaganda on behalf of Kossuth was for a time confined to writing newspaper articles. These were also his main source of income, along with literary works written

either jointly with his wife or on his own, including a publication of Hungarian folk tales, which he himself had collected around 1840. Meanwhile, he did not for a moment abandon the pursuit of archeology. He soon became a familiar face in the British Museum, regularly attending the sessions of the recently established Archeological (Royal Archeological after 1866) Institute, where, on January 3, 1851, he gave a presentation of the drawings he had made of the various items of the Fejérváry collection. In an article discussing the centennial of the Society of Antiquaries, Pulszky's name was mentioned among the names of British aristocrats and foreign diplomats who attended the dinner marking the end of the celebrations. He soon came to command such respect in the British Museum that he was asked to give a paper on the questions of its organization and the arrangement of its exhibitions. In a lecture entitled "On the Progress and Decay of Art; and on the Arrangement of a National Museum", which he delivered in University Hall, London, he criticized the British Museum not only because of the way it covered the whole universe, in which "*we go from the masterworks of the Parthenon straight up to the stuffed seal and buffalo, and two monster giraffes stand as sentinels before the gallery of vases*", but also for its one-sided approach, its restriction to the art of the Greeks, Romans and Etruscans, demanding the extension of collecting work and interest to cover Egyptian, Assyrian, Persian, Indian, and even Chinese and Japanese art—as indeed had been the case in the Fejérváry collection (although excluding from this list of "civilised nations" the art of the peoples of Africa and Oceania), so as to be able to give a complete picture of the entire artistic imagination of mankind. (He thence proposed that the presentation of original objects should



be complemented with a display of plaster casts). In addition, he vehemently criticized the museums' and the British Museum's exhibitions in particular for their neglect of artistic development, that is chronology, in the arrangement of their displays. As the historical relics of various ages and peoples are mixed in the exhibitions, "*though we see the monuments we cannot understand them.*"

At the time of the lecture, these were basic problems, which had either just recently emerged or were in the process of emerging; this was just prior to the breakthrough of the ideas of evolution and historicism as the absolute principles of categorization. This latter completely rejected the notion of all-round museums as reflecting the demand of earlier centuries to represent the cosmos in its entirety (surviving examples of this are the Liverpool Museum or the Royal Scottish Museum), and wanted to replace them by specialized museums, or at least by exhibitions organized according to intellectually related items, with separate ethnographical, natural sciences, etc. collections. In any case, in Pulszky's view the final goal should be the documentation of the "unity of mankind", rather than the contrasts and rivalry of national cultures. With its "astounding lucidity"<sup>1</sup> the lecture came to play an acknowledged part in the history of the British Museum. Pulszky's criticism of the Glyptothek of Munich and the Berlin Museum similarly addressed vital questions. These institutes were criticised for subordinating the museum's educational function to architectural effects in the case of the former, and to an ostentatious display of wealth in the case of the latter.

To illustrate his lecture, there were drawings of "amazing execution"<sup>2</sup> showing items of the Fejérváry collection. In 1851 Fejérváry died, leaving his entire collection to his nephew. It arrived in London within a few months almost in full. When the text of the lecture was published in 1852, in Pulszky's absence, the editor's note named Raikes Curries as the owner of the collection. Apparently, that was the name of Pulszky's banker, who was willing to buy the collection under his own name, so as to prevent its confiscation.

**A**fter Kossuth's arrival in England, Pulszky immediately joined his entourage, accompanying him on his seven-month tour of the United States in late 1851, acting as his press officer and also, on some occasions, as his speech writer. Nevertheless, Pulszky remained faithful to his "other" self. In Boston, where they stayed for a longer period, he made the acquaintance of a number of scholars, poets and politicians, such as Longfellow, Emerson, the eminent zoologist and geologist J. L. R. Agassiz, William Prescott, author of the classic books on the conquest of Mexico and Peru, J. Sparks, Washington's biographer, and the publisher of his works, Charles Sumner, a leading opponent of the Mexican war and a prominent abolitionist. In a gesture that reveals the high esteem in which he was held, Pulszky was invited to fill the recently vacated position of Professor of Modern History at Harvard University. After some deliberation he turned down the offer, and returned to England with Kossuth in the summer of 1852. Jointly with his wife, they published an account of their American experiences

1 ■ J. Jenkins: *Archeologists and Aesthetes in the Sculpture Garden of the British Museum 1800-1939*, 1992, pp. 57-58.

2 ■ Editor's note to the text of Pulszky's lecture published in *The Museum of Classical Antiquities*, March 1852.





*An 1851 photo of Ferenc Pulszky, taken in the United States by an unknown photographer*

in the best-selling *Red, White, Black*, in which their admiration for the democratic institutions of the United States was mixed with a certain amount of criticism of some aspects of American life. The book's documentary value, in addition to the passages taken from his wife's diary, was provided by the sections describing the personal relations between Pulszky and the leading figures of the American intellectual and political elite. (According to the review in the *Daily News*, "if this book is not received and read with eagerness, the fact will be in itself a curious sign of the times". On Kossuth's orders he returned to the United States at the beginning of 1853 on an ill-conceived political mission. Following his return to England after two months in the States, he settled in London for the next

few years, earning a living through his academic qualifications and literary and journalistic skills. He was the political correspondent of a number of English and American papers regularly covering current news regarding museums. He also toured the country giving lectures on archaeology, resumed his connections with the Archaeological Institute, procuring their enthusiastic support for an exhibition featuring the works of the collection still bearing the name of Fejérváry, held in the Institute's rooms between May 23 and July 9, 1853. The exhibition was enjoined with a series of lectures, in which Pulszky covered the history of ancient art from Egypt through Mesopotamia, India and China to Greece and Etruria. Admission fees were charged. The more than thousand comments in the visitors' book are evidence of the success of the exhibition.

Pulszky's specialized field of archaeology was glyptics, interest in which had once again revived, enabling him to profit from his expertise in the evaluation of engraved stones. Although he worked for the British Museum on a regular basis, he did not seek a permanent position there, as he did not want to give up his hopes of an eventual return to Hungary. He frequented the company of prominent scholars, writers, politicians and art collectors, even finding time to resume contact with some of his old friends. He was in continuous communication with the politicians of various nations in exile, including Mazzini (with whom he exchanged letters right until the latter's death), Saffi, Louis Blanc, Ledru-Rollin and Herzen. He was drawn to Lord Lansdowne both as a politician and as an art collector, and more or less the same could be said about his relations with Lord Dudley Stuart, a staunch advocate of Polish independence and son-in-law of Prince Lucien Bonaparte. He was a close friend of the great geologist Sir Charles



Lyell, in whose house he often dined with Darwin; he corresponded with Dickens and met Thackeray and Coleridge on several occasions. Many scholars of Antiquity were among his acquaintances, including George Peabody, then residing in London; Charles Fellows, the founder of the archaeology museum of that name at Stanford University, who helped the British Museum to acquire the burial monument of Harpya at Xanthos; Sir Charles Thomas Newton, the discoverer of the Mausoleum at Halikarnassus; the Assyriologist G. Smith; Th. Goldstücker, the famous Sanskrit scholar, under whose guidance Pulszky even embarked on a study of the language, "*with more diligence than success*"; and George Grote, the author of the monumental *History of Greece*.

Pulszky paid close attention to art dealings in England, as shown by the reports he sent (until 1859), regularly to *Archäologischer Anzeiger*, published by the Institutio in Rome; he also sent to Rome reproductions of the major pieces in his collection for publication. However, the financial burden associated with the growth of his family, and, even more importantly, his decision to change the direction of his collecting activities, led him to sell some items, and even whole sections, of his collection. His majolicas went to a French art dealer, and in 1855 his Mexican antiquities, including the famous Fejérváry–Mayer codex, his prehistoric items and the most valuable part of his collection, the ivories—which the British Museum, to public outrage, turned down—were acquired by the goldsmith, art collector and art dealer Joseph Mayer of Liverpool, who passed them on to the Liverpool Museum. A little later Pulszky's gold jewellery, along with a number of other items, passed into the possession of the British Museum with F. R. P. Bööcke as intermediary. Parallel to all this, however, Pulszky continued to col-



*Lajos Kossuth and Ferenc Pulszky on a daguerrotype taken by Southworth and Hawes in Boston in April or May 1852*

lect glyptics and small bronzes. In the huge exhibition of British private collectors, which was held in Manchester in 1857 and which was a turning point in the history of British tastes and of art collecting in general, Pulszky was represented by his bronzes, articles of gold and silver, ivories (by then in Mayer's possession, which the committee awarded with a special diploma), and, as noted in the Catalogue of the exhibition, "*a nice collection of intaglios and cameas, articles from India and China, and a memorable series of bronzes from China*." In the following year he held a highly successful exhibition of his engraved stones in a London gallery. We can only assume that many more articles pas-

Courtesy Hungarian National Museum

Bence Képesi



sed through his collection during these years. His relation to the academic world was not passive: in 1856, at Mayer's request, he wrote a catalogue for the Fejérváry ivories. In its own time this long essay entitled "General Remarks on Antiqué Ivory Carvings", was regarded as a pioneering work, and it is worth reading even today.

**A**t the time of the great realignment in European history in 1859, the politician Pulszky once again came to the fore. First in England, then (during 1860–61, on the pretext of a journalistic assignment) in Turin in Italy, Pulszky worked as one of Kossuth's chief advisors in an effort to link the struggle for the unification of Italy with Hungary's liberation from Habsburg rule. He was the chief negotiator both with Cavour (and later with his successor Ricasoli) and with Garibaldi; in 1863, however, he realized the hopelessness of the talks. He gave back his commission to Kossuth and, suspending his active political involvement, he moved to Florence. A little earlier, in 1860, he exhibited his medieval objects first in the Bargello in Florence and, in the course of one of his southern visits to Garibaldi, again in Naples. In Pompeii he became friends with Giuseppe Fiorelli, who directed the Pompeian excavations and who later became the first archeological superintendent of unified Italy, and with Johannes Overbeck, who wrote a definitive monograph on Pompeii.

In 1861, following the October Patent, he was offered Szécsény constituency in parliament; although he was inclined to accept it, lack of adequate political guarantees made him prefer to stay abroad. Once the estate of Szécsény, his wife's possession, was returned to the Pulszkys, its revenues provided the family with relative financial independence. In Florence, Pulszky leased out the Villa Petrovich sulla

Costa above Via de'Bardi. It was here that Francesco Dell'Ongaro, the poet who became a close friend of the family, held his Dante readings twice a week, which he later continued at the universities of Florence and Naples. On Saturdays his house, where he once again set up his collection, became a meeting place of prominent artists, scholars and politicians, both locals and visitors, including two members of the Italian government, Minghetti and Venosta-Visconti, (at that time Florence was the capital of Italy). When Pulszky gave a party to commemorate the sixth centenary of Dante's birth, Italy's two most celebrated actors, Rossi and Salvini, tried to upstage each other by reciting passages from the *Divine Comedy*.

During his years in Florence, Pulszky devoted much of his time to the methodical and thorough study of works of art held by museums, churches and private collections, primarily renewing his old interest in the Italian Renaissance, paying long visits to the Central- and Northern-Italian towns of great artistic wealth. He made a detailed study of specific problems in painting, sculpture and the graphic arts, and kept in touch with the reorganization of museums, along with the new problems and trends in historical monuments and restoration. He was soon able to make contact with people at the Uffizi, as well as with private collectors and art dealers, most notably with Guastalla and Foresi. He continued adding to the antique material in his collection, as the list of his purchases between 1860 and 1864 shows us. With the new direction of his interests, he turned his attention to Italian Renaissance sculpture, obtaining several examples, including Verrocchio's terracotta *Imago Pietatis*, through his bequest now in the Budapest Museum of Fine Arts.

Having withdrawn from active politics for many years, Pulszky was contemplat-



ing settling in Florence, making preparations for buying the Villa Petrovich. Then, just on the eve of the Austro-Hungarian Compromise and immediately after winning a lawsuit over his estate, he received imperial permission to return to Hungary, which he had applied for on the grounds of the terminal illnesses both of his wife, who had been back in Hungary for medical treatment, and his daughter. (The idea of applying for it as part of an amnesty was unacceptable to him.) He arrived back in Hungary in September 1866, just in time to bury not only his wife and daughter, but also one of his sons, Gábor, who had been fighting with Garibaldi. Pulszky decided to return to Florence only to make his farewells and to close accounts and then he moved back to Hungary.

He gave his word to keep clear of politics and journalism until Parliament ratified the Compromise in 1867. But these few months were not wasted. He became president of the recently formed Society of Fine Arts; in an antique exhibition held in March 1867 with the participation of private collectors, he put on public display several prominent pieces of his collection, including his Etruscan mirrors, small Roman bronzes and select pieces of his "*world-renowned collection of gems*", which were received with enthusiasm. This was a prelude to the most mysterious episode in Pulszky's life. In May 1867, only three months after the exhibition, Pulszky offered his entire collection for sale to the British Museum for £10,000. Alessandro Castellani, acted as intermediary. He was a revolutionary, a collector and forger of artworks, and a jeweller. Pulszky had had a long-standing association with him both as a politician and as an art dealer. Castellani, who had a long-lasting and close business relationship with the British Museum, valued the collection at £8,000, and in the event of the Trustees' affirma-

tive reply he asked for the "*minor pieces*" in the collection of gems as a fee. The British Museum most of all wanted to know whether all the bronzes and engraved stones that had been part of the collection when Pulszky lived in England were included in the offer. To affirm this, Pulszky enclosed in his reply to Castellani a copy of the collection catalogue, "*in the form we compiled it in Florence*", (i.e. in 1866 at the latest), adding that lately, meaning after his move to Italy, he had acquired many more items, which "*the Gentlemen in London still do not know of.*" Although Castellani forwarded the list still in May, no agreement was reached.

Soon after this, in early 1868, Pulszky exhibited the complete collection at the Hungarian Academy of Sciences; at the same time it was revealed that he wanted to sell it abroad. On the news that the collection was up for sale, Ágoston Kubinyi, who was then the director of the Hungarian National Museum, immediately took steps to acquire the collection. In response to his proposal, the Hungarian Academy of Sciences appointed a committee, which confirmed the importance of the purchase without reservations, estimating the value at 120,000 forints and recommending that, in conjunction with the submission of the request for Parliamentary approval, the Museum and the Academy jointly issue a subscription to facilitate the purchase through public donations. However, Pulszky flatly turned down the committee's request to postpone the sale of his collection to a foreign party until the approval of the two documents. In giving his reasons he listed, among others, the lack of interest in the exhibition (in two months a mere six hundred visitors saw it), the indifference of the aristocracy, Parliament and academic bodies, as well as the hostile political reception shown, for example, in the caricatures published



by the satirical magazine *Borsszem Jankó*. He donated his archeological books, vases, drawings of the collection pieces, photographs of his ivories, as well as some of his Hungarian-related items to the Academy, and sold the collection to Phillips, an art business founded in 1796 in London (currently located at 101 New Bond Street) for a price of £7,000, in other words for about twenty per cent less than the price recommended by the Academy's committee, which essentially corresponded to Castellani's estimate.

Between May 18 and 23, 1868, Phillips put the 936 items of the collection up for auction at the Hotel Drouot, Paris. The French catalogue was written by Pulszky. The preface gives the poor financial state of his estate as a consequence of its confiscation as his reason for selling. Neither the unfounded claim, nor the suspicion subsequently arising that the possession of a private collection could have disqualified him as a candidate for the post of Director of the National Museum, can explain the fact that he sold it in England for a price that was less than it could have fetched in Hungary. We know no more details, other than some vague hints on the Hungarian background of the case, but in the above circumstances the most likely explanation seems to be that Pulszky and Castellani may have come to some kind of an arrangement in connection with Pulszky's intention to buy the Villa Petrovich in Florence. In any case, he was unable to part completely with the art treasures which surrounded him during those last thirty years of his life; accordingly, at the auction he bought back his favourites, including a statue of Imhotep and the Grimani jug, for a total of £1,400.

**A**ll the post-1867 holders of high office in Hungarian culture, most notably the novelist Baron József Eötvös, twice

Minister of Culture and a childhood friend of his, had considered Pulszky to be the best candidate to head the Hungarian National Museum even during Pulszky's stay in Italy. That was just about the only representative and comprehensive public collection in the country at the time. Pulszky received his appointment in early 1869 and, as a member of the governing Deák Party, he also took a seat in Parliament. For the next decade, the two sides of Pulszky's life intertwined. The real challenge, a social position demanding his capacities, now lay ahead of him. He returned from exile as an expert scholar commanding international respect. (Almost as soon as he arrived, the Academy unanimously elected him as member, "*as the first and most knowledgeable practitioner of archeology.*") What was even more exceptional was that his expertise was accompanied by a broad intellectual and political horizon. Yet, the fate of every Hungarian messiah was in store for Pulszky, too. Initially, he was taken aback to find that those who had come home some time before, accepting an amnesty, now ignored him; he soon, however, reconciled himself to the thought that "*for the third time he must serve in the ranks, even though with a confirmed officer's commission,*" and as a museum director, as well as a member of Parliament, he set out on a crusade over a quarter of a century to create a new Hungary, which was only interrupted by his death. It was in the area of scholarship that he could achieve most, clearly realizing that this was a matter of life and death for the country and nation as envisioned by him. In other words, he understood that the establishment of a scholarly institute of international standing also meant a victory in the fight for national independence. Therefore, he did everything in his power to realize the objectives he had outlined in the lecture he had given long before in the



British Museum. In 1875, shortly after his appointment, he published in the pages of *Budapesti Szemle* his second programme, "On Museums". In sharp contrast with his earlier, more narrowly conceived approach, his ideal collection now had to have a universal character in the broadest possible sense of the term; from such collections, *"due to their broad outlook, nothing that demonstrates the cultural betterment of the human race, or nothing that sheds light on this betterment, is alien"*. That precise phrasing has lost none of its relevance. He contrasted this ideal with the *"nations of limited ambitions, which are aware of their second- or third-rate status, and which, for the same reason, display self-conceit to make up for the great nations' self-esteem"*. This can explain why, in those nations, *"we are more likely to find provincial museums, which serve less as institutes of public education, and more as instruments of boasting."*

It was in the spirit of such principles that he embarked upon the reorganization of the Hungarian National Museum, turning it into a chain of centres for scholarship and, realizing the founding idea at a higher level, elevating it to be the fundamental institute of national culture. Keeping alive every initiative that he judged useful, he organized academic departments. He laid down the foundations for international research and did it primarily through encouraging the growth of specialized libraries (when he took up office, the archeology library had two hundred books; when he left the museum, it had more than ten thousand). Most importantly, he created the outlines of the specialized museums and collections into which the monstrous mass of collections had to be transformed. He was the effective founder of a number of museums: ethnography, natural sciences, fine arts, applied arts and Eastern Asian art. He

urged the enlargement of the collection of minerals and arranged for the segregation of the zoological, botanical and mineral collections; he established the sphragistic/heraldic collection and the collection of plaster casts and photographs, which proved ever more indispensable in line with the modern concept of museums. He set up a fund to finance travel for scholars, both at home and abroad, thus encouraging them to join in international academic life, to participate in international conferences and to maintain personal contact with their foreign colleagues in the special fields, all that in the belief that nothing that was not good enough to be universal could be good as national.

This was the idea that brought together the people gathering at the famous Saturday soirées in the Pulszky salon, the island where the above idea was nurtured and, to quote a member of the circle, *"the epitome of intellectual sovereignty"*. The salon, a transplant of the Saturdays in Florence, attracted several prominent figures of Hungarian political and academic life. Nor did the foreign academic elite fail to call in, whenever they happened to be in Pest, from the great anthropologist and prehistoric archeologist Virchow to Mommsen.

The remaining items of the collection brightened the climate of this island. Pulszky himself went on a longer foreign journey after his return from exile only once, to visit Turkey and Greece in 1875. In 1879 he sold almost all the remaining pieces of his collection to his collector-friend György Ráth, with whom he maintained a trading-partner relationship that is now almost impossible to unravel. Pulszky hardly if at all added new acquisitions to his collection (perhaps just one clay Corinthian vase); the Grimani jug was the only item known to remain in his



house until his death. The museum director did, indeed, cease to be a private collector.

He, too, must have sometimes enjoyed retiring to the island. The Museum was not the place where he fought his greatest battles—there he found sympathetic support primarily in his scholar-colleagues, the archeologists Flóris Rómer and József Hampel. He fought his greatest battles, as long as he could speak, in front of the general public. Universal interests, international academic standards—all this was just one aspect for him, albeit an essential one, of a much greater requirement, even though these ideas made him feel isolated from contemporary scholarship: *"to engage in scholarship, in the disinterested search for truth, without any prejudices and practical profit"*, to reach equality with other nations in the field of learning, these ideas in themselves were enough to create suspicion. Nor did it help his case that he excelled in parliamentary debate, or indeed in any area of public life, almost daily, through the superiority of the educated mind over a backwoods nobility, unable to adjust to the new middle-class world and interested only in fighting for its own privileges.

In the course of his campaigns in the interest of museums, as evidenced in the establishment of the Museum of Arts and Crafts, and in his struggle to obtain the necessary support for the purchase of Prince Lobkowitz's collection of minerals or the Esterházy gallery, and indeed in his public speeches on any other subject, it became increasingly more obvious with the changing of the political climate that Pulszky's thinking was radically different from that of the majority of the Hungarian society of his time. The conservative Győző Concha was able to define the essence of the difference very precisely, when he pointed out that *"while most people saw in the laws of 1848 the final formula of liberty*

*and equality and the sacred palladium of national aspirations,"* Pulszky only regarded them as the starting point on the road to radical democracy. His decision to quit the ruling party in protest against the occupation of Bosnia, coupled with his ability to realize that this was the beginning of a conflict that would necessarily end in war, and his determination to speak up against all anti-democratic slogans, finally led to his expulsion from Parliament. Yet, one of the qualities which made him legendary was precisely the fact that in such a situation, when the door to active politics was shut in his face, he had something to turn to. This was the rare example of a successful and self-imposed retirement of a politician turning to academic work with an intensity he had never before exhibited. Amidst all this, instead of taking offence, he was fully aware that everything that had happened was in accordance with his ideas and could not have happened in any other way. *"Democracy,"* he said in a parliamentary speech in 1870, *"has always been ungrateful, and will always be ungrateful, that is how things are meant to be. And precisely because one cannot expect gratitude in democracy, great men are born in it. Because only those who cannot expect any gratitude will do things that last in history."*

The international conference on prehistoric archeology and anthropology, held in 1876 in Pest, and presided over by Flóris Rómer, provided the grand opening of this era. Its main attractions were an exhibition of copper-age objects arranged by József Hampel and Pulszky's lecture, which, for the first time, classified the copper-age material found in Hungary. In the foreword to the work, which was published in a monographic form in Hungarian in 1883 and in German in 1884, Pulszky looked back on his life, maintaining that if it had not been for compelling circumstances, he would have devoted his main efforts to



archeology. In his capacities as Chairman of the Academy's Archeology Committee, and for a while Vice President of the Academy, but also as the National Superintendent of Museums and Libraries, Pulszky was working on the establishment and enlargement of a national network of museums and libraries that would grow beyond the National Museum. He did so with evident success. The establishment of provincial museums, naturally with the active participation of enthusiastic local supporters, was in large part the result of his efforts as a superintendent. In the meantime, he wrote regularly, publishing in the bulletin *Archaeologiai Értesítő* on the latest finds, whether prehistoric or Celtic, Roman or Migration-period, often accompanied by far-reaching and pioneering discoveries, just as the journey in 1875 had its exciting academic results.

In this highly productive period of his academic life he even found time to publish, in German and in Hungarian, *Életem és korom* (My Life and Times), an outstanding autobiography, which ended with his return from exile. Although in the book he credited his wife with nourishing the idea of public service in him, he continued to abide by it till the end: *"Not for a moment did it occur to me to withdraw from public life, and to watch idly the unfolding of events."* Nor did he regard his academic and organizing activities as a withdrawal from public life. His opinion continued to count even after his retirement from Parliament.

On his seventieth birthday in 1884, the novelist Kálmán Mikszáth wrote: *"Without the old Pulszky there is nothing... Not for one day would we be able to bear life without him."* In a letter to the critic Ferenc Toldy, in which Pulszky looked back on his

life, he appeared as a more discerning and more profound judge of himself, of his work and of his place in contemporary society:

During my life I was engaged in too many activities to be able to accomplish something outstanding in any one of these fields. I was always able to obtain the appreciation of clever people, but no more; ...my contemporaries find me indispensable in public life, but they hardly like me. The younger generation is more attached to me, and I am satisfied with that. You see, I know my place.

Few people are able to look into the mirror as openly as that. Yet, this was precisely what he needed to be able to preserve the balance in his life right until the last moment, ending it so fittingly. In 1889 the Hungarian Academy of Sciences announced an invitation for academic handbooks and a monograph on the archeological finds in Hungarian territory, setting the deadline as October 7, 1889. At the age of seventy-five, Pulszky, then still working as head of the National Museum, with four more years of active service ahead of him, immediately set to work. Completing the book in the Arcady of *vita contemplativa*, he submitted the two volumes of the monumental *Magyarország archaeológiája* (The Archeology of Hungary) on time, supplementing the specified subject with a series of "Art Historical Essays", from the age of St Stephen to the reign of Joseph II. Even then, he did not consider giving up research: for him scholarship was not an occupation, but was by that time almost exclusively a way of life. Just one day before the planned celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of his membership of the Academy, he died in the National Museum, still in the saddle. ■



András Gergely

# Small States in the German Solar System

**I**n October 1848, after much preliminary work in committee, the Paulskirche Assembly in Frankfurt started on the discussion of the initial paragraphs of the draft constitution. It was their purpose to define Germany as a state, Germany that had previously existed merely as a theoretical, historical and geographical term.

The definition of Germany's borders and of dynastic relations with non-German territories, in terms of constitutional and international law was the subject of a debate that stretched over several days, allowing those assembled to expound their views on the kind of Europe they hoped for. Heinrich von Gagern, the popular and respected chairman of the Assembly, the most prominent German liberal of the *Vormärz*, and leader of the liberal centre, the majority, asked for the floor on October 26th 1848, close to the end of the debate.

Heinrich von Gagern argued that the humbled German people would have to be raised again. Germany had a mission in

the world. These days every nation was expected to boost her own power and influence. Germany could not be expected to warm herself in quiet retirement. She must ally herself with her neighbours, with all the peoples that were likely to achieve independence, such as the Italians, Hungarians and Poles. *"Those Danube riparian peoples which neither request independence, nor have a calling for it, will have to be drawn into our solar system as planets."*

What did this solar system vision, centred on (a non-existent) Germany, mean for interstate relations? Was this an early, metaphoric German imperialist claim, or rather a guardianship of the weak, a reckoning with Central European reality? Did it express a liberal-democratic new order, a restraint on the power of the czars, an attractive variant of the *pax germanica*?

How did the nations of the region react, the Hungarians in the first place? Were they even aware of what was going on, or did they, in their ignorance, neglect to consider what was said at Frankfurt? What was their own vision concerning the new international relations in the region? Could their vision of the future be reconciled with that of the Germans, bearing in mind that—as no-one denied—an alliance to be concluded with the new German power was to be the lynchpin of their foreign policy?

What exactly were Heinrich von Gagern's views? Gagern, a titled member of

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the Rhineland landed gentry, became active in politics in the 1830s. There is little public evidence of an interest in foreign policy, but his surviving private papers tell us much about his thinking. I shall quote from an 1832 draft:

The most wholesome, the D.v. most desirable, and the most obvious alliance, offering every kind of reciprocity, is undoubtedly that between Germany and Hungary. How could it be different, from the national point of view? Neither subjugation, nor conquest, nor a melting pot! We are at one, and have been through the centuries, for mutual protection and help... But not only persons, the constitution, achievements, traditions and neighbourliness link our two nations; the link provided by nature, by the Danube, holds firmer still.

Great changes can be expected south of the Danube: *"Bosnia, Serbia, the great realm that is Alexander's heritage, are in turmoil. We could well be mistaken, faced with so many symptoms of the gradual dissolution of the Osmanli Empire. New empires will come into existence."* Alliances to be concluded with them will have to be based on the acceptance of the national principle. Thus Gagern did not transform the thinking of the German Enlightenment into German nationalism. All that was the subject of a discussion between him and his contemporaries. In 1844 he was more explicit, albeit he still did not publish what he wrote.

I consider a desire for German cohesion, German influence, indeed preponderance (if it can be achieved) to be justified in colonies, to be natural and beneficial, where no nation with national claims exists, where a population is still in statu nascendi... In countries, however, where a nation already rules, i.e. dominates in the sense that, albeit the country could bear a larger population and the need for immigration is present, the country, and the ruling people are, however, identified by a history of which they can be

more or less proud, by local customs that are as good or bad as many another—there foreign immigrants can do no better than to incorporate themselves in the dominant nation, showing no tendency of forming a nation within the nation by a mass endeavour to exercise national influence, resulting in rivalries and ultimately in bloody civil war. I have repeatedly defended this point of view, in particular as regards Brasil... or Greece... but the Danubian Principalities and especially Hungary, also belong to this category."

Gagern differentiated between nations and peoples, in the manner of his time—just as Marx and Engels—calling on history as a classificatory principle. Nations with a history have a right to form nation-states. In such countries, the Germans *qua* Germans had to renounce a national role, at most they could have a cultural mission.

Gagern was not alone. It suffices to mention Friedrich List, a much read economist of enormous influence on his German contemporaries (and Hungarian readers of yore too). According to him, *"Hungary is not only the key to Turkey and the whole of the Levante for Germany"* but *"at the same time a bulwark against northern preponderance."* List, who travelled much in Hungary, expressed himself with great enthusiasm about the country's inhabitants:

A viable nation... in possession of great intellectual and material goods. Fortunately Hungary found her own nation and national language, the Magyar nation and language, since only a nation which in its fundamentals bears the stamp of the Magyar spirit, will found a great and flourishing empire on this soil, one living in intimate friendship with Germany.

It follows that List too thought it natural that Germans settling in these parts would adopt the language of the locals.

Owing to the censorship, the views on foreign policy of the Hungarian liberals of the Age of Reform can only be reconstruct-



ed on the basis of the few writings which were published—mostly abroad. An anonymous pamphlet (written by Count Károly Zay) published the views of the *Védegylet* (Defence Club) in German, and made it clear that the aim was full separation within the Habsburg Empire. As regards the objectives of expansion and settlement,

*the course of the Danube indicates the direction that had to be taken by the policy of the House of Lorraine, if the dynasty wished to base its might on a lasting warranty, on the geographic siting of its domains. Accordingly the Empire had to expand all the way to the Black Sea, Wallachia, Bosnia, Serbia, Bulgaria, Rumelia lie in its purview, and are its due, together with the mouth, with the Bosphorus, not Austria, but Hungary, would have become the nucleus of the new Empire, and Buda-Pest its capital.*

The Habsburg Empire is thus the instrument of an expansion which boosts the weight of a Hungary which will move to the centre. Was this directed against the Germans? Certainly not: "*Honour the worthy Teuton, conclude an eternal tie with him against Asiatic barbarity and Roman Law [that is against the Russians and Daco-Romans, A.G.]; let heart and tongue stay Magyar, but let head and arms be veined by German culture and German hard work.*" Wesselényi's "*Szózat a magyar és a szláv nemzetiség ügyében*" (Address in the Cause of the Hungarian and the Slav Nation), published in 1843 (also in German), argued for a federal transformation of the Habsburg Empire, and offered a concrete alliance to a Prussia which was deemed to be turning liberal. The foreign policy notions of the Hungarian liberals could be reconciled with those of the German liberals. A Hungary merely in *Personal-union* within the Habsburg Empire, becoming ever more independent, and a constitutional Prussia (or Germany), would

conclude an anti-Russian defensive alliance—as well as expanding in conjunction—through colonies, established by interstate agreement, or else by annexation—along the Lower Danube and in the Balkan region.

It was generally such views which reverberated in the Paulskirche in Frankfurt. Karl Moering, made famous by earlier pamphlets (*Sybillische Bücher...*), described Hungary as the "*most effective ally,*" as the "*most important country of the German Danube.*" It was he who moved on July 21st that all those in the Paulskirche should rise to their feet to urge the early conclusion of a German-Hungarian treaty. It was up to them "*to create a mighty, united, free Mitteleuropa which, with mailed fist, would hold the balance between East and West, between a republic and autocracy.*" (Moering was the author of the term *Mitteleuropa*, as a seventy million strong entity at the centre of Europe. The term first flourished in 1848, in the Paulskirche.) According to the left-republican Zaïs, Germany was "*the central power of Europe and its natural centre of gravity, which had to be guarded by an allied ring of secondary powers, Hungary occupying pride of place in the South East.*" Rümelin, also on the left, intended a similar role for Hungary in the creation of "*a great, free league of Nations,*" characterized by "*equal rights for all the nations*" through which the German nation would "*conquer*" making use of the "*peaceful, free-of-envy propaganda of education, commerce, colonization and intellectual superiority.*"

The German Paulskirche Assembly had hundreds of participants, of diverse political views. Some spoke of non-German "*tribes,*" of "*peoplets*" (i.e. people in the diminutive "*Völkchen*"), the lost children of the storms of the Great Migration Period, who only brought confusion to the future arrangement of states in Europe, whose only fate could be that of subjects. Some



presumed that, in harmony with the progress of civilization, the future of the inhabitants of the Danube valley lay in becoming Germans. Should they not recognise the laws of progress, they will have to be taught by force. Some even had daydreams about a congress of peoples where Slav, Italian and Hungarian delegates would also be present, lending an extra firmness to the German-dominated territory at the centre of Europe, but such words were received with *"extraordinary astonishment; continuous, growing unrest"*; it was obvious that such views—nationalist even in the present sense of the term—did not meet with the approval of the majority. It was not influential members of the Frankfurt parliament who argued that way. According to Simon, the Deputy Chairman, such hegemonistic plans could only mean *"dissolution and destruction for the German Volk."*

**M**uch of what was said is difficult to interpret, since in expressions like "German-mindedness," "German liberty," "German culture," "German nature," "Teutonic spirit," "German" does not necessarily mean something national but a higher standard than the one prevailing in Eastern Europe. When people east of Germany acquire that, they do not lose their national existence or independence, but rise to the higher level. Vogt, the well known democrat, again argues in an odd sort of way describing this process in relation to non-German Austria:

Well, gentlemen, loosen the shackles, offer freedom to these tied up nationalities... and these nationalities will become aware of what really suits them. You will see then how close links with Germany will come about on their own initiative through political and commercial alliances, you will see pacts concluded freely, and out of conviction, pacts of a kind against which the nations grumble if they are imposed on them.

Gentle utopia and an appetite for conquest; the "right" of the strong and more developed and the intention to help small nations; the (self-evident) assertion of world history and its (occasionally violent) imposition; power politics and generous renunciation; anxiety and radiating optimism; romantic daydreams and economic interests; nationalism and the league of nations—an unbelievable whirl of ideas and arguments was characteristic of the thinking of the Paulskirche. The historian of ideas is enchanted by this abundance, the historian of politics notes the conceptual confusion and the absence of a conceptual armory suitable for sizing up reality.

The employment of right and left as political coordinates is of scant help. In the Cologne *Neue Rheinische Zeitung*, the "organ" of the left that found itself outside parliament, the editor Karl Marx freely used his blue pencil and the Vienna correspondent made use of expressions like "Slav brute," "beastly week-minded Slavs," "Czech hounds." The editor himself reported that *"in Vienna Croats, Pandoors, Czechs, constables and similar scum throttled Teutonic freedom,"* or *"the Gypsies a.k.a. Czechs, once again brought all their national impertinence with them."* In a later, February 1849, article, Friedrich Engels, a senior contributor, established that, as regards small nations, the revolution and their national cause were in confrontation. Either they gave up their nation and sided with the revolution, or, what was more likely, they would provoke Habsburg imperial reaction. *"The time will come when bloody revenge will be our answer to the Slavs for their cowardly and base betrayal of the revolution."* This *"all destroying fight"* and *"implacable terrorism"* will be fought not in the interests of Germans but of the revolution.

Differences as regards ideas concerning the restructuring of the new order can be more clearly traced. Some claim that all



nations are equal and entitled to full independence, that is that the map of Europe will have to be completely redrawn, others will only recognize the German role in the area, presuming that everyone else will sooner or later be absorbed by them. As a politician of the Right put it, a little new Slav blood will do no harm. The majority, however, agree with Gagern: some nations are more developed, and larger, with a right to independence, thus alliances will have to be concluded with them as independent states, and there are others that will fit into this system as a planet fits into the solar system. The international order will thus be transformed, with an anti-Russian alliance as the major objective but national frontiers in Europe will survive and perhaps be revived. The German liberals placed the orbits of their international system in the zone between *status quo* conservatives and the revolutionary rearrangers who wanted to turn everything topsy-turvy.

The stakes were high but the fight was fought with kid gloves. They undoubtedly shared a spiritual base, Hegel's *Weltgeist*. According to Hegel, the Teutons at the centre of Europe were the intermediaries between Latins and Slavs, not only geographically but also between excessive Latin freedom and Slav servility. No-one may question the proper course of history, that is the eastern expansion of Teutonic civilization. This is the shared idiom of a discourse on which a generation was raised, and it would appear that this idea would come to fulfilment in 1848. What took place in the Paulskirche was not an amendment of the Hegelian world view, it was made operational there, and turned into coin that could serve as legal tender. *Mittleuropa* transformed from geography into politics and ideology provided those bottles into which the wine of the world spirit could be poured. For a new *Mittleuropa* could mean unambiguous German

domination, perhaps a single *Reich*. The majority thought of *Mittleuropa* as an alliance in which a fifty-million strong liberal Germany (including *Deutschösterreich*) would carry most weight. Some of the plans included Switzerland, Denmark and the Netherlands, arguing that this alone would make it possible to resist a two-pronged attack by France and Russia, or, at least, as a free trade zone, this could create the basis for an economic boom.

How did the other nations of the region react? For the Poles, the restoration of their statehood was the *sine qua non* and that could not even be imagined without German foreign policy support. Thus interests met on this point. The Romanians, primarily the revolutionaries in Wallachia, were ready to accept even German tutelage and presented themselves at Frankfurt with such requests. The non-German and non-Hungarian nations of the Habsburg Empire were those who were least pleased. They, especially the Czechs and Croats, feared absorption or the hegemony of Germans and Hungarians; that is why they would have preferred to hold the reins of a federal Habsburg Empire in cooperation, and in cooperation with the dynasty. Since this would have put paid to Greater German unity, as well as expressing Slav solidarity and the Habsburgs' conservative foreign policy, it would have been in accord with a Russophil foreign policy line.

But what were the foreign policy notions of Hungarian liberals seeking independence, and could these be reconciled with those of Germany? The notion of a German-Hungarian alliance between liberal nation-states, a mutual recognition of independence by Frankfurt and Pest-Buda, the sending of Hungarian envoys to Frankfurt, the concrete Hungarian offer to conclude an alliance, are all a recognized part of the history of the Hungarian and the other Central European 1848 revolutions.



Count István Széchenyi was one of the first to argue for a Hungarian nation-state and a Hungarian "mission". In his *Kelet Népe* (People of the East) he maintained that preserving and developing characteristics which the Magyars had brought with them from the East were the duty of the nation. Hungary would have a voice of her own in the European concert of nations.

Széchenyi had tabled his own "people of the East" notion at a time when earlier Hungarian ideas concerning self-interpretation had shown signs of exhaustion. According to the old tradition, first propagated by Protestant preachers but accepted by the Counter-Reformation in the 17th century, the Hungarians were the Chosen People, just like the Jews of old. God had something in mind for the Hungarians, for the time being He just put them to the test, punishing them by subjecting them to ordeals, primarily at the hand of the Turks. The last to present this image was the poet Ferenc Kölcsey in his "*Hymnus*" (Anthem) in 1823, which, set to music by Erkel, became the Hungarian National Anthem, but he already expresses a reservation in his subtitle: "*from the stormy centuries of the Hungarian nation.*" The tradition was exhausted by the 19th century, primarily because of the loss in strength suffered by the religious world view, but also because for a century or more Hungarians had not suffered any severe ordeal. The exhaustion of the tradition is also indicated by the fact that "*the God of the Hungarians*" still survives as a lively rhetorical trope, even in the press, but it only refers to Providence. In translation the expression sounds odd, as if the Hungarians were heathens, with a god of their own. Petöfi's poem "*Nemzeti dal*" (National Song) relies on this tradition when he asks that an oath be taken on the "God of the Hungarians," but the poem contains no transcendent argument, there is nothing about God's personal displeasure,

nor is there any search into his intentions.

Széchenyi recognized that there was need of a secular national objective, but his offer was rejected. Hungarian freedom as an objective, and not "*the people of the East*"—as a cultural marking—finally took centre-stage in the self-definition of the Hungarian nation. The concept of freedom was nothing abstract: it found expression in the independence of the state, the liberation of serfs, an elected parliament and constitutional government. In the Carpathian basin it was solely the Hungarians who were enabled by their history and social status to be the champions of freedom, so the national minorities could at least show loyalty to the Hungarian state. In this region—primarily in a southerly direction—it will be the mission of the Hungarians to propagate freedom, perhaps by offering alliances, or by serving as a constitutional model for others.

German national thinking, resting on Hegelian foundations, was concretely influenced by Savigny's historical school of jurisprudence. According to Savigny, the legal and constitutional system were manifestations of the spirit of the nation, to which they must be adjusted. Reforms must therefore be handled with care. This was the ruling spirit of the Paulskirche assembly which numbered several dozen professors of law amongst its members. Hungarian constitutional thinking did without "the spirit", but the same historical approach was at work. Old legislation was rethought and reinterpreted, sometimes revived, or amended by something new: that was the basis of change. The forms may have been more pragmatic, but the same historico-legal mentality ruled in Hungary as in Germany.

The basis of Hungarian foreign policy in 1848, that is of the foreign policy of the government headed by Count Batthyány



was the regional mission of Hungarians. It was "Greater Hungarian", as the historian István Hajnal tellingly called it. The most desirable course of events from this point of view was that the western provinces of the Habsburg Empire should join Germany, the Italian provinces would secede, and Hungary would become completely independent, a new centre, joined, *faute de mieux*, at least temporarily, by Dalmatia and Galicia. The Danube riparian states, seceding from the Ottoman Empire, would also take their cue from Pest-Buda. Similar ideas were bruited about in the Paulskirche as well. Some would have liked to add Wallachia to Hungary, others again planned a coordinated Hungarian South-Slav Empire.

Thus both German and Hungarian liberals were interested in building nation-states. What is surprising is the lightheartedness with which they then went on to plan the alliances of nation-states, great and small. At the back of all this were recognized foreign threats, and the need to establish an anti-Russian alliance, but the model was the United States of America. Again and again there was reference to the U. S. Constitution when arguing that it was possible for independent states to cooperate. What linked the two countries and regions was the Danube, which, temporarily, replaced the Rhine in the German mind. "*The Danube is our Mississippi*," that is, what the Mississippi was to the English, Irish or French who desired to emigrate, that was the Danube for Germans and Hungarians. It set the course for migration. "*That is our Texas and Mexico*," they kept on saying in the Paulskirche.

In liberal thinking the nation of the state, be it German or Hungarian, had a mission in both politics and culture, with the difference that the German stress was extra-territorial, the Hungarian, within Hungary's borders. Civilization and individual liberties were assured to the nation-

al minorities, and assimilation was expected in exchange. The German emphasis tended to be on culture, the Hungarian on politics. There were similarities in thinking. It was said in the Paulskirche: "*those brilliant speeches with which Kossuth carries away his audiences, aren't they suffused by German ideas and German culture?*" The thinking is similar, a German audience can follow the argument, is all that the Paulskirche speaker was saying.

The image of the political future is similar, too. A *Mitteleuropa* jointed by treaties, with an anti-Russian cutting edge, and open to participation in restructuring the Balkans, *pace* Hungarian reservations—Kossuth's too—concerning the dangers of German hegemony. The enemy outside is common, the Czar, and there is an internal enemy which can also be defined jointly, "the Slavs": Czechs for the Germans, and South Slavs for the Hungarians. The Hungarian alliance proposal to the Paulskirche refers to this internal threat, too, and not only to the Russians.

The two countries, of which Germany existed only on paper in the summer and autumn of 1848, differed in scale and development, but they were complimentary. Not a great power and a small state proposed an alliance, but a great and a middling power, a country of fifty-million inhabitants and one of twelve (which meant that contemporaries somewhat overestimated the population of Hungary). Germany was (relatively) overpopulated, a source of emigrants, Hungary sparsely populated, ready to take immigrants. The new German constitution established the right to emigrate, as 1847 turned into 1848, the Hungarian National Assembly debated a bill on immigration and citizenship. The German press touchily reacted to the proposal that citizenship be linked to a knowledge of Hungarian, and indeed, this provision was deleted, Kossuth moving the amendment.



Complimentarity was much in evidence. The German press loudly debated overpopulation and emigration; in Hungary, according to Széchenyi, even parricides should be pardoned, in view of the small number of Hungarians. That must have sent shivers down the spine of Germans.

Germany was more civilized, a fact accepted in Hungary. That is why Károly Zay, in 1844, spoke of "*the Hungarian heart*" and the "*German head*" to be united in the Hungarian body. In 1848, when the Hungarian Parliament wished to reciprocate the Paulskirche gesture urging an alliance, István Gorove expounded that the Germans were the torch of civilization, which the Hungarians carried in this region. In other words, the Hungarians made the "German" task their own, and implemented it.

A certain asymmetry in German-Hungarian relations regarding size, strength and development was thus recognized in Hungary as well, nor must we forget that the Hungarians applied the same asymmetric model in their dealings with the national minorities in Hungary. Although it was not so articulated, it could have been said that the Hungarians were "*that sun*" around which "*the planets*" of national minorities would revolve, national minorities unsuited for independence, not destined for independence, nor feeling that independence was their destiny.

There was one point on which the Hungarian liberals were ahead of the Germans, and they knew it and were proud of it. What I have in mind is constitutional practice. The April Laws had made a united country of Hungary (united with Transylvania), with a liberal constitution, and a government responsible to the legislature. The job was not complete, but basically she was a legally existing liberal nation-state, apparently enjoying the blessing of the dynasty, and even able to raise an army of its own. Dénes Pázmándy, one of

the Hungarian envoys to the Paulskirche, wrote home with the superiority of a politician from a country that had already undergone transformation, that the German representatives in Frankfurt kept on distinguishing and discriminating, but the cause of unity was making no progress. László Szalay, the other envoy, who stayed on, and who wished to share with others the benefit of the experiences of his country that had carried out the transformation, certainly contributed to the fact that the first paragraph of the draft constitution already at committee stage excluded a link that went beyond *Personalunion* (personal identity of the monarch) with non-German states. It must also have been his influence that the third paragraph established that a German ruler must appoint a regent in his non-German provinces. This provision was indeed in keeping with the legal position of the Palatine of Hungary. (The German Parliament finally passed these paragraphs of the Constitution at the end of October 1848 without amendment.)

The German constitutional debate continued but the liberal models of the international new order soon lost their timeliness in practice. It was of purely theoretical importance that Gagern, early in 1849, as a Frankfurt (German) Prime Minister without power, continued to support a Europe of nation-states against Prince Schwarzenberg's—the Austrian Prime Minister's—absolutist plan for a seventy-million strong *Mitteleuropa*.

I cannot shut out the ambition to belong to such a great nation. But the dominant idea of our time, from which we cannot depart with impunity, is the progress of liberty on a national basis... It cannot be reconciled with the demands of nationality, that we should allow a dozen foreign nations to sit with us here.

By then the sun of Frankfurt had set. New constellations had put in an appearance. ■



Ágnes Deák

# Translator, Editor, Publisher, Spy

The Informative Career of Károly Kertbeny (1824–1882)

The months and years following the suppression of the 1848–49 Revolution are remembered in Hungary as amongst the most traumatic in the nation's history. It was said of the absolutism which ensued that it was based on a standing army, bureaucrats sitting at their desks, kneeling priests and crawling police informers. Memoirs by contemporaries, and the journals they kept bear this out. They felt under constant observation, with their homes, families and close friends as their only refuge, and often enough even that refuge was found lacking. The precedents were there in the Age of Reform, which preceded the Revolution. The Secret Police was established in Austria under Joseph II, its methods were refined and honed in the course of time, making it a powerful organization in the hands of Sedlnitzky, Metternich's Police Minister. Hungary had no national state police, making things a little more difficult. The Secret Police was thus merely a political police in the strict

sense of the term, confining its activities to the political arena. Even at the time there was a tendency to overestimate the number of informers. An informer's report during the Reform Age, which has survived in police archives, tells of seven men, assembled in an inn, talking politics. They soon began to speculate on whether there was an informer amongst them. One then said that, reputedly, every twelfth man in Hungary was an informer. We're only seven, so another five are needed for this conversation to be reported, so the story goes. We know, of course, that he was wrong. Contemporary estimates were even higher after the Revolution. Gáspár Noszlopy, executed as a conspirator, estimated in 1850 that twenty thousand agents were at work in Hungary. As late as 1894, Lajos Hentaller said that, in the fifties, a quarter of the citizens of Pest had been in the pay of the Political Police.<sup>1</sup>

Reorganizing the Political Police had high priority after the Revolution. In the spring of 1848, the Police Ministry was wound up and all agents were given severance pay amounting to several months' salary. In 1848–49 most of such activity was of a military intelligence nature, but without any coordinated control. The system therefore, essentially, had to be organized anew throughout the Empire. Alexander Bach, the new Minister for

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Home Affairs, took charge. Most of the leaders of the Revolution, including Kossuth, had managed to take refuge abroad, attention was therefore concentrated on agents operating outside the Empire, whose duty it was to keep an eye on the exiles. In 1851 there were thirty-five such paid agents.<sup>2</sup> At home local police commissioners were put in charge, leading to considerable decentralization. Police commissioners recruited agents and forwarded reports, without ever naming the agent, writing simply "*my agent reports.*" This was justified first of all as preventing the coming into being of an excessive centralized system of self-serving bloodsuckers, not to mention that a direct, intimate, patriarchal relationship between the agent and the man who ran him protected the agent's anonymity. There were disadvantages, of course. On the one hand, it was entirely up to the police commissioner how many agents he engaged, furthermore, central evaluation and control of the information received was made much more difficult. Bach kept his own travelling agents for this purpose. These carried out journeys of inspection, reporting on morale and on the work of the local authorities, including the police commissioners.

A turn of events occurred in 1852 with the appointment of a high-ranking army officer, Johann Franz Kempen von Fichtenstamm, to head an independent Police Ministry. Contrary to Bach's ideas, he aimed to integrate the police and the gendarmerie, stressing the military character of the police. He did his best to centralize the network of agents both at home and abroad. He ordered that registers of all paid informers be compiled, which had to include their names and all their aliases, their occupation and education, any special qualities, and the moneys paid to them. These registers had to be kept up to

date and amended whenever a new agent was recruited, or an agent quit the service. He reserved the right to approve or disapprove any recruitment. Informants were generally self-recruited. The local Police commissioner then informed himself about the volunteer, and asked him to supply a number of trial reports. He submitted all these papers to Kempen, adding his own comments, and Kempen made his decision. More rarely, efforts were made to find an agent, generally in connection with a particular job. Thus, at the time of the Crimean War, merchants with good local knowledge of Bosnian conditions were often found and recruited. Agents belonged to all social classes. The revolutionary mass movements meant that the activities of the political police also had to become more democratic. Attention could no longer be confined to the political élite. Every quarter, Police Commissioners had to account for the secret funds put at their disposal, adding receipts for payments received, which agents generally signed with a pseudonym. They were used by Kempen when checking the register of agents. Police commissioners were obliged to forward immediately all information of relevance to state security, sending it to Vienna, marking it for Kempen's personal use. That is where all information was compared, coordinated and evaluated. Kempen, like Bach, also occasionally employed his own agents, using them for purposes much like Bach's.

The number of agents figuring in the official register is surprisingly low. Thus, in 1853, Protmann, Police Commissioner in Pest and Buda, listed ten, that same year there were three in Nagyvárad, twelve in Sopron, and sixteen in Kassa.<sup>3</sup> It should not be forgotten, however, that these were just the professionals, small fish, who kept an eye on places where crowds assembled, and even amongst them only those in



more or less permanent employment. The greater part of those sniffing out political conspiracies, however, were distinguished gentlemen with respected professions, whose informing activities were more or less a personal favour to the police commissioner, and whose anonymity was carefully guarded by the police commissioner or other officials. Thus the Governor of Dalmatia writes:

I gave my word to all those who offered their confidential services that I would never name them. Such work is generally done in the hope of serving a good cause, or as a manifestation of personal confidence, rather than because of some personal interest, but I never neglect to offer a tactful reward which does not run counter to the cause.<sup>4</sup>

It should also not be forgotten that some of the agents had their own subagents working for them, and the latter did not figure in the register. Nor did innkeepers or their staff of either sex, who as a matter of course, so to speak as part of their duties, occasionally provided information for a small fee. But even bearing all these in mind there is still a discrepancy between the members estimated by contemporaries and what can be discovered from a study of police archives. One of the reasons might be the large quantity of spontaneous, generally anonymous, denunciations. Furthermore, it would appear that many of the agents were far from reticent. On the contrary, many obtained all sorts of advantages by boasting of police connections. Falsely claiming to be secret agents was a common ploy when blackmail was used in the underworld.

Agents were generally paid in cash, between twenty and fifty guilders a month. The latter was already reckoned good money, though not really big money. Most were paid by results, which meant they

very much depended on those who ran them. Veteran agents could hope for two or three months' salary as severance pay if their services were no longer required. Some aged and invalid agents, who had already been employed before 1848, were exceptionally granted a small monthly grace and favour payment by the sovereign. The principle was, however, that an agent was not an official, he was, therefore, not entitled to a pension. Kempen also absolutely refused to propose any of his agents for a distinction or honour, however great the service they had rendered. Sometimes a trusted agent could hope to be rewarded with a subaltern office. Services rendered as an agent also counted when various licenses or state leaseholds were granted. In the case of exiles granted a pardon and allowed to return home, having been an informer abroad was, no doubt, an advantage.

**T**he world of informers had its own eccentrics, not least Károly Kertbeny, who made a name for himself in Germany as a translator and publisher of Hungarian literature. In what follows, I shall try to reconstruct the story of his curious dealings with the police.

The story starts with communication dated January 18th, 1854 from the Police Ministry in Vienna, to Joseph von Protmann, Police Commissioner in Pest and Buda. He was informed that a Hungarian writer in Vienna had offered his confidential services and that, in keeping with the usual practice, he had been directed to call on Protmann, which he should do within days. On February 9th, Protmann reported to Kempen that he was in touch with the writer, and that he had asked him to put down his ideas on paper, and that these, formulated in German, were attached to the report. Kertbeny relates there that a number of members of the Academy had



invited him to edit the journal *Ungarische Vierteljahrschrift. Archiv zur näheren Kenntnis Ungarns*, which would be published in Germany. The aim was to provide news of the economy, politics, science and art of Hungary. The distinguished list of writers and scholars who had promised contributions included Ferenc Toldy, Gusztáv Wenzel, Pál Hunfalvy, Tivadar Pauler, Antal Csengery, József Eötvös, Zsigmond Kemény, János Török and Sámuel Brassai. Kertbeny was commissioned to travel to Germany, to make arrangements with a publisher. This would be a favourable opportunity for Kertbeny to obtain the confidence of the Hungarian national, intellectual and social élite which confronted the government, primarily the conservative aristocracy, which was committed to a strategy of passive opposition. Such carefully nursed contacts would then allow him to undermine the opposition from within. He hoped for the support of the police, for 500 florins to cover the expenses of the journey to Germany, a passport in a false name (to allow him to dodge his German creditors) and 100 florins a month up to the time that the proposed journal would pay for his keep. Once that happened he would be satisfied with payment by results. He also asked that the originals of his reports be returned to him, lest he be publicly unmasked by them.<sup>5</sup>

The police commissioner thought Kertbeny a bit of an adventurer, but he liked the plan in spite of the reservations about Kertbeny:

There's no denying there is much to be said in favour of this plan. It would truly be to the advantage of the government if the editor of an oppositional paper were one of its own trustees, always presuming, of course, that the man truly deserved its consideration, that he was straight and honest in every respect. Given that, the conditions

he sets are not unreasonable. A decision on the question whether Kertbeny is the appropriate person in whom the government can put its trust in such a delicate matter, is however extremely difficult, given unfamiliarity with his life so far.

Károly Kertbeny, né Karl Maria Benkert<sup>6</sup> changed his name early in 1848. His father was an ethnic German merchant. The boy was apprenticed to a bookseller, but presented himself to the colours as soon as he completed his apprenticeship. In the mid-1840s he appeared in the Pest literary scene, concentrating on translations into German and their publication. In 1846 he went abroad and lived in Italy, France, Switzerland and Germany, "a pretty adventurous life", in Protmann's words. He made a name for himself as a translator of poems by Sándor Petőfi and János Arany. At the time of the revolutions, he played the democrat, as Protmann put it, but all he did was to leave behind debts wherever he went. In other words, Protmann had his doubts about Kertbeny, yet he was unaware of Kertbeny's political "misdeeds". Her and Mór Eisler, using the pseudonyms Vasfi and Benkő, published *Hangok a múltból* (Voices from the Past), an anthology of Hungarian revolutionary verse, a favourite in the early 1850s, kept well concealed in most households. Unable to make ends meet, and on the run from his creditors, he voluntarily returned to Austria in 1851. He had to face a court martial, but in the absence of serious charges he was released after a fortnight. Kertbeny then kept his nose clear of politics and did his best to reestablish himself in literature, first in Vienna, and then in Pest, where he moved in the summer of 1852.

Already in the 1840s, the Hungarian literary scene had not proved receptive to Kertbeny. His aims were high. To quote his own words, written in 1875:



I feel entitled to call myself a Hungarian writer since my whole activity was purely along the Hungarian line... the aim of my whole life has been to make the Hungarian nation known ... in the course of twenty-seven years I have published 125 volumes of printed works in German and French and I have written 3000 articles to this purpose. My works have appeared in 139,000 copies. If the right of existence of the Hungarian nation is recognized abroad—precisely because of support from the intellectual angle—then I can say with feeling that I have made some contribution to achieving this result.<sup>7</sup>

And yet it must be said that his contemporaries doubted his knowledge of both Hungarian and German, that he was accused of countless mistakes in hastily produced translations. Furthermore, he was self-centred in manner, producing prompt antipathy all round. He was all too aware of his complete isolation in literary life. Nevertheless, he engaged in an extensive correspondence with leading writers in connection with his translations.

There is no trace in the literature of the plan mentioned in the report. And yet it appears to have had some substance. Already in the 1840s Hungarian politicians and literary panjandruns felt the need to correct errors relating to Hungary, which appeared in the German press and to counteract Slavophile propaganda in e.g. *Jahrbücher für slawische Literatur, Kunst und Wissenschaft*. Accordingly, the *Vierteljahrsschrift aus und für Ungarn*, edited by Imre Henszlmán, was published in 1843 and 1844. Around 1847 the Hungarian liberal opposition planned pamphlets in German and some of them appeared in Germany. The aim was to obtain the support of German liberals. Such attempts were also undertaken after the *Ausgleich*, the 1867 Austro-Hungarian compromise. Brockhaus published the *Ungarische Revue* in 1869.

Kertbeny started *Ungarn und Deutschland* in 1872. In 1877 Pál Hunfalvy published *Literarische Mitteilungen aus Ungarn* which, between 1881 and 1895, appeared as *Ungarische Revue* under the aegis of Brockhaus.<sup>8</sup> (All these can be regarded as early precursors of *The Hungarian Quarterly*, the first issue of which appeared in 1936.) As the similarities in the title indicate, Kertbeny's plan was meant to continue the forties publication. An article in the January 1st 1854 issue of *Új Magyar Múzeum*, edited by Ferenc Toldy, expressly complains that although Viennese periodicals, and the German press in general, showed considerable interest in Hungary, generally their ignorance was just as great. It is possible, of course, that the plan for a German periodical was Kertbeny's very own; it is certain, however, that its inclusion in his plan for his work as an informer was not merely to pull the wool over Protmann's eyes. He also speaks of it in a letter to the scholar Ferenc Toldy, dated November 28th 1853. Indeed, the plan, in every way, fitted in with the main line of Kertbeny's efforts. He had already planned a *Jahrbuch des deutschen Elementes in Ungarn* in 1845 with the aim, which he later formulated, that the Germans in Hungary should become "interpreters, mediators and peacemakers between Hungary and Central Europe." Thirty-three years later, in 1878, he proposed the publication of an *Encyclopédie hongroise ancienne et moderne* in French, to be supported by the state, in order to make Hungarian conditions, social, historical and cultural, known the length and breadth of Europe.<sup>9</sup>

What always motivated Kertbeny's feverish literary activity was the need to make ends meet. The troubles of 1848–49 had done for the family fortune. After his return home, he and his brother were saddled with the upkeep of their old mother,



who lived in Vienna. Kertbeny loved her dearly and enclosed a sum of money, sometimes smaller, sometimes larger, with every letter. Letters to his mother allow us to keep up with his ever growing and ever more hopeless financial troubles in Pest. Soon after his arrival, in July 1852, he still writes enthusiastically about his being welcomed with open arms. He remembers Protmann too who, in the friendliest possible manner, assured him that he could sojourn in Pest at his pleasure. At that time he still judged his literary prospects to be rosy.

If I could only lay my hands on a few hundred guilders in a lump sum so I could pay off my creditors and live quietly on my monthly income. The way things are, all that comes in goes down the debt-drain, and, as a rule, there's no money for a smoke after six days. The same old story: too little to live on, but too much to put an end to one's life.

Thus he sighs in a letter dated March 16th 1854. He proposes that his mother move to Pest. Supporting her would be easier that way. He adds on April 2nd:

There's no need to say more about this subject, not to mention the lack of time. I have not minced words so far. I could not and cannot make any genuine promises. For the past eight years I have never known where I would sleep on the morrow and what I would eat. I can only refer to my good intentions and to the fact that being here together would be easier. So far too, your care has not been solely my charge, but should this become the case, I can assure you that I would sooner rob or steal than see you suffer want.

It was not larceny or robbery that he embarked on, but on a career as a police informer. That is very likely the employment he referred to in his March letter to his mother, with an optimism that, if the police archives are anything to go by, was far from justified. *"Should the post I have*

*filled since the New Year prove to be secure, then I can reckon on a monthly income of 60–80 florins a month if you were here."*<sup>10</sup>

These letters counterpoint well the appearance of optimism and self-assurance which radiates from the submission in which he offered his services as an informer. We can also take it for granted that he could not have seriously meant to carry out his grandiose plan, since his isolation in life and letters in no way justified such hopes. It is on the cards however that what he hoped for was not only a temporary improvement of his finances but also a passport allowing him to travel abroad for the reason mentioned or some other purpose. In view of his political unreliability he could certainly not reckon on acquiring a passport in the absence of special services for the police. It would appear that after the planned journey to Germany came to naught—there is no telling why—as did the planned periodical, Kertbeny only kept in touch with Protmann on an *ad hoc* basis.

**P**rotmann had his doubts from the start. It occurred to him that it was the Old Conservative Party that had asked Kertbeny to offer his services, that Kertbeny really wished to become a double agent. In any event, the Old Conservatives would not have much trouble exploiting him. Not surprisingly therefore, Kempen, in receipt of Protmann's report, instructed Protmann not to accept Kertbeny's services, but to do his best to gain some advantage from Kertbeny's contacts, without, however, committing the Secret Service. Protmann accordingly—as shown in his report of March 18th—though supplying an account of moneys paid to Kertbeny, as was prescribed for every informer, held back from close and intimate contacts and only asked him to write daily observations. At Kertbeny's urging he made 50 florins available to him, but promised only pay-



ment by result. The character he gave him in the register was not really flattering: "*An adventurer who does not lack in talent. Cunning and frivolous, with pleasant manners and good mimicry skills.*" Kertbeny had asked that the same name be used as a pseudonym and in the passport he asked for Joseph Némedy. "*All he has produced so far is a single report of little substance. It consists of flights of fancy rather than the results of observations or facts. His minimum interest in the cause is already manifest. It will only prove possible later to form an opinion of his usefulness and indeed of his true intentions.*"<sup>11</sup>

Kertbeny's record as an informer must have been pretty thin. Only two of his reports have survived. In one he denounces another informer of whom he knew that he had reported directly to Kempen, behind Protmann's back. The other is really another plan, rather than a report. With reference to the projected nuptials of the sovereign, he proposed a journey to Vienna, for which he needed permission and financial backing. A month later, Protmann's patience came to an end and he broke all contacts with Kertbeny.<sup>12</sup>

Thus Károly Kertbeny's adventure with the Secret Police came to an end. Perhaps he was not even sorry, henceforth devoting himself entirely to literary ventures. His volume of translations *Album hundert ungarischer Dichter* had appeared earlier and he did his best to become a contributor to the recently founded *Weimarische Jahrbuch für Deutsche Sprache, Litteratur und Kunst*. Working with Ferenc Liszt also promised a certain financial reward. At the same time, he was at work on the compilation of a bibliography of books published in Hungarian or in Hungary.<sup>13</sup> He moved to Vienna in 1855, after his brother's death, where he contributed to newspapers. In 1859 he left Austria illegally, only returning in 1875. Abroad he spent most of his time

translating, compiling a Who's Who of Hungarian exiles, with photographs. All along he was an indefatigable *ambassadeur voyageur* of Hungarian culture. Financial troubles still pursued him. His faults, of character and professional skill, stayed with him, as did the antipathy of others. He was always held in suspicion. As Baron Miklós Jósika, the novelist, mentioned in one of his letters, they called Kertbeny an informer, and, in his opinion, without reason. Kertbeny, on his part, acted the martyr, ready to tell falsehoods to back his case. Thus he wrote in 1864 to Baron Jósika, a prominent figure amongst Hungarian exiles, not hesitating to revalue his flirtation with the Secret Police:

At home they show me spite and rancour, and think me capable of every vileness because they repeatedly noticed that once again I was in debt up to my neck. True, the Austrians have often enough made me brilliant offers—Bach once even offered me the style and title of a *Hofrat* saying that I, who was so familiar with how things stood in Hungary, should devote myself openly to the aims of Vienna; but I preferred to end up in a debtor's prison, or to starve in the company of my old mother and kin and sooner got deeper into debt; one would therefore think that the dreadful state of my affairs would make things clear to everybody who has not fallen on his head, that it is the clearest witness and counterevidence against all those common and stupid accusations which, furthermore, are never expressed openly, but only whispered about.

Later contemporary accounts, which may well have been produced by Kertbeny himself, all present him as someone who was approached by the Secret Police but who steadfastly resisted.<sup>14</sup>

We now know for sure what his contemporaries merely suspected: that the heroic pose of a man who could make fools of the Secret Police, using them for



his own purposes, did not fit Kertbeny. Of course, the business had its uses, it did produce 50 florins which was not bad for a few pages of daydreams and beating about the bush. As he put it himself, it

should be all that much trouble for a professional writer to produce a few pieces of writing that accorded with his chosen aim. He may well have thought of them as something which was part of his profession. ■

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John W. Wilkinson

## Homage to Attila József

*Somewhere a dead leaf lies in wait for me, just as, somewhere,  
A goods train waited for you; whether brought into play by the planets  
Or timed by a dandelion clock, since nothing is really haphazard.  
It will be a warm day later on; one would scarcely think it November.  
Though a slight chill dims the window-pane, as we lumber down Fore Street,  
And the head of a sycamore-tree, cut off by the mists of Autumn,  
Hangs still like a golden light, in an alley beside the bus stop.  
Why think of that other head, cut off by the wheels of a goods train,  
In the yards of the Magyar town, whose name (though I cannot pronounce it)  
I can never forget? Why recall how you lay down and let it all happen?  
First the right wrist, then the neck, then the left wrist, clumsily severed;  
And the trunk still pumping blood, as the driver (poor fellow!) descended,  
To save what was left. Did you know he would likely never recover?  
He had taken a human life; he had also destroyed a great poet,  
Though he wasn't to know—few did!—and he wasn't to blame for either.  
But he'd blame himself—and the Doctors! They'd allowed a poor schizophrenic  
To wander loose on the track. And that sight would be always with him.  
I was two years old when you died; now I'm thirty years older than you were;  
I have seen your dreams and mine reduced to a uniform rubble;  
My dreams of a Ständestaat, your hope for a world of brothers;  
For it came while I was a child, the War you had always predicted—  
We survivors have spent our lives absorbing a kind of shellshock,  
A nostalgie de la guerre that destroys the affections it feeds on—  
And the Russian tanks came, bringing in the régime you had always longed for,*

---

**John W. Wilkinson**

*is an English poet, author of two volumes of poems, with a third underway.  
He has also written a novel and two plays. He lives in London.*



And Stalin's quislings came back, old Comrades who might have killed you  
 If you hadn't been safely dead. But they turned you into an icon,  
 Victim of Capitalism and Poet of the Proletariat,  
 And now, that too is all gone, like the age of Attlee and whale-meat.  
 What would we poets be at? Cloning a shadow, or teaching  
 A mirror to read our thoughts. Last night I heard that the sunsets  
 On Mars are a vivid blue—it's clever the things they're learning  
 Since I was a boy—and I thought of that vivid hallucination,  
 Your Ode; like Sicilian waves, whose rapidly overlapping  
 Blades seem to heliograph, from the depths of a menacing azure,  
 A secret only the blind may read, or the mad may interpret.  
 I talked to an actress once, who said she could hear, in those verses,  
 As they rapidly came to an end, the wheels of the train that killed you.  
 For me, when I read the Ode, it is always that Summer evening,  
 And I am still young. The pulse of the late June sun, still burning  
 The windowpane, beats slantwise on the face of an exiled Magyar,  
 (That self-deprecating voice!) as he reads, in his own translation,  
 Your Ode. We listen. No! that's the wrong word, since the mind of a poet,  
 That pitiless spectroscope, where words break down into colours,  
 Assays, at the heart of the poem, that splitting of words and experience.  
 Now think how the searing light of the first atomic explosion,  
 As it boiled the Nevada Desert sands into glass, would have blasted  
 The average spectroscope, and you'll see why I never recovered.  
 There's been a decline since you, and a bigger decline since Eliot;  
 We are plagued by a smaller breed, pathological Life Affirmers.  
 What can I do against so many? Talk foot-rot with R.S. Thomas?  
 Bang about on the Yorkshire Moors with the rest of our sorry provincials?  
 Or, wallowing in Nature's nastiness, by the banks of the Humber,  
 Relish the stench of dead dogs and the copulation of spiders?  
 So I lead this intractable mind through the blue of a Martian sunset,  
 Where the threat of Sicilian waves seems held in a kind of limbo,  
 And it talks, half through itself, in the tones of a schizophrenic,  
 More echo than voice, of the Magyar who taught me to be a poet  
 (Strange man, with a voice that seemed, like his aura, retreating inwards)  
 And the evening he showed me that ghost who would shortly become my Master.  
 I just hope the LORD didn't burn you in Hell. I don't see how he could have,  
 For you weren't really right in your mind. Nonetheless, if I heard that he had done,  
 I wouldn't rebel; what He does is right. I'd say, "Thy will be done, LORD".  
 All the same, like the Irishman, I hope I may meet you in Heaven  
 And be there myself. Do you think they'll allow us to read our poems  
 In a bowdlerised version? I'd still like to swap a few lies about Paris;  
 (Only kidding, LORD! But Thou knowest we poets are terrible liars;



It's our way of telling the truth!) and I'd like to know if your Paris  
 Resembled my own; for your Paris Postcard told very little—  
 Too Guillaume Apollinaire! For me, she was more elusive,  
 But her spirit, less than a sigh, in the ruin of my recollections,  
 Still troubles me down the years. She flits in and out of my sonnet,  
 Square de Choisy—little park where a nineteenth-century lamplight,  
 Cast by those muted globes, calls up, from the fountains and laurels,  
 The phantom of Deburau, as he pines, in Pierrot costume,  
 For the Moon that can never be his. She is there in the Tuilleries gardens,  
 Where the carp jump thirty feet high, and tall North African tribesmen,  
 With voices still unattuned, and whose eyes give back the Sahara,  
 Fly their mechanical, multi-coloured birds for American tourists.  
 She is there in the Sacré Coeur, where I found a Latin inscription  
 That didn't make sense—or perhaps I am not quite the Latin scholar  
 I thought I was. It is on those hills that the ghost of Moltke,  
 Still taking his solitary walks, marks down on his map the emplacements  
 For the guns he intends to bring. And I haven't the heart to tell him,  
 (Since he was a poet, of sorts) that his work has been twice superseded.  
 She is there in the booths of the bouquinistes, on the quai Montebello,  
 Where I found Casimir Delavigne's poems, but couldn't afford them;  
 He isn't much thought of now, but Byron translated his poems  
 On Napoleon; like Byron, he blends the classical and the romantic—  
 But not with that vigour and verve! We could both learn a lot from Byron;  
 Alas! Not you any more; and, at first, I learned all the wrong things,  
 But I think I've absorbed him now, and, with luck, I'll begin to transform him  
 Into something more truly me. You complained that the Paris of Ady  
 Was not to be found. Well, perhaps you were too out of patience with Ady,  
 Who was not in the least like you. And perhaps you were too out of patience  
 With Paris. She has to be stalked like a timid gazelle, not hounded;  
 And you and that Communist pack made a deal of noise in your hunting  
 What they wanted, they wanted now! Just like you! Like all schizophrenics,  
 You had never torn free from the infant phase; still glued to the nipple,  
 You gulped and wrenched, from the body of Life, even what she was willing  
 to give. It isn't your fault. But even the people who loved you  
 Felt threatened; you had this way of making your friends feel guilty  
 At wanting to be themselves. You invaded them. They disliked you  
 But couldn't stop loving you—their child, their impossible poet!  
 And I still can't tell, from your poems, if you really discovered Paris!  
 Perhaps you could tell me now, if we happened to meet in Heaven,  
 And whether, perhaps, like me, you loved her in spite of the people;  
 For I couldn't abide the French! There's a story my colleagues will tell you:  
 "Old Wilky came back from France and applied to a school near Bedford;



"Well, the ad. said "francophone", and Old Wilky, it seems, misread it;  
 "He thought it said "francophobe", so he wrote for the job—and got it!"  
 But perhaps I'd be different now, for, since I became a Christian,  
 Nothing bothers me quite the same, and I tend to be rather more gentle  
 And my evil One isn't there—I divorced her and married the Black Girl—  
 So I've no pathological need to drink, and my work gets better,  
 And they tell me I could learn to love the French, if I kept on trying.  
 The bus moves down to Bruce Grove, where the mist grows dense; if it thickened  
 Enough, we could all end up in the Thames, or the Seine, or the Danube.  
 Our Summers have died in vain. A dead leaf crouched in the doorway,  
 This morning, as I came out, and I wondered, was it an omen?  
 And blood on the wheels of the train... it was there at the World's foundation.  
 We learn, too late, from the past... I try to pray. By the Danube...  
 "A flash, and Time is fully grown..." Did you know, as you wrote it,  
 That your mind was shaping for death? Do they come to your grave, in the Moonlight,  
 The women you briefly loved; the ones who refused or accepted?  
 Do you hear their voices now, the dead or the barely living?  
 Do their footsteps trouble your sleep? Do you know if they ever forgave you?  
 Or perhaps they have lost their way, since the government had you re-buried;  
 Do ghosts ever know these things? The living, of course, would have found you;  
 Old and bewildered, they'd find their way, from the desecrated  
 Grave, to the desecrated remains, in their State mausoleum,  
 Where, fingered by public men, and soiled by public emotions,  
 They were finally left to lie—I wouldn't say "rest". Little poet,  
 You are puzzled (and so am I) as you gaze from the Korda portrait;  
 And Korda was puzzled too—there was something he couldn't quite finish:  
 It hangs like a threat, in the green of the shadows behind, but the subject  
 Has the all too receptive eyes of a child or a pitiful changeling:  
 Intelligent eyes, yet filled with a total incomprehension,  
 As when a Sicilian sea turns green, and the sky, of a sudden,  
 Quite ceases to know itself, and the wind cracks loud in the distance—  
 Or is it the wheels of a train? I suppose, in a sense, you were lucky;  
 You died at your peak, while the game meant more than the recognition,  
 And the people who thought you great were the handful who really mattered.  
 In the blink of a spectroscope, it was over. The public figures  
 Moved in: you became a street, a martyr, a college, a textbook;  
 For millions of children now, you will soon be "as boring as Shakespeare",  
 While, still on the margins, we who read you for the right reasons  
 Seem less than the spectral waves in the blue of a Martian sunset,  
 Mere signals adrift in space—Habent sua fata libelli.



Attila József

## Poems

Translated by Zsuzsanna Ozsváth and Frederick Turner

### *The Last of Seven*

*A hetedik*

*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!*

*If your enemy come to hurt you,  
seven there be who won't desert you:  
one who starts his day off ready,  
one who's on his tour of duty,  
one who takes no pay for teaching,  
one cast onto the waves, beseeching,  
one, a seed of forests splendid,  
one, bellowing ancestors defended  
when all his tricks could not get even—  
you shall be the last of seven!*

---

*This is the second of two instalments of selected poems by **Attila József** (1905–1937)  
in Zsuzsanna Ozsváth's and Frederick Turner's translation, taken from their  
forthcoming volume, *The Iron-blue Vault*.*



*If you're seeking for a woman,  
seven seek her love in common.  
One who spends his heart upon her,  
one who pays his debts of honour,  
one who plays the musing dreamer,  
one who gropes her skirt, the schemer,  
one knows where the hook is hidden,  
one treads her kerchief, that's forbidden,—  
as flies buzz meat, their goal and heaven!  
You shall be the last of seven!*

*If you'd make a poet's living,  
seven will work the poem-giving.  
One build towns of marble vision,  
one born sleeping, a magician,  
one who measures heaven's gutters,  
one whose name the logos utters,  
one who carves his soul a tiller,  
one vivisector and rat-killer.  
Four scientists, two heroes even—  
you shall be the last of seven!*

*And if it falls as it is written,  
seven to the grave are smitten:  
one dandled at a milk-filled bosom,  
one grasping at a stony bosom,  
one who scorns the empty platters,  
one ally of the poor, in tatters,  
one worn to shreds by work and action,  
one gazer at the moon's perfection:  
may you share the tomb of heaven!  
You shall be the last of seven!*

(1932)



# Consciousness

*Eszmélet*

1.

*The dawn dissevers earth and skies  
and at its pure and lovely bidding  
the children and the dragonflies  
twirl out into the sunworld's budding;  
no vapor dims the air's receding,  
a twinkling lightness buoys the eyes!  
Last night into their trees were gliding  
the leaves, like tiny butterflies.*

2.

*Blue, yellow, red, they flocked my dream,  
smudged images the mind had taken,  
I felt the cosmic order gleam—  
and not a speck of dust was shaken.  
My dream's a floating shade; I waken;  
order is but an iron regime.  
By day, the moon's my body's beacon,  
by night, an inner sun will burn.*

3.

*I'm gaunt, sometimes bread's all I touch,  
I seek amid this trivial chatter  
unrecompensed, and yearn to clutch,  
what has more truth than dice, more matter.  
No roast rib warms my mouth and platter,  
no child my heart, forgoing such—  
the cat can't both, how deft a ratter,  
inside and outside make her catch.*

4.

*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.  
Only unbeing can branch and feather,  
only becoming blooms at all;  
what is must break, or fade, or wither.*



5.

*Down by the branched marshaling-yard  
I lurked behind a root, fear-stricken,  
of silence was the living shard,  
I tasted grey and wierd-sweet lichen.  
I saw a shadow leap and thicken:  
it was the shadow of the guard—  
did he suspect?—watched his shade quicken  
upon the heaped coal dew-bestarred.*

6.

*Inside there is a world of pain,  
outside is only explanation.  
The world's your scab, the outer stain,  
your soul's the fever-inflammation.  
Jailed by your heart's own insurrection,  
you're only free when you refrain,  
nor build so fine a habitation,  
the landlord takes it back again.*

7.

*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 web of law is torn, unseaming.*

8.

*Silence gave ear: the clock struck one.  
Maybe you could go back to boydom;  
walled in with concrete dank and wan,  
maybe imagine hints of freedom.  
And now I stand, and through the sky-dome  
the stars, the Dippers, shine and burn  
like bars, the sign of jail and thralldom,  
above a silent cell of stone.*



9.

*I've heard the crying of the steel,  
I've heard the laugh of rain, its pattern;  
I've seen the past burst through its seal:  
only illusions are forgotten,  
for naught but love was I begotten,  
bent, though, beneath my burdens' wheel—  
why must we forge such weapons, flatten  
the gold awareness of the real?*

10.

*He only is a man, who knows  
there is no mother and no father,  
that death is only what he owes  
and life's a bonus altogether,  
returns his find to its bequeather,  
holding it only till he goes;  
nor to himself, nor to another,  
takes on a god's or pastor's pose.*

11.

*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.*

12.

*I live beside the tracks, where I  
can see the trains pass through the station.  
I see the brilliant windows fly  
in floating dark and dim privation.  
Through the eternal night's negation  
just so the lit-up days rush by;  
in all the cars' illumination,  
silent, resting my elbow, I.*

(1934)



# *That Which Your Heart Disguises*

*Amit szívedbe rejtesz*

*For the eightieth birthday of Freud*

*That which your heart disguises  
open your eyes and see;  
that which your eye surmises  
let your heart wait to be.*

*Desire—and all concede it—  
kills all who are not dead.  
But happiness, you need it  
as you need daily bread.*

*Children, all of the living  
yearn for our mother's arms;  
lovemaking, or death-giving,  
to wed's to take up arms.*

*Be like the Man of Eighty,  
hunted by men with guns,  
who bleeds, but in his beauty  
still sires a million sons.*

*That old thorn, broken piercing  
your sole, is long since drawn.  
Now from your heart's releasing  
death, too, falls and is gone.*

*That which your eye surmises  
seize with your hand and will;  
that which your heart disguises  
is yours to kiss or kill.*

*(1936)*



# You Gave Me Childhood

*Gyermekké tettél*

*You gave me childhood. Thirty winters' aging  
cannot withstand you, freeze gives way to thaw.  
I can not move nor sit. All unassuaging,  
my own limbs hurl me, drag me to your door.*

*I hold you in my mouth, a dog her puppy,  
and, lest I choke, I struggle to escape.  
Each moment heaps upon me those unhappy  
years that destroyed my destiny, my hope.*

*Feed me—I hunger. Cover me—I shiver.  
Attend to me—I am a clumsy fool.  
Your absence blows through me, a draught's cold river.  
Command—and fear shall leave me, as you rule.*

*You listened, and my words gave up their ranting.  
You looked at me: I let everything fall.  
Make of me one not quite so unrelenting:  
to live and die at my own beck and call!*

*My mother beat me out of doors—I lay there—  
would crawl into myself, it was too late—  
stone step down here and emptiness away there.  
If I could sleep! I rattle on your gate.*

*Many men live as I do, dull, unfeeling,  
out of whose eyes tears nonetheless can fall.  
I love you, for without your power of healing  
I'd not have learned to love myself at all.*

(1936)



# Inventory Closed

*Kész a leltár*

*I trusted in myself from the beginning—  
If nothing's there that's worth the cost of winning,  
there's nothing left to lose. Our death's no heavier  
than that of voiceless beasts, who cease forever.  
Even in mortal fear, I kept my station—  
was born, received, found individuation.  
I paid each man according to his measure,  
loved frankly who gave freely of his pleasure.  
Woman who played with me for promised joy  
I took in good faith—let her have her toy!  
I swabbed the ship, jerked up the bucketful.  
Among sly masters, played the stupid fool.  
I sold bread, paperbacks, and toy windmills,  
newspapers, poems—whichever paid the bills.  
No field of victory, nor servile rope,  
but a soft bed will be my end, I hope.  
When, come what may, the inventory's done,  
I died of life—I'm not the only one.*

(1936)

## Welcome for Thomas Mann

*Thomas Mann üdvözlése*

*Just as a tired child when put to bed  
and tucked in snug, a stubborn sleepy-head,  
still begs "Don't go away, tell me a story"  
(lest night should fall on him in sudden fury),  
and while his little heart, congested, pants,  
and even he knows not just which he wants,  
the story, or your stay; may we prevail  
on you to sit with us and tell a tale.  
Tell us the old story, we won't forget,  
how you've been with us always, will be yet,  
how we are with you, an unparted whole,  
whose cares are worthy of a human soul.*



You know it well, the poet never lies;  
 tell the full truth, not only that which is,  
 tell of that light which flames up in our brain:  
 when we're apart, in darkness we remain.  
 As Hans Castorp through Madame Chauchat's flesh,  
 let us tonight see through ourselves afresh,  
 your words, like pillows, muffle out the din—  
 tell us the joy of beauty, and the pain,  
 lifting our hearts from mourning to desire.  
 We've laid poor Kosztolányi in the mire,  
 and on mankind, as cancer did on him,  
 horrible monster-states gnaw limb by limb,  
 and we, aghast, ask what's the next disease,  
 whence fall new wolvish ideologies,  
 what newer poison boils within our blood—  
 how long, and where, you can still read aloud? . . .  
 So. When you speak, we must not lose our flame,  
 we men should still be men in more than name,  
 and women still be women—lovely, free—  
 because true humans daily cease to be.  
 Sit down. Start our favourite story—please.  
 We'll listen; happy he who only sees  
 your face among our race of evil will,  
 to know there's one true European still.

(1937)

## For My Birthday

Születésnapomra

Upon my thirty-second year—  
 what a surprise, this poem here,  
 knicky-  
 knacky:

a little gift with which I say,  
 lurking alone in this café:  
 happy  
 happy.



*Thirty-two years just blew away,  
I never made ten doits a day:  
hungry,  
Hungary.*

*A pedagogue I might have been,  
not this pen-busting, might-have-been,  
saddie  
laddie.*

*But no; Herr College Chancellor  
showed me the outside of the door:  
mocktor  
Doktor.*

*It was a short sharp shock for sure,  
my "father" poem got its cure;  
his word  
and sword,*

*that saved the fatherland from me,  
evoked my spirit and set free  
its name  
and flame.*

*"As long as I have any say  
you'll not teach here a single day"—  
bibble-  
babble.*

*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.*

*(1937)*



# *And So I've Found My Native Country...*

*Íme, hát megleltem hazámat*

*And so I've found my native country,  
that soil the gravedigger will frame,  
where they who write the words above me  
do not for once misspell my name.*

*This black collection-box receives me  
(for no one needs me any more),  
this Iron Six that was worth twenty,  
this coin left over from the war.*

*None needs that iron ring inscripted  
with sweet words, that the world is new:  
rights, land.—Our laws are the leftovers;  
now pretty gold rings all pursue.*

*For many years I had been lonely.  
Then many people visited.  
I'd have been happy if they'd stayed.  
You are alone, was what they said.*

*And so I lived, useless and empty,  
and now I see it all quite plain.  
They let me play the fool until  
by now even my death's in vain.*

*All through my life I've tried to weather  
the whirlwind that would always blow.  
I was more sinned against than sinning,  
and it's a laugh that it was so.*

*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.*

*(1937)*



Gusztáv Molnár

# The Transylvanian Question

*In Memory of Gelu Pateanu*

*"The beati possidentes... are not likely to admit that at the moment of victory they went too far and took unfair advantage of a favourable moment, to the detriment of other nations' justified, vital interests. And yet, are there any moments in the life of nations, when such recognitions could take shape in their souls, at a time other than when it is all too late?"*

*Address by Count István Bethlen, a former Prime Minister, in London,  
30 November 1933*

*"If we had only been capable of duly appreciating the time and the opportunity in the course of that single year... we could have armed ourselves with such basic laws of primary importance as would not have failed us even in a monarchy that had committed the sin of dualism."*

*George Barit on the Transylvanian Diet of 1863–64*

## 1

A fortnight before the run-off election in Romania in November 1996, the campaign staff of the incumbent president, Ion Iliescu, in a desperate attempt to avoid a defeat similar to that the Romanian Party of Social Democracy had suffered in the first round, published two remarkable maps.<sup>1</sup> One was taken from Samuel Huntington's *The Clash of Civilisations* and showed the eastern (East European) frontiers of Western civilization; the other was a map of Romania displaying the voting figures for the first round of the presidential elections. The Romanian stretch of the frontier in the former was identical with the demarcation line of first-round election results in the latter. Everywhere in Transylvania, classified by Huntington as belonging to the West, the opposition candidate for the presidency came out on top in the first round, with the exception of Hunyad and Máramaros Counties; in contrast in the Regat, classified as belonging to Orthodox Eastern Europe, Iliescu triumphed almost everywhere.

The campaign proclamation alleged that the intention is all too obvious—to tear Transylvania out of "Romania's body"; the instrument for this "crime", which is to take the form of granting Transylvania autonomy and federalizing Romania, is none other than Emil Constantinescu, the opposition candidate.

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Budapest.



Interestingly enough, the documents in question did precisely mirror the reality. The run-off results showed that Iliescu may have won the majority of the vote in Old Romania, with 52.4 per cent of the 8.5 million valid votes; but in Transylvania the proportion of votes for the Democratic Convention candidate was so overwhelming that, in a region of much smaller voting strength, with only 4.5 million valid votes, it could counterbalance Constantinescu's defeat in the Regat (Figure 1).

Huntington's paradigm of civilizations has been criticized by many as "morally objectionable and politically dangerous".<sup>2</sup> A noted Romanian philosopher, H. R. Patapievici, who considers Huntington's central thesis "irresponsible", goes as far as calling the American scholar an apologist for religious wars. Nothing could be farther from the truth. All Huntington says is that fundamental differences between civilizations that go back to a past of thousands of years, may lead to conflicts and occasionally to war. This has now all become timely because of all civilizations, the Western one "moved out of its 'warring state' phase of development... and toward its 'universal state' phase".<sup>3</sup> Should the West, therefore, be involved in an armed conflict on its frontiers, it could only arise from a threat coming from non-Western, "barbarian" quarters, or else it shall affect the whole of the emerging Western civilizational state, and compel it to engage in self-reflection.

The problem of the position Patapievici takes on this point merely follows from his particular view of universality. "*Capitalism, physics, mathematics or the rule of law are all universal structures and may be adopted as such by anyone, whether Catholic, Orthodox, Hindu, Shintoist, Animist or Islamic,*" he writes.<sup>4</sup> He suggests that all that is needed to assert the norms of Western civilization is to act clearly and resolutely. This is a typical case of mistaking modernization for Westernization. The elite of a nation may decide on modernization and see the outcome in a couple of decades perhaps, whereas a change of civilization is feasible only after maintaining an organic relationship between the donor and the recipient civilization for several centuries. Even then the outcome is unpredictable.

Huntington illustrates the failure of efforts aimed at a total change of civilization with the examples of Russia and Turkey. Peter the Great and Kemal Ataturk created countries that were divided against themselves and uncertain of their true cultural identities.

Political leaders can make history but they cannot escape history. They produce torn countries; they do not create Western societies. They infect their country with a cultural schizophrenia which becomes its continuing and defining characteristic.<sup>5</sup>

It is too late to adopt a Western outlook and embrace Western political and legal cultures in the global period of modernization, because all the distinctive features of Western civilization developed in the centuries prior to modernization.



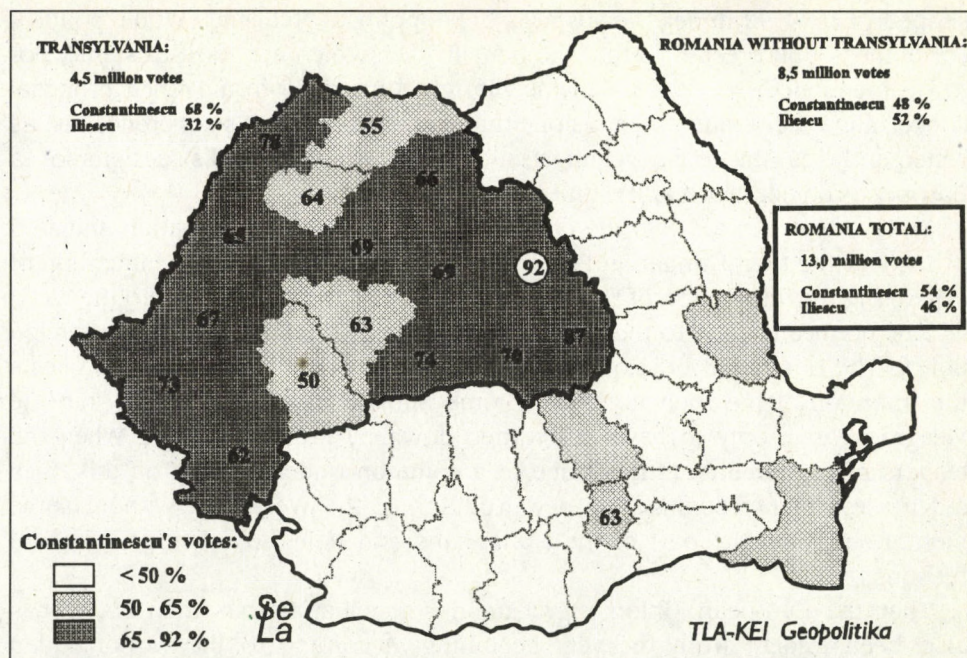


Figure 1. Final results of the Romanian presidential elections (Nov. 17, 1996.)

Huntington engages in what is called "grand geopolitics". With his elaboration of a paradigm of civilization and his firm repudiation of Western daydreams of universality, he may have succeeded in producing the most precise outline so far for an international world order in the next century. He does, however, ignore details and finer shades—frontiers within particular countries, or even smaller territorial or administrative units. These are the concern of what is called micro-geopolitics or, in the formulation of the French geopolitical school, which has pioneered in the examination of such questions, *géopolitique interne* (Yves Lacoste).

This study aims to point out the possible consequences of those "tiny" differences that appear between the borderline of a civilisation as drawn by Huntington and the frontiers of Western institutions as they are currently emerging.

At the Madrid summit of the North Atlantic Alliance and, not much later, at the Brussels headquarters of the European Commission, a selective enlargement of the Western organizations was decided upon. This has surprised many. Yet all that happened was what the leading Western powers, the United States, Germany and Britain, have always wanted. Selective NATO enlargement follows primarily from the Clinton administration's readoption in 1995–96, after the detour of a neo-Wilsonian drive for the worldwide extension of "market democracy", of the original American strategy (at least as far as its essence is concerned),



shaped in 1989–90 under the auspices of geopolitical “realism”. While ‘political correctness’ still prescribes that the new divides, which are “non-existent”, not to be mentioned in 1997 Madeleine Albright turned down a French proposal concerning wider enlargement as one that jeopardizes NATO’s coherence just as vehemently as the Bush administration rejected Mitterand’s designs of a European confederation at the time.

Today it can be said that the creation of the Visegrád co-operation, initiated in 1991 by the then Hungarian Prime Minister József Antall with the intention of expediting the integration of Hungary, Poland and Czechoslovakia into the West, was by no means alien to the post-Cold War strategic goals of American foreign policy. The Hungarian host of the first conference communicated to his guests the intention of the then Romanian Prime Minister, Petre Roman, to join the Visegrád Three, only to have this turned down by President Havel. When the leaders of the three countries came to a common understanding on this, they did no less than recognize the new frontiers of the West—not without some mental shock on the part of the Hungarians and Poles for obvious historical reasons.

That the European Union may extend somewhat farther than NATO has also been evident from the very beginning. According to the working plan *Agenda 2000*, adopted by the European Commission in Brussels, the negotiations for the enlargement due to start in 1998 will involve Estonia and Slovenia in addition to the original candidates, the Visegrád Three. This may give some hope that in the first decade of the 21st century the EU will incorporate all those countries historically part of Central Europe which belong culturally to the West.

The question is now what is going to happen to those fragmentary regions of *Mitteleuropa* that have been left outside the new eastern frontiers of the West? (Figure 2) What is going to happen to the fringe territories that historically belong to Central Europe and culturally to the West that, after decades of forced centralization by right and left-wing totalitarian regimes, are emerging more and more conspicuously, in direct proportion to the assertion of democracy, as separate from the Eastern European regions of their own states? Should they, as the new external frontier area of the EU, help bring their respective countries closer to the West, or get definitively in the failed-states area of Eastern Europe?

## 2

In the case of Belarus, an overwhelmingly Russian orientation and the lack of a sovereign national identity appear to have settled this question. In the Ukraine, there is peace—national identity embodied in a sovereign statehood seems to have created a balance between the traditional nationalism of the western part of the country, where the nation is taken as a supreme value and the etatism of the central and eastern parts, where the state has always been more appreciat-



ed. Slowly but surely, the Ukraine is advancing toward the West, without, however, burning its bridges to Russia. Though a typically Central European region, the Vojvodina's weight historically and demographically is meagre as compared to Serbia, and even more meagre against Yugoslavia as a whole, which also includes Montenegro. Although in Tito's Yugoslavia there was a local bureaucracy with some sort of distinct regional identity, the majority of the Serbs of the Vojvodina do not claim a regional identity. As different from Transylvania and the Romanian parts of the Banat, here the newly arriving waves of immigrant Serbs have assimilated the earlier arrivals as far as mentality, behavioural patterns and political culture are concerned.

What happened in Transylvania was exactly the opposite. Following the example of Budapest, Bucharest also deemed Transylvania unfit for self-government and released upon the province its "administrators and apostles" from the Regat. This not very creditable tradition was continued in the communist era by "the commissars of Balkanization", as the Transylvanian Romanian writer Alexandru Vlad called them. Their efforts, however, largely or entirely failed to affect those Romanians from the Regat who came after 1919 to settle in Transylvania in search of a better life, rather than to fulfill a "mission". They naturally targeted the two most developed regions, Southern Transylvania and the Western border region. Southern Transylvania and the Banat had benefited from strong German influences, and the western border region in the course of the 18th–19th centuries had been an organic part of the mainstream of Hungarian bourgeois development. Consequently, it took a generation or two for these newcomers to be culturally assimilated to the Transylvanian Romanians, who made up the majority in the province.

The marked cultural identity of Transylvanian Romanians, more clearly western in character than that of those from the Regat, as well as the existence of a relatively large and well organized Hungarian community which had systematically opposed post-communist Romanian nationalism, have led to a particular state of affairs. As opposed to Belarus, the Ukraine and Serbia, today's Transylvania, i.e. Transylvania in a wider sense, as that part of Romania which was part of Hungary before Trianon, as a Central European fragmentary region, may be able to play a role in Romania that is vital for the future of the whole country. It must be pointed out that by the specific cultural identity of Transylvanians—Romanians, Hungarians and, naturally, the remaining Germans—I mean primarily a given work ethic and closely related political attitudes, features that are relevant in the circumstances of mass democracy and manifest themselves at the level of a "majority" rather than the élite.

H. R. Patapievici is right to doubt that the creativity of Hungarians is more powerful in Transylvania or the Vojvodina than in Hungary; he could have said the same about Romanians in Transylvania and Bucharest. At the same time, he is sure that, *"thanks to the beneficial influence of the Austrian Empire"*, the



Romanians of Transylvania are "more reliable" than those in the Regat.<sup>6</sup> Transylvania's political creativity might be of vital importance to Romania because it has manifested itself just at a time when, following from the indifferent logic of majority democracy, the elitism of the Regat committed to Western ideals, was about to be sidetracked.

The fundamental difference between Transylvania and the rest of Romania was already conspicuous at the time of the first election in May 1990. In Transylvania, with 34 per cent of all voters, Ion Iliescu obtained 29 per cent of his total, Ion Ratiu 40, and Radu Campeanu, then believed to be an authentic opposition candidate, 66 per cent. This is a fact that some try to ignore. In his outstanding book on Romanian historical myths, Lucian Boia points out that Pavel Campeanu, in his analyses of elections between 1990–92, entirely ignores the data broken down by counties and provinces. "Nevertheless, and this is the most astonishing thing of all," the head of the Centre for Historical Studies of the University of Bucharest writes, "especially after the 1992 presidential elections, we see two distinctly separate zones emerge along the two sides of the border that had once separated Romania and the Austro-Hungarian Empire."<sup>7</sup>

In his study on the results of the 1990 and 1992 parliamentary elections and the county results of the 1992 local government election, István Székely points out that while in 1990 the opposition received over 40 per cent of the vote in only the four counties where the proportion of Hungarian population is the highest, in 1992 the counties of Bihar, Arad and Temes also joined Harghita, Kovászna, Maros and Szatmár—with over 50 per cent.<sup>8</sup>

Finally, in 1996 there was a breakthrough in those Transylvanian counties which have a clear majority of Romanians. With this it has become clear that a structural trait and an increasingly strong political trend are at work, the importance of which extends far beyond the Hungarian factor. In 1990, the "specificity" of Transylvania could be put down to the election preferences of the Hungarian block which makes up some 20 per cent of the population, and did not command a majority even within Transylvania. In 1992, a regional majority was achieved, yet it did not grow into a countrywide majority. By 1996, however, the Transylvanian vote practically decided the national results. This is not to under-rate the results achieved by the former opposition in old Romania. However, it may not be mistaken to say that these indicated disappointment with the earlier regime, rather than a positive—clear and above all enduring—option.

The Romanian intelligentsia have produced diverse responses to the Transylvanian phenomenon. Boia and Patapievici indicate, as mentioned above, that they explain it as something rooted in the specific traditions of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Emil Hurezeanu, in his commentary on the 1996 election results, also explains the conspicuous differences between the two regions on the basis of differing historical traditions. "The Central European values of the Enlightenment, the Reformation, tolerance and competition, primarily those of



the Transylvanian Romanians," he writes, "are joined in Romania by social and political forms of contemplation and passivity and belong to the values of the Orthodox eastern world." And this is not a value judgment, Hurezeanu adds very properly, but "a fact".<sup>9</sup>

Though Transylvania's otherness is obvious to almost everyone, a possible regional role was pointed out by Gabriel Andreescu alone. Should the Hungarians of Transylvania emphasize competition, multiculturalism, the maximum development of relations between the regions along the Romanian-Hungarian border, instead of fetishizing various forms of national autonomies, the chairman of the Bucharest Helsinki Committee warns in good time, "they could set in motion the bourgeois self-awareness of the whole of Transylvania." Gabriel Andreescu says that it would be a luxury, an unpardonable waste, not to make use of the advantages "of a wonderful province that deep down in its social structure still preserves the civilisational power of the Mitteleuropa of old".<sup>10</sup> Yet even he cannot go as far as to draw the institutional, let alone constitutional, consequences of this position.

In dealing with the philosophy of European unification, Andrei Marga also thinks that the turning-point of 1989 in practice released the Central East-European region from the hold of ethnic particularities and questioned the very foundations of the traditional ethnicist philosophy of history, according to which, "the road to universality leads through the cultivation of ethnic particularities". Since an intense identification with ethnicity is an inevitable feature in this region, the author argues, a change in the mechanism of identification is called for in order to avoid conflicts.<sup>11</sup> This conclusion is entirely acceptable. What is unclear to me is that once change is deemed inevitable, why should one be content with replacing the traditional clichés of ethnic identification with another ethnic identification, even though different and more agreeable, based in Marga's view, on following "exemplary achievements"?

According to the accepted liberal formula, political conflicts triggered by ethnic separation and exclusivity should and must be resolved in the higher order of the political community of the nation. We know all too well that national homogenization breeds conflicts as much as ethnic separation does. Consequently, political actions should be based on territoriality—territorial or local identity—rather than ethnicity or nationality. Nation could be conceived of also as a guise of some sort, in which the exclusive power practised by a state over its "own" territory takes on a democratic form and, through the "irresistible" force of national feeling, is made generally acceptable within the given area. Yet this spontaneous legitimization is basically as vulnerable and precarious as was that of absolutist monarchies, nor, like dynastic legitimacy, can it endure for ever.

The unlimited dominance, or sovereignty, if you like, of the state over its "own" territory today is as repulsive and hazardous as were the efforts of the



tyrannical state to retain unlimited control over bourgeois society in the 17th century. As János Apáczai Csere, studied in the Netherlands and taught at the Calvinist College first of Gyulafehérvár (Alba Iulia), then of Kolozsvár (Cluj), wrote four years after the beheading of Charles II, in 1653, "*a tyrant who knowingly and deliberately distorts all or several truths of the community of burghers... may be destroyed by legal instruments or by the force of arms.*" The inevitable conflict arose from the fact that while subjects turned into citizens and the feudal parliament of the estates, helpless *vis-à-vis* the power of the monarch, became an institution of "*the community of burghers*" functioning as a political society, some monarchs insisted on retaining the omnipotent state as a fiction of constitutional law. The rights of the state and the rights of society cannot be based on different principles: if this be the case, they are on a collision course which can only end in open or latent civil war. Either the state integrates the society or society integrates the state.

The West, as the political civilization of the state integrated by society as the coda of the whole of its modern progress, following the natural necessity and irresistible force of self-government, confronts a new collision between the territory of the state and regions demanding their own parliaments. This new collision is a *par excellence* state of civil war for the postmodern (post-nation-state) age.

As in the 17th century, the theoretical and practical solution to the problem has been found by the British. At the time of the Glorious Revolution it was the division of constitutional competencies between the monarch and Parliament; today it is devolution, the rational division of power between central and local parliaments. Devolution means that the exclusive dominance of the state territory as it is spiritualized by the "soul of the nation", is replaced by a pluralism of territories. Owing to devolution, local territories (historical provinces or regions of later origin), which are objects of state administration, will now become subjects of the state, themselves states in some sense, just as citizens/burghers became 'sovereign' in 17th-century Western Europe.

Obviously, the pluralism of territories does not mean that nation-states have to share with other nation-states the power they had earlier exercised undisturbed over "their own sovereign territories". Nor does it mean some sort of carving-up of a previously unified territorial sovereignty and the creation of new, subnational territorial entities. Even the Scottish National Party, which set the full independence of Scotland as their goal and, up to recently, sharply opposed even devolution, regard the Queen (and her lawful successors) as their monarch and not only wish to remain a member of the European Union but want to strengthen, rather than weaken, the EU's institutions.<sup>12</sup> The leading theoretician of the SNP, Neil MacCormick, speaks not out of some "atavistic" nationalism but, turning to "small statehood" within the EU and advocating rights-based liberalism, knocks down the theoretical constructs of traditional sovereignty and the nation-state.<sup>13</sup>



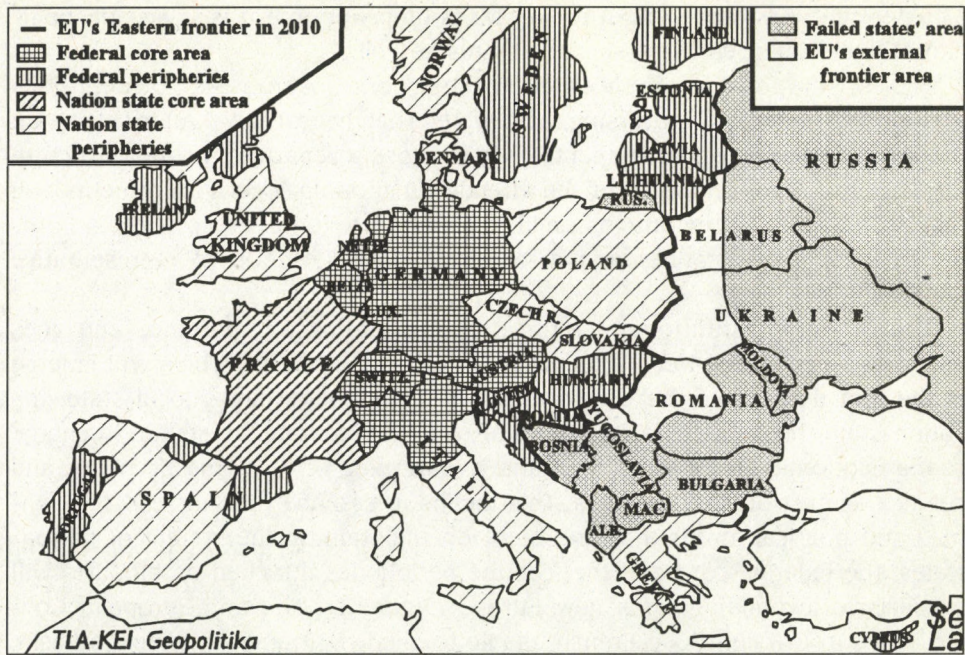


Figure 2. Europe in 2010

Margaret Thatcher, whose role in strengthening Scottish identity was considerable, says Alice Brown, Professor of Political Studies at the University of Edinburgh,<sup>14</sup> said on the relationship between the Scots and the United Kingdom:

The Scots, being an historic nation with a proud past... have an undoubted right to national self-determination; thus far they have exercised that right by joining and remaining in the Union. Should they determine on independence no English party or politician would stand in their way, however much we might regret their departure. What the Scots (nor indeed the English) cannot do, however, is to insist upon their own terms for remaining in the Union, regardless of the views of the others. If the rest of the United Kingdom does not favour devolved government, then the Scottish nation may seek to persuade the rest of us of its virtues; it may even succeed in doing so; but it cannot claim devolution as a right of nationhood inside the Union.<sup>15</sup>

By arranging for a referendum on devolution, the Labour Government made it possible for the Scots to do precisely what Margaret Thatcher, as a "quintessential English" figure, tried to avoid at any cost, namely to hold a separate referendum, thereby offering an advance, as it were, on the right to political autonomy to the Scottish nation, who make up a mere 10 per cent of the total population. The results are well known—more than 60 per cent of those eligible went to the ballot, 75 per cent of whom voted for a separate Scottish parliament and



63.5 per cent for authorizing it to levy taxes (implying that it is to accept the financial consequences of the separate status as well).<sup>16</sup>

The constitutional reform initiated by the Labour Government, however, goes even farther than that—reversing, as it were, Thatcherian logic. After setting up the Scottish and Welsh Parliaments, they propose a separate, two-tier structure for England: representatives of the already functioning local governments will first be delegated to regional assemblies which have to be set up, then, according to local circumstances and demands, a direct election of representative bodies will take place.<sup>17</sup>

The British constitutional reform is of extraordinary importance and goes ahead of a new, three-tier European constitutional structure which will emerge in the first decades of the next century. Its components are a local state, the nation-state that remains a formal frame, and the federate superstate in charge of the economic life of the Union and a warrantee of its domestic peace and defence against outside enemies. This means in essence that, instead of countries and political forces that are intent on maintaining the system of nation-states, the federate core and the federate peripheries attached on all sides will be decisive in building up a new Europe (Figure 2). The anti-European Conservatives in Britain, those French unable to shed right and left-wing Gaullism, those Italians trying to stall the introduction of federalism and, last but not least, certain Central European politicians marching under the banner of 19th-century notions of nation and sovereignty will, unsurprisingly, try their best to contain the process. The system of nation-states, however, as Ferenc Glatz, a historian and President of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, aptly observed, *"is untenable in its present form within modern integration. It will have to pass on its licenses to shape security policy and economy to international integrative structures and renounce others in favour of smaller administrative units."*<sup>18</sup>

The true difficulty lies not in the fact that many even in a united Europe are not aware of the above but that the chances are that this historic change of paradigm will only take place west of Huntington's civilizational frontier in Europe.

### 3

**A**t the end of this study, let me again raise the question what happens to those fragmentary regions in Central Europe, whose traditions, economic and cultural development enable them to carry out a change of model, but whose countries may not be capable of so doing themselves? Transylvania, for example, as a "small state", which for a long period in history had political, legal and religious institutions of its own,<sup>19</sup> has a good chance of winning for itself a constitutional status similar to that of Scotland.

Transylvania had an autonomous constitutional legal status between 1526 and 1867, i.e. for more than 340 years. During this period its Diet, whose law-



making powers were precisely defined, sat on 407 occasions. The laws that were passed under the independent principality of Transylvania were published in the volumes *Approbatæ*... (1653) and *Compilatae*... (1669).

In Moldavia and, especially, Wallachia in the same period, gatherings that could only with strong reservations be described as feudal assemblies, met very rarely. They were invariably convened by the ruler and made up of his chief followers. They had no clear competencies and their role was in practice restricted to electing a ruler and to approving to his actions. As justice was based on "the Law of God", there was no legislation. The ruling prince was the sole and supreme arbiter, the judges "merely his agents and instruments". We cannot therefore speak of regularly sitting feudal assemblies which restricted the ruler's power in any form or exercised some sort of control over it.<sup>20</sup>

There were fundamental differences between the administrative system of Transylvania and that of the two Romanian principalities, Wallachia and Moldova. This fact explains why the 1848 generation of Bucharest intellectuals and politicians postulated as their main goals a radical break with the customs and structures of past centuries and the copying of the West European model of the nation-state, while the Romanians of Transylvania followed a political strategy throughout the 19th century aimed at maintaining Transylvania's traditional autonomy as a province first within the Austrian Empire, then, after the Compromise of 1867, the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy.

A good example of this "devolution" strategy, which appears so modern to today's observer, is what George Barit, one of the most influential Transylvanian Romanian thinkers, said of the 1863-64 Diet of Nagyszeben (Sibiu, Hermannstadt) where the full equality of the three Transylvanian nations and languages, Hungarian, German, and Romanian, was declared. Though the resolutions of the Transylvanian Diet convened by the Austrian Emperor were not carried through because the Hungarians boycotted them and the Austro-Hungarian Compromise was already taking shape, these were still of vast importance to the Romanians of Transylvania. The Emperor's rescript which was read out at the opening session, Barit wrote in 1887,

would have been of no greater importance to, and no more beneficial to the future of, any other nation of the Empire than the Romanian people. The autonomy of the country is restored, our national identity acknowledged, our language raised to the rank it deserves, the union, or more precisely the merging, with Hungary annulled and, above all, *several millions of the country's revenues set aside for the purposes of an independent budget* (my italics), from which the country's three nations can, beyond covering the costs of public administration and justice, maintain as many cultural institutions as are necessary and useful, without having to humiliate themselves before other countries or diets, begging for their support. Where could we be if only in the past 24 years the Romanian nation had received just a half-million annually from the country's revenues for the purpose of establishing schools and hostels, scientific societies



and similar bodies? Let us go to Croatia and see for ourselves how far the Croats have gone on their share of the budget which they receive in accord with the agreement they have squeezed out of Hungary.<sup>21</sup>

It was not a question of principle for Barit whether the Romanians of Transylvania received their autonomy from the Emperor or the Budapest Parliament. When it was already obvious that Vienna had desisted from assimilating Hungary into the Empire and once again acknowledged the special constitutional status of the Hungarian Crown, Barit wrote an article in the 31 July 1865 issue of *Gazeta Transilvanei*, in which he took the position of Transylvania's autonomy within Hungary.

The Hungarian political élite, living under the allure of national unity, most resolutely turned against this very natural demand that arose out of the traditions of Transylvania, both at the time of the 1848–49 Revolution and between 1867 and 1918. The problem therefore was not Transylvania but the Hungarian state, clinging, as it did to a rigid centralism at all costs. Nor is the problem now Transylvania, it is a Romania that continues with the bad traditions of 19th-century Hungary.

Since the Transylvanian question is, ever since the collapse of the historical Hungarian state, no longer a Hungarian but a Romanian question, contingent on the coherence, or to put it more dramatically, the survival, of the Romanian state, the clue is in what in the near future is going to happen in, or more appropriately, to Romania.

Taking things a bit farther, we may say that Romania will either be able to grow up to Transylvania or will be adrift in a crisis zone of unsuccessful or failed states stretching from Montenegro to Siberia, dragging Transylvania with itself.

If we say that a state is successful if it continues to be operational also in the post-national period of history, as a "signal box" between the principal scenes of economy and politics, the local and the supranational; then an unsuccessful or abortive state is one that fails to latch on to the dynamic movements at work at local and supranational levels. Disregarding here a number of other aspects, from the viewpoint of constitutional law it means that a failed state does not or dares not allow more leeway to lower administrative units because it thinks, more or less by right, that this would be taking a first step towards secession of these territories. Since the inner integration of failed states is problematic (only a state certain of not losing its identity and coherence in the process can afford to grant autonomy to its administrative units in devolution), they cannot join any supranational integration structure which in turn could extend a protective net for it at a time when its own institutions inevitably decline. This is, unfortunately, a perfect catch.

While failed states are astray in the labyrinths of inner and outer integrations, one cannot help notice that the expansionist zeal of the West is losing momen-



tum. The processes that have already started will enable some Central European states to be integrated into the Western system of institutions, which is facing enormous challenges from within. But it is futile to dream of a series of new circles and waves of enlargement. Huntington's latest study is remarkable in this respect—since we started with him, why not end by citing him again? The same author who in past years considered a NATO enlarged with the Visegrád Three as vital for the coherence of the West, now warns of threats to the coherence of the United States and proposes the urgent shaping of an American foreign policy serving the national interest.<sup>22</sup>

The selective enlargement of NATO is only possible because it fits in with both the strengthening of the European positions of the US and the internationalist sense of calling the Clinton administration has nurtured. Those wishing to join after 1999 cannot expect another fortunate coincidence like this.

Wedged between two zones of failed states, the post-Yugoslav and the post-Russian, Romania is running out of time. What can it do if, in its long-term interests, it wishes to proceed along the path of integration but the West ignores, certainly in the coming years, its overtures?

Resorting to aggressive centralism directed against Transylvania and, with this, the economic and political positions of the Hungarians, no matter how loudly this is demanded by the new Romanian leftist-nationalist opposition, would be an all too risky undertaking. Such a move might destroy the long-term prospects for the country's integration, and raise a question mark over the outcome of one hundred and fifty years of the modernization process; it may also jeopardize the integration of parts of the country with differing traditions. In less developed Moldavia there is already a political movement taking shape, a regionalism feeding on frustration and disappointment with Bucharest. Transylvania may easily decide to follow suit if it wants to preserve its status as a region whose economy and civilization is more developed.

Such processes that pose genuine threats to the stability and integrity of the country must be preempted. Any anti-regionalist hysteria can only aggravate the situation. A new etatist chauvinism may destroy all compromises. In order to avoid this, the powers interested in Western integration and the democratization of Romania shall have to consider reorganizing the country on a federate basis, or at least offering Transylvania, together with other regions that may claim it, the opportunity for devolution. ■



## NOTES

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- 4 ■ H. R. Patapievici: *Politice* (Political Writings). Bucharest, Humanitas, 2nd ed., 1997, p. 239.
- 5 ■ Samuel P. Huntington: Op. cit. p. 154.
- 6 ■ H. R. Patapievici: Op. cit. 299.
- 7 ■ Lucian Boia: *Istorie și mit în conștiința românească* (*History and Myth in the Romanian Conscience*). Bucharest, Humanitas, 1997, p. 164.
- 8 ■ Cf. Székely, István: "Választottunk..." (We Have Cast Our Votes...). *Magyar Kisebbség*, 1966, Nos. 1–2, pp. 15–70, Figs. 6 and 9.
- 9 ■ Emil Hurezeanu: "Cine a câștigat alegerile?" (Who has Won the Elections?). 22, 1966, No. 49, December, 4–10.
- 10 ■ Gabriel Andreescu: "Privirile, indreptate spre Republica Moldova ori spre Ungaria?" (Shall We Look to the Republic of Moldavia or Hungary?) In: *Naționaliști, antinaționaliști... O polemică în publicistica românească* (Nationalists, anti-nationalists... Polemic in Romanian Journalism). Iasi, 1966, p. 23.
- 11 ■ Andrei Marga: *Filosofia unificării europene* (The Philosophy of European Unification). 2nd enlarged ed., Cluj, 1997, p. 338.
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- 13 ■ Neil MacCormick: "What Place for Nationalism in the Modern World?" *The Hume Papers on Public Policy*. Spring 1994, 79, pp. 94–95. Also by him: "Sovereignty: Myth and Reality". *Scottish Affairs*, Spring 1995, pp. 1–13. For the debate on sovereignty organised by the Korridor Centre for Political Studies, Budapest, see: *A szuverenitás káprázata* (The Illusion of Sovereignty). Budapest, 1966.
- 14 ■ "L'identité écossaise s'est affirmée durant les années Thatcher." *La Croix*, 12 September 1997.
- 15 ■ Margaret Thatcher: *The Downing Street Years*. New York, 1995, p. 624.
- 16 ■ The White Paper on Scotland's Parliament published by the Labour Government in summer 1997 provides a summary of the law-making powers of the Scottish Parliament and the new constitutional relationship between Scotland and the United Kingdom.
- 17 ■ Cf. Colin Mellors, University of Bradford, UK: "Prospects for Regionalism: an English Perspective". Paper presented to the seminar "Regionalism, Integration and Sovereignty". Hungary, Kőszeg, 22 March 1997.
- 18 ■ Ferenc Glatz: "A hatalmi államtól a szolgáltató államig" (From the Power State to the Serving State). *Népszabadság*, 19 August 1997.
- 19 ■ For small states, with especial regard to Central European historical aspects, see Kosáry, Domokos: "Az európai kis államok típusai" (Types of Small States in Europe). In: *A történelem veszedelmei. Írások Európáról és Magyarországról* (The Perils of History. Writings on Europe and Hungary). Budapest, 1987, pp. 451–483.
- 20 ■ Cf. Valentin Al. Georgescu: *Bizanțul și instituțiile românești până la mijlocul secolului al XVIII-lea* (Byzantium and Romanian Institutions up to Mid-18th Century). Bucharest, 1980, pp. 248–253; Valentin Al. Georgescu–Emanuela Popescu-Mihut: *L'organisation d'État de la Valachie. 1765–1782*. Bucharest, 1989, p. 63.
- 21 ■ George Bariț: *Părți alese din Istoria Transilvaniei. Pe două sute de ani în urma* (Excerpts from the History of Transylvania in the Last 200 Years). 2nd ed., Vol. 3, Brașov, 1995, p. 266.
- 22 ■ Cf. Samuel P. Huntington: "The Erosion of American National Interests". *Foreign Affairs*, September–October 1997, pp. 28–49.



Ádám Bodor  
The Sinistra District  
Three stories

## Colonel Borcan's Umbrella

**T**wo weeks before he died, Colonel Borcan took me with him on reconnaissance to one of the barren heights in the Dobrin forest sector. Keep your eyes peeled, he said, especially on the rowans in the roadside scrub, to see if the waxwing has yet arrived. It was mid-autumn, and the brush was buzzing with unfamiliar sounds.

Such patrols by the forest commissioner consisted of a visit each morning to the bear farm, where he sized up the livestock, and on the way home, ambling along some mountain ridge and taking in the overpowering silence of the preserve, the babbling of brooks from deep in the valleys below, he would formulate a report on what he had seen. Now, however, making his way along all but impassable tracks by following markers left by the mountain infantrymen, he was headed straight for a secret vista. Word had it that the waxwings had indeed arrived, and in their tracks, so too had the fever that visited this forested region each winter, that which, in the Sinistra district, who knows why, was called the Tungusic flu.

Up top a rest area made of rocks and insulated with moss awaited Colonel Borcan, who, on nearing this destination, dropped his leather umbrella, the sort used by the mountain infantry, on the grass, loosened his greatcoat, and in no time found himself a comfortable spot. He removed his cap, too, anchoring it by tossing on a few rocks mottled with lichen, and then, bare-headed, as it were, his hair waving like a flag in the wind, earlobes quivering, he stared for hours on end through his binoculars toward the eastern horizon.

The crag which jutted out just so above the pines was part of the crest

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*A collection of stories, The Euphrates at Babylon, was published in Britain by Polygon in 1991. The three interconnected stories we publish here are from his 1992 book Sinistra körzet (The Sinistra District).*



of Pop Ivan, from where one could see far across the border, to the blue ranges that came one after another in the Ruthenian forest country. Dark smoke rose from somewhere behind the furthest hills, maybe as far off as the open country, and a purple curtain draped the sky to the east, as if night were already coming on. The faraway colours faded with the rising of the sun, and by the time the valley filled with the opal lights of afternoon, the forest commissioner put away his binoculars and picked up his hat, indicating that the reconnaissance had come to an end.

Now, whether he had indeed caught a glimpse of that which he sought on the slopes across the way, of the waxwing or some other sign of the Tungusic flu approaching from bush to bush, this was to forever remain his secret; nor did I ever figure out why he had taken me along that day, a simple harvester of wild fruits, stranger that I was, to the Ukrainian border.

On the way home, once we were well on our way down, he asked if I'd seen a waxwing. Well, I said, it seems I did, two, maybe three—whereupon Colonel Borcan replied that he would then put in an order for the inoculations.

We were already near the barracks when he again dropped his umbrella on the grass (now, the colonel was the only member of the mountain infantry who roamed those dank forests both summer and winter with an umbrella under his arm) and he once more removed the binoculars from their case. The stranger they called the red rooster happened just then to be crossing the faded autumn meadow beyond the stream. His feet hardly touching the ground, he swaggered along the ridge which divided the forest from the meadow, and his red hair and beard seemed practically ablaze against the black pines. Colonel Borcan followed the red rooster with his binoculars until he disappeared into a swarm of birch leaves, glistening yellow, they were, those leaves. Then he spoke to me, in a hushed, almost intimate tone.

"Say, Andrei, by any chance, wasn't a small package mistakenly left with you of late?" Noticing that I barely understood what he was getting at, for I was gazing at him dumbly indeed, he added, "A little something, that's all, for me. For example, a freshly caught fish."

Although the question was strange, all right, and so too, was the way he seemed to lose heart when I replied that I had no package for him, no doubt I would have forgotten the entire matter. Except not long after, that stranger, the red rooster, called on me at the fruit depot. A plastic bag all fogged up inside swung from his hand, and sparkling at the bottom of this bag in a little water, was a fish, which would rightly have been the forest commissioner's. By that time, however, Colonel Borcan was no longer alive.

**T**he residents of Sinistra mostly have dark brown or black hair, blondes being rare indeed, and redheads nowhere to be found. Well, there was one exception, so far as redheads were concerned: Bebe Tescovina, the young daughter of



the canteen manager. Everyone thereabouts knew Bebe for her hair, which, orange-red, like rowan berries, shone pretty far. So it was that, when a redhead showed up, as dying your hair wasn't the style in those parts, everyone knew at once that it could only be a stranger passing through.

The red rooster seemed to be a simple rambler, cutting across the slopes as he did with easy steps, his hair and beard suddenly alighting here and there against the black pine forest like a burning bush chock full of rosehips. What's more, he arrived in mid-autumn, when the hips turn ripe under the bite of the early frosts: one morning the tracks of his foreign-made rubber boots loomed on the rimy trails.

He was a slight, wispy fellow who spoke Ukrainian, Romanian, Hungarian, and even Zips, a German dialect of the region, but none of them well. Most probably, he didn't have a decent command of a single language spoken in these parts. Even his way of walking, a self-assured swagger, just wasn't the way people around there walked. Besides which, he spent all his time outside, as if to convince those who saw him that he rambled along the Sinistra river for no other reason but to gaze in awe at the mist-shrouded mountaintops.

In the vicinity of Dobrin, where this stranger paid his respects almost every day, the Sinistra branched off into various smaller streams, and steep valleys cut deeply into the ascending face of Pop Ivan. Winding their way along the water-worn ravines up to the rocky ridge were steel rods wrapped in barbed wire, concrete posts, watchtowers, and trap-filled gullies. The border ran along the watershed atop the mountain. The network of fences, ditches, and other obstacles opened only a crack, in a drafty mountain pass where an old dirt road somersaulted into the hills on the other side, which were bathed in the foreign lights of the north.

The road at that point was blocked off by a blue and yellow lifting gate, beside which stood a little guardhouse and a threadbare camp tent full of shivering soldiers. This was the only operating border station in the Sinistra district, and even here the gate was raised just once a week, for a few hours each Thursday morning. The duty soldiers marked the occasion by switching sides, nosing about each other's side of the border in the name of brotherhood in arms. Meanwhile, those two or three civilian vehicles which had a permit from the regional authorities to travel the route would then cross the border.

The redheaded rambler, whose hair, dress, and unconcerned, stately posture gave him away as a foreigner even at a distance, nonetheless did not first show up on a Thursday, but on a Saturday. Masons dismantling the forest chapel came upon his tracks one morning; and in the afternoon, Géza Kőkény, a night watchman, who spent his insomniac days in a watchtower at the edge of the village, spotted the stranger, descending the slopes of Pop Ivan. Like the wind, the redheaded fellow seemed to walk freely about the hedgerows and the barbed wire entanglements. Down below he was asked on several occasions for identifi-



cation, but the infantrymen always found his papers in order, although they were presumably forged.

He wore brown rubber boots and a grey felt jacket of the sort worn on the other side of Pop Ivan, with many green corduroy patches; and he was hatless, which is to say that his narrow-brimmed hat, ornamented with kestrel falcon feathers, dangled on his back from a long band. Fluttering from the top of his head was a crest of red hair, and a rakish beard, parted down the middle, ornamented his chin.

From the very start, on glimpsing the fellow, the night watchman who was on the lookout also by day, dubbed him the red rooster, and sure enough, since no one knew his name, this simple but telling appellation stuck. A mottled calfskin knapsack ornamented with metal fittings and brass clasps hung from his shoulder, a translucent plastic bag swung from his right hand, and wriggling about inside this bag, like some silver-bellied fish, was a shiny platter. Sometimes he would approach those at work in forest or field and offer it for sale, surely he must have known that folks hereabouts weren't given to using platters. For a while everyone was taking guesses at just what in fact the fellow was up to: prying about to ascertain the purchasing bent of the locals, was he? Or just how friendly they were? The mountain infantrymen hassled him for a day and a half or so asking again and again to see his papers, but then, it seems, they were told to let up; and indeed, afterward they didn't as much as give him a second look. After all, no one with such a resplendent appearance, for all they might try, could possibly hire themselves out as an agent or spy.

The lower reaches of forest were tinged pearl-grey with hoarfrost each morning, or sheathed by a film of passing nighttime snow, so the tracks which generally passed from Pop Ivan toward Dobrin were visible from even far away on the downy hills. The stranger was sometimes accompanied in his wanderings by a whole flock of waxwings. This bird moves into the valleys of the Sinistra just before the numbing winter winds from the north. Meandering about on the faded meadows with the birds swirling above his head, the stranger, it seemed, had not come from the Ukraine at all, but had wound up on the domestic landscape straight out of some old picture book.

The waxwing, by the way, was not well liked around there. The locals chased them away with stones, and those really on the ball simply spat on them; for it was believed that where these birds appeared in flocks, they would be followed in short order by the Tungusic flu, the very fever that, in the end, did for Colonel Borcan as well.

The colonel, poor man, looked me up again—something he didn't do too often—only days before his death, and, practically begging, grilled me once more about that certain package.

"Say, Andrei, be honest, now. Didn't anyone leave a plastic bag at your place? There's a fish inside, nothing else. It's okay if you ate it, but tell me, at least."



Although I swore I was telling the truth, he left with a brooding look of suspicion and resentment, and we never did meet again. Before long Nikifor Teskovina, the canteen manager in the nature preserve, spread the news that the forest commissioner had disappeared. Bear wardens and colonels alike drank in the canteen, so he knew everything there was to know. So it was Nikifor Teskovina, once again, who soon announced that Colonel Borcan had been found, feet up, on a bare mountaintop—unfortunately not in time, for a bird had already built a nest in the colonel's gaping mouth. Later, someone nailed the corpse to the ground (some poacher dressed in mountain infantry uniform, no doubt) by thrusting bayonets through the hand and securing the legs amongst the rocks with bands, to keep the griffins from tearing away his flesh.

**T**he red rooster looked me up afterward at what was then my workplace, the fruit depot, where cranberries, mulberries and mushrooms were my business. What's more, I even lived there, in the storage building—in one of its chambers, that is, amongst tubs, buckets, and fragrant barrels. I recall the incident quite well, for it was the same day a new fruit gatherer, Elvira Spiridon, came by with her load. The wife of Severin Spiridon, who lived in the mountains, Elvira (there's no harm in adding that, later on, she became my lover) introduced herself with a basket full of blackberries and a satchel of lepiota mushrooms.

A few hundred bears were held at the Dobrin nature preserve, and, as they just loved lepiotas and blackberries, their feed was supplied from the fruit depot I managed.

I noticed that Elvira Spiridon—a fidgety, trembling tendril, a fiery snake, and a red-hot titmouse all in one—was now limping on one foot. Suddenly I found myself thinking, if only a thorn had passed into the sole of that foot, why, it would be my job to remove it. Well, it may have been a ridiculous wish all right, but Heaven heard it. While I emptied the basket of blackberries into a barrel and spread about the mushroom caps on a sieve, Elvira Spiridon sat on the threshold and, the bronze loops of her enormous earrings flashing about, to my delight she set about wresting the sandal strap from her ankle. I didn't hesitate a bit, but knelt down before her, placed her foot in my lap and, with my very own hands, unwrapped the white, felt rag she used for a sock. Her stubby little foot was still brown from the stacking of hay that summer, and a purple web of veins spilled fragrantly over the surface. Her sole, like that of someone who always tiptoes, was almost pink, a tad soft and damp; and what's more, skulking inside was not a thorn at all, but a silvery golden thistle. Naturally I picked it out with my teeth, then, allowing it to glitter for a moment on the tip of my fingernail, I spat on it before tucking it under my shirt. Meanwhile, I clutched Elvira Spiridon's foot in my hand, and if someone were to have glimpsed the scene, they would have figured I was just then introducing myself to her.



Sure enough, this someone really was lounging about nearby. Suddenly, without even a rustle, a silhouette complete with coloured edges appeared before the threshold, that of the red rooster. Of course, it couldn't have been anyone else but him: mounts and clasps gleamed blindingly from the broad strap that passed over his chest and from the leather knapsack on his waist. In his right hand was a plastic bag, meanwhile, and wriggling about in a bit of murky water inside this bag, like a platter, was a silver-bellied fish.

"Listen up, Andrei," he said, addressing me without further adieu by my first name. "This take you to Colonel Borcan. Until the sun sets."

"Certainly," I agreed, embarrassed by the proximity of Elvira Spiridon. "Go ahead and put it down over there."

By then Colonel Borcan was no longer alive, but then again, this wasn't exactly the stranger's business. I threw the plastic bag, with the fish inside, into an empty barrel, and after the stranger left I hurried after Elvira Spiridon, who, glittering earrings and all, faded away in fright into the marshy meadow with one foot still bare, the sandal dangling in her hand. My compliments fled one by one past her ears to no avail—she, too, it seemed, had lost heart at the meeting with the red rooster.

Back then I happened to be wooing that old battle-horse, Aranka Westin. So far as I could tell from subtle cues, she, too, was not exactly indifferent to me, and I got to fantasizing that one night while her boyfriend, the barber with whom she lived, was making the rounds of the rooms at the barracks, cutting the hair of the mountain infantrymen, Aranka Westin would run out of the village in a flimsy nightshirt or, perhaps, completely unclothed, and make her way along the backwater straight to the fruit depot, where I lived alone. She, too, worked for the mountain infantry as a seamstress, so in the world of reality, sometimes even late in the day, I'd call on her using frayed collars or dangling buttons as a pretext.

This is what happened after the red rooster's visit, too. I'd woken at night to the sound of wild geese, which, being autumn, had been driven toward the Sinistra peaks by the smoke that covered the open country to the east. The frosty nights, dead silent, were filled with the cackling of the passing birds, so that these choked squeals, not unlike the occasional sound of the gate keeper's clarinet, wormed their way down chimneys and rummaged about in ash-laden stoves till the crack of dawn. So it was that this mewling, which indeed grated one's nerves, invariably awoke me to my solitude, and to thoughts of Aranka Westin.

Deep inside the village yards, behind the grating of leaveless plum trees, light still issued from behind Aranka Westin's window. I tore a button off my jacket and, stealthily passing over a few fences, before long I tapped on her window. She reached out for the jacket and, while stitching, she asked, "What the hell was that red stranger doing up by you?"



"You mean the rooster? Oh, I don't even remember—nothing, I think. He only asked if I might be able to recommend a good privy."

"Now, now, Andrei, don't you get mixed up in something. Everyone knows he left a plastic bag with you. There's a silver platter inside, real nice."

The matter irritated me so much that, on my way back home to the fruit depot, I took the fish, which was still busily struggling in that barrel, to the outhouse at the far end of the yard and dropped it in the pit of the latrine. I wanted to keep my mouth shut about the whole thing, not to mention about the red rooster's visit. No, I had no wish to wind up in dirty business and, in the end, be banned from the area as a result. Years before I'd secretly learned that my adopted son, Béla Bundasian, was living in internal exile on a nature preserve not too far away, so I went up there looking for him. Hoping to pick up his scent, I'd hired myself out as a fruit collector. It would have been a shame to let down my guard now and ruin all I'd managed to attain—why, I'd already gotten to the level of harvest coordinator at the depot.

Something was up, indeed: at dawn the following day the red rooster looked me up once more. He was unkempt, mud-stained up to his thighs, his hair was matted, and the rest of him, too, was bathed in sweat as he made his way hastily across the meadow, which was overgrown with weeds and grass. Why, his hair didn't even look fiery, not now; instead, his skin, not to mention the tips of his nose and ears, glowed, flared, with both terror and rage.

"For Christ's sake, Andrei," he hissed, "why didn't you tell me Colonel Borcan was dead?"

Why, indeed. I shrugged: because.

He was looking for the fish, and as soon as he realized that I hadn't eaten the thing, and where it could now be found, he ran off to scoop it out of the faeces. He scrubbed it clean in the stream, wrapped it in a burdock leaf, tucked it into his mottled calfskin knapsack, and left. The red rooster disappeared forever from Dobrin.

**A** new forest commissioner, Izolda Mavrodin, arrived to replace Colonel Borcan as commander of the mountain infantry. My life too changed somewhat. One blustery spring day, I, too, disappeared.

**M**any years later, a Greek passport in my pocket, I rolled about the roads of the Sinistra district in my sparkling new, four-wheel drive, metallic green Suzuki jeep and spent a day, just a day, in Dobrin. I arrived via Baba Rotunda Pass, figuring I'd take a look at how my one-time lover, Elvira Spiridon, was getting on in those fields of thyme, or more precisely, on the upper floor of the log building where she'd lived with her husband, Severin Spiridon, in a roadside clearing. But there was no longer a thing where their lot had once been, just a heap of dark blue cinders drenched with rain and ice. Delicate young blades of



grass, along with fresh sprouts of nettle and saffron, encircled the spot where the house had once been. Almost certainly, their grave.

It was late afternoon, and the cloud of woe, a heavy, orange-red cumulus bank, lit up the eastern horizon. Lately such distant passing clouds, ornamented with towers and splendid creamy puffs, submerging into the purple veil of the coming night, reminded me of the past and so saddened me. I left the jeep by the side of the road and, crestfallen, walked by a few familiar nooks and crannies along the edge of the forest.

Winding through the clearing before me were two close-fitting parallel bands—of ice or, who was to say, maybe glass?—glimmering in the reflection of the clouds. Yes, my own old ski tracks wound their way over the incandescent spring grass far away into the darkness of the forest, engraved in the ground, left over from the final winter I'd spent precisely there, years ago, in the pass. Those who've skied through a forest know well that if you pass over your own tracks a few times, the snow gets packed down underneath, sometimes melts just a little, then freezes over and over. Even if such a double track should melt, the silky ribbon, rendered so by silvery lights, fades entirely only by early summer. Some, though, never do.

**T**hat last winter I skied every day toward the meandering subterranean streams of the Kolinda forest, which break the surface here and there. A few unauthorized recluses hid from the mountain infantry in dank underground lairs and caves; they were unwilling to emerge, neither when called upon nor when begged to do so. At first they had me set them traps, iron traps; then, in the end, we simply filled up the entrances with cement. So it was that for weeks I skied about the area with sacks of cement on my back, always on the same tracks. Cement is heavy, mind you, and under my weight the snow petrified into diamond.

**I**'d already become lost in reveries over my old life when, nearby, I found two parched red wigs hanging from a pine branch, swinging to and fro in the wind, bursting afire in the light of the cloud of woe. Skewering them with a twig, I examined the wigs from close-up as well: one was for a head of hair, and the other, judging by its form, for a beard. In a dark nook of the clearing lay a young man, stretched out on last year's slimy fallen leaves, snoring loudly in his dreams as vibrant flies buzzed about him. On his side was a mottled calf-skin knapsack; beside him, an empty bottle, tipped over. He closely resembled someone. I hurried away.

As a foreigner, after registering I took out a room in the Dobrin lodge, but once darkness came on—in the meantime, of course, I'd had a drop or two—I sneaked outside and spent the night with my former girlfriend, Aranka Westin. It was she who then filled me in on Colonel Borcan, who, after his death, had been



sentenced to death. The Polish borderguard colonel and he were cronies, and they must have come a cropper over something: the Pole always smuggled his messages, if not real dollars, to Colonel Bórcan in the belly of a fish.

I didn't want to hear another thing about the affair.

Being an essential part of the story, however, it should be mentioned that, although no little time had passed by both of us, under the cover of night we rubbed knuckles once again, so to speak. There I was lolling beside her, feeling my pulse, and I'd almost begun musing over whether I might be able to stay near her at least another day, when a distant caterwaul, a clarinet-like honking encroached from high up in the sky: the wild geese had announced their presence in the clouds above Dobrin. They'd become regulars, it seemed. As could be heard unmistakably through the nighttime silence, they were coming from the south, from the Kolinda forest, and on arriving above Dobrin, they'd turned suddenly north, toward Pop Ivan. I felt them to the tips of my little fingers, I did: there's not a sound more disquieting than theirs.

So when the mountain infantry came to fetch me around dawn, announcing that since I'd secretly left my designated lodgings they would revoke my residence permit and ban me forever from the Sinistra district, I'd long been alert, waiting for morning, so that I could finally be done with the place.

## Andrei's Dog Tag

One spring day I arrived by bicycle on Baba Rotunda Pass, and it was from there that I first glimpsed those imposing peaks at the foot of which I would later all but forget my life up to that point. The Sinistra basin reposed before me with its long, sharp shadows in the orange light of afternoon. Stands of willow and thinly scattered rows of houses loomed intermittently along the bends of the river at the bottom of the valley; shingled roofs glistened on distant, sun-bathed slopes; and furthest away, the icy peaks of Pop Ivan and Dobrin shimmered above black, forested collars of pine. Behind them, the icy green, foreign, northern sky.

There were no more roads from there. The nature reserve in whose vicinity I planned to lay low was presumably under the steep walls opposite. Somewhere deep in that wilderness lived Béla Bundasian, my adopted son. For years now, I'd been searching for him.

The main road, once it wound its way down from the pass, followed the railroad embankment for a while, then the double track suddenly disappeared into a tunnel, at whose entrance the watchman was playing his clarinet. Further on, toward the village, the embankment once again ran up alongside the road, and before long a local, narrow-gauge railway found its way there, too. Bicycling



along, I arrived at the terminal of the Sinistra branch railway almost simultaneously with the train.

A shabby, one-story building stood by the end of the tracks. Hanging from the eaves was a painted wooden board featuring the name of the village, Dobrin. That was not all: someone had painted the following, with mud, on the wall directly below: City. It was spring, towards evening, when I arrived in Dobrin City.

Having propped my bike up against a railing, I waited for the mass of silent travellers, some in rubber boots, others wearing sandals, to pass by, figuring if someone seemed agreeable, I'd strike up a conversation. It was my first time in Dobrin.

Smoke stirred above the station, wood smoke, for the trains in these parts were wood-fuelled, and a few clouds even crept upward along the main street as if pulled along by the passengers now walking home. Leaning against the wall of the loading platform across the street was an olive-brown man who, blinking incessantly, eyed the openings that formed in the departing crowd. He wore a sleeveless, dirty white vest, stained army trousers, and sandals on his otherwise bare feet. I had no intent to greet him, but once the travellers had dispersed, he jumped off the ramp and ran directly over to me across the now empty space.

"I see," he said in a soft, oily voice, "you're looking for a place to stay."

"Something like that."

"Because I know a place."

This is how I met Nikifor Tescovina. His name was apparent from the start, as he wore it on a little tin plate dangling prominently on a chain about his neck. For his part, not only wasn't he interested in my name, but he fended off a handshake as well. Let's not force the issue of just who you are, he said, until Colonel Borcan calls on you in person. Yes, he added, the forest commissioner would decide on a name for me, among other things; for he commands the mountain infantry in Dobrin.

"And if you hadn't noticed, people here don't get about on bikes. You won't need it anymore either. Leave it here, someone will take it."

He was always one step ahead of me as we ambled through the village, which stretched out over the bottom of the valley. Sometimes he walked into a puddle to wash off the dust that got into the sandals around his bare feet. Summer had already arrived, the way he saw things, and yet hardly had the sun disappeared for the day behind the peaks to the west, and the puddles were encircled by a cuticle of ice. A cool evening breeze punctuated with the odor of pine buds blew off a narrow, weasel-shaped patch of snow glistening on the steep mountainside above the village, swinging to and fro the cut lines dangling from the electric poles along the main street in Dobrin City.

"Everything around here is the domain of the mountain infantry," Nikifor Tescovina explained in his soft, oily voice. "Same goes for the place where you'll live. Around here, they take care of the people."



"Up till now I saw them only in pictures," I replied, as softly as possible, "but I've heard the mountain infantrymen are decent, proper folk."

"Indeed they are. And make sure to tell them you lost your papers. Colonel Puiu Borcan will pretend as if he believes it, too."

"Come to think of it, my papers," I said with a start. "I stashed them in the frame of my bike, under the seat. I wouldn't mind going back to get them."

"Oh, leave it be. Your bike's gone by now, anyway. Forget they ever existed."

A dwarf sat beside the stream, which passed under a covered wooden bridge in white torrents toward the end of the village. He was soaking his feet. Before long, Nikifor Tescovina left the road into an alley that soon narrowed into a track and, making its way along the backwater, whose banks were all soggy and overgrown with weeds, passed between the village yards to a meadow. Looming at the far end of this meadow, beside a few pines, willows and black alders, was a building with a dented roof and made of coloured stones. From the looks of things it used to be a water mill, but the stream or the river had veered away, leaving it alone on the meadow. Birds nested in the broken windows as nightfall shimmered on the cracks of the shingled roof, like colour blades, they were, those cracks. The one-time furnishings—axles, grindstones, and the like—had been removed, and the meadow's evening fragrance now blew gently through huge, gaping holes in the wall.

Nikifor Tescovina passed through the hollow space between those walls straight to the first floor and stopped before a wide open, rickety door. Looming in a corner of the room beyond, which seemed to have been a storage area of sorts, a tool repository perhaps, was a berth of freshly torn pine branches.

"This," said Nikifor Tescovina, "is the place where you can lay low. No one's going to ask you a thing."

"How did you know I was coming?"

"Ever since you set foot in the Sinistra district Colonel Borcan has known of your every move. This region draws people like you. Those who follow the Sinistra upstream don't stop till they reach Dobrin."

"Whew, that's good to hear. So the colonel also knows I'm just a simple wayfarer."

"Of course he knows. By the way, simple wayfarer, what's it you aim to do? You seem like a versatile fellow."

"Well, I'm at home in the forest and know my trees, not to mention bushes. Let's say I know a thing or two about mushrooms and fruit: I've worked at food markets before. If need be, I can work at a timber yard or even as a bark stripper. Why, if it comes down to it I could even set traps."

"Doesn't sound bad. I'll speak with the colonel. But until he comes by in person, please don't leave this place. Don't even step outside, I mean."

"And if nature calls, if my digestion moves me, where might you allow me to go?"



"Best you just stick your backside out the window."

Nikifor Tescovina waved good-bye by putting a palm to his forehead. By the time he reached the far end of the meadow, where the village fences began, dusk had already swallowed him up. Leaning on the damaged window sill, I continued looking in his direction until an owl flew outside from behind me, with a great swishing of wings.

Days passed before Nikifor Tescovina deigned to show himself once more. Each morning I found a small bag hanging on the entrance bolt, and inside it there was always a bottle of water, a few congealed, boiled potatoes; onions, a handful of prunes, and a few hazelnuts. Those days of boiled potatoes and of prunes fused quickly together, as surely as the mist that passed fleetingly over the meadow; and from that point on, for a long while I had no idea whether it was Monday, Wednesday, or Saturday. The passing of time was signalled by the changing shape of the patches of snow on the mountainside above Dobrin.

One morning, though, there he was again, Nikifor Tescovina, seated on the threshold beside the dangling bag.

"I'm glad to see you've been sleeping so well," he said. "I've come by often enough, true, but let you be. Let the man get his rest, I thought. Meanwhile, though, Colonel Puiu Borcan and I got to talking about you."

"You don't mean to say he has time to deal with me?"

"Why, of course. He's the forest commissioner up here in Dobrin, right? He wants to see you, so he's going to come by soon. From the look of things, you can stay."

"If you've really settled things, I'll repay you someday. I'd like to make a successful go of it. And something tells me this is where my life is going to come full circle."

"That could well be. Colonel Borcan likes your line of thought. He reckons if you were serious in proposing to deal with wild fruit, something could be worked out. The gathered fruit could be stored in barrels and tubs here at the mill."

"My thoughts exactly."

"And you could sleep well meanwhile. The scent of the fermenting fruit will be a soporific."

"Why then, I'd be curious to know how the area is when it comes to mulberries. I was thinking mainly about cranberries and mulberries, you know."

"Hm, I'm not quite sure. And the truth be told, it all depends on the bears as well, what they want. They're going to eat what you harvest. They keep a hundred, maybe a hundred and fifty, in the reserve. Yet another reason Colonel Borcan liked your idea."

All day long I leaned out the window, gazing at mountain peaks which seemed by turns headstrong, by turns capricious, and all the while I waited for Colonel Borcan to show up. But for weeks on end only shadows—flocks of crows, clouds—made their way across the meadow that stretched far between



Dobrin City and the Sinistra river. Spring rains came from the west, from the Sinistra, and the clouds, colliding with the steep walls of Mount Dobrin, rambled about for days amidst the icy summits. Light clouds would occasionally descend on the peaks from all sides, assuming the shape of the mountain range like a veil draped over a sculpture. When they lifted after several days, there stood Mount Dobrin once more, glistening white, while spring had taken hold all around. When Nikifor Tescovina arrived by chance toward night with the daily bag of food, we would sit on the tepid threshold amidst the scent of ivy rising from the backwater near the river.

"As you can see, you enjoy our complete confidence," Nikifor Tescovina kept saying. "Just you see, hardly anyone will ask where you came from. And don't you go telling anyone, either. If someone takes to badgering you with questions anyway, why then, lie."

"Hm. That's the way it will be. I'll get into the swing of things, I trust. Why, I'll say something different to everyone."

"Ah yes, you're getting to know the ropes. As for your name, forget it, just like that. I mean, if you so much as hear your name hissing somewhere nearby, don't even give a start. React to everything with a straight face, you hear."

A thick, opaque darkness descended on Dobrin after sunset, so that above the black contour of the houses light could be seen only in the distant windows of the barracks. Signals of light occasionally flashed from the watchtowers of the mountain infantry. Thunderbolts from Mount Dobrin loomed amidst the nighttime clouds, and their faraway murmur interwove with the hooting of owls down in the groves. The foggy, yellow light of dawn invariably saw me leaning out the window.

One day Nikifor Tescovina arrived with his little girl. Even from afar the child's short red hair gleamed through the fog like ripe rowan berries in autumn. They were near the mill by the time I noticed that the father was leading his daughter on a leash. A stone's throw from the entrance he tied her to a boundary demarcation stake, and entered the building alone.

That day Nikifor Tescovina brought a bottle of methylated spirits as well, along with a tin mug, and charcoal in a pot drilled full of tiny holes. He explained that, to render it drinkable, the alcohol had to be filtered through charcoal into another vessel. In the absence of charcoal, he said, tinder fungus or blueberries would also do the trick.

"It's going to make you puke at first, but you'll get used to it."

"No doubt."

Already he'd begun to pour the liquid over the charcoal, holding the mug underneath and watching for the first drops.

"Soon you can get to work. The colonel has already ordered the tubs and buckets. He's also taken on the fruit gathering women. They're going to swarm around you, those women, but you watch out for yourself. Like I said before, keep that face straight no matter what."



"Lately I've done pretty well at self-discipline."

"Then make sure you act proper if you meet a man called Géza Kökény. He'll tell you he's not just anyone, but that his bust stands on the bank of the Sinistra. Well, don't you believe him."

"I won't hear him out."

"That's it. There, by the way, is my little girl, Bebe." With this he extended an open palm toward the meadow, where the red-haired child tied to the stake sat in the grass. "You'll get to know her. She's just eight, but from what I can see, she wants to leave me."

"Don't you let her."

"She's fallen in love with Géza Hutira."

"I don't know the man. Must be an alias."

"Hm, who knows. He's the meteorologist in the reserve. About your age, a good fifty. But his hair reaches the ground. He's got Bebe's heart, my little girl's, in his hands."

I'd already been staying in the abandoned water mill amongst voles, bats and barn owls for four, five, maybe six weeks when Colonel Puiu Borcan finally called on me in person. He came up here and brought me my new name. Winter returned that day for a couple of hours to the forests of the Sinistra district. An icy cloud descended even upon the blossoming meadow, a shimmering glassy mush veiled the knolls along the stream, and snowy mountainside clearings shone on the village below. I glimpsed the two approaching figures through drifting wisps of fog—one of them was my benefactor, Nikifor Tescovina. The other, a baggy-faced, big-eared man wearing an officer's greatcoat, adjusted his cap on his forehead as he approached. A big black umbrella swung from his hand. Although icy drops of vapor from the passing storm still permeated the air, the umbrella was closed, its sodden black fabric hanging limply downward like the wings of a sleeping bat. An enormous pair of binoculars swung from the neck of the forest commissioner.

Later, once I earned a measure of his respect, I, too, had the opportunity to peer through those binoculars. On one occasion I accompanied him up into the forest, and while he went into a thicket to relieve himself, he entrusted me with his umbrella and binoculars. It being Revolution Day, I knew the mountain infantrymen were playing shuttlecock down by the stream with the Dobrin railway workers. To this day I recall how that tiny snow-white birdie flashed back and forth above the tall, swaying, untrodden grass, two or three meters high.

Anyhow, those binoculars about his neck, the limp umbrella in his hand, Colonel Borcan came to a halt on the threshold. His expression was woeful, a tad clammy. The light of the distant snowy clearings glimmered through his ear-lobe, his hair frizzed in tufts out from underneath his hat, and drops of the now-passed freezing rain clung to the stubble on his chin.

"So you're the one."



"Me."

"And what's your name?"

"I dunno. Lost my papers."

"Fine, then. All's in order."

From his pocket he removed a glistening little tin tag, dangling from a watch chain. On it, freshly engraved: Andrei Bodor. My alias. He personally put it around my neck, fused the loose ends below my nape with tweezers, and no sooner had he done so than the metal began warming my skin. Andrei, that part of my new name, I especially liked.

## Aranka Westin's Window

**F**or weeks, months, maybe years I'd been living in the Sinistra district under the alias Andrei Bodor when a trackman's job opened up at the narrow-gauge forest railway. Tin-sheathed freight cars and scrapped trolleys were used on the railway to transport fruit, horse carcasses, and other feed to the bears on the nature reserve. There, behind the fencing of the reserve, far from the world, lived my adopted son, Béla Bundasian, whose circumstances had led me to move to this mountainous region up north. So as soon as I heard that trackman Augustin Konnert had been found in several pieces one morning beside the tracks, I applied for his post at once.

Probably I wasn't the only one who'd applied, but in no time I was called in to the base for an interview. While waiting in the hallway I met up with the barber of Dobrin, who had just been expelled from the district. That day marked the beginning of my lifelong friendship with Aranka Westin.

**I**t was around then that the wild-fruit depot in Dobrin had been closed down, and although I was immediately let go from my post as harvest coordinator, I continued to live in the storage building, sleeping in a pantry amongst barrels and tubs. The depot was situated in an abandoned water mill on a meadow along a stream, a backwater of the Sinistra; the stream had long before broken away from the mill during a spring flood, leaving the stone building isolated on the meadow in the company of some pines, rowans, willows, and black alders. The place was marked by a tall, yellow-painted post which shone far even when overcast, so the fruit-gathering women arriving from nearby mountainsides could find their way there even in the swirling mist.

On the morning of that memorable day a narrow slip of paper torn from a bag fluttered from that now superfluously towering yellow post. Looming upon it, in hastily scrawled letters, written with charcoal, were the words: "Hurry, Andrei, to the office." The message was for me, written personally by Colonel Coca



Mavrodin, the new mountain infantry commander in Dobrin. I recognized her writing from the backward sloping 'N's and 'S's. The unknown messenger must have pinned the note to the post in the early hours, as evident from tracks made by rubber boots which had groped their way over the rimy soil about the post. Autumn was coming to a close.

Circumventing the track through the meadow, I flanked the willows along the stream and didn't meet a soul, only the bust of Géza Kőkény appeared from beyond the yards, through the fabric of denuding tree branches. Dobrin stretched out beyond the stream and, beyond even the village, almost on the mountain-side itself, stood the mountain infantry barracks, looming grey at the bottom of the precipice like great piles of fallen boulders. Behind them, in one of the valleys extending to the border, lived Béla Bundasian, my adopted son.

It's a simple, everyday story, this tale of ours. My adopted son, Béla Bundasian, did not return home one time from Moldavia, where he regularly went to get sheet music paper from the black marketeers, and from that point on I never saw him again. After his disappearance, say for a week or two, it seemed conceivable that once more he was passing the time with that hot-blooded gal, Cornelia Illafeld—she, his lover, lived somewhere smack-dab in the middle of the Carpathians, near a tunnel—but since he hadn't shown up even weeks later, and hadn't so much as given a sign of life, it was safe to assume he had got mixed up in something or other.

That's what happened, too, he had got mixed up in something all right. In fact, only a good one and a half years later did it become clear that Béla Bundasian had been resettled somewhere in the vicinity of the Ukrainian border and was now living on a nature reserve in the Sinistra district. All this I learned from an anonymous well-wisher by way of writing etched with a needle onto a coin, a twenty, which the person—maybe some well-meaning soul from the authorities, who knows—had dropped into my mailbox.

Such news is far from being a cause for celebration, perhaps, but it elated me nonetheless. I gave up my job with the head office at the market, where, at that time, I worked as an inspector and, on occasion, a mushroom authority. Having done so, I travelled north, hoping to land a job at some mountain village along the Sinistra. All the while I followed my nose, and finally—years passed meanwhile, of course—I ended up precisely there, in the vicinity of the nature reserve in question: dank, drafty Dobrin.

Gathering wild fruit and mushrooms was a sure way of getting by even in the leanest of times, for one could always fill up one's own bag in addition to the government-issue pack basket. Cranberries, mulberries and chanterelles are, of course, much appreciated by a good many folks. Lest there be any misunderstanding, it wasn't some big canning factory we supplied, but just the nearby nature reserve, where the bears were kept in the ruins of a chapel and in abandoned,



caved-in mines. By way of dropped hints and wily enquiries, I determined that Béla Bundasian was living in the house of the meteorologist Géza Hutira, beyond the timber line, in the snow-capped peaks. He had nothing to do, and it was only benevolence that led him to sometimes go outside and note the position of the weathercocks perched out on the cliffs or to take readings of the instruments scattered here and there on the high plateau. He never came into the village, so I awaited a chance that might somehow or other see us meet up once again.

It was that the region's previous forest commissioner, Colonel Puiu Borcan, who as if he had seen right through my plans, was unwilling to sign a pass which would have allowed me to go collecting in the reserve. But Puiu Borcan came unexpectedly to an end, failing to return from one of his patrols. For a time folks waited for him, figuring that perhaps he would appear after a drawn-out escapade, but when a solitary black umbrella flew over Dobrin City steered by the wind, like a giant bat—only he, mind you, the commander of the mountain infantry, used such an umbrella on his patrols—everyone knew the colonel was no more.

Colonel Puiu Borcan was succeeded as commander at Dobrin by a woman, Izolda Mavrodin, who went by the nickname Coca. She was a slender creature, quiet, diaphanous, like a dragonfly. When she wanted to see me, she'd send a note, just a few short words, and ragged at that, invariably torn from a paper bag. What's more, recognizing her messages was easy, seeing as how her 'N's and 'S's were always sloping backwards. Such brown, coal-scrawled strips of paper fluttered even now, as I walked, from dry stalks and denuded twigs along the trail which led to the base. "They're waiting for you, Andrei, it's very important business."

Coca Mavrodin had summoned others that day to the office as well, and the vestibule was full of resin-scented lumberjacks, forest rangers, and the like. This is how it was that while awaiting my turn I met up with the barber of Dobrin, Vili Dunka. As if no longer recognizing anyone at all, he happened to be leaving the office with hurried, disdainful steps, but I went after him. Now and again we'd pal up beside a drink or two.

He was no more pleased to see me than anyone else, saying he was in a hurry, as he had to leave the village, the whole Sinistra district, in fact, on the first train. That morning he'd been summoned to the base with a travel pack, a change of underclothes, and his favourite objects, so from here he was headed straight for the station. The barbershop had closed in Dobrin City, as had the bar; all those venues had been shut down where folks were given to talking while waiting or lingering about. To prove the veracity of his story he pulled out his free rail pass, with which he could travel to his designated new abode.

"And what does Aranka Westin have to say about this business?" I asked.

"Nothing. It doesn't apply to her; she'll go on patching up officers' overcoats. She'll stay here, naturally."

The woman in question sewed for the base, and until that day had lived with



Vili Dunka.

"Because I figure you know full well," I said, continuing my initial line of thought, "you'll be away for many years. Possibly you won't ever come back here at all."

"Uh-huh, that's how things look. I'm ready for anything."

"And I don't know if you ever caught on, but my mouth always watered for Aranka Westin. Now that you're off, I'll do everything I can to fill your shoes."

"Yeah, that crossed my mind too. Well, it's simple: I just won't think about you two."

"I'm saying this now because I'm a straightforward sort of fellow. I wouldn't want it to look as if I'm doing anything behind your back. No, I wouldn't want you to end up thinking anything bad."

"You two are forgotten already. Most of my things are still there, with her, so feel free to use anything at all that's to your liking. My vests, slippers, underwear, still there—we're about the same size. All I'm taking with me are scissors, razors, and a couple of shaving brushes, not to mention shaving cream. My barber's supplies, you know. Everything else is yours."

"You're a decent guy."

"What the hell can I do?"

"Then again, who knows what's going to happen to me. As you can see, they called me in here, too."

"But you don't have your travel bag with you. You can stay. At least for a while."

"I sure hope so. And that's why I'll now take the liberty of asking if you could give me a few words of helpful advice. How should I behave towards her, after all? What are her habits, womanish whims?"

"Damn it, man. You just worry about her big white shanks, not her whims. But all the same, let's just say that if she's busy sewing, don't even bother with her. For her, duty always comes first. And now I've got to be off, if you don't mind. All the best."

"Thanks. Take care of yourself, huh?"

That said, Vili Dunka, the former barber of Dobrin, headed off. From the hallway window I watched him go, following him with my gaze as he cut across the yard, which was glistening with puddles; as he waited by the porter's lodge for the duty officer to let him out; until his path on the other side of the solid fence was indicated only by sparrows taking flight. Vili Dunka disappeared along the road to the station, and that was the last anyone ever heard of him.

It was late afternoon by the time I was called in for the interview. Seated in the forest commissioner's chair was the coroner, Colonel Titus Tomoioaga, who asked me to excuse Coca Mavrodin, as she happened to be occupied at the moment, but meanwhile she was reviewing my application for the trackman's job. Only there's a little hitch—namely, that my files were lost on the way to the



records office. Until they turn up, they would solicit the personal opinions of a few trustworthy people. And who knows, even if the trackman's job is out, she might just employ me as some sort of courier. Yes, they need someone to take messages into the nature reserve.

It seemed they wanted to send me to the very place I'd been banned from up till then. After waiting for so many years, perhaps I would meet finally Béla Bundasian once again. Feigning indifference, I assumed a bored expression, as if the whole thing were not exactly my cup of tea. And after so long, I couldn't even bring myself to be too happy over the news. Besides which, to be honest, my thoughts were yet on Vili Dunka, who was still waiting at the station, the railway pass in his pocket. The sounding of the short whistle would mean he had left. Indeed, I thought, it would be nice to try on his slippers that very night.

Being late autumn, night was already coming on as I left the barracks and passed along the unpeopled streets of the village, interwoven with the barking of dogs and with stray mists. More than a few years had passed since the electric lines had been cut, so for the most part the houses cowered every night in muted darkness; and even now, so early, the glow of hurricane lamps and tallow candles was visible just here and there. A pale window shone faintly like day-break from deep inside the yard of Aranka Westin, the seamstress.

For quite some time I went about peering through the cracks and crevices in the curtain, watching her rummage about in a somewhat widowed way, watching her patch up the heavy cloth uniforms in the flickering candlelight. A thick woollen shawl, triangularly folded in two, covered her back; its tip reached her bottom, its two wings nestling onto her thighs, those thighs Vili Dunka had called shanks. She must have been a bit cold. Yes, it seemed she hadn't had the time that day to light a fire.

I went around the house to the woodshed, bundled a few logs in my arms, grabbed some kindling to boot, then went back around and, without knocking, opened the door by pressing down the handle with my knee. Aranka Westin looked up at once, but bent back down again, and flashed me another quick look or two as I clumsily closed the door, again using my leg. Assuming her eyes were sharp, and seamstresses have sharp eyes, they do, she might have noticed the trousers trembling about my leg—perhaps, she may have thought, from the draft. At least five years had passed since I'd been with a woman.

I waited for the first encouraging sign—say, for the furrows to subside on her chin, for her toes to slacken invitingly in her slippers, but most of all, for her to finally drop from her hands the officer's cloak she happened to be equipping with new pockets of grey cloth. This little venture of mine was a sure-thing, I knew, and now I knew another thing, too: not even by chance must I make a move as long as the sewing went on. ■

*Translated by Paul Olchvary*



László Kéri

# Parties in the Run-Up to the 1998 Elections

In various ways, the multi-party system in Hungary has travelled a path different from that followed by other countries in East Central Europe. In the spring of 1990, Hungary was the only country where the elections were essentially fought between the two wings, national and liberal, of the opposition, and not between the opposition and the old order. Another Hungarian feature has been stability, unique in the region: four years later, in 1994, the same six parties were returned to Parliament as on the first occasion. In addition, four of the six parties achieved, to within a hair's breath, the same results as in 1990. The two main forces changed place, with the Hungarian Democratic Forum, which led the centre-right coalition, being replaced by the post-communist Hungarian Socialist Party. The latter achieved the dominant role in government in a new coalition formed with a strange bedfellow,

the liberal Free Democrats, the party launched by dissident opposition figures of the party-state. After 1995, the field has split into two: the role of three parties has increased in a lasting way, while some of the other parties' power has declined.

In the first months of 1997 it seemed that three of the more-or-less similarly supported political parties were in a position to win over a majority of Hungarian votes in the coming elections. For months on end the results expected of the Independent Smallholders' Party, the League of Young Democrats, and the Socialists remained in the 20-25 per cent band.<sup>1</sup> It seemed that any one of these three could win the 1998 elections, but that none had a chance of scoring a victory on a scale that would enable it to dispense of its two rivals. In other words, every observer predicted that a forced coalition would become a necessity. However, after the summer of 1997, relations have changed. Although not spectacularly, the Hungarian Socialist Party has increased its support month by month, while its rivals have either stagnated, or they found themselves slipping downhill.

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1 ■ Hereinafter, when data is referred to, the figures are based on those of the public opinion polls published monthly by the Szonda-Ipsos organization; within this, the data relate to those willing to express an opinion.



Today the question is whether in this multi-party system the communists' successor party—whose weight, power potential and economic, mass-communications and organizational strength are greater than those of all the other parties combined—will continue to predominate. All the early signs are that, after the 1998 elections, four parties at most will play a serious role. Hence, in what follows, I shall attempt to outline the position and perspectives of these four parties.

## Socialists in the lead

**I**n the run-up to the May 1998 elections, the most important factor in Hungary's party structure is the Hungarian Socialist Party, which currently holds an absolute majority of seats in Parliament. This oppressively large bloc shows no signs of splintering, although many reckoned that a party balancing such contrary interests, culture and traditions would disintegrate in government as a result of internal strife.

This did not happen, although there was no shortage of disputes and conflicts. The history of the Socialists from 1994 to 1998 can be seen as the history of how the centre, led by Gyula Horn, was able to maintain party unity—often at the last minute—against alliances of lobbies. Most analysts asserted that providing political representation for winners and losers—the newly rich and the newly poor—at one and the same time was an impossibility. Others predicted that the party would disintegrate because it was a socialist party governing at a time when capitalism was being adopted. It is a fact that, in many respects, this party is a party of absurdities, but these absurdities are all too familiar in Hungary in the 1990s.

Examining their four years in government, analysts of the Socialists often as-

sert that actually they function as the party of big capital. As preliminary evidence, commentators cite their privatization policy, by which private property became dominant in the Hungarian economy in a surprisingly short time. By way of reproach, they say that the leading groups in the party are linked to various key structures of the economic elite. They also mention the fact that under the Socialists, the Hungarian economy has become, and has remained the one most favoured by foreign capital in the region. Judging by the party's policy while in opposition between 1990 and 1994, and the promises it made during the 1994 election campaign and on coming to power, it was going to strive for a more equitable and balanced transition. Accordingly, a big rôle in the 1994 victory was played by the fact that the average voter had been disappointed by the performance of the previous coalition, and expected from the Socialists that adjustments be made that served the interests of the common man.

To my mind, one of the most important reasons for the success currently enjoyed by the Socialists lies precisely in the fact that they forgot both their old critical attitude and their election promises in the shortest possible time. For a few months after the 1994 elections, they put off restrictive measures but, after a brief clash with the trade union lobby, they chose an approach in which pragmatic considerations predominated, and continue to predominate. The essence of this is that the transition cannot be achieved equitably. The most important task is for the Hungarian economy to become competitive and ready for Western integration. All this requires serious sacrifices, but does create a chance for the Hungarian economy to break out of its decade-old dilemma of growth or foreign equilibrium. After no little debate, the entire Socialist Party—the



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## The parties

**T**he multi-party system has shown surprising stability between 1990 and 1998. In the first and the second general elections, in 1990 and 1994, respectively, the same six parties achieved representation in Parliament, with four of them gaining approximately similar results on both occasions. All this was largely due to the electoral system, believed by many to be somewhat complicated. The Hungarian system is a combination of the two main systems used in other countries. Of the 386 seats in Parliament, 176 are of the individual constituencies, using the simple majority principle, almost exclusively based on the results of the second round. The rest of the seats are allocated according to the proportional representation system on the basis of the party list results in the first round.

The Hungarian parties are, generally speaking, of three kinds. At the outset, the so-called three "system-changing" parties were the most important. These were the parties that put together programmes for changing the political and economic system in the political struggles at the end of the communist period in 1987 and 1988. (Generally with a longish cultural, generational and quasi-political past.)

**The Hungarian Democratic Forum** was the first to build up a national organization and to collect together elements of the dissatisfied intelligentsia in the provinces; to a large extent it was able to rely on the mood and demands which emerged during the dramatically rapid changes of 1988–90. It was the Forum that won the first elections, securing 43 per cent of the seats; but four years of coalition government exhausted its political reserves. In 1994 it won just 10 per cent of the seats in Parliament and lost its centralist liberal fraction. In contrast to its beginnings ten years ago, the party now is decidedly centre-right and conservative in character, and in 1998 it seems to have no chance of playing an important role in the third Parliament.

**The Alliance of Free Democrats** was the other decisive political force in the changeover. Winning approximately 24 per cent of the Parliamentary seats in 1990 and 18 per cent in 1994, it ran second on both occasions. As a markedly liberal party and as a committed supporter of citizens' rights, the rule of law, the market economy and integration with Western Europe, its possibilities have by and large been determined by this profile since its creation in 1988.

In 1994 the Free Democrats accepted the role of junior partner in a coalition with the Socialists, and now in the run-up to the 1998 election they are finding it difficult to come to terms with the consequences of this. In the ten years of their existence so far, the Free Democrats have been able to count on the support of the better-educated in the urban middle class.

The third among the "system-changing" parties is the **League of Young Democrats—Hungarian Civic Party**, which was a very special product of the changes in Hungary. In 1990 it secured 6 per cent of the seats in Parliament, with the fact that it gained seats, causing widespread surprise. The majority of its MPs were in their twenties, just out of university.



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In 1994 the party achieved the same result as before, and this, too, was an enormous surprise, since this time everyone saw this as a defeat. In the period between the first two elections, the party had been far and away the most popular: in 1992, for example, it enjoyed more support than all the other parties put together. At present it casts itself in the role of the centre-right party to replace the Socialists, we shall see with what success.

Of the Hungarian parties, the **Hungarian Socialist Party** is supposed to represent a degree of continuation of the old system, although this is true only in part. In 1990 they secured around 9 per cent of the seats in Parliament, which at the time was a major defeat for the reform communist alternative, although it was well known abroad that their leaders were popular. (It will perhaps be sufficient to mention Imre Pozsgay, Miklós Németh and Rezső Nyers.) The resolve of Gyula Horn shaped the Socialists into a disciplined, competitive and highly pragmatic party during its years in opposition, and its victory in 1994 was therefore not surprising. But the scale of the victory was. With 54 per cent of the seats the party won an absolute majority, which no-one had expected. Admittedly, the spectacular victory was, to some degree, the result of the two-round Hungarian electoral system, in which the winner of the first round is unduly favoured. In any event, the past eight years are not enough for one to be able to say whether the Hungarian Socialist Party is a typical East European successor party, or rather whether it can be regarded as the first successful post-war Social Democratic organization in Hungary.

The so called "historical" parties did not play a decisive role during this decade.

In both elections the **Christian Democratic People's Party** achieved around 6 per cent, although this time it seems unlikely that they will be able to repeat this result. As the party of Hungarian Christian Democracy, it would have liked to continue where István Barankovics was forced to leave off in 1949, but after the passage of forty years this proved difficult. In 1990, the party joined the coalition led by the Hungarian Democratic Forum, but was unable to establish a sufficiently distinct profile. Ongoing internal disputes since 1994 have put paid to it.

Finally, the second renowned "historical party", the **Independent Smallholders' Party**, is, in the 1990s, merely a distortion of its once-famous and important predecessor. In 1990 it secured some 12 per cent of the seats in Parliament, but only four years later managed approximately 7 per cent. The Smallholders' real problem is not so much its lack of weight, but rather that the political style and political culture they represent are a far cry from the general requirements in Europe at the end of the 20th century. From the political point of view, it is undoubtedly important that there be a party capable of voicing the grievances of the man in the street. However, to do no more than formulate these grievances in radical right-wing, sometimes extremist and populist, terms is no substitute for a coherent programme and credibility. Today's Independent Smallholders' Party resembles its historical predecessor in name only.

L. K.



party in the constituencies, the parliamentary party and the members of the government—accepted this basic position and the whole of 1997 went by in the spirit of this pragmatic unity.

For the election campaign, the task is to convince the party's one-time supporters: *"Yes, we didn't do what we promised, but in the given circumstances we tried to do the best possible. The country's macro-economic indicators are now improving, and if we remain in office the situation for all of you will improve sooner or later."* At the moment, one still cannot tell whether prospective voters will accept this explanation. However, the Socialists' (and the entire government's) approval ratings rose continuously between May 1997 and January 1998. Recent support for them was at 39 per cent, versus 21 per cent one year earlier.

At the present time—February 1998—support for the Socialists is at least as strong as it was before the previous elections; even a majority of those who do not support them think that they will win.

However, the future of the Hungarian Socialist Party continues to be an open-ended question. It is not known how long unity can be maintained, given the great diversity within the ranks, or how long the younger politicians who have emerged will be content with their second-line positions behind the senior team led by Gyula Horn. Another question to be asked is the extent to which the Socialists will be able to defuse the continuing dissatisfaction and fend off the demands of the trade-unions allied to them. Moreover, the degree to which they can neutralize supporters among the left-wing intelligentsia, disappointed and alienated on account of their no-nonsense approach, is also unclear.

At the moment no answers can be given to these questions. We can only proceed from the fact that during the last ten

years the Hungarian Socialist Party has always been able to produce responses to actual challenges. The Socialists have learnt that it is not a problem if those who vote for them do not like them.

## The problems of the opposition

In the four years since the last elections, the Socialist Party has had two significant rivals. In 1995, the Smallholders became the governing coalition's principal opponent, and it seemed that they would also be capable of harnessing public anger towards the government. One year later, the situation had changed in that the Young Democrats were considered the winners in 1996. Not that the Smallholders had been squeezed out, but rather that the Opposition bloc had split into two camps, by and large, of equal size. This division, of course, proved useful to the Socialists, thus it is worth taking a closer look at the two opposition alternatives.

Without a doubt it was the Smallholders who were the first to find their role in Parliament after the 1994 elections. Almost from the start, they relentlessly attacked the government, and were the first to exploit every wrong move by them.

As a result, they were able fairly quickly to double the support they had achieved by the elections; they primarily attracted those who did not like the socialist-liberal coalition, especially after the spring of 1995, when the government set about implementing a financial and economic package, which contained a whole series of economic restraints. By the end of 1995, the Independent Smallholders' Party had become the most popular party in the country, although a finer analysis of the data even then showed that this growth clearly had its limits. The undoubted advantage of the party chairman's, József



Torgyán, loud, relentless, extremist and often demagogic criticism was that the dissatisfied, the downwardly mobile, and those who had lost out in the transition, sided with the Smallholders. This confrontational policy, however, did not achieve popularity among the well-educated, living in larger towns, especially those in Budapest. The Smallholders' success story can be summed up by saying that they were quickly able to meet the psychological and political needs of the discontented, but were unable to come up with a programme capable of winning over those wishing to see an alternative to how the government was being run.

At this point attention should be paid to the attempt at forming a second opposition alternative. The Young Democrats got over their 1994 election defeat with difficulty; then, after internal consolidation, looked for political allies. They did this with the belief, if I am correct, that the governing coalition was so strong that only broad solidarity among the opposition parties had a chance of unseating them.

The leading figures amongst the Young Democrats wanted to draw together the forces of the defeated Antall coalition. But two problems stood in their way and eventually made the formation of such an alliance an impossibility. The first problem stemmed from the fact that the leaders of the smaller parties were not uniformly enthusiastic about the leadership, in this prospective alliance of Viktor Orbán, the young and talented Young Democrat chairman. However, it was the second problem that proved fatal to the plan. The leaders of both the smaller parties (the Hungarian Democratic Forum and the Christian Democratic People's Party) were highly uncertain as to which opposing group would be the one worth joining—the moderates or the extreme right wing as represented by the Smallholders. This dilemma

led first to unresolvable disputes within the Hungarian Democratic Forum, and eventually to a split (in early 1996). Later, in 1997, the same process of self-destruction split the Christian Democrats, too.

The Young Democrats devoted great energy to the formulation and dissemination of its own programme for government. It was certainly able to count on greater appeal than that enjoyed by the Smallholder alternative. And so it turned out that at the end of 1996, the Young Democrats already had behind it the overwhelming majority of those who had supported the old Hungarian Democratic Forum coalition. Moreover, it had been able to increase its popularity in Budapest and among graduates; a number of analyses considered that the Young Democrats might be the only party truly capable of competing with the Socialists. In the early summer of 1997, however, with the Socialist Party producing spectacular results as a result of its austerity program this upward swing seemed to come to an end. With great energy, the Socialists closed ranks in the run-up to the elections, personal disputes—and clashes with the Free Democrats—came to an end (or were at least kept out of sight), and the party basked in the recognition it had won abroad because of the country's economic performance in 1997.

For a few months, the Young Democrats tried to be negative about the signs of economic stabilization and growth. Later, when this line was less sustainable, they attempted to formulate an interpretation of the economic processes to suggest that a truly desirable future would be promoted by the policies they offered. Now, as the elections draw near, Viktor Orbán, the party chairman and the opposition's most likely candidate for prime minister, is taking every opportunity to present May 1998 as the opportunity to choose be-



tween the past and the future. He correctly senses that, in the last analysis, choice has a galvanizing effect only if it is between two clearly formulated and mutually exclusive possibilities. The Young Democrats are the only major political party which has no experience in government—and whose hands are not tied by an established and stable interest group.

On the other hand, the Young Democrats' difficulties stem from the fact that built into the above either-or struggle are a number of ideological, confrontational and structural elements which hinder further growth in the party's popularity. The most problematic is its current self-definition as a centre-right, national, conservative and liberal party which is able to respond, at one and the same time, to the demands of the right as a whole. This overcommitment is accompanied by the fact that today it would have to meet political demands of the type it opposed for many years. An additional consequence is that in adopting an unequivocally right of centre position, it has reduced its chance of winning recruits from the disillusioned left. Tangible proof of this is the fact that the Young Democrats have not been able, for seven months running, to improve their popularity among voters with established party preferences.

As a result, the sole possibility for expansion lies in the direction of the Smallholders. This is achievable in many different ways. One is for the two leading opposition forces to conclude a pact before the elections. The support of both the Young Democrats and the Smallholders is firm at between 20 and 25 per cent, which primarily means that neither would be able to beat the Socialists alone or with its own smaller allies. From this it would follow that they should try to achieve this jointly. Yet co-operation of this kind would be problematic for several reasons, primarily

because, considering their similar level of support, it is not clear who would lead the broad coalition of the right that might ensue. On the other hand, the Young Democrats may justly shy away from such an alliance, not only because it would remove their ability to attract votes from the left, but also because it would drive many of their existing supporters into the arms of the Free Democrats, since their fear of József Torgyán is much stronger than the appeal of the Young Democrats.

The other main route to expansion to the right is not to seek an alliance, but rather, to attempt to win, through campaigning and rhetoric, the majority of the current Smallholder supporters. One cannot know whether it was conscious or not, but in 1997 some Young Democrat leaders actually made an attempt at this, employing gestures that were previously exclusive to right-wing radical populism. One reason for this could have been that the pronounced and steady increase in the party's popularity had seemed to stop in mid-1997. Yet, in the political field as it is at present there are only bad and worse solutions for the Young Democrats. One would be, following a good electoral result, to replace the Free Democrats in a coalition with the Socialists. This possibility, it seems, has been deliberately ruled out by their shift to the right. The other is to win in conjunction with the Smallholders. This is still not excluded, but would produce the problem mentioned above. There is a third way, however, to try to beat the Socialists alone. In practical terms "alone" means with their current electoral allies, that is what remains of the groups joining them from the Hungarian Democratic Forum and the Christian Democrats. Much can happen in the weeks remaining before the election, but there is only a very small chance that this third alternative will lead to a victory.



Most observers of Hungarian politics take the view that in 1995 the Young Democrats began the process of shaping themselves into a competitive centre-right alternative, but that in 1998 they have still not achieved this goal. It is very probable that, having increased their representation in Parliament several times over, they will, as the strongest opposition party, be able to continue this search for a profile during the coming four-year period.

### The dilemmas of the Free Democrats

**W**ith around 20 per cent of the votes cast in each of the last two elections, the position of the Free Democrats is the most uncertain among the parties with a chance of gaining seats in Parliament.

Even in the first half of the present Parliament, the support for the Free Democrats seemed to be melting away dramatically. The melting stopped in early 1997, and the proportion of secure Free Democrat voters stabilized at 8–10 per cent. With the elections drawing near, this figure improved somewhat, and the 12 per cent indicated at the beginning of 1998 suggests that, with a good campaign, approximately 15 per cent could be attained. It is usually argued that up until now the Free Democrats have always run the most professional campaign and are traditionally able to select good, acceptable candidates. All this is true, but while Socialist supporters are willing to forgive the four years of government, this is not the case among those who have supported the Free Democrats.

If, in the final analysis, the election boils down to a contest between the supporters and the opponents of the governing coalition, such a development will not favour the Free Democrats, for in this case in most constituencies the contest will be a two-cornered fight between the

Socialists and the Young Democrats, with those who support the government voting primarily for the Socialists. The Hungarian electoral system has two rounds—with only the three strongest candidates going through to the second round—it is therefore conceivable that the Free Democrats will be forced to fight the Smallholders for third place. This would not necessarily be unfavourable, since the Smallholders' weakest point is the calibre of their candidates. All things considered, it can be said that this time it is very difficult to predict the expected Free Democrat result. Many arguments can be made for and against their success. However, their biggest problem is that this time—from their position in government—it will be very difficult for them to use their strongest weapon, their campaign. Incidentally, four years in power have brought changes of a radical nature to the top of the party. The critically-minded, independent and well-known intellectuals who founded the party have been gradually squeezed out of its leading bodies. In conjunction with this, pragmatically-minded specialists have achieved prominence, a group with weaker ties to opinion makers, i.e. the media and the professional elite. Only the election and the campaign will make clear whether or not this change will be able to preserve the party's earlier electoral base.

Apart from their internal problems is another issue: about what kind of a role Free Democrats will want to play in political life in the longer run. If they combine their original penchant for liberal and human rights with the pragmatism deriving from experience in government, they could always be the minor coalition partner, either in a centre-right or a centre-left bloc. If on the other hand the party wants to compete with the Young Democrats and the Socialists at the same level, and be capable of beating them, they



must do almost everything differently after 1998.

Future uncertainty needs to be mentioned not only in connection with the Free Democrats. The entire Hungarian party structure would be affected if, for example, the Socialists homogenized their present multi-profile composition in one particular direction. The Young Democrats' undoubted dominance on the centre-right would also strongly affect elbow-room for the other three parties. Today's large parties are divided not only internally, but are continuously shaping and reshaping the Hungarian multi-party system, which has now been ten years in its development.

The foundations of the multi-party structure were very strongly affected by the last two elections, and will be by the May 1998 poll as well. For the time being all that seems certain is that the multi-party system is contracting and there is little chance that the balance in Hungary's Parliament will be determined by the same six parties as in 1990 and 1994. The narrowing of the selection could, however, be accompanied by a clarification of the parties' profiles; the political roles of the parties could become less ambiguous than at any other time in the decade.

The Socialists could become a classical centre-left, social democratic party, ready

for government, as well as ready for the use of governmental means to correct the injustices created by the logic of the market and free competition.

Over the next decades the Young Democrats could act to represent, both politically and organizationally, the demands which are national, liberal and conservative. This would be the centre-right position, always ready for government, when the situation permitted.

The Free Democrats could be a liberal party, and an ongoing player in government, moving back and forth between the other two large parties, sometimes limiting the excesses of the free market, sometimes the excesses of state intervention.

The Smallholders are a traditionally Hungarian-style political and cultural group, in that there is a lasting need, even in the form of a mass party, to represent the grievances, moods and feelings of disappointment.

This brief survey outlines the possible roles of the most important of today's parties, a diminishing number from the perspective of eight years ago. How the future of these parties will be affected by the challenges of integration will become clear only during the course of the four-year term beginning in 1998. ■



Imre J.P. Loeffler

# Bedbug Hunt

In the days before DDT, Budapest was a town of bedbugs. Mother believed that the house was built from used bricks: this was her explanation for how, in a house of clean and orderly burghers, this nocturnal insect could colonize the bedrooms. Paul did not know how the neighbours coped with the problem, although he did see visits of specialists in gassing. (Cyanide was the poisonous agent. For it to work, and for the burghers to survive, the latter had to move out for a week. All doors and windows were sealed with brown sticking paper, tell-tale signs that the inhabitants have lost a battle and decided to call in mercenary forces—alas Paul's family could not afford to vacate the flat for seven days, seven people for seven days in a hotel was too huge an expense even to be contemplated.)

The Lehnerns have thus developed their own startling strategy to deal with the arthropod invasion. Incidentally, the niche for the bedbugs in the domestic ecology would have been secure—as one got used to their bite; they were hunted not because of a physical but rather because of the aesthetic harm to the Lehnerns, a bedbug stinks, the scent of a large colony of bedbugs is quite penetrating. Bedbug bites also bleed and thus the bedding becomes stained, and in those thrifty days, bedsheets were changed once a month, by which time they looked like material patterned with variously shaded red dots. True, the smell could be squashed by stronger scents, (and there were many) and one did not have to show the bedding to guests who came for tea, but the real devastation to middle-class pride and sense of beauty arose from the bedbugs' habit of

depositing their excreta onto walls—they are cleanly creatures and they do not like to soil their abode. Living under pictures, for instance, if overcome by the urge to defecate, they will wander off a little distance from the frame, and do the needful. There were plenty of pictures in the Lehner's flat: either family photos or

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faint and poor reproductions of great art. Bedbugs living under Boticelli's *Spring* polluted the perimeter of the silvery frame, as they tried to avoid soiling their own habitat. Ironically, bedbug cleanliness triggered bedbug persecution, largely because these brownish circles around pictures could not be hidden from visitors. Most of the family's friends had, of course, bedbugs in their own flats and houses, but these matters were not discussed, evidence was hidden as much as this could be done, for instance by putting the same pictures into larger and larger frames from time to time. Shame and embarrassment, the constant movers of burgherly action even tried to edit out of reality the word "bedbug" and Paul's young brother Steve was told—to make sure that he did not inadvertently promulgate classified information—that those little things he saw scurrying about were "moths".

**T**he ultimate Lehner strategy was the monthly cooperative of the bedbug hunt. Father took a day off from work and appeared for breakfast in the attire he reserved for shoe-cleaning and bedbug-hunting: an unbelievably old pair of trousers and a similarly ancient, but much tattier, shirt. After breakfast, the attack started in the parents' bedroom. All furniture was moved, the beds were taken apart, the pictures were taken from the walls, and the hunt proper began in earnest. Mother and sister Theresa each carried a little rectangular soapdish filled with water in their left hand, and a small stiff wire (the type used to poke the roast to determine how tender it is) in their right. Poking the wire into the holes and cracks and recesses of the wall, they made the bedbugs emerge: the quarry in flight was then knocked, with a quick flick of the wire, into the water-filled soapdish to drown. This method of hunting was tedious and required dexterity. If one poked about with the wire too much one damaged the walls, in particular one had to be careful not to make the holes for the nails on which the pictures hung bigger. Squashing the bugs in flight was forbidden, not because this was considered unsportsmanlike, but squashing bedbugs on the wall would have made the walls look like the bedsheets, as changing time approached. A further problem was the soapdish with water, and a steady hand was required to avoid scratching and splashing the wall. Not surprisingly, the sport was dangerous—and also rather loud. One of the ladies covering the upper regions and standing on a ladder may just have disturbed a group of bedbugs (is it a covey, a herd, a school, or a pack?) hiding in a hole around the nail on which a lustreless replica of Raphael's *Madonna della sedia* hung: the bugs took flight, scattered in all directions, and could they run! Sometimes a dry painting brush was used to wipe the running game from the wall into the vessel of death.

Father was in charge of chemical warfare and his main concerns were the breeding colonies. Most of these colonies were found in the complicated inner mechanism of the beds. These beds were wooden structures, except for the linkages between the headpiece and footpiece and the sideboards. These linkages



were metallic slots accommodating metallic hooks and behind the slotted plate of bluish metal was ample space for a thriving hatchery: eggs and hatchlings in various stages of development as evidenced by size and colour and consistency sheltered here. As these metal plates were screwed to the hard wood, all plates had to be unscrewed every month. The hiding places having been uncovered, turpentine was spread in all the corners and nooks. This task required much circumspection, as turpentine could spoil the carefully polished parket floor by dissolving the wax which generations of maids had brushed into the floor. Therefore, thick layers of newspaper had to be laid down first—the nations' Catholic conservative daily thus finding transient use, transient, because this multifarious resource, newsprint, was gathered again in the evening, stored in the cellar and used for many other things before it found its penultimate role in the complicated task of lighting the fire in the stove in the bathroom.

Paul's job was to help Father to disassemble the beds, keep the eight screws for each plate (four plates to each bed, two beds in the room) properly identified, as each screw had to be replaced in its original hole, this procedure having been thought to be beneficial to the preservation of hole and screw. Paul was also responsible for the hot pursuit of escaping bedbugs, as there were some who tried to avoid death by turpentine by dropping to the floor. These had to be squashed. But the body of a fully grown bedbug is hard to squash, particularly for a child and particularly against the multilayered carpet of the conservative daily. A hammer had to be used. But then again, a metal headed hammer in the hand of an excited juvenile hunter could do damage to the floor, newspaper carpet or not, and so the hammer was a wooden one with a large head.

**T**he hunters rested for a break at mid-morning, devouring well deserved sandwiches on the battlefield. Then work continued. The hunt in the parents' bedroom took all morning, not only because of the complicated beds with the 64 screws and those wooden springs, ten to a bed, resting on wooden cylinders, the latter slotted into the sideboards—and in Paul's family it was a rule that each individual piece in the flat had to be put back where it came from, nothing was interchangeable, in fact the very idea of interchangeability was despicable! The hunt in this room was time consuming because the largest number of bedbugs were here. Mother's theory was that this peculiarity of distribution was the result of the lack of concern on the part of the neighbours whose bedroom adjoined. This lack of concern was also manifest in their leaving the radio blaring (in spite of the fact that the Lehnerns had no radio, this blaring was only welcome if there was an operatic programme or some sensational news was to be expected) but then these unconcerned neighbours were used to doing everything loudly, had enormous arguments using foul language and on occasions, in fact quite frequently, made groaning and laughing and sighing noises, accompanied by a lot of creaking noises which apparently are made by inconsiderate neighbours



and are rather difficult to explain to children. According to this theory of Mother's, the neighbours were the indescribably dirty people with bedbugs and we only had the overspill from the neighbours' bedbug sanctuary. These neighbours—a police captain and his idle, childless wife—never did anything about these bedbugs, Mother said, explaining, yet again, her theory of the gradient between rooms. Paul never believed in this theory, however often it was proposed, whenever there was talk of bedbugs or of the neighbours. Probably, Paul thought, the bedbugs prefer the blood of children. For one thing, their bedsheets were more spotted than those of the adults, but then they all slept in the parental bedroom at that time. They slept on clumsily folding metal beds, which required the cooperation of two persons to unfold and position every evening and to fold and store in a corner every morning. (Always the metal feet on felt pads, like beer mats to protect the precious floor.) Also, in that very room was the real bedbug sanctuary: the 200-year-old black clock with its brass pendulum. Like the temple of Vesta in ancient Rome, if a culprit made it to the sanctuary, it escaped unhurt. Even bedbugs rushing towards the old clock were not in peril as everyone was so afraid to disturb the clock. There was the explanation that some time in the prehistoric beginnings of the family, in times not remembered by Paul, during an early hunt, the clock was taken off the wall. It took Father several months to adjust that clock after this disturbance, he had to balance it again by putting little wedges of wood and paper behind it. This clock was the master clock in the house, losing a minute in the week during the winter and gaining about the same amount during the summer. Also, of course, the location of this clock allowed it to be adjusted and checked as the noon time signal came from the neighbours' radio every Sunday, through the same wall through which, according to Mother, the bloodsucking insects invaded.

**B**y midday the parents' bedroom was reassembled. Clean sheet, clean pillowcases tonight!—in Paul's memory the pleasure of clean bedlinen is inseparable from the smell of turpentine. Lunch. A hunter's lunch. Quick good lunch for hard workers. Then the troops parted, Father and Paul attacking the grandparents' bedroom, and the ladies the pictures in the drawing room and the lobby.

The grandparents' bedroom did not harbour many colonies of bedbugs, perhaps because their blood was not sweet, but salty, thought Paul. Also, the beds were more easily broken down, no screws to worry about. In the early days the drawing room and the lobby were not much of a problem. There were rows of pictures, photographs: each one of the children as a naked baby, then in the pram, later as a toddler holding a ball; all pictures taken in the studio of Master Rosbaud, all made with the same mysterious, large, black, cloth covered camera and the actual exposure—after a lot of posturing and excitement—consisted of taking the lens cover off, and replacing it again whilst everyone held his breath. (Because of the lack of cooperation, the baby pictures were never sharp giving



rise to a new style.) As there were many pictures in the drawing room and the hall, there was shelter, but there were not many bedbugs because there was no food for them. For the lack of sleeping mammals in these rooms, the habitat was unattractive to bedbugs in spite of the abundance of shelter. Or so it was in the beginning. As the children grew it became undesirable that they sleep in the parents' bedroom, and they had to be segregated according to sex. Now the metal beds had to be unfolded in the evening in the drawing room and the lobby—the old carpet having been carefully rolled up. Paul's first observations of population dynamics, habitat, dispersal, migration according to resources were made at this time, suddenly there were more bedbugs in the drawing room, there was a population explosion under the picture of Our Lady of Lourdes—and breeding grounds were established in a number of suitable places, although the frame of the metal bed itself was never found to harbour a single bedbug. Still, the paternal bedroom remained the most densely populated area. Paul was too young to ponder whether tradition and ecology are complementary.

**B**y mid-afternoon on bedbug hunting days, the stove in the bathroom was fired so as to provide a bath for the sweaty, tired hunters. By dinnertime, the children counted the slain bedbugs, the weapons were cleaned and put away, even the newspapers, somewhat soaked, were folded and ready to be taken to the cellar. The furniture was back in place, the beds were reassembled, everything was clean and new. So were the children. Paul sat at dinner on such days in his pyjamas, rolled into a wollen blanket, his freshly washed hair covered with a huge woollen turban. These precautions, to avoid pneumonia and meningitis, were necessary because the windows and the doors were all open. There was a devilish draft in an attempt to diminish the turpentine smell.

On these evenings after the bedbug hunt, the exhausted children went to bed without demur. Whilst Paul tried to find in the clean and therefore cold bed a cozy way to lie down, he could hear the splashing and snorting and gurgling noises which he later in life learned to associate with hippo schools—which noise, however, in those days, came from the bathroom where Father was the last of the family to set to scrubbing.

On these evenings, Paul was asleep before Mother came to say the evening prayer, although, as he grew older, he used to notice the touch of her tender finger with which she traced the Sign of the Cross on his brow. ❧



László Mravik

# Hungary's Pillaged Art Heritage

Part One: Theft and Destruction 1944–45

"Hungarian art treasures": In an older Hungary this was the expression used for all the objects of cultural, artistic and historical value located in churches, castles, châteaux, town houses, castle gardens, public buildings and public spaces within the country. It made no difference whether these objects belonged to private individuals, public bodies, or to the state itself. In describing them, no attention was paid to whether they were the works of Hungarians or artists of other nations, or whether they had been created in Hungary or in another part of the world. Thus, a Nuremberg silver goblet in an aristocrat's collection, an ornamental halberd in a Transylvanian castle, or a Raphael Madonna in the National Picture Gallery, were all regarded as "Hungarian art treasures". They counted as items deserving respect by the nation. Later, however, they became a part of the "national stock of art treasures".

This last definition acquired an undoubtedly narrower meaning than the earlier term, which had taken everyone into account who lived in Hungary and which had been clear to one and all. Hungarian art treasures became national only when their numbers diminished, when seven tenths of Hungary was divided among the successor states of the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

Stressing the national element in culture suddenly became important when Hungary, starting off as a multi-cultural entity with a dynamically developing economy found itself a poor, problem-ridden small country. In other words, after the First World War the background to Hungarian art treasures was not as before. The private wealth which backed them diminished greatly, as did the liberal strand in politics (and the esteem it enjoyed). This, generally speaking, had been enthusiastically supporting art and culture, safeguarding artefacts in newly established museums, and making them accessible to the general public. In the changing climate, however Hungary's property-owners, leading figures in the world of business and intellectuals turned inwards; they either retired into literary culture (which required less financial outlay), or, (in most cases) to nothing at all.

We can say, therefore, that the national stock of art treasures had become owner-

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less in the spiritual sense, and, unlike earlier times, shaping their fate had become unimportant as an aspect of morale, embodied in the state. As a result of this, an ever-growing proportion of what used to be requisites for high culture in everyday life became a means for the temporary easing of liquidity problems in the more-or-less still glittering private sphere. From the start, art treasures preserved and augmented over many centuries, left the palaces of the aristocracy and flooded on to the reviving Hungarian art market, pushing down prices. Later on more and more of these works found their way abroad—westwards and ever more westwards, naturally.

Even so, a certain augmentation did occur in the late 1920s, partly for historical, partly for economic reasons. Some of the old aristocratic collections stranded outside the country after the drawing of the Trianon frontiers, did make their way to Hungarian territory, in whole or in part. One such was the treasury and weapons collection, from Transylvania, of the Teleki de Szék family. These were brought to Budapest with the permission of the King of Romania. It should be noted that it was not patriotic pride that prompted this ancient Transylvanian family to bring these dazzling treasures to the Hungarian capital. Initially they had wanted to sell them in Paris, but found the money offered less than they expected. The family was then obliged to make another attempt, on the Hungarian art market, where, in Budapest, it received the price they hoped for. For similar reasons, the best items from the Erdődy family's famous residences (Galgóc, Szomolány, etc.) in what had become Czechoslovak territory came up to auction in Budapest at this time, thanks to the not insignificant efforts of Hungarian experts. (Even this material did not reach Hungary directly but via Austria.) The ordeal of

these two collections illustrates what became a general process in this period, namely that many Hungarian art treasures went to the West and that very few found a home in Budapest. At the Budapest auctions of the Teleki and Erdődy collections, Hungarian museums and art collectors did make purchases; the museums could only do so thanks to the generosity and prompt response of the Hungarian financial élite. Such public acquisitions, however, were few in number, and the bulk of the items on sale went to Hungarian and foreign art dealers and ended up abroad.

What acted against an entropy common in the care of Hungary's art works was linked to a well-educated and decidedly rich stratum of Hungarian society. The Hungarian *haute Juiverie*, was consistently zealous in the support of Hungarian culture, be it literary or material. At a time when the country's aristocracy and ethnic Hungarian upper bourgeoisie were happily exporting works of art, when Hungary's publishing houses could scarcely find a single really important aristocratic patron, it was the Jewish *haute bourgeoisie* that brought here numerous art treasures from all over the world. It was they who, through their patronage of literature, were enabling some poets and novelists to pursue their careers. They also supported music. During these years it was they, whose "Hungarianness" was later cynically called into question, who shored up the continuity of Hungarian high culture. In the meantime, however, following the Great Depression of 1929–33, many of them found themselves in financial difficulties, and were forced to sell fabulous art treasures in order to retain their huge industrial holdings. It was in this way that, for example, Baron Adolf Kohner's enormous modern collection was broken up, a collection which included paintings by Corot, Cézanne, Gauguin, Van Gogh, Matisse and



Modigliani, as well as many works by other great masters. And although it was auctioned off in the Hungarian capital, not one work by the above painters found a Hungarian buyer. All went to the West.

Only two large and world-famous collections survived the Great Depression without loss: those of Baron Ferenc Hatvany and of Baron Mór Lipót Herzog. The former was one of the principal figures in the Hungarian sugar industry; the latter was almost the only operator of Hungary's state tobacco monopoly, and a main shareholder in all the major Budapest banks. They added to these collections significant new acquisitions, even in the very depths of the slump. But taken as a whole, the local and occasional concentration of energies was diminutive alongside the general and all-embracing tendency to entropy. Still, at the end of the 1930s, despite all the losses, by European standards Hungary counted itself as a rich country in terms of its art treasures, although nothing like as rich as it had been from the turn of the century to the outbreak of the First World War.

**A**s the Second World War came to an end, at a time when human life was worth nothing, who cared about the fate of Hungarian art treasures, and who worked to save them? There were, in fact, such people. These works of art represented property which could be preserved for the postwar period and which would be worth a great deal. Cultural and artistic treasures whose owners were in a position to cross Hungary's western frontier. Without exception, these were people without a drop of Jewish blood and in a high societal position. Dozens could be listed, but here only two will be mentioned. The ancient castle of Sárvár contained an enormous number of art treasures. Its owner, a prince of the Bavarian royal house, saved

these objects by sending them to Germany in several trainloads. No-one has since looked into what he took to the West legally and what he took illegally, i.e. without an export permit. It was not looked into, since one of the successes of the Kádár régime was its foreign policy; which meant that it was so servile and mealy-mouthed towards the West that it was not given to raising issues of this kind. Now that Hungary has reached the shores of parliamentary democracy, for a change we have become even more servile, in order to court Western investors. The other example is that of the Count Berchtold family, who managed to send their magnificent collection of paintings to the West in its entirety, similarly using scarce railway rolling-stock.

After the German occupation of Hungary in the spring of 1944, Hungarian Jewry found themselves doubly captive. In their own interests, and to assuage the expected German "thirst for culture", the Hungarian authorities sequestered art works kept in Jewish apartments, town-houses and villas. At this time, however, the best art works belonging to Jews were already in the safes and strongrooms of the larger Budapest banks, where their prescient owners had placed them in 1942 and 1943. These, which were worth billions, amounted to an appreciable part of the Hungarian cultural heritage, both quantitatively and qualitatively. However incredible it may sound, the safes containing these art works survived to the end of the war unopened and unharmed. Easily identifiable art works of such high value did not arouse the interest of the German troops occupying Hungary. Realising that the war was already lost, and wisely thinking ahead regarding bank secrecy, they did not exceed certain limits. But they did pocket the jewellery, gold and precious stones of Jews outside the capital, who



were almost totally liquidated. The identification of such items was impossible after the war; the property stolen from these Jews provided for more than one high-ranking Nazi a carefree existence and a prosperous old age in South America. Likewise, Ferenc Szálasi, the Hungarian Arrow-Cross leader, who came to power in October 1944, did not touch the objects in the strongrooms. He was not so much motivated by sober considerations as by lack of time. He was content with the fact that selected material from the Hungarian museums and a significant proportion of the art works sequestered from Jews were being evacuated to Germany. With only modest losses, these were returned to Hungary in 1946 and 1947, as part of the restitution procedure. Nearly all were given back to their rightful owners, or to their authorized legal representatives. Afterwards most of these objects were smuggled out of Hungary; their owners also left, thus avoiding possible punishment. To what extent this is or is not understandable or forgivable is not a subject for consideration here. What remains a fact is that an enormous cultural loss occurred, or, to be more exact, that another enormous cultural loss occurred.

The great bulk of the treasures—of enormous value—kept in the banks did not remain in Hungary either. These were taken care of by units of the Soviet Red Army trained in the looting of art works. Wherever possible, these units had bank premises containing art works opened by bank staff; otherwise they used explosives, and simply removed the material they found. The circumstances of removal and temporary storage in Hungary were barbaric. When, after August 1945, the great part of the material had been taken from the central collecting points to the Soviet Union, the Hungarian governmental authorities were able to make on-site inspections. They established that an enor-

mous amount of porcelain, mostly 18th-century Meissen and Vienna ware, remained, smashed into pieces, and that fragments of old Hungarian printed matter, documents, stamp collections and picture frames were to be found among the ashes of bonfires. Certain records refer to the fact that some several hundred tons of old silver thus removed was melted down while still in Hungary, and that the bars—art works turned into ingots—were taken to Moscow. Soviet units also destroyed or burnt *in situ* surviving valuables from public warehouses in the capital and from country houses, churches, libraries and archives in the provinces, taking the best items, when possible, to the Budapest collecting points and from there eastwards. They showed no consideration for premises in Hungary enjoying diplomatic protection, if these were “suspicious” for some reason. A large number of Hungarian art collections had been taken by their owners to the Swedish legation, whose actions in saving Jews had been particularly heroic. In the days following the liberation of Budapest, Soviet troops turned up there and opened the safes with oxyacetylene equipment, and took away their contents. All this took place after the cessation of hostilities, at great expense to Hungary, which by then was an ally, and not an enemy. This grievance is unredressed even today.

It is a wonder that after such happenings any art work remained in private hands. Today there are far fewer, considering that the (mostly illegal) export of art works continued without a break after 1945. It continues today, and as far as one can tell, will do so in the future as well. There are many obvious and well-known examples of this.

Since 1929 Hungary's stock of art treasures has been protected by law. This means that, for practical purposes, a more valuable piece can only leave the country



with an export permit. Alas, these laws have never been anything but wishful thinking cast in the appropriate legal form, and the responsible officials of all régimes were incapable of ensuring that they be observed. They never contained serious legal sanctions. At the time of writing, similarly unrealistic legislation is being drafted, which only awaits approval by a parliament clearly unaware of what is at stake.

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**W**estern Transdanubia has always been an important region from the point of view of Hungarian culture and politics. It is the westernmost part of the country, the bulk of which, even in the painful centuries of conquest and pillage, remained under the rule of the kings of Hungary and were governed by the Hungarian constitution. As a result of this, most of the richest, oldest and most splendid aristocratic homes were located in it as well as a considerable number of towns, with an established and sizable number of burghers. In the 16th and 17th centuries, Transdanubia was a border area, lying adjacent to those parts of Hungary which had come under Turkish rule. Every town and every major estate centre was fortified, and some churches and monasteries were built in a way that would offer effective defence against Turkish marauders. The homes of the aristocracy had been fortified as a matter of course—previously they had served as a defence against pressure from beyond the western border—or were turned into fortified homes in the 16th century.

An enormous number of art treasures and valuable furnishings were to be found in the region, which in the last stage of the Second World War and in the initial period following the expulsion of the Germans was exposed to grave threat. If we ignore Budapest, at least 35–40 per cent of Hungary's post-Trianon cultural heritage

was located in these three western counties given additional importance by the fact that the greater part of the various delayed or held-up consignments of museum and library material carried off from Budapest—"evacuated", to use the word employed by Szálasi's Hungarian fascist (Arrow Cross) government in 1944—could be saved while in transit to the West, or if not, then data concerning its despatch could be established. It was also hoped that something could be found out about the (largely Jewish-owned) art treasures stolen or looted in Budapest by the Germans. The most arresting issue at that stage, however, were excesses by the Soviet military, which caused the destruction of artistic and historical treasures that had escaped the tender mercies of Germans and the Arrow Cross, perhaps being left behind for lack of time or transport. Local inhabitants also joined in the pillaging of property, sometimes in league with Soviet troops.

For all these reasons Count Géza Teleki, the first post-war Minister of Religious and Educational Affairs, deemed it necessary to delegate an art historian, Pál C. Voit, to look into matters. Voit's report on his August 1945 tour of inspection has survived in the archives. It would make for fascinating reading if its content were not so depressing. No access to the document—or to similar documents—was possible before 1990. Only one or two trusted archivists knew of it, and its publication was out of the question as was any serious research on wartime or post-liberation atrocities by the Soviet occupational forces. It is not possible even today to comment definitively concerning the validity and accuracy of the document's each and every statement. The total picture is further complicated by the fact that surviving pieces from the country and town houses of the aristocracy and larger manor-houses ended up in various museums, libraries, archives or



public offices, or in certain institutions of the financial administration, possibly a good distance from their original locations. Settling their fate and the clarification of ownership appear to be highly problematical even today.

Following the stages of Pál Voit's journey, a number of comments are in order, based on additional archive material and also on information which has inevitably come to light in the course of work on Hungarian public collections over a number of decades. I shall discuss some of the mostly painful stations of Pál Voit's journey.

**Szombathely** is a county seat in the western marches of the country. The person best acquainted with local conditions, whom Pál Voit also wished to employ, was, beyond doubt, Ágoston Pável. He, however, was prepared to co-operate only on "certain conditions". The report is diplomatically silent on what exactly these conditions might have been. Pável probably requested tactful treatment in connection with his role during the war years, an assurance which the ministerial commissioner was unauthorized to give. Pável had participated in the sequestration and collection of Jewish-owned works of art and historical treasures which had taken place in 1944. This had been directed from Budapest, by the "Jewish Government Commission" (full name: "Government Commission for the Registration and Safeguarding of Art Treasures Sequestered from Jews"). Those engaged on the job were acting on official orders and only a few dared to resist this "central direction". Like Ágoston Pável, many "Government Commissioners", however, saved Jewish-owned movable property, showing good will. The Hungarian Jewish community was quick to issue a statement on this as early as 1945, that post-1945 measures were of little or no account. The report did not mention

the fact that, as a result of a direct hit by a bomb, Szombathely Cathedral's enormous altarpiece by Franz Anton Maulbertsch and his studio had been completely destroyed.

**Répceszentgyörgy:** The house there served mostly as a summer residence for Bishop Mikos. The art collection, furniture and interior fittings were—as Voit wrote—taken away by "soldiers of unknown nationality". This expression was an early example of the euphemisms used when dealing with matters that concerned the Soviets, and occurs on very many occasions in post-war archive material. In each and every instance it meant Soviet troops. At that time the Germans could by and large be named openly, since they were already out of the country.

**Vasszécsény:** Of the Ebergényis' two old and interesting houses there, one was built in the 16th century. The enormous number of art treasures that the two homes contained were destroyed during the fighting. Most of the buildings listed in the neighbourhood were also large. Many objects from the museum at nearby Vasvár were actually taken by the Germans, and the majority have never come to light. In a number of places the more important objects were removed from the buildings by local inhabitants.

**Kőszeg:** Near the Austrian border, this is still one of the most prosperous and beautiful little towns in Hungary with a unique historic townscape. Fortunately, it escaped wartime damage, and a number of privately-owned art collections survive there presently. István Lehrner's (Lelkes) solution for the problems connected with the Chernel house was a rare occurrence. Here it should be noted that the furniture and fittings which passed into the hands of the parties, principally the Communist and the Smallholders' Parties, later ended up in a museum.



**Celldömölk:** The Soviet requisitioning of the premises housing the Lázár collection was a typical case. For a considerable period of time the Hungarian authorities were not allowed into the building, and the objects housed there could not be found when the soldiers and their families moved out. It would appear that in Celldömölk the Soviet soldiers rarely appropriated things that could be regarded as art work, nor did they hand them over to military authorities. Much was destroyed, however, as a result of careless handling. It later turned out that the soldiers put up in this building carried on a lively barter trade with the local population, and with shrewd buyers from further afield. In this exchange many valuable objects were dispersed. The great majority of these cannot be identified. Occasionally, and even today, a few first-rate objects come to light which can be identified on the basis of a family coat of arms or in some other way. However, the greater part of the objects that disappeared in this way were, in the course of time, smuggled abroad. **Ikervár,** the huge centre of the Batthyány estate, served as a recreational area for the Red Army, and while it was used as such its contents disappeared.

**Sárvár:** Sárvár Castle, once the home of the Nádasdy family, was one of the few to survive more or less intact. It was used by the Red Army for a long time. The building and a significant part of the estates around it was owned by a Bavarian prince. A considerable part of the furniture and fittings removed by the owner had been brought to Hungary by him. We have our doubts regarding the removal of another part: art works which, to the best of our knowledge, were not given export licenses. The small quantity of furniture and fittings which remained at Sárvár turned up later. With the knowledge and consent of their Wittelsbach owner, most of the items were

put on display in the museum set up in the building.

**Szentivánfa:** One of the many country residences which belonged to the Bezerédj family. The building could be more precisely described as a manor house. Its furniture and fittings were extremely valuable. There is every indication that the precious-metal objects were looted by the Germans, or possibly by Arrow-Cross men. As Voit writes, the house was destroyed by the Arrow Cross. During the war Szentivánfa must have been one of the most horrific places in the country: insofar as it is possible to reconstruct events, it could have been the Hungarian Salo. The two surviving female members of the Bezerédj family left nothing to chance: they hid the gold and silver objects in the walls in two places. The commercial material (which formed the larger part) was found by the Germans and carried off. The material of historical value was discovered and taken by the Soviets. Not one piece has so far come to light. In both cases the hidden treasures were found on the basis of informers' reports.

**Vép:** Residence of the Counts Erdődy. The indications are that the building was emptied by Soviet soldiers. The contents were thrown out, or destroyed. The villagers played a major role in the carrying away of the valuables, of which hardly any have since come to light. Similarly, no trace remains of the pieces saved by the owner, Count Sándor Erdődy. A few family portraits, however, survived in some mysterious way, and were passed on to a museum.

**Somlyóvár:** Residence of the Counts Erdődy. Some collections at the Budapest War Museum (today's Museum of War History) were moved to the provinces. One was taken to Somlyóvár. Voit's clear account gave rise to the suspicion that the disappearance of the objects could be laid at the door of the Soviet military authori-





*Ikervár, the Batthyány chateau and its music room; Sárovar Castle, festive hall.  
Photographs were taken prior to 1944.*



ties, wrongly, as it turned out. However, with regard to treasures placed elsewhere by the War Museum, what happened is somewhat vague. According to rumours circulating in Russia, many such war history relics taken from Hungary are in Moscow.

**Szentgotthárd:** Here Voit succeeded in getting hold of numerous pieces left behind by Szálasi's fleeing supporters. He merely touches on the theme. A great percentage of museum and private collection objects that remained in the town were later returned to Budapest and for the most part were restored to their original owners. The consignments sent to Austria were seized by the American authorities and approximately 95 per cent of their material was returned to Hungary between 1945 and 1947. This material—much affected by the vicissitudes of its transportation by repeated and careless re-packing, and by transshipment—could be exhibited only after many years of restoration work.

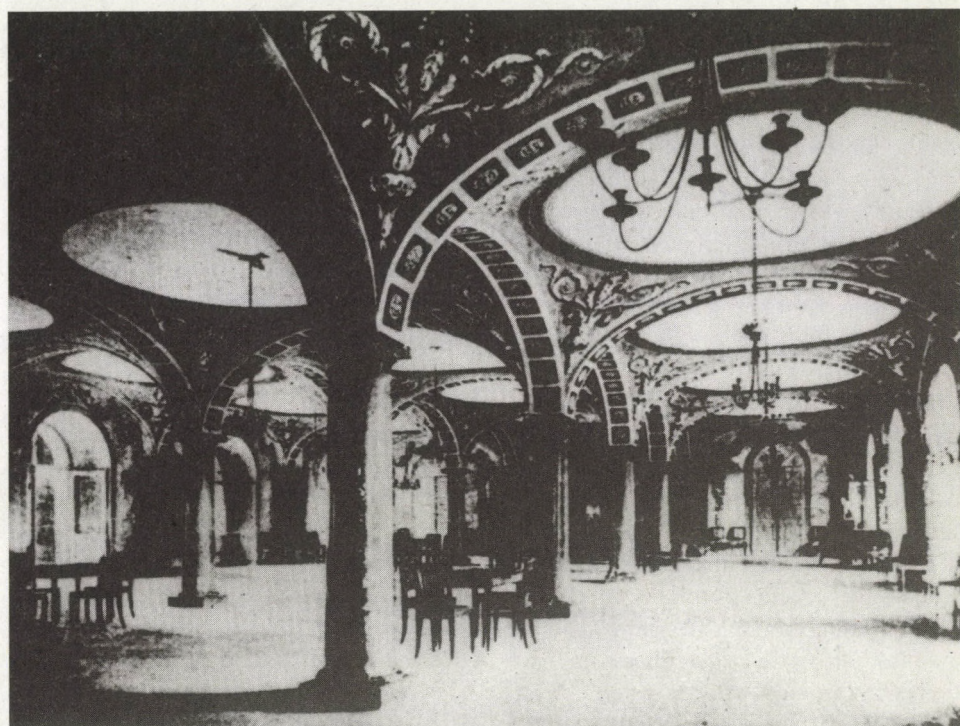
**Körmend:** The Renaissance Batthyány mansion was one of the country's largest buildings and contained treasures accumulated by an immensely rich family over a period of 800 years. The contents, which were of matchless value, survived the war in a manner that bordered on the miraculous. The building unfortunately passed into the hands of the Soviet military, following a modest amount of looting by the local population, and Cossacks, not really renowned for their restrained behaviour, were billeted in it. Together with his pupils, an outstanding teacher, amply blessed with a sense of responsibility, somehow endeavoured to save at least part of the material. The objects at Körmend were too good simply to fall prey to destruction; Soviet experts took away not only tapestries bearing pictorial designs and coats of arms, but also carpets and other items of immense value—among them enormous Turkish ornamented tents—in three freight

wagons. Using lorries, the Russian soldiers at Körmend took the weapons collection (of several thousand pieces) and the Batthyány archives (one of the largest in Hungary) to the outskirts of the town, where they discarded everything. János Kőszegi and his helpers gathered up all they could, dried documents (many dated back to the Early Middle Ages which had become soaked, and took the weapons to safety. Later on the documents passed to the Hungarian National Archives, and the weapons to the Hungarian National Museum, where they now make up the bulk of the weapons collection. A considerable number of them boasted ivory or precious metal inlays. Some are carefully selected hunting weapons of unique importance.

According to Voit and Kőszegi, the family pictures were completely destroyed. But the truth was a little kinder: although the paintings suffered serious damage, most of them later passed to museums and many could be restored. Their survival was helped by the fact that soldiers could put pictures to practical use. For example, an equestrian portrait showing one of the Batthyány-Strattmann princes served as a lavatory door. When the Soviet troops pulled out of the building, just one painting remained intact: a large equestrian portrait showing Maria Theresa as Queen of Hungary. One explanation for its survival is that for some reason the Russians thought it was of Catherine the Great, and therefore spared it. Furthermore, many objects found their way into private homes nearby, since in Körmend, too, Russian soldiers carried on a barter trade with Hungarian civilians. During the course of a swift police operation, most of these were confiscated and taken to a museum. The works of the greatest value, however, never came to light.

**Alsópaty:** A small country house owned by the Felsőbüki Nagy family. A consider-





*Kőrmend, the Batthyány mansion. Pre-war photographs*



able quantity of the material it contained was destroyed. However, surprisingly many of its stoves and pictures survived and are still in the building, which is open to the public.

**Bük:** Szapáry residence. The greater part of the Szapáry archives were destroyed. All traces of the paintings mentioned by Voit have been lost: they were, presumably, taken to the West. The Szapáry family homes were generally beautifully and richly furnished. As the main legatee to the Venetian Morosini collection, the family obtained primarily Italian and Venetian pictures. It included masterpieces by Giovanni Bellini, Giambattista Tiepolo, Sebastiano Ricci, Giambattista Piazzetta, the two Longhis, Luca Giordano, and many others. Nearly all left the country, with a good many going to major world museums (for example, a Tiepolo ceiling passed to the Brera in Milan).

**Peresznye:** Berchtold gallery. Characteristically, this family had a palace on the Grand Canal, and the material was mostly Italian. With the exception of the few works donated to the parish church in Nagyorosz and to the Archiepiscopal Museum in Esztergom, almost everything was removed from Hungary, with just a few water colours turning up in the Hungarian art trade decades later. The contents of the gallery are not as well known as that of the Szapárys.

**Sopron:** As in Kőszeg, conditions here remained comparatively good. The Corvina codices mentioned in the report all came to light and were returned to libraries in Budapest. The numismatic material looted by the Germans was not recovered. Endre Csatkai, the director of the local museum, did everything possible to save material, and his efforts were largely successful.

**Eszterháza:** This palace, where Haydn worked as Kappelmeister (1772–1790) and was known as the “Hungarian Versailles,”

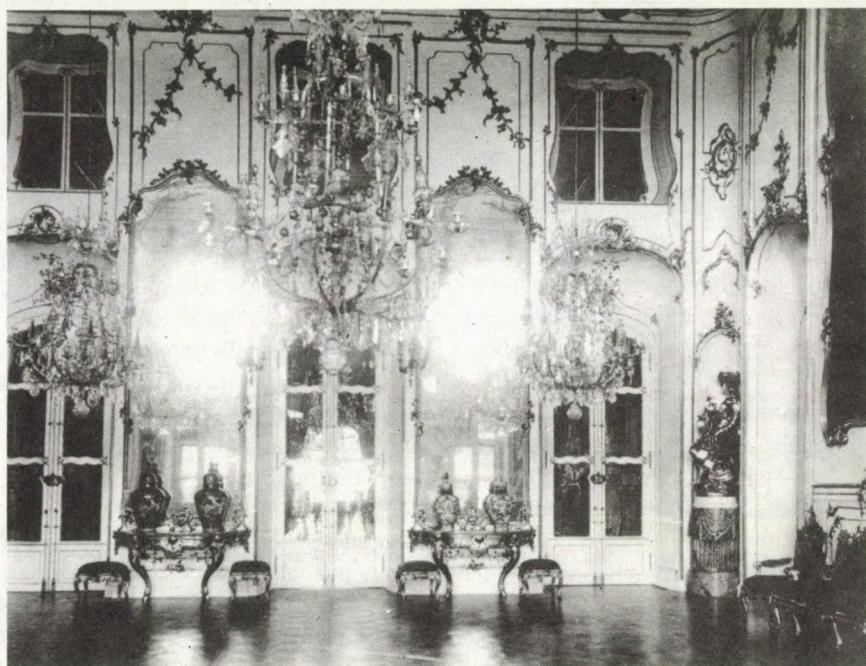
suffered enormous damage, and so did the park. The primary cause of the destruction was the billeting of soldiers there in 1945. Some of the furniture and fittings were burnt by Soviet troops, some were discarded, and others were bartered with the local population. Of the several thousand art works in the building, scarcely any remained. Even twenty to thirty years later it was still possible to purchase outstanding pieces from people living in the area. This was the greatest single loss to occur in Western Transdanubia.

**Hédervár:** Approximately 10,000 volumes, some 10 per cent of the whole of the vast Kluen-Héderváry library, survived. These were brought to Budapest. The pictures left in place remained in the Soviet military hospital housed there, and they have disappeared without trace. The chapel, though, remained untouched. Later on a Hungarian primary school was established in the building. It was then that the valuable furniture and fittings—such as the Rococo-tiled stoves—were discarded.

**N**ot every house, town or village has been mentioned in the above list. It is perhaps worth noting things about which Voit is silent, since they lay outside his brief, namely that the Soviet authorities, throughout the whole of Hungary, took away anything that could be moved from every bank, financial institution and public warehouse. This property, too, included art works and art collections. The fate of these is unknown.

The conclusion has to be very brief. At the end of his report, Pál Voit writes: “*I was able to establish that in this region 80 per cent of the art relics from the Hungarian past have been destroyed.*” As we know today, this was a cautious and optimistic estimate. The real quantity lost probably exceeded 90 per cent, although the precise figure will, in all probability, never be known. ■





Bence Képesi

*The Esterházy Palace. Etching by F. Landerer from Beschreibung des Hochfürstlichen Schlosses Esterháss im Königreiche Ungarn, Pressburg, 1784 and a photograph of one of the festive rooms taken around 1900.*



# Report

to the Minister of Religious and Educational Affairs

by

Pál C. Voit

on Museums, Museum Collections and

Privately-Owned Art Works in Western Transdanubia, August 1945

**U**nder Assignment No. 27.052/1945, the Minister of Religious and Educational Affairs commissioned me to track down art collections taken from other parts of the country to Vas, Sopron and Moson-Győr counties and to make arrangements for their return. At the same time, I was asked to catalogue endangered art collections in private hands in these counties—movable property of especial importance from artistic, scientific, historical and museum points of view—and, where necessary, to make arrangements on the spot, on the basis of Government Decree No. 4450/1945 M.E., for its safeguarding, with instructions that I should keep a diary of my official tour and submit a report as soon as possible after my return.

I left in the early morning of August 2 in the company of Dr János Kapossy, national chief archivist, and Dr Sándor Kozocsa, a librarian, both of whom were given similar assignments. Because of much trouble with our car and the ruinous state of the roads, I reached Szombathely only after sunset.

On August 3 we established contact with the heads of the local authorities: with the Deputy Lord-Lieutenant of Vas county, the Mayor of Szombathely, with leading figures in the Roman Catholic Church and Dr Ágoston Pável, the director of the local museum. Dr Pável reported

that the museum's material had not suffered major damage, and that the objects were relatively safe. János Tóth—chief architect of the town and honorary custodian of the museum's fine and decorative arts collections—reported that of the ceramics material that was valuable, some pieces of Haban faience ware had been broken. According to Ágoston Pável, no museum-type antiquities have so far come to light in Szombathely: such items had been collected neither by the museum, nor by the parties, nor by the Government Commission for Abandoned Property, nor by the police, and none had been seized during the time of the Szálasi régime. To the best of his knowledge, no consignments of this type reached Szombathely for storage. However, a report had been filed in connection with the protection of the Lázár private archaeological collection at Celldömölk, the owner of which was deported to Germany last year. His representative in Celldömölk requested urgent help, since soldiers were billeted in the building constructed to house the collection.

I asked Museum Director Ágoston Pável to accept the responsibility of taking charge of any art works sequestered in Szombathely and in Vas county. Mr Pável was willing to perform this task only if certain conditions were met. Since I consid-

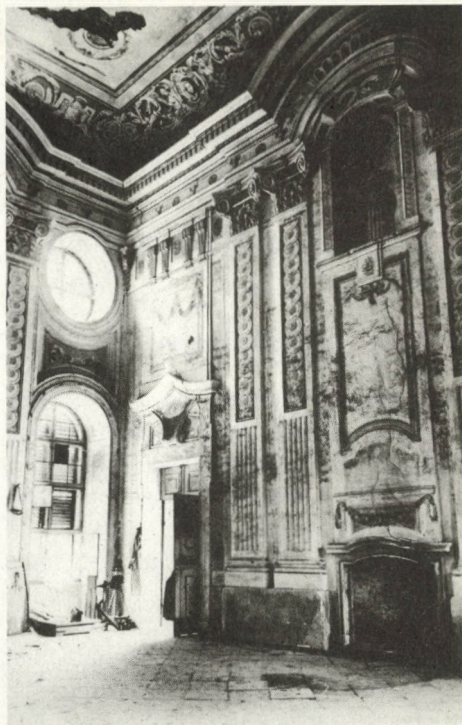


ered these conditions unreasonable, I did not commission Museum Director Ágoston Pável. In Szombathely, art works and museum-type antiquities have been barely damaged; the furniture in the Bishop's Palace is for the most part unharmed. Certain items, such as the Louis Seize salon pieces in the reception room, were taken to the Sorok manor on the episcopal estate to protect them against air raids. The fate of these pieces is unknown. The bomb which hit the rear wing of the Bishop's Palace destroyed only smaller rooms and caused no substantial damage. At present, the bombed-out Mayor's Office is located in the palace, with the result being that the furniture and fittings, which are renowned among art historians, enjoy the appropriate protection.

The church furnishings of Szombathely Cathedral, as well as of the other churches, are intact. Although the cathedral was destroyed, the devotional objects in the sacristy, which remained intact, were spared. The same is also true of the high altar's Alt Wien porcelain pieces, which were moved to safety before the bombing. The bishop of Szombathely has called on all the parishes of the diocese to submit reports on damage to buildings and liturgical and other objects; the reports are due to arrive shortly.

Approximately one-eighth of the material of Bishop Mikos's art collection at the country house at Répceszentgyörgy is stored on loan in the Szombathely seminary; the rest were removed by soldiers of unknown nationality at the beginning of May this year.

Dr Imre Abay, the librarian of the seminary who has visited the location, supplied many important details. It was he who reported that the Chapel of St Guy, in Vas county, had been looted, and the furniture and fittings of the chapel at Vassurány destroyed.



National Ancient Monuments Authority

*Interior of the Ebergényi château at Vasszécsény.*

*Photograph taken in the early fifties*

In Vasszécsény both 17th-century Ebergényi houses are undamaged. The older one serves as a recreation centre for the Russian military. There is no way of getting in, and the fate of the furniture and fittings is unknown. The Ambrózy-Migazzi palace at Tanakajd is still standing; its furnishings have been recently broken up and its botanical gardens destroyed, including the famous cedar of Lebanon. At Táplánszentkereszt the Rosenberg (Széll) house is still standing; its furnishings were destroyed recently. The home of the Counts Szécheny was a recreation centre for Russian soldiers for two months. The exterior of the Draskovich palace is intact, the interior destroyed. The house at Bogát is still standing; its furniture and fittings



are missing. The churches at Bucsú and Vát-Szentkút have been looted; the church at Nemeslód is being used as a stable. The museum at Vasvár was stripped by German soldiers billeted in it. The liturgical objects of the church and monastery at Vasvár are still there.

On August 3 we went on to Kőszeg, where, according to information received from Father Székely, the parish's Gothic monstrance and Gothic chalices have survived and are safe, as are the devotional objects of the parish church and those of the Benedictines. However, the Baroque statues in the Calvary Chapel have been broken up. Almost without exception, the old Kőszeg families have remained in their homes, with the result that some houses of historical value today enjoy the protection their owners can give them. On the other hand, it came to my attention that the Chernel palace at Kőszeg—the owners of which, the Baron Mike and the Baron Schelwer families, are living abroad—was being emptied at the very time we were there. Hurrying to the scene, I discovered that, in the courtyard, there was already a large quantity of antique furniture awaiting transportation. In the upstairs rooms I found representatives of the local Communist Party, who were making arrangements for further shipments. The representatives of the Communist Party declared that the Russian military command had sequestered the furnishings of the palace, and that when the sequestration order was lifted, it had commissioned the party to distribute the movable items among the poor of the town.

The local Communists had commissioned Aladár Visnya, director of the Kőszeg Museum, to select museum-worthy material. With the exception of the renowned Chernel ornithological library, the items selected by Aladár Visnya were all

unimportant odds and ends, and he wanted to lock these up in one of the rooms of the palace with the express intention of restoring them to the former owners if and when they return.

Since there seemed to be no hope of agreement between Aladár Visnya and the parties, and the museum director possessed neither the expertise nor the seriousness necessary, and since he had not represented the interests of his museum, I ordered material selected by me to be taken to a room in the town museum which had been selected for this purpose. I also ordered the collection of antique furniture and fittings already distributed and their placing under lock and key. In the presence of the local town clerk, who represented the mayor, I assigned the custodial and other local duties to István Lehrner, a teacher of art at the Benedictine *gimnázium*, who convinced me there and then that he had the necessary expertise as well as the full confidence of the local parties. At the same time I persuaded the Communist Party representatives that the objects of cultural value placed in the museum would, at some future date, belong to the community, something for which their party is striving. The representatives not only recognized that the interests of the culture of the nation had to be placed above the different interests of the parties, but also expressed pleasure at the fact that they could play an important part in the re-founding of the Kőszeg Town Museum, by way of a substantial increase in its collections.

On August 4, I hurried to inspect the Lázár archeological collection at Celldömölk, which was in need of urgent protection. It had been mentioned to me by Ágoston Pável, the director of Szombathely Museum. During discussions with the local basalt quarry management,



which was acting as the representative of the owner, who had been deported to Germany, it turned out that some two months earlier Ukrainian families had been housed in the museum building constructed by the owner, and that they had caused severe damage to some items. However, the release of the building had been achieved a few days earlier, and at present the greater part of the collection was still unharmed. I appointed Dr Lajos Smiedt, a senior physician at Szombathely Hospital, who is currently working in Celldömölk and who is also a well-known Vas county amateur archeologist and art collector, to act as custodian of the collection, giving him authority throughout the county. As his assistant I appointed Dr Imre Abay, librarian of the Szombathely seminary. Lajos Smiedt informed me that the liturgical objects of the Benedictine church at Celldömölk were in place, although the monastery had been used as a billet. He also informed me that his very valuable archeological and fine arts collection stored in Szombathely survived the war and the devastations which followed it.

**O**n the way back, we did not manage to visit the country homes at Ikervár and Sárvár because in these, as in country houses generally, recreation centres for the Russian military are operating. Since we had no papers from the Russian military authorities, our attempts at entry were vain. According to information received from the parish priest at Sárvár, the owner, Prince Franz of Bavaria, sent two trainloads of material from the castle and the estate to Germany (Leitstetten, Bavaria) well before the liberation took place. The liturgical objects of the church at Sárvár are intact. At Szentivánfa, Mária Bezerédj's Empire-style home, along with its furniture and fittings, was destroyed by the Arrow Cross. With the exception of the li-

brary and the archives, all was burnt, including the picture gallery on the first floor, old furniture and works of art. The gold objects, the items of goldsmith's work and the silver items belonging to Bishop Bezerédj were probably taken away by the Germans. The Arrow Cross set up an executioners' school at Szentivánfa, where aspirant executioners were trained in hanging and other execution techniques. In order to obliterate the traces of the summary court held in the building, three party workers were left behind to set the building on fire, together with the art works it contained.

**O**n Sunday, August 5, I inspected the ecclesiastical collections at Szombathely and the liturgical objects of the city's churches. Fortunately, they have escaped the ravages of war. In the afternoon we went to Count Sándor Erdődy's palace in the nearby village of Vép, but found no way whatever of gaining entry. At the parish office we found Sándor Erdődy himself who, by his almost heroic firmness, had saved very many of the family treasures. He collected surviving antiques thrown out of upstairs windows by the inmates, placing some of them with village people. Of the collection of paintings, which formerly comprised some seventy to eighty items, he managed to save thirty to thirty-five old Italian and Dutch paintings, together with three large Oriental rugs, a 17th-century Italian brocatelle chasuble bearing a presentation inscription and the year 1663, etc. He requested protection and sequestration. What remains of the collection has been locked up in the oratory of the Presentation Church, and in the presence of the village notary and members of the local National Committee we appointed Ferenc Balta, a local official, to act as custodian. Although the weapons collection has been completely destroyed,



many pictures and other antiques are in the possession of villagers. According to the village authorities, these could only be recovered through the intervention of the police, but implementation of the relevant sections of Decree No. 4450/1945 would be successful only at another time. The correctness of this view was proved at nearly every stage of our official journey. From Vép we went to the village of Bakófa, where—just hours before the arrival of the Ukrainian families that were to be housed there—we put Hungarian National Museum sequestration plates on the part of the county archive placed for safekeeping in the local Erdődy house.

According to information from Sándor Erdődy, the war museum "in safekeeping" at Count Péter Erdődy's home at Somlyóvár, on the border of Veszprém county, has been broken up by the soldiery and is completely destroyed. Some pieces from the collection of old uniforms can be seen on Gypsies in the village, who derive great pleasure from walking around in the old, ornate dress uniforms of generals. The castle of Rum, in which Count Móric Széchenyi had magnificent 18th-century Hungarian furniture brought from the house at Pápa, also presents a picture of desolation. In the park one can still see an enormous inlaid wardrobe from the time of Maria Theresa, used by the inmates there as a commode.

On August 6 we went on to Szentgotthárd, where, in line with my mission, I was to look for art works transported there from other parts of the country. On the basis of information gained by Dr Zoltán Oroszlán, of the Museum of Fine Arts, and with the co-operation of János Nemes, a Szombathely detective, and the cooperation of the Szentgotthárd police, I began the investigation. The threads of a short, one-and-a-half-day inquiry led on

the one hand to Budapest, and on the other abroad and to Szentgotthárd and its vicinity. Concerning details of the investigation, which may be termed delicate, I have prepared a separate, confidential report, one copy of which I enclose for the Minister of Religious and Educational Affairs and one copy for István Genthon, Curator of the Museum of Fine Arts, with a view to further inquiries.

Regarding art works "rescued" by the former curator Dénes Csányi, it can be established that the most valuable consignment was probably that which left the country by road for Germany. Because loading was interrupted, some items were left in the courtyard at the Cistercian monastery at Szentgotthárd, while others were left in the passage leading to the monastery cellars, and yet another portion in the locked air-raid shelter in the cellars.

In the confusion of the liberation, many of the boxes were broken open, and the air-raid shelter was plundered. Between the liberation, the drawing up of an inventory by Ministry official Dr Irén Várady, and their transportation back, much time elapsed, during which there was ample opportunity for unauthorized persons to gain access. This was when the painting we discovered in a Szentgotthárd school sick bay could have left the monastery. This large oil painting (approx. 240 x 160 cm), *Hagar at the Well*, and which has a gilded frame, was damaged in two or three places. It had a red stamp on its back reading: "Miksa Schiffer, Certified Engineer". Because of its size, I was unable to take it with me in the car, and it is temporarily safeguarded in its present location.

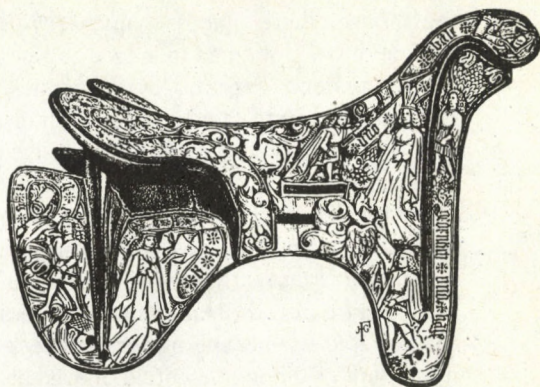
I received twenty-four sketches originating from the Wolfner collection from Father Felicián Gondán, a Cistercian, and the librarian of the order, and took them to Budapest. These came to light in the library of the order. I also brought with me



a jug from Upper Hungary (also from the Wolfner collection), which I found during my inspection of the monastery.

**O**n August 7 we established contact in Körmend with János Kőszegi, a headmaster who, according to information we had obtained in Szombathely, was already zealously and successfully rescuing the archives of the Princes Batthyány-Strattmann. He said he was present some two months ago when tapestries bearing the Batthyány coat of arms and rare Persian carpets from the antiques collection were taken away in trucks by soldiers of unknown nationality. The renowned weapons collection has been broken up, thrown out or taken away by the Cossacks billeted in the house. One Cossack tried out the pride of the collection, the exquisite 14-century ivory saddle from the time of King Sigismund, much discussed in Hungarian art history. Despite all Kőszegi's pleas, this Cossack—although he could see that he could not use it for riding—then put the saddle in his sack and took it away. Against a receipt, I brought with me to Budapest a single broken item salvaged from the huge weapons collection—a Turkish 17th-century dagger.

The task of custodian in Körmend was delegated to János Kőszegi and Chaplain Lajos Koltay. The oratory of the church was designated as the place of sequestration, and a copy of the inventory drawn up in the presence of the the local authorities was placed in the town archives. János Kőszegi's thorough local knowledge made it possible for us to enter the house—which was occupied by the Russian military—through a back door. Inside we were greeted by a most distressing sight. The paintings in the marble hall, the "sala terrena", were missing. They showed the ancestors of the Batthyáns and are highly valuable from the history of costume point



*Bone saddle from the Batthyány-Strattmann Collection at their Körmend mansion; now at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.*

*First half of the 15th century.*

of view. According to Kőszegi, these works were cut into strips by the soldiers.

The same day I was visited in Szombathely by Dr Lajos Tuboly in connection with the furniture and fittings of the 18th-century house in Alsópaty which was the property of his wife (née Teréz Felsőbüki Nagy). These had been destroyed. He said that they included old faience stoves and pieces of furniture—among them a wardrobe from the time of Maria Theresa with inlay pictures of the four parts of the world—and pictures, some of them the work of Rosa da Tivoli. These objects have largely been destroyed. For purposes of salvage, and protection, if this is still possible, I gave the owner a sequestration plate, on condition that he establish contact with the local representative, Dr Lajos Smiedt, concerning possible sequestration in accordance with Decree No. 4450/1945 M.E.

**O**n August 8 we reached the village of Bük in Sopron county, where we were able to talk to the former owner, the Dowager Countess Szapáry, and to see in her room, in the gardener's cottage, some of the pieces from the historical interior of



the house there, pieces which—by a caprice of fate—she had managed to save. In the château, pictures by a Viennese Biedermeier painter, Ender, have been destroyed, along with the fine English-type Empire furniture. Of the six Pietro Longhi paintings, two have been saved. The other four were taken away by a quartermaster. The house is currently serving as a recreation centre for the Russians. Countess Szapáry told us that the owner of Peresznye, Count Zsigmond Berchtold, moved his collection of paintings to Meran in good time. Besides the pictures he had recently inherited, his collection included paintings by Bisselo, Hamilton, Kriehuber, Amerling, Füger, Winterhalter, and Cranach.

Those parts of the church of Sopron-horpács which date back to the Árpáds are, together with its 18th-century pictures and fittings, undamaged. However, the old furniture and fittings of János Széchenyi's country house have probably been destroyed, since it is serving as a prison camp. At Sopronlővő, the parish priest was unable to supply us with information about the Gothic chalice mentioned in the literature. At Nagycenk, the home of Count István Széchenyi, those who stayed there threw out the library, the pictures and the furniture—including the pieces brought back from England by Széchenyi—and burnt them. A short while ago the Sopron police searched the village for Széchenyi relics—without much success, as far as I know.

**I**n Sopron I tried to get in touch with Dr Endre Csatkai, director of the town museum. With regard to the state of public and private collections in Sopron, my own information, on-the-spot visits and what I have learnt from Csatkai, can be summed up as follows. The Stornó Collection in the Stornó House on Ferenc József tér is intact. The furnishings of the Stornó "hall of art" have been destroyed, as have many

faience pieces, several 16th- and 17th-century wood carvings from the mining towns, inlaid chests, doors, etc. The room is currently used as a cinema. Apart from a few broken faience dishes, the private Zettl Collection has not been damaged. One or two Haban pieces at the town museum have disappeared, as have some 500 folk textile items. The collection of Roman glassware has been destroyed, as has its natural sciences collection. The 17th- and 18th-century tombstones and furniture have been damaged. János Stolz moved his collection of engravings and drawings to America earlier on. One or two pieces are missing from the Holl silver collection, but the silver items bearing the hallmarks of Sopron masters are all safe. The Töppler Collection—old Sopron costumes, pewters, a 17th-century clock, old furniture, and paintings by Antal Ligeti—shared the fate of the family: with the latter it lies buried beneath the ruins of the Töppler House. The Benedictine Collection was plundered by the Germans, especially the gold pieces in the coin and medal collection. The collection of Roman archeological items of the Lutheran Lyceum has been broken up, and a military hospital is still operating in the building. Some of the portraits in the building of the Lutheran convent are still there. The four to five chests of art works which Bálint Hóman allegedly had taken off the National Bank's golden train from Pannonhalma, and which should have been stored at the Benedictine monastery, seem to have contained Corvina codices (see the report by Sándor Kozocsa), for that reason I ended my own investigations.

**I** appointed Dr Endre Csatkai, director of the town museum, to act as custodian in Sopron and in Sopron county. With regard to the Esterházy palace at Eszterháza, news of the worst kind had reached Sopron. It is impossible to get near it, its



furnishings have been cast out and, according to rumour, at Eszterháza the women sit on Baroque chairs from the palace when milking cows. I called Endre Csatkai's special attention to Eszterháza. I would remark that in the last year Károly Diebold, a Sopron photographer, did manage to take some splendid photographs of the palace interior, to which it was always difficult to gain access. The photographs were made into an album, and I recommend acquisition of this for the library of the Museum of Applied Arts, so that the interiors of this magnificent, destroyed edifice and its furnishings are made accessible to posterity, at least through photographs of the appropriate standard.

On August 10, we reached Kapuvár via Fertőszéplak and Fertőszentmiklós. There the church's liturgical objects are—apart from one modern chalice—intact. The house, which in the past served only as flats for farm bailiffs, houses the local headquarters of the Democratic Federation of Hungarian Youth (MADISZ). At Csorna the liturgical objects of the Premonstratensian priory are unharmed, although the buildings have in the meantime been used for military purposes. Their two chasubles (one made of Louis Quinze silver brocade from Lyons) and the "golden diadem" are in a safe place. In Győr the liturgical objects of the churches have survived. One part of the town museum material that was packed up into chests was apparently taken to Brennberg, near Sopron. The state of the unclassified museum material belonging to the Benedictine *gimnázium* has not changed. In Győr, I appointed the town's Chief Archivist, Dr Ferenc Bay, to act as a custodian, requesting him to establish contact with the local authorities and with the Government Commission for Abandoned Property, especially since the

last-named has already collected museum-type material. Because Jenei, the former director of the town museum, has departed for the West, I gave the official commission to Dr Ferenc Bay. I asked him to ensure that the sequestration plate demanded from Budapest for the house at Hédervár reaches its destination, and that sequestration be implemented—if desired by the owner, Károly Khuen-Héderváry. Despite the instructions I received in Budapest, I was unable to go out personally to Hédervár, because petrol for the car was beginning to run low. For the same reason we were forced to leave Mosonmagyaróvár, and to start homewards.

**O**n August 11, after a ten-day official journey, we left for Budapest. János Kapossy stayed behind in Csorna, from where he returned to Szombathely.

With regard to my tour of inspection, which covered the war-torn region of Western Transdanubia, I returned with devastating impressions. Sometimes thanks to the force of state authority, sometimes through talking and persuasion, I managed to do everything possible to save the appallingly mutilated relics of the Hungarian past. But in most places I arrived too late, or else my efforts were blocked by obstacles we were unable to surmount, obstacles which are still insurmountable today. This was especially the case with regard to the treasures of the country houses. I was able to establish that in this region 80 per cent of the art relics from the Hungarian past have been destroyed, without real hope that this figure could be reduced, or that the still-present danger of destruction could be allayed, or that I could make any recommendation that might possibly save art treasures that continue to be destroyed, beyond protective measures contained in a government decree. ■

**Fair copy. Hungarian National Archives, K 726 461/1945.**



Miklós Györffy

## Clichés and Curiosities

Andor Szilágyi: *Shalim*. Budapest, Ab Ovo, 1997, 206 pp. • László Márton: *Jacob Wunschwitz igaz története* (The True Story of Jacob Wunschwitz). Pécs, Jelenkor, 1997, 234 pp. • Lajos Parti Nagy: *Sárbogárdi Jolán: A test anyala* (Jolán Sárbogárdi: The Angel of the Body). Pécs, Jelenkor, 1997, 92 pp.

Is it possible to write a good novel in Hungarian about the civil war in Bosnia? Of course it is, given the talent. Some personal experience of the war might be helpful, and an in-depth knowledge of events, such as first-hand information based on eye-witness accounts, for example, is essential. To make the case, one may point to the late György G. Kardos's outstanding trilogy set against the background of the Palestine events of 1947, with all the pandemonium surrounding the birth of the Jewish state. Obviously, no matter how good a writer Kardos was, his work would not have been the same had he not been there at the time.

Andor Szilágyi's novel, *Shalim*, is about the civil war in Bosnia. I do not know whether Szilágyi visited war-torn Bosnia, or whether he had any personal or first-hand experience of what people had gone through there. In terms of factual knowledge, his novel reveals no more about the events than newspapers and television would provide. *Shalim* is about an extended family of intricate genealogy, in which every single member across several gener-

ations falls victim to the Bosnian catastrophe. Only a small boy named Shalim survives, ending up in hospital, traumatized, almost in a coma. The traumas render him incapable of communicating. The story is pieced together from the fragmented, and initially incoherent, impressions, hallucinations and recollections of his shocked mind. In this way, the book gradually builds up its larger picture from the mosaics of small episodes. Nevertheless, this picture all along remains a fragmented one, insofar as the brief segments vary—occasionally even repeat—a relatively small number of situations; all the elements that may combine these scenes into a comprehensive tableau are absent from the novel. Each character is associated with just one situation or memory fragment, and the repeated narration of these scenes either serves to show the character from a slightly different angle, or resumes the same story-line. Nevertheless, there are many instances of almost literal repetitions.

Following many mythicizing saga novels of the more recent past, Mamó is a kind of primordial mother, or a primeval force of retention. At the age of 100 or so, she is above political and ethnic conflicts. What also vanishes with her death in the civil war is the knowledge and experience which up till then held the family—and

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is our regular reviewer of new fiction.



perhaps even the South Slav nation—together. All the other family members are of mixed ethnicity. Mamó's son, Mitho Kić, half Hungarian and half Jewish and dead long before the civil war, was a victim of the original sin in Yugoslav history, Tito's dictatorship. Once close to Tito in the partisan war against the Nazis, Mitho eventually fell from grace. Perhaps the best part of the novel, although somewhat familiar from other treatments of the theme, describes how a party functionary called Big Head tries to bring the retired Kić to heel. Tito's other confidant in the novel is Gyilovan, readily identified with Milovan Djilas. Shalim learns about these legendary historical preliminaries, merely one or two episodes in the novel, from Mamó. The memory mosaics of the sparring between Big Head and Mitho produce a layer of meaning rich in anecdotal details, greatly differing from Shalim's other memories.

Bosko, Shalim's father, was Mitho's grandson. To colour his Hungarian and Jewish ancestry, he also had some Serbian blood. Perhaps through this ethnic mixture—and in correspondence with the author's didactic intentions—Bosko and his European horizon would have meant the future, had he not been killed. His murderers were those Serbian nationalists whose chief proponent in the novel was Bosko's "milk cousin", Dragan. The endless political arguing between Bosko and Dragan is another one of the novel's recurring themes. Dragan's family name is Mladić, (the same as the Bosnian Serb commander's, now a wanted war criminal), which unequivocally marks Dragan's place in the novel. During a summer vacation on the coast before the war, Dragan saves Bosko's life so as to fend off criticism of being a one-dimensional character. But in order to show that Dragan was still a monster, we are told that his wife has left him; that he raided Bosko's house

with a bunch of Chetniks; and finally, that it was Mamó herself, the allegorical primeval mother and wielder of the people's justice, who kills him with Mitho's old partisan rifle.

Shalim's brother is Danilo Kić—a clear reference to Danilo Kiš, the great Yugoslav writer and civil-right activist. Their childhood games are in the imaginary world of cowboys and Indians—a subconscious protest against the stupidity and barbarism of "white men". In the Mostar hospital, Shalim is attended by a coloured nurse of a fabulously cheerful disposition, who acts as the counter-point against this background of moronic and murderous nationalism. All this strikes readers as being carefully calculated to produce an effect—and as placing them under a certain moral pressure. In Szilágyi's novel, every little detail is served in portions strictly according to political correctness, and to object to this on aesthetic grounds makes one politically suspicious. Still, it must be said that precisely because of that political correctness and the book's political and moralizing tendencies, *Shalim* as a novel is less than convincing. Everything is exactly how it should be, in the way that we, the morally superior, know and feel that it should be. This impression is further enhanced by the didactic care in drawing the characters and defining the emphasis. Yet, the life experience on which the novel draws seems limited and meagre and the sensual and material presence of the characters hardly affects us. The variations of situations and chronological layers soon become mechanical. Almost everything takes place at the linguistic and structural level of these variations which might perhaps even have been interesting and original, had the novel been written about something else, not about the brutal reality of its chosen subject-matter.



László Márton's new novel, *The True Story of Jacob Wunschwitz*, is set in a milieu far removed from Hungary in both space and time. The story takes place in 17th-century Germany, in the town of Guben by the river Neisse; in the imperial province of Oberlausitz; and in the Principality of the Saxon Elector, who ruled from Dresden. The extremely complicated story begins with a serious injury that befalls the wine producers of Guben in November, 1603, on the festive day for a competition between the town's musketry clubs. The wine producers, in keeping with an ancient tradition, bring the wine remaining from last year to the market hall to strike a bargain with the boatmen about shipping it on the town's boats down the river Neisse to the maritime Hansa towns. For some reason, however, not explained, they find the towngates closed. When they complain about the incident at the magistrate, their protestations are met with complete indifference and rejection. Faced with not being able to sell their wine, the wine producers decide to express grievances openly by drafting a public petition. This, however, is regarded by the authorities as a hostile gesture. The crisis, insignificant by imperial standards yet vitally important from the vigneron's point of view, gradually begins to escalate: at first the unrest and tension is restricted to Guben, but the tides of discontent spread to the surrounding areas.

The vigneron's decision to write letters of complaint to both the Imperial Governor and the Saxon Elector come to have a fatal bearing on the events. On his way to Dresden, the messenger carrying one of the letters calls on an acquaintance, Jacob Wunschwitz of Meissen, a textile dyer by profession. Born in Guben, and still owning a house there, Wunschwitz shows interest in the affair and decides to visit Guben, if for no other reason than to settle some outstanding business there. This is

how Jacob Wunschwitz becomes a protagonist "in his own true story": partly through circumstance, partly through chance, and partly because of his temperament and moral qualities, he becomes involved in the unrest sparked off by the vigneron's grievances. He becomes the leader of the civil riot that subsequently erupts, and he is murdered in the end.

The story of Jacob Wunschwitz is a *Kohlhaas* paraphrase. László Márton has already given many indications that he is strongly attracted to the German Reformation and Baroque Ages. He has translated the works of several German Romantic writers, including Kleist, and he even shares in the Romantic movement's fascination with the past. But he is also a post-modern author, turning various historic themes and period styles into elements of a grotesque and fantastic narrative. This historicizing attitude becomes a multi-coloured costume for current experiences and ideas, mostly on human character and literature. Having suffered an injury, Kleist's Michael Kohlhaas sets out to seek justice conscientiously and obsessively, supported by a well-developed sense of his rights. By contrast, Márton's Wunschwitz is drawn into the events by chance, for a while remaining ignorant of his motives, and of his own part in the affair. Compared to Kleist's Romantic rebel, he is a more modern figure. Still, the *Kohlhaas* analogy is clearly apparent: driven by personal interests and a strong sense of justice, but also by irrational destiny, Wunschwitz becomes the protagonist, and the victim, of a story in which he has become involved only by a quirk of fate, and which itself took place only by a quirk of fate.

As with the story line, the narrative style of Márton's novel emulates Kleist's *Kohlhaas*, with the chronicler's objective yet cumbersome and circumlocutory manner of speech, habitually slipping into phi-



losophizing. The argumentative and pedantic narrator, who uses the royal we, switches back and forth between being an informed contemporary witness and someone with the hindsight of a modern-day commentator, at one point reflects on his undertaking as a chronicler:

It is not our intention to denounce the laws and lawlessness of previous ages, barbarous as they may seem to present-day observers; many others have done it for us already. Nor do we wish to do the opposite: we have no intention, in abhorrence of the laws of our age and in despair of the prospects of the future, to play off the past against the present; exonerating the one through the veils of a remote age, in order to enable us to denounce the other all the more vigorously, along with our prodigal misery in it. The goal of our undertaking is no less and no more than the story itself: the relatability of the story of a man, so to speak. But the true story of a man is in reality the true story of countless people and things, and no amount of editing, selecting and arranging could change that; but if we direct the divergent lines of faces and actions towards a focal point defined by us, we can be sure that this focal point will fall outside our horizon.

Therefore, it appears that Márton tries to illustrate, through the example of Wunschwitz's "true" story, the paradox that there can be no true stories, not even in theory. Stories containing the complete truth can be reconstructed neither in the historical reality outside the book, nor in the fictional reality inside it. The possibilities of narration relate to reality roughly as the Gruben wine producers' injury relates to the fact that Hans Wahl, the merchant entrusted with the delivery of the letter of their complaint, happened to have some business with Wunschwitz, a textile dyer born in Guben and living in Meissen—or to "*a countless variety of people and things*", for that matter. More than any-

thing, it is the entangled mess of these infinite number of things that Márton's novel portrays with Baroque exuberance. Wunschwitz's story is just one among the many stories of the other participants, so much so that these other stories occasionally completely eclipse it; although somehow connected to Wunschwitz's story according to the narrative fiction, these connections are wholly arbitrary and can be reproduced endlessly. In reality, what Márton's narrator is interested in is not the connections, not the search for the truth of the story—indeed, we have seen that he admitted the vanity of such a search—but the colourful preponderance of interesting and "genuine" (in other words, historically authentic) details, lives, incidents and curiosities. With his imagination fluttering wildly, he sets an incredible number of characters going in various scenes and in different situations, until the reader finally gives up trying to keep track of them. At one stage, the turmoil of details seems to throw the narrator off course: he starts talking about Jacob Wunschwitz's twentieth-century "name-sake" who, on the basis of the information revealed, turns out to be none other than Wilhelm Pieck, once head of state and a Communist leader in the old East Germany, who was also a native of Guben, for which reason the place was known during the Communist period as Wilhelm-Pieck-Town. To a certain extent, the chronicle-like manner of narration, which despite the hopelessly long and extremely complicated sentences remains manageable and comprehensible, lends a homogeneous setting to the florid details proliferating like a cancerous growth. Actually, the narration is so confident and so fluent, and its viewpoint is so unassailable, that it bears no witness to narrative uncertainty, whose demonstration in theory would have been the proclaimed aim of the book. *Wunsch-*



witz is, therefore, more like a Baroque chronicle of ironic fiction, which should be read as a collection of curiosities or antiques rather than as a learned or educational narrative fable.

Lajos Parti Nagy's book *Jolán Sárbogárdi: The Angel of the Body* describes its genre under the title as a "Rasp-soda" (sic). Although it emulates a style of narrative wholly different from Márton's chronicle, the "reconstruction" of the linguistic, grammatical and spelling idiosyncrasies of his chosen language is even more essential to this book. The manner/style of *The Angel of the Body* does not really exist, at least not as a literary style. If we still insist on giving a loose definition of the model it follows, then the closest would be a romance for teenage girls, or an intimate girl's diary—as much as these can be regarded as a model. Naturally, it is a parody, but then the tendency to parody has always been an essential element in Parti Nagy's work in fiction. The language here plays on the adulterated and corrupted clichés used in uneducated speech today, elevating them to the realm of poetry, drawing inspiration from the chaotic admixture of various linguistic layers, as well as from the inorganic and incoherent blabbering of people without identity. Parti Nagy has an amazing ear for the typical forms of linguistic corruption, and is able to tease new meaning from the mad proliferation of his formulae through his unrivalled linguistic creativity. All this is extremely funny, just like an actor, who is caricaturing the weaknesses of his fellow thespians, or those unguarded snapshots of our everyday lives.

The stupid story attributed to the fictitious writer Jolán Sárbogárdi is in fact just an excuse for profuse linguistic/stylistic virtuosity, yet it is also a caricature in itself. Edina Margittay, a virtuous young la-

dy of a good family, who works in the marketing department of an export-import company, falls in love with Dénes Balajthy, a muscular television director, who himself is attracted to the girl. He asks her out on a date, but due to some misunderstanding the girl thinks that the director wants to meet her only because he is looking for an actress for his new film, obviously assuming that she is "that sort of a girl". Through relatives and friends, his motives are eventually clarified, and when he has an accident on the set, Edina visits him in hospital. Although the visit almost amounts to a confession of love, the director soon faces a new ordeal. He asks Edina to marry him, but the refined and unimpeachable girl reacts to this unexpected and precipitate proposal with a nervous breakdown. Finally, this obstacle, too, is removed from the path of true love, and Edina can turn into the Angel of the Body at Dénes's side.

Because of the demands of his story, and also because of the turn of phrases used, Parti Nagy precisely defines the sociological coordinates of his "Rasp-soda". Regardless of the exaggeration, in the background of the romance between Edina and Dénes there is an accurate picture of the life and the value system of the technocratic manager class in late-Kádarian society. As in the case of his other sociolinguistic diagnoses, Parti Nagy portrays a social formation which indiscriminately combines behaviour patterns of various origins. One of the patterns is the manners of the Hungarian gentry of the 1930s. This is confirmed by the genre of girl's story and the outmoded moral values. Another pattern is the lifestyle of the welfare states of western democracies—this is mostly presented in the story by way of its material requisites and outward manifestations. And then, of course, there is the Budapest elite of the late-Kádarian period, ignorant



yet full of pretensions, with all their privileges and phony mannerisms.

It might seem a little odd that we take this hilarious comedy so seriously, reading into it such a multi-layered interpretation. Yet, *The Angel of the Body* is a genuine encyclopedia of clichés knocked together from heterogeneous parts, on which the morality and the culture of the political transition in Hungary was founded. It is the verbal clichés that are focused on, of course. (In this regard, Parti Nagy's book could well become a source for linguists one day.) It would be impossible to convey to a foreigner the total chaos of verbal communication with which Parti Nagy characterizes his social climbers of hybrid origin. His invention, Jolán Sárbogárdi, collects the linguistic material of her story from diverse sources, ranging from sentimental and kitschy fiction, and from the stereotypical phrases used in prize-winning school compositions, the mixed metaphors of the pretentious with poetic aspirations, the florid language of girls' diaries, from "on the job" witticism, drawing-room humour all the way to the

commonplaces of television. She compiles these fragments in a slapdash way, often in violation of elementary rules of grammar. The result is an endless flow of ridiculous and at the same time horrifyingly monstrous sentences.

Although it is only 90 pages long, after a while the reader has had his fill of such dense lunacy. It is certainly not the storyline that keeps you reading the book to the end. And as to the total "communication breakdown" between the characters, it literally pains a reader, especially if, like myself, a teacher of Hungarian language and literature by profession, who knows that every single sentence in the book is taken from real life. This is really how people speak and write. One admires Parti Nagy for knowing them so intimately, and for being familiar with their thinking and manner of speech, but one also abhors the result. And, after a while, one feels that one cannot take more of the sheer nonsense: too much knowledge is abhorrent. Perhaps one will pick up this concatenated collection of curiosities at some other time to dip in it. ♣



Nicholas T. Parsons

# Finger in the Dyke

Steven Beller: *Francis Joseph. Profiles in Power* series. Addison Wesley Longman, 1996, 276 pp.

*"You're either part of the solution or part of the problem."*

Eldridge Cleaver

**W**hy, one might ask, is there such a substantial (and apparently increasing) body of literature about one of history's more dreary personalities? What more is there to be said about this seemingly desiccated individual whose dull terms of expression (*"Es war sehr schön, es hat mich sehr gefreut"*),<sup>1</sup> whose obsession with protocol and bureaucratic minutiae, and whose pathetically repressed emotional life may arouse a certain guarded sympathy among posterity, but whose blundering dynastic rule (*"absolutism mitigated by muddle"*)<sup>2</sup> and botched foreign policy helped to plunge all Europe into conflagration? Steven Beller's excellent contribution to

the *Profiles in Power* series supplies the answer: the events of Francis Joseph's reign and the person of the monarch are inseparable. Francis Joseph was both a political player and an institution indispensable to all the other political players, the bung that kept the water from running into the Central European boat and sinking it. Nonetheless his personal rule contained a fundamental weakness: only the person of the Emperor could unite the diverse nationalities of the Empire around a common symbolic and actual authority; yet that authority could only survive by means that were old-fashioned at the beginning of his sixty-eight-year reign and grossly anachronistic (though modified) by the end of it.

One of the problems of autocratic rule in an age that has lost its reverence for the divine right of kings is that responsibility for errors or policy failures cannot be placed where they rightly belong for fear of endangering the whole system; nor can an educated public (which might to-

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1 ■ Francis Joseph limited himself to this observation on public occasions after one of the architects of the Opera committed suicide when the press exposed him to mockery after the Emperor had made a mildly slighting remark about the building at the inauguration. This self-imposed moratorium on critical comment showed how hard Francis Joseph tried not to give offence and the legendary brutality with which he disposed of ministers who had served him faithfully may well have been due as much to conscience and embarrassment as to ruthlessness.

2 ■ The phrase was coined by Viktor Adler, leader of the Austrian Social Democrats, who spent more than one spell in gaol for his activities, even though they were ostensibly within the law.



lerate and even honour a constitutional figurehead) be persuaded to disregard the evidence of its own eyes and ears. Steven Beller nicely encapsulates the dilemma when he writes:

The calamities of 1859 (i.e. defeats in Italy) destroyed Francis Joseph's neo-Absolutist regime. Buol had already been sacked in May, when the consequences of his diplomacy had become evident days after the declaration of war. Bach, Kempen and Grünne followed by the end of the year. Bruck's dismissal was so insensitive that it led to his suicide in April 1860. The only prominent member of the government not to be sacked was Francis Joseph himself (pp. 70, 71).

The problem is one of accountability, which is unaffected by the enlightened nature or otherwise of the policies pursued. After his bad experiences in war, Francis Joseph stuck rigidly to a policy of peace, despite the belligerence of generals like Count von Hötendorf. At one point he became exasperated with the latter's constant attempts to manoeuvre the Empire into military action and rebuked him thus. *"I forbid you these continuous attacks against Aehrenthal [the Foreign Minister]. These attacks because of the Balkan policy and of Italy, they are directed against me, for I make this policy, it is my policy. My policy is that of peace. To this policy all must adjust themselves."*<sup>3</sup>

## Dispensing with history

Francis Joseph entered upon his inheritance in a time of grave crisis for the Empire and the Habsburg dynasty. His lands had erupted in revolution, forcing concessions from his predecessor, the weak-

minded Ferdinand I; advised by the devious Prince Felix zu Schwarzenberg, he felt obliged to begin his reign by reneging on all the undertakings given by Ferdinand and taking revenge on the insurgents (in most cases, but especially in that of Hungary, the revenge was little better than judicial murder). This was the exaltation of force that proved a harbinger of absolutist rule, a form of governance that did not distinguish between legal or non-legal opposition, or even between loyalty and dissidence in the Empire; as was sardonically observed at the time, the other nationalities of the Empire were rewarded with the same treatment with which the Hungarians were punished. However, absolutism is a blunt instrument and even its successes in the realm of economic management contribute to dissatisfaction with it, since increased prosperity inevitably brings with it aspirations to greater civil liberty and political autonomy for the individual, as for the nation.

One way of looking at Francis Joseph's reign is to see it as a series of concessions under pressure, each one producing as many new problems as old ones were thereby defused. Concessions not willingly made imply a belief that the clock might yet be turned back when the time is ripe. Certainly the beginning of the reign was a reversion to Metternichian principles, even if these were not applied with quite the Metternichian cynicism (the old fox is said to have repeated Madame de Pompadour's notorious remark, *"Après nous le déluge"*, when contemplating the expected consequences of dismantling his system). Metternichian principles were progressively diluted as time went on, but not entirely abandoned, containing as they did the contradictory formulas of "divide and rule"

3 ■ Quoted in John W. Mason: *The Dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian Empire 1867-1918*, London and New York, 1985, p. 58.



on the one hand, and "unite round the Emperor" on the other. The oppressive system of governance that resulted has been summed up in the following words quoted by Beller: "*Francis Joseph ruled with four armies: a standing army (of soldiers), a sitting army (of officials), a kneeling army (of priests) and a crawling army (of informers)*". "It is not a very kind description," writes Beller, "but it does sum up the basis of the neo-absolutist system" (p. 59).

The modifications to that system during Francis Joseph's reign chart the course of attempted modernization. One of the Emperor's most retrogressive acts had been to sign the 1855 Concordat with the papacy, which allowed the Vatican direct control over the Austrian Church, as also a monopoly of primary education and the regulation of marriage. It was not until 1868 that the Emperor, "*much to his chagrin*", as Beller writes, decided it would be expedient to allow the German Liberals to pass the May Laws reasserting state control over education and marriage and providing legal equality of religious denominations; in 1870 the Concordat itself was abrogated.

The standing army of soldiers remained the apple of Francis Joseph's eye, not least because he had been brought up to admire the military code and ethos. Steven Beller reminds us that he acquired his first uniform at the age of three and his first regiment at the age of thirteen. To his dying day he preferred the uniform of a simple Lieutenant, his habitual garb for the daily routine, as the statue of him in the Burggarten shows him. Unfortunately, recurrent budgetary crises meant that his beloved army was not as well equipped as it should have been. The fatal consequences of this were seen at the battle of Königgrätz (1866), when the needle-gun adopted by the Prussians decided the day and—ac-

cording to A.J.P. Taylor<sup>4</sup>—the ultimate fate of the Empire.

Then again, Francis Joseph himself embodied the sitting army of bureaucrats, rising at 4.30 a.m. and often working until late at night on official papers. On the last day of his life he was studying recruitment figures with a temperature of 39.5°C and almost his last words to his valet were an injunction to call him in the morning at the usual time, so that he could get down to the mass of work that awaited his attention. Lastly the crawling army of informers may have been less irksome once Vienna had become a vibrant metropolis in the *Gründerzeit*, but we have the testimony of James Joyce in Trieste to indicate how it was experienced in the outer reaches of Cisleithania. Spying on the heir to the throne may have been a regrettable necessity, but it was hardly an attractive aspect of autocracy; nor was the tiresome censorship, of which Grillparzer complained, albeit *sotto voce*.

As against all such objections, it is clear that Francis Joseph did unite symbol with political reality in his person, that he and he alone represented for the majority of his peoples a desire for stability and order. The case for the Emperor was partly the case for monarchy that Walter Bagehot put forward in *The English Constitution* (1872): "*The best reason why Monarchy is a strong government*" he wrote, "*is that it is an intelligible government. The mass of mankind understand it and they hardly anywhere in the world understand any other.*" Time and democratic republicanism have made this look like an oddly provincial view, but in the year it was written, it is doubtful if many individuals under Francis Joseph's rule would have dissented from it. As has been frequently pointed out, most of their concerns and grievances

4 ■ A.J.P. Taylor: *The Habsburg Monarchy*, London, (1948) 1964, p. 137 and following.



were of a local nature; if anything, they saw the Emperor as being able to transcend the underling's misuse of power and put to rights what was wrongfully being done in his name. The institution of the Monarchy might still command allegiance, even if the Emperor's policies carried out through his ministers left much to be desired. This contradictory allegiance would certainly have been a feature of Hungary as well, at least after the 1867 *Ausgleich*, but the Hungarians were exceptional in that they suffered from a burning sense of injured merit, unable to forget that it was the Emperor himself who had trampled on their rights as late as 1849.

### Francis Joseph and Hungary

Near the beginning of his book Beller writes the following: "*Among the most fervent admirers of the former empire are now, irony of ironies, Hungarian historians*", and adds: "*Instead of the dynasty getting in the way of nationalities, it is now almost as if it is the nationalities who get in the way of the one thing that could have saved them—and by implication the rest of us—from the terrors of the twentieth century, the institution of the Habsburg Monarchy.*" (p. 8) The author cites István Deák in support of this remarkable claim, one which sounds uncannily like a repositioning of the focus of an earlier historian, A.J.P. Taylor: "*In other countries, dynasties are episodes in the history of the people; in the Habsburg Empire, peoples are a complication in the the history of the dynasty.*"<sup>5</sup> If Beller is right, however, the Hungarians may partly be reacting to years of abuse that places much of the blame for the break-up of the Monarchy on Magyar

shoulders. In resisting this claim (insofar as it is resisted and not simply ignored) it is natural that the value of what they are accused of destroying is rediscovered. The bottom line, however, is that the discrepancy between the claims of individual nations, and the political compromises needed to keep a multi-ethnic Empire on the rails, requires that legal fundamentalism be tempered with painful realism. Moreover the desire to extract more concessions from the dynasty (whether or not grounded in historical and constitutional rights) than your neighbours can extract, must be tempered with some awareness of the justified aspirations of those neighbours, lest the whole delicately interlocking system of imperial rule breaks apart.

It is perhaps inevitable, and certainly understandable, that Hungarian tactics were primarily concerned with safeguarding and strengthening their privileged position, even if at times such manoeuvres seemed little more, edifying than the doctrine advanced by Don Alhambra in *The Gondoliers*: "*When everyone is somebodee, / Then no one's anybody!*". It is hard to see how it could have been otherwise, for as Alan Sked (following István Deák) stresses in his book, the Hungarians believed their revolution of 1848 to have been lawful in two senses: "*firstly in that it restored the constitution; secondly, in that the king [had] agreed to it [i.e. the April Laws]*". Thus, when Jellacic attacked Hungary, the Hungarians "*found themselves in opposition to their monarch, and not at all by their own decision. It was he—or his Austrian advisers—who in their eyes had overthrown the legal order.*"<sup>6</sup>

Francis Joseph's actions merely compounded this situation. Indeed, calling in a

5 ■ *Ibid*, p. 12.

6 ■ Alan Sked: *The Decline and Fall of the Habsburg Empire 1815–191*, London and New York. 1989, p. 59.



Russian army to crush the Hungarians was, in the eyes of a nineteenth-century Magyar patriot, not different from the enforcement of the Brezhnev doctrine in the eyes of a twentieth-century one. It is a bizarre but not totally distorted perspective that sees Francis Joseph as the imposer of a legal settlement that was no more true to the principles of genuine law than was later the carefully planned lawlessness enshrined in "socialist legality". After the Emperor was forced to abandon his unyielding stance and enact the Compromise of 1867, there was no reason why he should not command the loyalty of his Hungarian subjects—so long as he fulfilled his coronation oath, uttered as he flourished his sword to all four points of the compass, which obliged him to protect the interests of the Magyar nation. The problem was, of course, that the Emperor had the (possibly conflicting) interests of the other nations under his rule to consider. Several of his ministers tried to address these (particularly with regard to the Czechs and the language laws), but all such perfectly sincere efforts usually foundered on the opposition of those in one ethnic group who would be disadvantaged by concessions to another. In 1871, Francis Joseph actually sent a message to the Bohemian Diet promising a settlement somewhat similar to the one with the Hungarians, but the uproar the proposal provoked amongst Germans, Poles and Magyars meant that it had to be abandoned.

In the case of Hungary, matters were particularly sensitive, not least because the burgeoning demographic deficit threatened Magyar supremacy head-on. In 1905 Francis Joseph decided—or was forced by circumstance—to exploit this factor when a nationalist Hungarian government re-

fused to collaborate with Vienna, nominally because of a dispute about the language of command in the Hungarian army. The Emperor introduced a general franchise bill in the Hungarian Parliament, which would at a stroke have removed both national supremacy and the class supremacy of the gentry. This blackmail had its effect and the Hungarians fell into line. The whole incident brought into sharp focus the fact that "*Magyar dominance in Hungary was the most important condition of the dualist system*".<sup>7</sup> At least from this time on there were many (most notably the heir to the throne, Franz Ferdinand) who saw the Magyars as the single biggest obstacle to reform of the Empire, whether in terms of federalization ("trialism" to supersede dualism) or of democratization.

It may not be very popular to say so, but it is hard to resist the conclusion that Francis Joseph in his more liberal phase was in many respects forbearing with the Hungarians, although that may have been because he had no choice. No doubt his adored wife Sissi also had some influence on him, though probably not as much as his Hungarian subjects imagined or hoped. On the other hand, Francis Joseph never forgot his baptism of fire in 1848, and his alleged remark to Gyula Andrassy that he was glad he had not executed all the leaders of the revolution, since otherwise he (Andrassy) would not be around to serve him as Foreign Minister, savours more of the wit of Saddam Hussein than of the regal little jest he doubtless intended. The remark may also reveal Francis Joseph's lingering conscience about the activities of General Haynau in 1849, "*a moderate soldier but an outstanding butcher of psychopathic proportions*," as Gordon Brook-Shepherd describes him.<sup>8</sup> The judicial

7 ■ Mason, *op cit.* p. 42.

8 ■ Gordon Brook-Shepherd: *The Austrians*, London, 1996, p. 69.



murder of Count Lajos Batthyány, the legally constituted Prime Minister in 1848, and the execution of thirteen Hungarian generals (many of them bearing names that revealed Germanic origin) was pretty bad politics too. Hungarians were hailed in much of Europe as freedom fighters, Kossuth was fêted in England and America, and Baron Haynau, on a visit to London, narrowly escaped lynching when recognized in the street by some draymen from a local brewery.

After such a start to his reign in Hungary, it is a wonder that any reconciliation with his Magyar subjects was reached at all by Francis Joseph; it was only the pragmatic and far-sighted statesmanship of Ferenc Deák that eventually made such a reconciliation a political possibility, but until that occurred the Emperor was generally hated. Beller cites an incident in 1852 when Francis Joseph was on a visit to Hungary and asked the mayor of a village through which he was travelling why the people shouted "*Vivat!*" instead of "*Éljen!*". The candid reply was that they were so used to shouting "*Éljen Kossuth!*" that some of them might forget to change the name, and it had therefore been thought prudent to have them shout "*Vivat!*" instead. As late as 1884, when the Compromise had been in force for seventeen years, Liszt composed a Royal Hymn for the inauguration of the Budapest Opera (which Francis Joseph had financed out of his own pocket); unfortunately, this stirring composition had to be banned at the last minute when the sharp-eared house manager realized that it was a thinly disguised version of the *Rákóczi March*.

Nevertheless, as modern historiography has increasingly demonstrated, neo-absolutism had proved a useful device for mod-

ernization of infrastructure and stimulation of commerce, from which Hungary undoubtedly benefited. As R.J.W. Evans has written, the implementation of the Silvester Patents "*proved a massive operation which proceeded according to recognizably modern standards, even if it involved anomalies like reintroducing the birch into Austria from Hungary on the grounds of consistency.*" He points out that growth rates in the Empire "*roughly matched those elsewhere in the German Confederation*", and that "*rational reform of taxation, both direct and indirect... raised (the state's) revenue by two-thirds (in Hungary by four times).*" Moreover, full equality before the law and the abolition of serfdom were taken over from the reforms of Kossuth and enshrined in the new dispensation. Evans cites the "*complacent, punctilious and indefatigable*" head of the statistical office, Carl Czoernig, who boasts in 1858 of the achievements of the regime, including "*47,221,812 cubic feet of roadstone used in Hungary, 3,000 kms of railway, 2,389 post-offices, 359 barges on the Danube*", and so on and so forth. "Czoernig", says Evans, "*records a mass of endeavours great and small, from the maintenance of law and order (the police made over a million arrests in 1854, against only 70,000 four years before—what progress!), to measures against cruelty to animals or elaborate safeguards against the explosion of steam engines.*"

The great weakness of such a system of governance is that its only solution to problems that bring into question the ideological basis of the power wielded by the establishment is to pretend that they do not exist. The Catholic Church has supplied a paradigm for similarly blind autocracy with its attitude to misbehaviour in the priestly ranks, encapsulated in the

9 ■ R.J.W. Evans: Raleigh Lecture on History: "From Confederation to Compromise: The Austrian Experiment, 1849–1867", *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 87, pp. 138–39.



phrase "was nicht sein darf, nicht sein kann". In the same way, the nationality issue, the proximate cause of the Empire's demise according to many commentators, was at first deemed a non-issue, which in practice meant that there was one nationality (German Austrian) to which the others were cultural and political appendages. Evans cites the patronizing remarks even of the great Grillparzer which showed that this mind-set was fairly widespread among officials and the intelligentsia (Grillparzer remarked that Kant's *Critique* would have sold only three copies in Magyar and that "Czech nationality has only a single flaw, that it isn't one").<sup>10</sup> Presiding over such a one-eyed system brought out in Francis Joseph the least attractive sides of the two forebears his chosen name was supposed to honour—the hypocritical and oppressive conservatism of Franz I and the ruthless Germanizing centralism of Joseph II. The refusal to recognize, perhaps even to grasp empirically, the spiritual and legal claims of subject nations ultimately exacted a high price despite the system's delivery of material improvements to living standards, and despite the rather desperate attempts to make up for lost ground later. In a happy phrase, Evans remarks that the "real motto for the first and main phase of the Austrian experiment might have been 'sauter pour mieux reculer', the more so because of its sins of omission and commission in respect of other kinds of national sentiment."<sup>11</sup>

It may be thought that this unsatisfactory state of affairs was done away with by the *Ausgleich* of 1867. Yet, as Steven Beller points out, the appearance of a reformed constitutional monarchy was largely misleading: "Both in Cisleithania and Hungary Francis Joseph retained very large constitu-

tional powers, which were far from being merely theoretical." In Hungary in the secret *Punktation* of March 1867, Francis Joseph insisted on, and the Magyar leadership accepted, various powers which went beyond those of a monarch in a "parliamentary" system. Apart from various executive powers, such as those of appointment in the central bureaucracy, there was the crucial power of the royal "presanction" of legislation. That is to say, Francis Joseph had to give his permission before legislation was presented to the Hungarian parliament by his ministers. This amounted to a royal prophylactic veto, giving the Emperor immense negative powers over his Hungarian ministers and parliament. The post-1867 constitutional settlement in Hungary thus included within itself what George Barany has called "the disguised continuation of monarchical absolutism" (pp. 105–106). In other words, the resulting Hungarian polity was neither fish (complete political assimilation to the more powerful unit, as was the case with the union of Scotland with England) nor fowl (complete autonomy, which would have led to the break-up of the Empire). This political imbalance did not, perhaps, totally eclipse the rather generous economic settlement of the *Ausgleich*: just as Scotland has always tended to do better pro capita in exchequer outlay than the rest of the United Kingdom, so Hungary was only obliged to contribute 30 per cent of common expenditure to Austria's 70 per cent (after 1908, 36.4 per cent to 63.6 per cent). This no doubt helped to assuage some of the discontent, and there were plenty of people who simply concentrated on getting rich. Even so there was at least one political crisis around the turn of the century that caused Francis Joseph and

10 ■ Evans, *op cit.* p. 152.

11 ■ Evans, *op cit.* p. 151.



the Austrian high command to draw up plans for a possible invasion of the Transleithanian part of the Empire.

Unable to love a King-Emperor who still denied them fundamental rights for which they had fought and to which they believed they were legally entitled, many Hungarians focused their allegiance on the Empress Elizabeth. This allegiance was not just a psychological oddity, but a thinly veiled political statement, the sub-text of which was Hegel's "desire for recognition". Empress Elizabeth could supply the cultural and spiritual empathy with Hungarian identity that the head of the dynasty was obliged for reasons of state to shun, or (as the Magyars suspected) was incapable of feeling. Purely in terms of the public perception of her, parallels between the late Princess of Wales and Empress Sissi are rather striking. Like Diana, she rebelled against the stuffy protocol of the court and fought a rearguard action over her children's upbringing against a mother-in-law who saw the interests of the dynasty threatened by what she regarded as her daughter-in-law's feckless behaviour. Like Diana, she created a personal following, which inevitably highlighted the rather lukewarm sympathy for her husband, who appeared emotionally repressed by comparison with her intensity and fondness for the dramatic gesture. Like Diana, she was thought unstable by hostile critics and apparently suffered from a partly psychosomatic ailment (bulimia in Diana's case, anorexia in Sissi's). Like Diana she was an aerobic fanatic, installing gymnastic equipment in her Hofburg apartments. Last but not least, Sissi, like Diana, displayed a streak of narcissism, caprice and occasional recklessness, which the public seemed inclined to overlook in favour of posthumous canonization, the death of both being dramatic and tragic. Mark Twain watched the cortège of

Elizabeth from his hotel balcony in Vienna and later recorded the scene in words that again seem to supply an uncanny parallel with the recent extraordinary outburst of national mourning: *"To her virtues were attributed that she never had even in dreams. But just think how much she had to put up with, and of the man to whom she was married...."* This was less than fair to Francis Joseph, whose dog-like devotion to Elizabeth survived even the conflict of loyalties forced on him by his disagreeable mother, not to mention the erratic behaviour of Sissi herself, who spent long months flitting round Europe or writing poetry in her Corfu villa.

Charisma—the gift of grace—is by definition only tenuously connected to the actual qualities and achievements of a person whom the Greeks saw as touched with divinity. The aura that charismatic people exude is also self-feeding and auto-suggestive among the susceptible. The Hungarians made Elizabeth the focus of their aspirations and the more she felt the power of their regard, the more reserves of charismatic charm she seemed to discover within herself. In the mawkish phrase that Diana used of herself, Sissi was the Hungarians' "queen of hearts", and in the slogan used by Prime Minister Blair in homage to Diana, Sissi was also something of a "people's queen". All this was happening at a time when Francis Joseph still had on his palace walls paintings showing Austrian troops crushing the Magyars in 1848. The feeling for Elizabeth showed its half-observed political dimension when the Hungarians protested violently because the Empress's coffin originally bore the single inscription "Empress of Austria". Indignation ran so high that the words "Queen of Hungary" were hastily added, prompting Prince Lobkowitz to inquire why there was no mention of the "Queen of Bohemia". In a rare lapse of



understanding, Beller seems to imply that the Hungarians were being both petty and insensitive over this issue. Yet the Empire was officially constituted as the Dual Monarchy of Austria-Hungary and it is therefore not difficult to see that the "safe" inscription chosen by protocol to avoid problems of particularism must have looked like a deliberate slight, especially in view of Elizabeth's special significance for the Hungarians. It was a row that rather resembles the manoeuvrings over Princess Diana's funeral and the refusal of a similar band of protocol mongers to fly the flag of Buckingham Palace at half-mast. The emblematic power of Dianas and Sissis is largely beyond the emotional comprehension of the sort of people who spend their lives working out tables of precedence and indeed it was largely an embarrassment to such people that the Hungarians had invested in their Queen their political hopes and aspirations to cultural recognition. The Queen was both a conduit for patriotic emotion and a lightning conductor for the static electricity of potentially dangerous political grievance. She was an inestimable help to Francis Joseph in making his regime seem more human and acceptable to a people who fundamentally mistrusted him, and to do him justice he seems to have recognized this.

### Francis Joseph and the historians

Steven Beller's stimulating book is particularly elegant in the way it describes Francis Joseph's rule in the context of his personal qualities (good and bad). At the same time, it takes full account of the pressures (internal and external) that continually threatened to capsize the Austrian ship of state that Bismarck had so offensively described as an "*ancient, worm-eaten galleon*" (in contrast to the "*trim, seaworthy frigate*" of Prussia). His analysis

of the fateful decision to go to war in 1914, while giving due weight to the German desire for military aggression and the war-mongering of Francis Joseph's own Chief of Staff, Conrad von Hötzendorf, ultimately returns to the personality of the man who had so single-mindedly pursued a policy of peace ever since the humiliation of the Austrians at Königgrätz, but who now turned to war. Francis Joseph saw his *raison d'être* as being to preserve the dynasty and its traditional role as power-broker in Central Europe, even if that role had been increasingly eclipsed by the self-aggrandisement of the new German Empire. "*In this light,*" writes Beller, "*the decision to go to war was not irrational at all, for it was reasonable to assume that this was the only way to maintain the Monarchy's prestige and status, which was its purpose for being.*" This reasoning, however, was accompanied by a certain fatalism, as in his remark to Conrad: "*If the Monarchy must perish, it should at least perish with decency.*" (p. 218).

In a highly illuminating and even-handed survey of the historiography of Franz Joseph's reign and the causes of the Monarchy's demise, Beller begins with two vivid, but contradictory images of the Emperor: the benign father of his peoples on the one hand, and the cold-hearted, anachronistic bureaucrat on the other. Of course these and other images are part of a bigger picture, in which the Emperor is the central, but not the controlling figure. As Beller puts it (p. 3): "*Francis Joseph is in many ways more interesting for the context in which he acted than for himself.*" He then goes on to discuss the voluminous literature on the Empire's demise—the so-called "inevitability" debate in which one faction maintains that the Monarchy was doomed to fail and deserved to do so, while the other (especially since the 1950's, and including the "pro-Monarchy"



Hungarians referred to earlier) has been impelled by political developments since 1918 to see the Monarchy in a more sympathetic and nostalgic light. Linked to this debate is that concerning personal choice and the impact on events of a single individual, in this case the Emperor Francis Joseph. Beller describes this discussion rather aptly as *"a modern-day version of the old theological debate between free will and predestination, with, perhaps not surprisingly, the 'Calvinist' camp seeing Francis Joseph as powerless to stop his Monarchy's inevitable demise"* (p. 10). Finally Beller sidesteps the perhaps rather sterile "inevitability" debate with the statement: *"a profile of the power of Francis Joseph is a profile of the power of dynastic monarchy in an age of social, economic and political modernization... it is also a study therefore of the strength of traditional sources and institutions of power at the dawn of the twentieth century."*

The polemics of historians, like those of the courtroom, adduce facts to support a particular interpretation of events and strive to discredit the significance or validity of evidence that casts doubt on this interpretation. In the case of Francis Joseph and the Monarchy, the jury is still out and is likely to be out for some time to come.

There is plenty of empirical evidence to suggest that the Dual Monarchy remained economically viable and was even modestly successful in that respect; and there is some evidence to suggest that political and constitutional adjustments (a further *Fortwursteln*?) could have bought off the nationalists, who in most cases came only rather late to the idea of the complete break-up of the Empire. The most contemptuous dismissals of the Habsburg regime come mostly from those with an *arrière pensée*, like Bismarck, or those writing with the gift of hindsight, like Robert Musil in *The Man Without Qualities*. Yet there was a streak of fatalism in Francis Joseph himself, which, if not so dramatically expressed as Karl Kraus's apocalyptic vision of *"an experimental laboratory for world endings"*, often seemed to come pretty close to a premonition that the Empire would die with him, as to all intents and purposes it did. At the age of thirty-three he seemed to appreciate the real significance of Königgrätz, writing to his mother, *"one just has to resist as long as possible, do one's duty to the last and finally perish with honour"*. Perhaps he did that, but the price of salvaging the honour of the Habsburgs proved to be higher than less clear-sighted players had ever anticipated. 20



Zsuzsa Beney

## Enter Attila József

Thomas Kabdebo: *Attila József. "Can You Take on This Awful Life?"*  
Budapest, Argumentum—Dublin, Cardinal Press, 1997, 220 pp.

A long-standing question, involving constant challenge, pain and rarely pleasure, can be formulated in this way: "How can Hungarian literature, and especially poetry, break the barriers that separate it from Western European and world literature, of which the language barrier is but one?" Among the essential issues of this isolation is whether ideal translation could break the quarantine, or whether the poetic specifics, rooted in the Hungarian language, are primarily the reason why even today, with translations appearing constantly, there is not a single Hungarian poet who is well known and acknowledged in Western Europe. Or is there another, equally important dividing factor beside linguistic isolation (the problem of translation applies to all the other languages)—a factor which separates Central-European thinking so deeply from Western European thinking, that words, no matter how accurately rendered, gain new meanings?

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I am almost certain that a substantial intellectual division exists between Western Europe and Central Europe, with some communication between them working only in one direction, unfortunately. The Central European countries are primarily recipients, even though in occasional and individual instances, certain Central European regions break down these walls, and do so not by adapting the Western patterns, but by virtue of their unique character. The Czech writer Hrabal is just one example. As far as Hungarian literature, and most notably its fiction, is concerned, however, even works which were justifiably expected to be successful, especially in France (Kosztolányi, Ottlik, the young Márai, who wrote his novel, *Zendülők* (Rebels) not long after the publication of *Les enfants terribles*, a novel of similar theme but of less depth), continued to remain in quarantine even when translated. By contrast, in German-speaking countries a number of modern and contemporary Hungarian writers (Péter Esterházy, Imre Kertész, Péter Nádas, et al.) have come to enjoy genuine popularity in the past twenty years or so, for reasons well understood but not to be discussed on the present occasion. Poetry, which is a treasured part of Hungarian literature, shows an even more depressing picture. Classical Hungarian poetry never became



as popular in the West as Western poetry here, and the situation is not much better regarding modern poetry. Kassák is said to be genuinely popular in France; and the publication in recent years of volumes of poems in English by a number of contemporary Hungarian poets—Weöres, Pilinszky, Juhász, Nemes-Nagy, Orbán, Petri, Rakovszky—has been met with acclaim from their peers. Eventually into these ranks may come Miklós Radnóti, who now has various translations published, and Attila József, whose growing number of poems are now available in English, and which might, at long last, make his name known.

**P**erhaps. But far from certain. Because, while entire oeuvres of Western poets have been translated into Hungarian, becoming integral elements in Hungarian poetry, it is unlikely that any poem translated from Hungarian would ever become as important for English or French readers (or God forbid, poets), as T. S. Eliot, Dylan Thomas, Apollinaire or Rilke are for us (to mention only a few modern examples). I do believe that, due to the freshness, the quality and the high standing of translations, even those Hungarian readers who do not speak a foreign language may feel part of the European culture. Yet this interaction is a typically one-way process. While a Hungarian atmosphere may be lost in translation into any Western language, we, on the other hand, are able to receive a picture of the atmosphere there through our reading of the classic authors of Western literature.

It is quite probable that we can have a feel for the traditions of Western literature, since we Hungarians know much about life, history, society and the milieu there, much more than any Western reader knows about our circumstances. For this reason, Western readers see the works

translated from Hungarian more as a curiosity, and the problems of social and cultural development discussed in these works, while exciting questions for us, remain incomprehensible to them.

Therefore, it is imperative that the translations be complemented with fundamental studies and critical essays on Hungarian literature. It is an important development that just when Attila József's poems are coming out in ever more translations, and genuinely good ones among them, a biography has also been published. Given its author's familiarity with both cultures, there are grounds to believe that he will be able to acquaint Western readers with the poet's personality, his life story and circumstances, and the specific sociological, cultural and socio-cultural conditions of Hungary in the first third of the twentieth century.

Thomas Kabdebo was already an adult when he left Hungary for England. Both there and in Ireland, he is Chief Librarian at University College, Maynooth, he stayed in close contact with British and Hungarian cultural life. He knows the importance of the bio-graphical details from the viewpoint of the Attila József poems, and appreciates that strange, marginal position that the poet endured in his life. He also knows that this position, with all its marginality, was closely bound up with the development which characterized both society and intellectual life in the Hungary of the 1920s and 1930s, with its simultaneous intertwining and unfolding of intellectual trends in the left-wing movements. He is familiar with the strange dichotomy of a cosmopolitan, Western orientation and a provincial outlook, which coexisted in Hungary during the 1930s. He is also aware of the psychological strain felt by the poet, who was burdened with a speculative mind and an uncontrollable and overheated intuitive world, and who, although born



in an impoverished proletarian family, soon made it to middle class society; who bounced back and forth between political extremes, aligning himself with the socialists for most of his life, before becoming disillusioned with them. Kabdebo knows and understands the foundations of Attila József's poetry. (This much we have known from his other works). In view of this, it came as a great surprise to me that his book fell short of fulfilling the high hopes pinned on it. I find it difficult to grasp how, in an age which has produced various critical studies, he could continue to retain the basic view, in full knowledge of those critical studies, which he had probably acquired as a university student in then Communist Hungary.

**T**he book has undoubtedly been written with the best of intentions (even if it contains a number of minor inaccuracies and mistakes). Nevertheless, in my opinion the other most important expectation which this book invites, besides the need for it to be accurate, would have been to generate an image of the poet in the non-Hungarian reader—and its shortcomings concern the uncertainty of its approach. Those non-Hungarian readers who know some of József's poems in translation, probably would have liked to be offered a more serious analysis of his work, not just a biographical overview. What they really needed, more than anything, was an analysis of József's particular conception of poetry, since it was so vastly different from theirs. I am convinced that even in the 1930s, an English reader would have looked upon these poems very differently from us, who place them in the context of Hungarian poetry. Indeed, this is the most important question which Kabdebo poses, yet fails to answer: the two-way possibilities of communication between cultures—or, in fact, the impossibility of at least one

of the ways. In the context of modern Western poetry, József could rightly be described as a traditional, or even conservative, poet, because of his formal conservatism. It is not enough to convey in translation that incredibly exciting modernism which we continue to discover between his traditional lines and realistic images that are analogies; this lends to his poetry an enigmatic quality and gives evidence of an irrationality cloaked in paradoxes, turning logic upside down over and over again. It should have been the primary task of an English language book about József to call attention to these underlying values, for this would have been the only way to place his poetry squarely where it belongs, within the canon of Western literature.

This primary requirement could equally be felt by those who have come to know his poetry only recently, as well as by those who are seeking solutions to problems in connection with poems they have read earlier in translation. Kabdebo could not choose between these two kinds of prospective readers—or alternatively, he did not try to meet both requirements. He obviously chose a biographical presentation to satisfy the requirement of easy reading. I am convinced that Kabdebo regarded this form to be the more suitable for introducing not only the poet's life, but also contemporary Hungarian conditions, which he thought to be essential from the viewpoint of a proper understanding.

However, one cannot expect to penetrate József's poems on the strength of these biographical details, these circumstances and these skin-deep analyses.

Readers would find the information a great deal more interesting and exciting than a description of his childhood, as sentimental and sad as any in a Dickens novel, and an account of adult years, when his talents did not receive the recognition they deserved. It is hard to tell which



would have been more appropriate: a more highly dramatized treatment of the biographical details or an approach in which the main emphasis would be placed on the specific qualities of the poet, and his place in Hungarian literature. This would have required a comparative analysis of English and Hungarian poetry, with a description and explanation of the incongruity and phase shift between the two and, even more importantly: a demonstration. Kabdebo definitely possesses the qualities needed to accomplish this. Presumably he chose the biographical way in the hope of reaching a broader audience, and also because he believed that this was the best way to approach József. Nevertheless, the otherwise right presentation is not accompanied by a depiction of the intellectual ambiance of the age, nor is Kabdebo quite able to convince readers of József's poetic genius. To achieve that, and to produce something more than a "correct" work of literary history, he would have had to draw on his own literary talents. It is difficult to undertake a twin-task of this sort today, when the academic status of literary history is dependent on its objectivity (or the appearance of objectivity) in the face of essayistic subjectivity. Kabdebo tries to be objective—or, more precisely, authentic—all along, and paradoxically, this is exactly what prevents him from drawing a coherent picture of the artist and his art. Strangely enough, the book, which came out in 1997, in many regards remains faithful to the approach prevailing in Hungary in the 1950s and the 1960s: József is presented as the people's poet, inspired by his proletarian background both politically and sociologically, a class-conscious Marxist who won the admiration of both the working class and the Hungarian people. This simplifying, false and vulgar-Marxist concept backfired even then; it still does today, as readers

are repelled, rather than attracted, by such an image. (To top it all, József's expulsion from the underground Communist Party, instigated by the Muscovite Hungarian Communist exiles, which had deeply upset the poet, remained an absolute taboo for quite some time, no mention of this was permitted and the lies circulated by the authorities had to be accepted.)

Kabdebo has continued with the unwarranted liberty, one which struck roots many years ago in Hungary, of referring both to the poet, while analysing his poems or discussing his biographical details, and to the poet's friends and lovers by their first names. He mentions this himself in the concluding chapter.

The somewhat sketchy portrayal of the József family does not help toward a better understanding of the poet either, with its slightly idealized pictures of Mama (the poet's mother) and Jolán (one of the poet's sisters), especially Mama. This book does not even touch the poet's memories as unleashed by analysis (published a few years ago under the title *Szabad ötletek jegyzéke* (A List of Free Associations)). I do not mean to suggest that Kabdebo's portrayal of the poet is at variance with the available biographical details, as the somewhat crude presentation of such minor details hardly sustains such a charge. A much more serious shortcoming is that the book leaves the reader in the dark about the social and socio-cultural fabric of the 1920s and 1930s, and that is something that not only has a direct bearing on the evaluation of József's poetry, but also on the way of understanding it.

Unfortunately, it cannot be taken for granted that English readers have a well-founded idea of the cultural environment in the 1920s and 1930s, which provided the setting for József's life and art. Although young British writers, too, had



their flirtation with Socialism in the 1930s, I do not believe that their involvement had the same depth as the infatuation which the young Hungarian bourgeois intellectuals had, who were much more insecure and divided. One of the major factors in József's life was his marginal position. This marginality was not purely sociological, in regard to his childhood, and this, in my opinion, is of crucial relevance, as well as being perplexingly mysterious. The marginal position remained as he reached maturity, and could hardly be separated from his personality, from the consequences of his mental illness (a latent schizophrenia, which manifested itself only at the end of his life.) Of course, the effects of this particular illness on his poetry are much easier to detect in retrospect than they were during his life.

Perhaps more than anything else, József's poetry is characterized by an uncompromising honesty to express, accompanied by a constant urge to conceal, which alone can make room for honesty to speak up, for the profound subjectivity that can never manifest itself in a direct way. In his case, it is the insatiable drive to achieve precision that strives for an expression of

a non-intellectual, and not even verbally reflective, intensive sense of being. To convey this, one would have to analyse his poems line by line; but that would make an unrealistic demand on English-speaking readers.

It is for this reason that we have to make allowances for the shortcomings of Thomas Kabdebo's book, indeed to exonerate him. It is unlikely that, given the space and the difficulties, there is anybody who would have been able to solve the problem of introducing a poet almost completely unknown in English-speaking countries much better than Kabdebo does. The difficulties of the task are not confined to that which is rooted in the poet's personality and circumstances, or to the differences in life and mentality between Central Europe and Western Europe; it is the specific character and irradiation of his poetry that poses the main difficulty, as readers would have to be familiar with it before they could be expected to take an interest in such an analysis. This is a vicious circle. As far as I know, this is the first book written about the poet in a language other than Hungarian, and, despite its shortcomings, its author has done a useful job. ■



Pál Engel

# The Past as Prologue

A New General History

Miklós Molnár: *Histoire de la Hongrie*. Paris, Hatier, 1996, 469 pp.  
(Collection "Nations d'Europe")

**A** new survey of Hungarian history from the earliest times to the present in a world language is always welcome. It is even more heartening when the work is not a translation, but written in living French, for a foreign readership. It is an unfortunate rule that works by Hungarian authors for a Hungarian readership fail when brought out in foreign languages.

It is also welcome that the book is the work of one author. Of course, an author can be fully conversant only with the history of one or two periods, having, for the rest, to write at second and third hand. There is a sense in which it seems preferable that a number of specialists should undertake the writing of a summary work, and many such works have appeared in the past. However, these did not provide evidence of the advantages of collectivity, and it seems that even the highest competence is incapable of making up for that lack of over-

all coherence which always appears when a number of different authors cooperate.

Miklós Molnár is a specialist in contemporary history. He was active in the reform movement that preceded the 1956 Revolution. Since then he has lived in Switzerland, where, until his retirement, he was a professor at the University of Lausanne. He is an acknowledged 20th-century historian, and thus one would expect that this century would receive more space in his book than any other period. Yet this is not so: the balance within the book is almost perfect. Almost the first quarter is devoted to the Medieval period (to 1526), the second to the Early Modern Age (1526–1849), the third to the Austro-Hungarian Empire (to 1918) and the last to the 20th century. The treatment extends up to our own time, since the final pages deal with the first two years of the present Horn government. The work is complemented by a brief chronological survey, a two-page bibliography and an index of names.

The treatment is strictly chronological. The backbone consists of a running presentation of political history. However, there are constant and substantial digressions, illustrated as much as possible by data on social and economic conditions, and on the most important events in the development of culture. In all this the author is concise and informative. There are brilliant miniature portraits of many char-

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## Pál Engel

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acters in Hungarian history, politicians as much as of artists. Sometimes similes assist the concision of style, (e.g., Baron József Eötvös as a political thinker is "the Hungarian Tocqueville"). The chapters presenting the social problems of the 19th and 20th centuries are particularly good.

Minor and major errors are to be found in almost all general histories, and this one is no exception. In Pest the town walls were not demolished, but incorporated in buildings—parts survive even now (p. 300); Bosnia-Herzegovina was never, in any form whatsoever, a part of Hungary during the Middle Ages (p. 310); and Miklós Horthy's son was carried off in 1944 by Otto Skorzeny's men not from Buda Castle, but from an apartment in the centre of Pest (p. 372). With regard to the Middle Ages, with which I am most familiar, I could list a good number of mistakes, some of which would be quite serious in a scholarly work. However, this is not a work for the specialist, but for the wider public, and thus its usefulness is not vitally affected by the factual errors it contains. Much more important is the author's success in presenting the reader with the cardinal issues in Hungarian history, the competence of the picture he provides of that history, and the degree to which he assists the understanding of social and political problems of the present time. In this respect the work is, I think, largely successful. In addition to writing clearly and simply, the author does everything possible to make an understanding of conditions in Hungary easier. He avoids concepts which are difficult to grasp, but refers to parallel phenomena abroad. One good idea is to give, when quoting statistics—more than once—their French or other equivalents for purposes of comparison. Most important of all perhaps, the author succeeds in avoiding an excessively Hungarian viewpoint and presents an objective and balanced picture.

Nevertheless, I believe the ideal would be for the history of any country to be written by foreigners. For they would certainly more easily notice those important aspects which, in Hungary, have for the most part been passed over. For example, it is not easy to understand Hungarian medieval history as a whole, nor Hungarian history in the modern age, if no stress is laid upon the fact that up to the end of the 14th century the Kingdom of Hungary was the major power in the region, and an aggressive one at that. Its military strength was, as contemporaries agreed, much superior to that of its neighbours, while war was both a favoured pastime and everyday activity for Hungarian monarchs. With the exception of the Mongol invasion of 1241, the kingdom experienced no significant foreign attack for three centuries; for their part, if internal stability permitted, Hungary's kings frequently invaded neighbouring principalities. The signs are that the aim was not one of conquest, since this occurred only rarely, but rather to provide a constant reminder of Hungarian military superiority and, of course, booty. This can be said equally of any 12th, 13th or 14th-century Hungarian monarch; the only difference is that under the Anjou kings the objective was the Balkans, while earlier it had been other countries too. Only in this connection can we assess the weight of the enormous change brought to Hungary's policy towards its neighbours by the expansion of the Ottoman Empire. After 1389, Hungary found itself in the path of Ottoman expansion and, for the first time, came into conflict with a neighbour who in the long run proved stronger, a neighbour who regularly laid waste her territory, and who finally destroyed her. The appearance of the Ottoman Turks on the southern border not only put an end to Hungarian hegemony in the Balkans once and for all, but also made defenders out of those who



had been attackers. It is easy to see the effect this development must have had on the thinking of the Hungarian elite, and on a Hungarian nobility as a whole, which was brought up on an aggressive policy.

Similarly, one cannot emphasize enough the distinctive character of the Hungarian nobility, which, up to the 20th century, had remained the component of Hungarian society serving as the model for the rest. Of course, "noble" meant different things in different parts of Christian Europe—not to mention in other civilizations. Two things are worth stressing. The first is that—unlike in England—the dividing line between noble and peasant was always very clear in Hungary, and awareness of this was not lost even in the bourgeois age. The second is that—unlike in France, for example, where the dividing line was also fairly sharp—in Hungary the stratum which was called "noble" was comparatively broad, comprising at the end of the Middle Ages some 4 to 5 per cent of the total population. Most nobles, however, were actually peasants as regards their lifestyle and living standard, differing from serfs (vileins) only owing to their special privileges. Consequently, the Hungarian nobility was not among those nobilities which elsewhere were called aristocracies. Neither wealth, nor a lifestyle that derived from this made someone a noble, as was the case elsewhere; nobility derived merely from a landed estate, however small, to which basic rights were attached. Only a few nobles were able to live in a fashion appropriate to their status, but their culture as a whole was determined by the mass, and not by them. Therefore, neither in lifestyle, nor in culture was the Hungarian noble able to provide a model for a society on the road to modernization. He was very conscious of his own value, very proud of his descent and his privileges, since these were all that

differentiated him from the peasant. The gentleman's way of life remained alien to him until very recently, as did the notion of *noblesse oblige*.

Finally, there are important issues which we Hungarians simply do not notice, except when we try to step out of our own skins. For example, why is "the history of Hungary", as we call it, for us always the history of the Hungarian people, or of the Hungarian ethnic group? At the beginning of his book Molnár devotes five pages to the history of the Carpathian Basin before the year 900, but twice as many pages to the migrations of the Hungarian people's Uralic, Finno-Ugric and Turkic forebears on the steppes north of the Black Sea. This is not much, and there are other concise histories which provide much more. However, it is worth reflecting on this: is there in Europe today any country whose history begins several thousand kilometers away from its frontiers with an outline of the data on its oldest linguistic relatives, a history which for a long time continues outside these frontiers with a description of sundry "ancestral homelands"? Imagine a book on English history which begins with a discussion of the origins of the Indo-European peoples and, among these, the Angles, the Saxons and the Jutes. The author of such a book would attribute minor importance to Stonehenge, the Celts and the Romans, but would passionately endeavour to reconstruct the journey from the Vistula to the Straits of Dover made, over several thousand years, by the forebears of Hengist and Horsa. This approach, so natural to a Hungarian that in his eyes it needs no justification, would seem to an Englishman, Frenchman, Swede or anyone else odd indeed. Why this state of affairs developed is most interesting; understanding it would surely help towards a comprehension of public thinking in the 20th century. ■



Balázs Illényi

# Situation Good But There Is Still Hope

Iván Vitányi: *A magyar társadalom kulturális állapota. Az 1996-os országos vizsgálat zárójelentése.* (The Cultural State of Hungarian Society. The Final Report of the 1996 National Survey). Maecenas, Budapest, 1997. 126 pp.

Everyone knows the Viennese saying: "the situation is desperate but not serious". The findings of a team studying the changes in the Hungarian cultural situation since the end of communism in 1989 could best be summed up by a Budapest variant: "the situation is good but there is still hope". One of the reasons for taking on this 1996 survey was the pessimism shown by intellectuals, artists and politicians over the past seven or eight years which suggested that the country was irreversibly progressing towards a nadir with everything of value in culture being replaced by facile entertainment. There were others, however, who argued that the shock caused by the changes was not that profound. There was, therefore, no reason to raise the alarm. The report this survey of unprecedented thoroughness the Institute of Sociology of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences produced for the Ministry of Culture and Education, did not really confirm either opinion, but was rather a strange amalgam of the two.

What did the team mean by culture? Iván Vitányi, one of those in charge, said that the intention was to cover a well-defined field, "centred on the arts, on knowledge and the attitudes, lifestyle and quality of life of various social groups." This somewhat narrows the scope of the term culture as it is understood by social scientists, but it facilitates research and—at least in the view of those responsible—an analysis of results permits some generalization.

The questionnaire used concentrated on four fields: cultural institutions, the reception of culture, territorial distribution, and changes therein. Figures and percentages do not make for exciting reading, but analysing them replaces commonplaces with hard facts. The first stage, therefore, was an outline of the branches and institutions of culture and trends in this field apparent since 1989. If we turn to book publishing, which had been supported in many respects in the previous forty years (though ideologically guided and censored), no one who pays attention to what is happening around him will be surprised to find that by 1994 the number of titles published was up by a fifth compared to 1990, the nadir after the preceding twenty years, and that the list of authors fortunately included many a name—Hungarian or foreign—who had been neglected earlier.

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Heti Világgazdaság.*



At the same time, the number of copies printed steadily diminished, while prices almost tripled. Sadly, too, local authors increasingly had to take a back seat to best-sellers from abroad which appeared in huge editions.

The number of public libraries was halved, compared to 1985, and the number of their users also diminished steadily, though not at the same rate. It is therefore not surprising that much of what sociologists reveal about the reading habits of Hungarians is depressing. Of those questioned, 22 per cent said they had not read a single book in the preceding year, and a third declared that they never read what they called literature. Book buying, as you would expect from the above, declined to a fifth of what it had been five years earlier, and most of the books bought were by foreign best selling authors. Earlier reading habit surveys had regularly shown Maurus Jókai, Kálmán Mikszáth and Géza Gárdonyi, Hungarian classics, at the head of the list, plus a few Hungarian 20th-century middle-brow writers. At present, there is only one Hungarian amongst the best sellers, László L. Lőrinc, an author of pulp fiction, and he uses the *nom-de-plume* of Leslie L. Lawrence. The repeat of a 1970 survey among teachers also provided telling evidence. In 1970 teachers had mentioned nine contemporary Hungarian authors among the writers whose works they read regularly; that number is now down to one—Péter Esterházy was the only living Hungarian writer they read.

The cinema is the 20th-century visual art *par excellence*. Its role has been radically altered by television, a fact fully confirmed by the survey. The several thousand cinemas of the eighties have mostly closed their doors, a lack of capital and out-dated equipment being mostly to blame. In 1994, 500 cinemas survived, a number slowly added to by the new, state-of-the-art cine-

ma complexes. The number of films shown has not declined at the same rate, indeed the number of Hungarian productions has risen somewhat. In 1960 140 million had attended cinematic performances, thirty-five years later that number had shrunk to an annual 14 million. But it should not be forgotten that this was the period of the second phase of the media revolution: of colour, satellite and cable television and video. By the middle seventies, every household owned not only a radio but also a TV set, which had been generally replaced by a colour set by the end of communism. Now the Internet has reached households as well, as an extra addition to satellite, cable and video. Of those questioned, 85 per cent owned a colour TV set, half were linked to cable and owned a videoplayer. Two thirds of the latter used it at least once a month, and more than a tenth used it daily.

The result is that people spend more and more time watching their TV screens. That subject deserves a survey of its own. 1977, 1986 and 1993 time budget surveys comparing work, leisure and TV viewing have made it easier to treat this phenomenon as a process. A comparison of these surveys shows that Hungarians spend significantly less time at work, men five hours instead of the earlier six, and women three instead of four. Fast growing post-communist unemployment had the major role in the shaping of these figures. Available leisure hours grew, as could be expected, by an hour each for both sexes, to almost five hours for men and to four for women. Since figures for just about every other activity remained constant, this extra time is generally devoted to television. Both sexes now generally spend more than half their leisure time in this way.

This high proportion is unusual. It seems that, in this respect as well, Hungary is following the Anglo-American pat-



tern. There, as against e.g. Japan, Austria and Scandinavia, TV does its best to fill as much of the available time as possible. Women, because of their domestic chores, see a little less TV, but the TV proportion in their total leisure is the same. There is no essential difference according to age or education, though the obvious is naturally true: those in employment spend less time watching television. In Hungary as well, those with more channels at their disposal spend more time in front of their sets, but less time watching given programmes and more time merely surfing.

**T**he survey also concerned itself with the habits of various age-groups and definable sections of society. This allowed two distinct groups to be isolated: those who favoured political information and high culture (music, drama, art films, etc.), and those devoted to light entertainment. Though the figures were more or less expected, they still make one think: 17 per cent fall into the first group and 83 per cent into the second. The latter include the youngest and the oldest, and the less educated. Bearing in mind the possibility of further structuring in terms of viewing habits, it can be said that more than three quarters of all Hungarians prefer, indeed, almost exclusively view, soap operas, sport, quiz shows, or programmes offering thrills or light entertainment. Half of this group, however, and the sociologists argue that this is a possible cause for concern, could not care less what is on when they turn on their sets. This includes those under 30, a generation already considerably differentiated from adults in their radio listening habits and whose preference is for computers and videos.

As regards theatre, the sociologists consider it a good sign that the number of theatres has not diminished, has even grown a little, especially outside Budapest.

In Budapest, companies that can be described as alternative (semi-amateur, semi-avant-garde, experimental) flourish. Numbers attending performances have declined slowly but steadily, from an annual 6 million in the seventies to an annual 4 million. This decline is most in evidence in Budapest. Furthermore, the social composition of the public has increasingly shifted towards the upper classes. Theatregoers these days either have a special interest in culture, or well-filled pocket-books. In music there is some good news as well. Earlier the National Philharmonia concert agency enjoyed a nationwide monopoly as impresario; today there are already more than a hundred firms in the business and the number of concerts has doubled since 1989. There has been no decline in total attendance. Unfortunately, due to the lack of money, there are fewer international guest artists, and the larger local ensembles live under a constant threat. In addition, there are negative signs in the composition of the public. While there is a public, even given the larger number of concerts on offer, no more than 3 per cent of Hungarians attend concerts, and only impassioned music lovers and the well-to-do think of such functions as part of their normal social life. The music market has seen some changes too. LPs have all but disappeared and the number of CDs has trebled. The number of Hungarian recording artists has declined significantly: they now account for less than a third of total record sales.

The general position of fine arts and that of exhibitions in particular is shaping in a desirable fashion. In recent years both the number of exhibitions and of visitors to them has grown. There is a growing number of private galleries and they are doing well. The breakdown of gallery goers, however, resembles that of concert goers (around 3 per cent of the popula-



tion). Shows by contemporary artists, which are the most numerous, are only attended by a narrow circle of intellectuals who care for that sort of thing, and only connoisseurs and investors buy pictures. The sociologists argue that the figures confirm that, once again, a huge gap has opened up between the tastes of an elite and of the general public, and that there are numerous groups within both whose tastes isolate them, there being just about no passage between them. All this may well lead to the atomization of art life and to the destabilization of the position of artists.

Since the middle of the nineteenth century, museums have grown into bastions of culture in Hungary, becoming even stronger since the Second World War. Their permanent displays were both the places and instruments in the education, training and entertainment of millions. A few decades ago, the country led the world with its annual ten million visitors to museums. That figure is still around nine million but it should be borne in mind that in 1985 there were twenty million and thus the decline can be described as dramatic. And yet both the number of such institutions and of the objects held by them has grown steadily, unlike their annual budgets or their staff. Both financial resources and numbers employed have declined by 20 to 30 per cent since the end of communism.

For many decades, Houses of Culture have had an important role. They provided a roof for many kinds of functions, ranging from voluntary adult education to amateur and professional theatricals, concerts and political meetings. Surveys show that their position is not much worse, but it is worse nevertheless. Following the great expansion of the fifties and sixties, some 3,500 functioned in Hungary. Since 1989, many have ceased operation, or had their opera-

tion suspended, since local government authorities can no longer maintain them. A few new ones have appeared, mostly in towns. The decline in numbers is ongoing and is mainly taking place in country areas where the need for them is the greatest. The slow rate of this decline in numbers suggests that there is a genuine demand for such institutions. The number of their staff, particularly of professional animators, has unfortunately almost halved in recent years. Nevertheless, between a third and half of the population still regularly attend the programmes they offer, and this indicates that the interest in them is still considerable.

Finally, associations, foundations and non-profit organizations should also be mentioned. Their number is growing steadily and that is to be welcomed. Between 1991 and 1994, the number of commercial businesses concerned with culture has just about tripled, to almost six thousand. Communism had largely throttled the clubs and associations that flourished before the war. In the eighties, large sections of the opposition and those involved in the reform of adult education aimed to revive them. As a result, the seventeen associations which existed in the seventies have now become more than seventeen hundred.

**T**he second major theme of the survey concerned the cultural behaviour, interests and attitudes of Hungarians. Such questionnaires have been regularly repeated in Hungary over the past thirty years, with a systematic improvement in methodology, and this significantly boosts the validity of the research project. These are essentially time budget surveys that throw light on life styles and on sociocultural structures.

A survey in the eighties identified four sociocultural groups in Hungary. Thirty-



five per cent belonged to the passive type who were not interested in any sort of cultural activity, at best they watched TV but without being selective. Many members of the rural and the urban proletariat belonged to this group. The second type, which is called cultural acceptors, made up 26 per cent of the population. These work hard, for the sake of their future, but they longed for rest at the end of a day's work. They were ready to accept cultural programmes for their relaxation, but had no concrete demands in this respect. Better educated workers and peasants tended to belong here, as well as those employed in the services. The third type were the open-minded accumulators (24 per cent) who demanded culture, but did not differentiate in terms of value. (In America, such people were called culturally omnivorous.) Finally, 15 per cent of the population were the adherents, consumers and producers of high culture. When this survey, now more than ten years old, is compared to similar surveys abroad, it is clear that this last group is as strong in Hungary as in culturally more favoured nations. The real difference is in the first two types. In the Euro-Atlantic countries the middle groups are much stronger, and the number of those who miss out on culture altogether is much smaller.

**T**he 1996 survey aimed to find out if these ratios had changed. One finding is that the 15 per cent more actively engaged in culture has remained unchanged. But these days they have remained essentially isolated as concert or theatre goers, as visitors to galleries and museums, as readers of high-brow books and as learners of foreign languages. The ratios of the two lower types have shifted in favour of the most passive. These include those who just sit at home and never pick up a book, those men who only go out to drink or watch a

game, and the women who only go out visiting and who spend their time knitting or doing embroidery. According to the sociologists, the bad news is that their ratio has grown to 43 per cent.

The two middle groups together do not amount to 40 per cent. Earlier, they had exceeded 50 per cent. As a result, their weight has been reduced. The present survey preferred to classify in terms of age groups. It proved possible to identify a pretty active, youthful group accounting for 24 per cent, which attends light music concerts, calls on friends, goes on outings, is active in sports, reads a lot, uses libraries and Houses of Culture, but spends less time in front of television sets. This group, in which young men make up the majority, prefer more active television programmes to the thrillers that are now swamping broadcasts, and they know how to handle new technical equipment. They must therefore be taken to be more modern but, according to the sociologists who carried out the survey, these are most likely to become the victims of a uniformized consumer society. Another group, somewhat older (15 per cent), favour the conventional forms, they spend more time sitting at home, reading, which has both advantages and disadvantages.

One welcome conclusion that can be drawn from the survey is that those questioned placed culture pretty high on a ten-point scale of values, at 7.5 on average, which means that it still figures as a basic value to them. Half of those who responded, however, were not able to relate a single cultural experience; what is more, another section only spoke of how splendid it was to have fun, and only one per cent was able to mention an activity in which they had a creative role.

A third major category of questions examined the cultural position of habitats. Habitats were defined as a special unit,



"which defined the relations that satisfied the everyday needs of the population in keeping with the principles of homogeneity, functionality and identity." Making use of demographic indices, peculiarities of occupation and employment, the state of the economy and of the infrastructure, statisticians were able to define a total of 178 habitats in Hungary. One of the most interesting and most comforting results of the survey was that that slope descending from West to East, which characterizes the economy and the infrastructure, does not apply to culture. It is also good news that in half the habitats the indices of cultural development are essentially, or at least somewhat, better than the economic or infrastructural data. This happens to be generally true of the countries of East Central Europe (Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovenia). The experience is that these countries have moved further ahead in cultural than in economic development. It became clear in the course of the survey that there are many localities where people have in general made serious and successful efforts to ensure a flourishing cultural life, in spite of economic difficulties. This is shown by the larger towns (Pécs, Sopron, Szeged, Veszprém, Győr, Szombathely, Szolnok and Zalaegerszeg) and the smaller towns (Kazincbarcika, Szerencs, Sáropatak, Hódmezővásárhely, Szentes, Jászberény, Szécsény and Kalocsa) which have made dynamic progress. It is noticeable that the market towns of the Great Plain are amongst those that are doing best in the cultural field, although this in no way appears logical given other indices. It must be said, however, that the situation has essentially deteriorated in recent years, both in an absolute and in a relative sense in the disadvantaged rural areas, in frontier areas, in isolated areas far from towns, or in areas that are otherwise disadvantaged.

The Budapest metropolitan area was subjected to special scrutiny, since one fifth of the country's population live there. Four areas are distinguished, two inner cities and two suburban areas, one of each on each bank of the Danube. The inner city in Buda, the right bank, is a historical area, that of Pest, on the left bank, the centre of a *fin de siècle* and early twentieth century megalopolis. The Buda suburbs are garden suburbs, those on the Pest side are of all kinds; in fact towns in their own right, garden suburbs and housing estates. The inhabitants of Buda tend to be wealthier, and the surveys show that they are culturally more developed than those on the Pest side, spending more on culture items, reading more high-brow books than anywhere else in the country; there are to be found more cinemas, theatres and concerts there, and their education level is better than the nationwide average. Budapest is thus in a better position than the country as such, but the population of the Pest bank, which is better supplied with cultural institutions, has shown itself more passive in their exploitation.

Finally, finance. Since 1991 less and less of the national income has been devoted to culture. Earlier, 3.6 per cent of GDP was thus spent, but only 3.2 per cent in 1995. Expenditure on public education, higher education, R&D, on the arts and the media by the state has declined from 14 to 12 per cent at a time of growing administrative and debt servicing costs. The survey shows—and this is both good and bad news—that the public is now paying for culture. In 1996, 76.3 per cent of the income of these institutions came from the public. The state has never before had as small a role in the financing of culture, 18.6 per cent at present, the remainder being accounted for by non-profit organizations. A more thorough investigation of the situation shows that financing was in a



similar state in the seventies, however, then the difference was provided by enterprises and mass organizations. In other words, the democratic metamorphosis has only resulted in nominal changes, the general public still pays the decisive share.

The really bad news in this is that two thirds of the 76 per cent coming from the public is made up by television licence fees and money spent on newspapers, records and cassettes; this means that less and less is spent on the theatre, literature and the cinema. While it is true that the share of culture has grown somewhat (from 2.5 to 2.8 per cent) within total expenditure by the general public, according to the analysts, this is due solely to a decline in total spending.

The real problem in the financing of culture is that the role as patron occupied by the state under communism now devolves not only on market mechanisms pure and simple, but also on civil society and related non-profit activities. The survey established, however, that in view of the fragility of the structure of civil society, business has to undertake this financing role. The analysts argue that, at this moment in time, this is the weakest point of culture. The weakness of the non-profit

sector alone cannot be blamed, the fact is that state support is only around half of what is customary in the West.

**T**o sum up: Hungarian culture cannot in any way be described as a disaster zone. The intellectuals and other groups have managed to hang on to what they seized in the past. In numerous areas, such as book publishing, concerts, theatres, records, exhibitions, the range of commodities on supply has grown much larger. The network of institutions has survived, although the number of institutions has slowly declined in each field. It is good news that people still participate in culture in large numbers. Privatization has taken place in culture as well, without major shocks. What is particularly important is that cultural processes—particularly as regards geography, have not followed in the tracks of economic changes, which have often been unbearably cruel. One should stress all the same that public participation has declined in recent years, which can be explained not only by money but also by the declining prestige of culture. All this is evidence that there has been no spectacular implosion. All there has been is a slow waning, a process which, the sociologists hope, is certainly reversible. ■



# Tales from the Stage

Ede Szigligeti: *Liliomfi* • Ferenc Molnár: *Az üvegcipő* (The Glass Slipper) • Dezső Kosztolányi: *Édes Anna* (Anna Édes) • Iván Mándy: *Régi idők mozija* (The Movies of Old Times) • Zsigmond Móricz: *Nem élhetek muzsikaszó nélkül* (I Can't Live without Music) • Ephraim Kishon: *A házasságlevél* (The Marriage Certificate) • István Örkény: *Kulcskeresők* (Key Searchers)

The story has reclaimed its importance on the stage. Modern drama frequently divests itself of characters, and postmodern drama does so with a plot, a traceable story line. Yet the urge to tell a story gains the upper hand from time to time, while the urge to play will never disappear as long as theatre means actors in performance.

In 1849, the actor and author Ede Szigligeti wrote a play about actors. *Liliomfi*—not to be confused with *Liliom*, Ferenc Molnár's play from the beginning of this century. *Liliomfi* is about a young actor who flees his studies and a marriage and who eventually wins his true love's hand. Coercion is personified by an uncle, an erudite professor of Latin. The irony of the elopement is, similarly to that in Georg Büchner's *Leonce and Lena*, that the girl the young man is forced to marry in an arranged marriage happens to be the one he has chosen for himself. The happy end takes a while to reach, with a number of obstacles dexterously negotiated by

the young man using his actor's instinct for frequent changes of costume and appearance.

The Attila József Theatre in Budapest commissioned a noted contemporary playwright to rewrite this popular comedy, which we had also seen on the screen some years back. He devised a frame story about *Liliomfi*'s participation in the defeated revolution of 1848–49; this provides the hero with a second motive beyond the stage, namely that he is trying to lie low among a troupe of strolling players under the stage name of *Liliomfi*. In this new version the mimetic ability is coupled with the instinct to save one's life. The light comedy, however, couldn't carry this idea. The company eventually decided to stage the play in its original form, commissioning instead a couple of songs as a musical icing for the cake. Both the lyrics and the music have a fine irony lurking in them, a playful Rococo serenity connecting the original mid-19th-century play with the wry mood prevalent at the end of the millennium.

In Péter Léner's direction, the confines of the play are nicely filled out with the finesse of the acting, with the highly intelligent Pál Mácsai's outstanding *Liliomfi*. Rather than a flowing-haired romantic youth relishing the idea of elopement, he is a promising scholar, who abandons his

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studies—forced on him by his family—in order to be an actor. Mácsai's bespectacled Liliomfi is no different from anybody, except perhaps for a degree of narcissism. Only when acting does he become somebody. His personality asserts itself through transformation: he becomes himself in the guise of somebody else. Mácsai invests great energy in his role, yet is at ease. Each gesture he makes is meticulously elaborate; his knock-kneed gait is as much part of the "figure" as is his varied use of a full-bodied baritone. His linguistic awareness allows him to hilariously parody a German-born innkeeper of Pest—as though the ex-student of philology had acted out his flair for mimesis and role changing. This performance is an apotheosis of buffoonery.

**F**erenc Molnár was the great theatrical storyteller of the beginning of the century. The play of his most frequently performed recently has been *Az üvegcipő* (The Glass Slippers). A fairy-tale set in the outskirts of the capital, it is about a servant girl who learns her poetry sitting up in the gallery of the National Theatre, who sees the Prince Charming of her dreams in the form of a respectable cabinet-maker in his fifties. Sipos, the cabinet-maker, however, is the longtime lover of the landlady of a boarding house who decides that the time has come to tie the knot—especially as another lover of hers, much younger than Sipos, is about to marry someone else. But Irma, the servant girl, will not have her "sweet'n'mad" Prince deceived and, at the marriage feast, emboldened by a glass or two, comes clean about the love life of his new spouse. After the scandal she is ready to start up as a "street-walker"—even though it is not quite clear to her what the word means—were it not for good fortune bringing together her and the honest, though grumpy Prince of her dreams.

This latest production is directed by János Ács at the Új Színház, fully aware that the sugar-coated squeamishness of productions thirty or so years ago is now obsolete. He experiments with genuine dramatic content, with vital, harsh colours and the grotesque lyricism these produce. The result is ambivalent, primarily because he has no leading actor who can carry it off. In his resolute unclamorous way, Molnár's Sipos is a dimwitted stalwart of good solid lower-middle-class morals and the victim of female scheming. The confirmed bachelor with a freakish charm, the morose charmer who is always outwitted, a respected cabinet-maker who wants to assert moral order around him by using a ruler and compass, he is driven into the haven of matrimony by the desperate romanticism of a "daft" servant girl. This grumpy numbskull, upright and respectable, can only be portrayed with inner serenity, hidden humour, ease and elegance—grumpily, but not aggressively, with obstinate freakishness but not with noisy anger. For all the excellence of the female leads and the supporting cast, the production fails to convey the very essence—the bitter-sweet poesy of cheap dreams come true.

**N**ow for another story of a servant girl on stage, and this one is much more gripping. The time and place is just about the same—Budapest just after the First World War. The author is Dezső Kosztolányi, poet, writer of fiction, translator of poetry, journalist and, last but not least, theatre critic—equally brilliant in each of his guises. Although he never tried his hand at a play, his novel *Édes Anna* (Anna Édes, 1926) has been adapted for the stage several times (also filmed a few years ago), and now most recently at the Madách Chamber Theatre, Budapest.

The story is simple. One day early in the morning, Anna Édes, a maid in the



upper middle-class Budapest home of the Vizys, kills both her master and mistress with a knife. Her motives are unclear. She was not really maltreated; the husband was amicably neutral towards her; true, the wife was at times kind-hearted and caring, at other times hysterical, querulous and mean. True, too, that a reckless young relative of the couple has seduced her, only to abandon her. Everyone is aghast at her terrible deed—yes, this is all you can expect from people like *these*, you treat them well and look what they offer you in return. The novel reflects the state of Hungarian society after the 1919 Red Revolution, the brief “Commune”, through its finely depicted political and sociological tensions.

One is in fact puzzled at the choice of play by the Madách Theatre where Cooney *père et fils* are regularly performed. The adaptation is not necessarily topical and was made by a young modernist author, István Tasnádi who, as a dramaturge, has safe hands and is absolutely professional. He delivers and delivers well. The structure is all right, the scenes are nicely wound up, the dialogue works. The story starts on a note of relief over the collapse of the Hungarian Soviet Republic—this is a novelty; ten years ago it would have been simply unthinkable. The performance is impeccable, even though the title role, as was only to be expected, allows only for a passive, undramatic personality.

The stage is too small for an upper-middle-class drawing-room. So the set is arranged diagonally. A kitchen is squeezed in, entered from a tiny lobby, and there is an access to the backstairs. There are backstairs, but no servant's room. This is bad—a middle-class home in a Budapest apartment house between the two wars was almost unimaginable without a servant's room. So, at night Anna Édes pulls out an iron folding-bed from the closet,

makes her bed in front of the kitchen range, says her prayers and goes to bed. This does not work. In a play about a servant, you cannot do without a servant's room, for it is much more than just a bedroom—it is a shelter. For Anna Édes, it equals the world. It is her empire which bears the stamp of her personality. The kitchen, on the other hand, is her mistress's, Mrs Vizy's territory. Seduction cannot happen in the kitchen as far as Anna is concerned, despite modern soft porn's liking for it. The young master stealing into a kitchen is out of style.

And Kosztolányi calls for style. How did nice upper middle-class people behave in the early years of the century? What did they wear? How did they arrange their meals? What were their social conventions? What was a party like with a cabinet minister as a guest? The replies the production gives to these questions are random. The guests are noisy and vulgar, almost caricatures. Yet they are not; they simply do not understand the norms of natural behaviour on the stage. It is a simple truth that the ambiguous is always more interesting on the stage. If Mrs Vizy is rambunctiously mean and hysterical, a straightforward bitch, there is no play. It would have been much more exciting to reveal the real faces behind the surface, the hidden meanness, the inner core of the characters. When Anna gives notice, this Mrs Vizy responds in a venomous temper, reproaching her for her “disloyalty” with an air of superiority and contempt. Yet her speech also contains the desperate sincerity of someone who feels she has been offended. Here, tearful incredulity, hysterical self-pity and indignation over the disloyalty of a maid she feels was treated well in her home, would have been more rewarding. The young director, András Lénér, however, has not been able to get his cast to abandon its routine solutions and clichés.



**A**nother fairy-tale world is that created by the fine short-story writer Iván Mándy, who died not long ago. His domain is cinematic; his short stories are full of fade-outs, cuts and flashbacks, lyrical reminiscences of the past as though in faded takes, the scratched and worn films of his youth; long-gone cinemas with quaint names, forgotten stars on the posters, fluffs of life, never-happened meetings, dream and reality mixed up. The Radnóti Theatre, combining with the Petőfi Theatre of Sopron, put together a stage version of the Mándy myth, *Régi idők mozija* (The Movies of Old Times).

Here everything is in style. The setting is a "flea-pit" before the Second World War, where the real and film characters in the life of Zsámboki all meet up. An old film is being shown on the screen, the hero and the heroine are singing, now and then the "private characters" sitting in the audience, typical Mándy little people, make comments. The "story" begins—if indeed it is a story, consisting as does of fragments, takes, everyday episodes—the story of a family, or is it of a film?—Zsámboky's movie—with flashes of lives, everyday love conflicts, grotesque situations.

This too is an urban milieu, with a leaning to the bohemian and nostalgia for the artistic, with miniature character portraits. There is a charmingly irresponsible womanizer of a Father, a chirpy little bird of a Mother, and János, their son, half in the shadow of his father and half under the spell of movie stars, trying to live his own life and assert his own as yet unshaped self—a portrait of the writer as a young man. Grotesque situations arise from trysts disturbed by the parents returning home too early. Movie stars step out of the screen—Hollywood's romantic heroes of the 30s offer János advice on how to lead a life of success. This is reminiscent of Woody Allen's *Play It Again*

*Sam*. The actors subtly mock the mannerisms of old stars and movies, the crooning romantic heroes and the body language of female vamping.

The basic story does not really work on the stage. The protagonist is doomed to mere passivity—apparently the fate of young fictional heroes transferred to the stage. He is staring at length in the direction of the gallery, which here symbolizes dreams, rather than the future, as is the theatrical convention. This stare is inward looking and, after a time, dull. You cannot really keep up looking inward and remain interesting.

**T**he theatre has always tended to attract novelists with a strong penchant for story-telling. Zsigmond Móricz was one of the major novelists between the two world wars, who often worked for the stage, to make ends meet. His best short stories are suffused with suppressed drama, yet box office success often directed him towards compromise and cheap solutions. As far as compromise is concerned, *Nem élhetek muzikaszó nélkül* (I Can't Live without Music), adapted from his novel of the same title by the author himself, is a representative piece, an amalgam of "woeful Hungarian life"—as the great poet, contemporary and friend of Móricz's, Endre Ady wrote in a poem—and shallow melodrama. The production at the National Theatre opens with something like a visionary poetic *danse macabre*, instead of the usual sugary creampuff of music hall songs and merry-making. The whole thing is set in a manor house with the look of a crypt, and the revellers languish in the middle of nowhere way into the small hours. A boarded up ditch is in the front of the stage in which we are supposed to see the mud too, given the all too frequent mentions of muddy snow-covered boots in keeping with the wintertime setting.



An allegory is in the making, we may think, of the funereal Hungary of the Puszta, drowned in rowdiness and vanity, of Ady's "Hungarian Fallowland" which sucks you in, covers and lulls you to sleep.

But the play, following the major compromise made by a major writer, is about something else. It's a Taming of the Tramp or how to domesticate the boisterous, rowdy, song-bawling Balázs, how he is being tamed by his sweet Pólika. It is indeed syrupy stuff, with dimwitted figures for a dimwitted audience, a production that fits in with a tradition at the National Theatre, itself often so diluted before the war. The play could probably be played in the vein it opens in under the direction of Tibor Csizmadia—as a barbarian rite, an allegory of melancholy Hungarian life drowned in Gypsy music. Not at the National, though. The director soon gives up and lets the Hungarian tradition of cabaret and stand-up comedy take over.

This is a tradition, however, that continues to be nurtured by many authors, among them the writer and director Ferenc Kishont, who, starting with the fifties, made a name for himself as Ephraim Kishon in Israel. His comedy *A házasság-levél* (The Marriage Certificate), has been translated and performed in several countries. He contributed to the Hungarian translation—originally the work of a Hungarian actor in Tel-Aviv, András Rónai—and took on the direction of his play at the József Attila Theatre, Budapest.

The comedy is about an honest couple, the Borozovszkis, who, it turns out, are in fact unmarried, as their marriage certificate was mislaid due to a bureaucratic error. The mistake becomes critical when the mother of their daughter's fiancé insists on having a look at the document or else her consent to the marriage will not be forthcoming. The story is about the diffi-

culties of locating and obtaining the missing document, the nature of which would not tax the imagination of any audience. The reassuring conclusion is reached through gags, jokes and misunderstandings.

Whoever thinks the theatre is a place where tried and trusty effects are repeated will not be disappointed. The acting is timeless—in the sense that even a modicum of the unexpected is banished. The author's personal contribution to the production cannot be described as direction. The set designer, on instructions from the author, has built an absolutely faithful copy of a Tel-Aviv system-built flat. This too is an absolute waste, because the audience cannot appreciate it in the first place, and not a tiny fraction of the sets has any function and anyway, *couleur locale* is fully dispensable in a play which could take place anywhere, anytime.

A system-built flat also figures in the Katona József Színház, Budapest, with a view through the window of rows of prefabricated apartment blocks—yet with a difference. The effect is highly revealing. The play is not new, the author of *Kulcskeresők* (Key Searchers), István Örkény, died 20 years ago. The piece in question is not one of his most popular, compared to the more often performed *Catsplay* and *The Tót Family*, which have also been staged in other countries. *Kulcskeresők* is, however, more open philosophically and offers a wider scope for interpretation. It is both an everyday story and almost pure allegory at the same time, about an aircraft captain, Antal Fóris, who has already been demoted twice, as a consequence of a number of unexpected mishaps in flight caused by him. Now he is captain again, and his wife is expecting the arrival of the Prague flight in trepidation. Her fear proves to be justified: Fóris, in an effort to



execute the most perfect ever landing, ends up—with a sudden gust of tailwind—by touching down at the entrance to a nearby cemetery, instead of on the runway. Apart from family, a small group are waiting for the pilot in his apartment—it turns out that a number of them have some interest in the passengers on that particular flight. They comment on the events and have something else on their mind, since the Fóris's have lost the keys to the flat they have recently moved into, and the locksmith has bungled the lock and no one can leave. Under the circumstances, they proceed to discuss the landing at the cemetery, with guidance provided by an unknown person called The Wanderer who has turned up uninvited and tries to calm Mrs Fóris as an invisible guardian angel would. Fóris's landing, at first glance a fiasco, is gradually transformed into an act of bravery. With no knowledge of the facts and drunk on their imagination and the champagne they have consumed, the group starts lionizing the hapless pilot; indeed, they continue to do so even though the Fóris girl's fiancé has switched on his tape-recorder (he is a radio reporter) and plays back the passengers' indignant statements. (You may well ask how the reporter could get in through the jammed door—apparently, it can be unlocked from the outside.)

*Kulcskeresők* is a grotesque metaphor on our capacity to paint our fiascos rosy,

dream them into triumphs and falsify them as victories. This is an ironic study on national character by Örkény, which has nothing to do with self-reproach and self-effacement. "You are telling me I'm not a good pilot?" Fóris asks in the play. And the answer is: "You're a good pilot but you aren't cut out to be a pilot." The wild goose chase, the lack of a sense of reality have often been in evidence in Hungarian history. It is an open question whether, after the fall of communism, the greatest of all wild goose chases, and with the opening of European perspectives, there is any change at all or are we indeed painting the sky a different shade of pink again.

This question Gábor Máté's direction, though witty, resilient and entertaining, offers no reply to. Nor can it do so since the play is about the absurdity of the everyday devoid of any concrete ideological content. The view from the window of the flat onto the "endless belt" of houses suggests that nothing much has changed. The director may probably be right. We've made a bumpy landing again and, though the passengers may protest, we claim it was real workmanship since no one has been hurt. In the last scene, the figures withdraw into their own personal catatonic illusions, while a Hungarian folk song of ethereal beauty is heard like the music of spheres. And, just to make the end of the tale more frightening, the opposite block of flats starts coming towards us slowly, inexorably. ■



András Csejdy

## Hope Dies Last

András Kern-Róbert Koltai: *A miniszter félrelép* (Out of Order) • Péter Tímár: *Zimmer Feri* (Feri Zimmer) • Tamás Sas: *Presszó* (Bar) • Igor and Ivan Buharov: *A program* (The Programme) \* Juli Sára: *Apa győz* (Daddy Wins)

The first month and a half of the year is usually a dead season for the cinema and for film production, when nothing of interest happens. There are no, premieres, no film festivals, no special screenings; journalists have nothing to report on other than what is about to come off the production line. The time is spent counting the days down to the Budapest Film Festival, and production teams are engaged in a mad rush to edit and post-synchronize their films in order to have them ready in time for the judgment days early in February every year.

In this year's Festival, directors competed in three different categories: in addition to the fifteen full-length feature films, festival-goers were treated to twenty non-fiction (mostly documentaries) and ten experimental, short-length films.

A film version of Ray Cooney's farce *Out of Order*, one of the first purely commercial movies produced in Hungary for many years, opened just before Christmas. With this choice Andrew G. Vajna, the Hungarian-born Hollywood producer, hoped to prove that even in the present unfavour-

able market conditions investing in motion pictures in Hungary is both possible and worthwhile. In a Hollywood reflex, Vajna turned to András Kern and Róbert Koltai, both enormously popular (and commercially succesful) actor-directors on the Hungarian stage, and equally well-known to cinema, television and radio audiences. They have both tried their hands at finding a way to make a commercially viable Hungarian movie, with varying degrees of success.

Ray Cooney's play *Out of Order* played to packed houses a few years ago (and is still in the repertoire) in one of Budapest's commercial theatres, where Vajna saw it while on location here with one of his productions, *Evita*. He turned to Kern and Koltai, who had starred in the successful stage production, in the hope that audience response to a movie version would be similarly enthusiastic.

The storyline is dead simple: a minister books a suite in a luxury hotel for a night of dalliance with the secretary of one of the opposition parties, oblivious to the fact that she is being tailed by a private eye hired by her husband, a former boxer. Given this for openers, what unfolds is the standard formula of farce, with all its concomittant misunderstandings and unfortunate coincidences.

However the formula, originally designed for Mrs Thatcher's England, feels forced

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András Csejdy

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to anyone even vaguely familiar with contemporary Hungary. And anyone following the latest developments in the Clinton affair, the current tabloid scandal, would hardly be surprised to learn that Hollywood, always willing to oblige, is soon to release two super-productions on the subject. But the character of a politician cheating on his wife, when given a Hungarian background, doesn't stir much interest in the Hungarian public, which in its oversimplifying way, views politicians as an untrustworthy, corrupt and untruthful breed anyway. Since they are casual about most basic moral norms in handling public affairs, who cares what they do in their private life? For this reason the production team, which hoped to pull in, for the first time for many years, a domestic audience of over one million, is bound to be disappointed.

Two excellent actors calling on everything in their bag of tricks, the attempt to create a star out of the newcomer Kati Dobó, a final year drama school student (topless in posters all over town, to the delight of passing males), the highly professional promotion of the film—the politically highly incorrect poster included. All this is wasted, however, since the idea of a stunning secretary dying to jump into bed with Kern, who is not usually associated with the role of a lady-killer, seems unlikely, indeed forced. And the yapping of the invalid mother of the minister's political secretary sounds utterly ridiculous, going on endlessly about her little boy never coming home in time, cursing and blaming the politicians for everything in an attempt to stir up trouble among the lethargic inhabitants of Budapest.

In other respects the film is successful. Although falling short of the investors' expectations, with its 350,000 paying viewers in December, *Out of Order* is still leading the charts and the intention to popularize

Hungarian movies is a laudable one, even when the end product is somewhat controversial.

When the earth moved in 1989, with Communist regimes collapsing every month, what happened in Czechoslovakia came to be described as the Velvet Revolution. International journalism didn't come up with a similarly catchy phrase for the Hungarian transition for quite some time, until one day somebody, perhaps Timothy Garton Ash, dubbed it the Melancholy Revolution. The expression stuck, and it was not before long that even Hungarians were thinking of our own situation in such a way.

And indeed, we had little enough reason or time to be cheerful amidst the rapid changes, losing our sense of humour and irony as they unfolded. Just when we seem to be getting over the first shock, with our great expectations not met, just as we have learned to accept the cruel realities of life, some artists come forward to tell us about the funny side of the rapidly moving events.

Péter Timár's career as a film director has been anything but typical, yet not without consistency. In the late 1970s, when he was still an independent filmmaker, he was working with the late Gábor Bódy, one of the most original of all Hungarian directors, right until the latter's death. Timár's first full-length feature film, *Sound Eroticism*, combined experimental elements with an overtone of radical social criticism in a way which had not been seen before. In addition to his satirical films, he has given us documentaries, full-length video clips and advertising spots. Then came last year's satirical, musical interpretation of the swinging sixties, *Dollybird*, which broke all domestic box office records.

Encouraged by the success of *Dollybird*, an outside investor put up the money for a new low-budget Timár comedy, which went into competition at the 29th Film Festival.



*Feri Zimmer* caricatures a distinctly Hungarian character, the small-time businessman renting out rooms to visitors in the Lake Balaton region. (The title puns on *Zimmer frei*—Rooms to Rent in German, the board seen on almost every house, bungalow and hostel around Balaton, and on *Feri*, diminutive for Ferenc.) Those in the business have two months of the year to milk as much as they possibly can from German holidaymakers, using all the tricks in the book, and have the rest of the year to prepare for the next season. This bunch of lower-middle-class profiteers, the *Feris*, will be able to recognize themselves in the mirror that Timár holds up for them, if they have the courage to do so, that is.

The director, with fine instinct, focuses on his brazen main character, who serves up carrion to his intimidated guests, and who body-searches them before allowing them to go off to the lakeshore, to make sure that they haven't expropriated anything from the premises.

The movie is an absurd farce, yet, the situations and the dialogue taken to the extreme often seem faked, and not even the use of advertising clips, a trademark of Timár's, can save the production. Although he tries his usual tricks over and over again, none of them seem to work, whether it is the sequences recorded in reverse motion and then rolled backwards by the movie operator, producing a hilarious effect, or the speeded up voices edited in. No amount of fiddling can, however, change the disappointment caused by the weaknesses in this hastily produced film.

**D**ollybird's success was as pleasing as the ungraciousness of this attempt to make a killing on that earlier movie is saddening.

In the last issue of *The Hungarian Quarterly*, I argued that the only way to overcome the present crisis in Hungarian

film-making was to produce the type of films in which limited financial resources could be turned to advantage: taking risks by experimenting with new approaches and processes.

The cameraman Tamás Sas makes his debut as a director at this festival. The basic idea of his film, *Bar*, is simple enough: the entire movie is recorded from a fixed camera position. Everything we see in this 90-minute film takes place in the bar or in front of it, as seen through the window. The scene is a typical Budapest locale and the story is a single-location tale; the film-makers took a serious risk in hoping that audiences, accustomed to the visual variety in cinema language, would put up with a homogeneous visual world throughout the film, and that a story-line and swift dialogue delivered by good actors would be able to hold their attention.

It is a brave and risky undertaking, as there are not too many directors who can present contemporary characters speaking in such an entertaining, interesting and authentic manner—not to mention the fact that we are not all that well provided with good actors, either. For this reason, the film is a pleasant surprise. In watching *Bar*, we really feel that we are sitting there, listening to the three girl friends describe what has happened to them and witnessing a talkative TV editor picking them up, exploiting them and ruining them in succession. From the dialogue, as well as from what happens at neighbouring tables, an exciting and realistic tableau of what is going on in the country right now is presented to us, and that alone is a rare achievement.

*Bar* is an immaculately directed film, with some excellent acting and occasional flashes of classical dramaturgy: an excellent period piece on the private sphere.

In countries where film-making is more vigorous, independent film-makers and maniac amateurs, who have grown



tired of video imagery, record their highly unmarketable productions on 16-millimetre, occasionally achieving international note when these films fare well at some festival. The same applies to Hungary, although here we have some smaller workshops, which in the 1990s decided to return to Super 8, which has almost been relegated to oblivion by now.

Igor and Ivan Buharov, two young filmmakers whose chosen names reflect on the ironic and provocative streak in their character, have already won prizes at a host of regional and independent festivals with their short films; now they have teamed up with their friends to make a feature film, *The Programme*. This maimed and compositionally unsound piece has already divided the jury of the Budapest Independent Film Festival, itself giving support to the production. This panel of acknowledged jurors, although regarding it as a film quite a cut above others in the field, chose not to award it first prize on ethical grounds. The panel's main objection concerned the torturing and killing of a hamster, regarded by them as an unnecessary gag, a deliberately shocking straining after effect. On hearing the panel's reasons at the award ceremony, the film-makers tried to put a brave face on it—not that it came easy to them—then accepted the criticism and the goodwill by editing out the incriminated parts. As regards the result, it was a sequence of confused dream, packed with anxieties, recurring motifs and also featuring the grandma, a familiar figure from their earlier burlesques. When was the last time that anyone saw a priest in cassock, getting ready to eat a piece of raw liver with knife and fork, only to find in it—what else, of course?—a steel spring. And who were those characters in masks, who resembled people featuring in Austrian ecological documentaries, looking like some ghosts from Chernobyl?

It could well happen within a few years that these "morbid Hungarians" have a fair chance of making the first Hungarian cult movie. In that film, the dialogue will all be in place, and the voices will be recorded using directional microphones, and the considerations of sparing the feelings of the consumer will come to the fore, without losing anything of the originality, brave radicalism and unmistakable Hungarian quality of their burlesque.

I've left the amazing competition entry by a young woman in her early twenties, Juli Sára, to the end. *Daddy Wins*, her diploma work, was based on a short story by Mihály Kornis, one of the *enfants terribles* of Hungarian writing. How is it possible to create magical realism from home-made material? How is it possible to tell a chilling story about death in the clichéd language of chansons? What does it mean to be a Jew in Hungary? These are questions answered in the original story. What makes the movie version different, and perhaps more powerful, is the unbelievable confidence with which Juli Sára is able to get various prominent Hungarian actors to produce mannerless, authentic and moving characters. In forty immaculate minutes, the past fifty years of Hungary's past have been captured, which is an astounding achievement even from someone who is suspected to be a prodigy.

Shot in black and white, *Daddy Wins* is a movie with complex characters and figures; as a result of the absurd opening situation, the dead narrator can speak about the most fundamental issues of life in a conversational tone: "It is an outrage to die. You need no coffee anymore. You need no cigarettes anymore. That is the good part of it. But never forget: 'Life according to T. It is good.'"

We can be certain that we will be hearing more of and from Juli Sára. ■



Zoltán Kocsis

# Radiant Creative Power

György Cziffra's New Video Cassette

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Liszt: Hungarian Rhapsody No. 6; Polonaise in E Major; Grand Galop chromatique • Chopin: Polonaise in A flat Major, Op. 53

György Cziffra, piano, EMI Classics 7243 4 91715 3 4, VHS Mono, 59 minutes.

**W**ere it up to me, I would have György Cziffra's new video cassette included in the curriculum, and not just for pianists. All instrumentalists and fledgling instrumentalists should see it, as should the host of music critics who turn up their noses at virtuosity as a wild shoot of the performing arts, as should those who can perform music to a certain standard, the human voice included, as well as those who cannot. I would indeed go further, inviting those too who are the least little bit interested in what achievement means in the arts or what we call the freedom of the spirit.

Unfortunately, we have no access to the video in Hungary as yet, just as we did not to Cziffra for a long time. His legendary figure once again became a tangible reality for audiences here only in the mid-70s. Again, because before 1956 a tiny number of music lovers had enjoyed his piano recitals, which were soon to win the high-

est plaudits on five continents. Whether the recital captured on the video cassette represents Cziffra the devilish virtuoso or the mature maestro, can only be decided by those who cherish memories of either or both periods—many of whom felt disappointment, it must be said, when they heard him on his return to Hungary in 1976, a return which can rightly be called historic.

Any appreciation of Cziffra's performance is bound to include comparisons even if the critic never heard him play in a concert hall. Most of the pieces he plays here were always a part of his repertory, and of the impressive body of recorded editions of his piano recitals. Yet an acoustic experience when complemented by the visual does make a difference. Perhaps there is nothing additional, yet in certain cases it enhances the picture. As Stravinsky says:

Seeing gesture and all the movements of the body is an essential necessity to the apprehension of [music] in all its fullness. For all music that is created or composed requires a means of exteriorisation for it to be received by the listener. In other words, it needs an intermediary, a performer. If this is an unavoidable condition, without which music cannot reach us, why wish to ignore it, or try to ig-

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nore it, why close one's eyes to a fact which is part of the very nature of the art of music? Obviously, we often prefer to turn away or close our eyes when an unnecessary gesticulation on the part of the performer is an obstacle to aural concentration. But if gestures are uniquely produced by the demands of the music and are not aimed at impressing the listener in an extra-artistic manner, then why not follow with one's eyes a movement, like those of the arms of the timpanist, or of the violinist, or of the trombonist, which make auditory perception easier?<sup>1</sup>

We know from experience that if we close our eyes sometimes we stop hearing what we have seen; very rarely the opposite occurs as well. Listeners who never played a musical instrument, and for whom, therefore, the physical act of music-playing will not elicit sensory associations, are bound to vote against the visual—except, of course, for some special cases.

**T**he case here is such a special one. This video presents someone who is without question one of the greatest pianists of all time—the “miraculous pianist”, as the musicologist Aladár Tóth described the prodigy György Cziffra. There he is in his physical self, in full armour. As regards the quality of his playing, it is clearly far superior to the recordings he made for Hungaroton in the mid-fifties. The main contributing factor is less the sound quality or the adjustments a young pianist arriving in the West, like it or not, must have made in his playing in order to meet the tastes of Western audiences, markedly different from those in his own country. It is much more the inevitable emotional and intellectual development he had undergone that was most conducive to his development as an artist. There is no question of losing the air of the cafés; on the

contrary, it is, if anything, even more incorporated in Cziffra's musical vision, a vision that constantly expanded and was based on sound and professional foundations. The mode in which he tackled his instrument was more than *comme il faut* in the early 1960s. Yet the eruptive improvisation at the start seems to deny this. This gives us an insight even into the secrets of practising, good practising. Midst all those Hungareshque, Romanianesque and Gitane sounds, suddenly Chopin's famous C Major Etude appears. It puts us in mind of Liszt, the only pianist who is said to have been able to play this piece at sight. His recital may have differed in style but certainly not in attitude. Those who think of comparison between Liszt and Cziffra as a boring commonplace are doubly recommended to watch this unique documentary.

The piece for organ by Bach in Busoni's transcription testifies to Cziffra's awareness of what he was predestined for. He deliberately progressed towards incorporating the ideals that defined Liszt's work and pianism. Any plea for a more organ-like intonation would be as ludicrous as criticism of the overabundance of virtuoso elements—for which, incidentally, much of the blame should be placed on Busoni himself. Like it or not, this is the reading of those who came from the “other side”. Not a narcissistic, overbred, emaciated intellect but an ancient healthy instinct repeatedly gives evidence of its artistic truth. According to legend, Bach, whenever he tried out an organ, played for a couple of minutes with all the registers pulled out, thus testing the full range of the instrument. I do not want to force comparisons, yet in Cziffra's interpretation something similar in format can be sensed—a demonstration of power which has far-

1 ■ *Chroniques de ma vie*, Paris, Denoël/Gonthier, 1962, p. 82.



reaching significance in an approach of this calibre. Cziffra's interpretation displays all those features that prompted this reviewer to write this article. The audacity of the playing is well worth watching—Cziffra takes great risks, yet is never for a moment irrational. Just as a wild animal watches its prey, measures the distance in deadly calm, and will not lose patience to wait for the right moment before lashing out, so Cziffra would not set out to take on the irresolvable. Where exactly the irresolvable begins for him is of course another matter. One senses his earnest consideration, wise deliberation and the practice, work and experiment of years, presumably of decades, behind the largest gestures, the most resounding fortissimi, the most neck-breaking jumps; one senses also a perfect awareness of the markings on the playing field and of the rules of the game. You have to be born to this, to attain security and nonchalance of this magnitude, such identification with the keys and the sounds of the piano.

Cziffra's is a lucky case then. Inherited and acquired traits do not often accommodate themselves in such an auspicious way in individuals. We see so many cases when talents start out as mighty promises, only to lose their power and grip and eventually burn out, either because they are unable to assimilate positively the new impressions that they may deem useful yet which are basically alien to their artistic selves, or because a forced rationalization prevents them from employing their best capabilities in a primary manner. For Cziffra, owning up to his roots was natural, it was his life element, the sole guarantee of creating value. The "air of the café" is therefore felt not only in the recital of those pieces that directly call for this manner but also in all the pieces he plays. And what is wrong with that? Who could claim in full conviction that Bartók, for instance, would have

refused all approaches that in some way diverged from his own? How many could seriously believe that an understanding of Liszt's Sonata in B flat Minor is impossible without reading Goethe's *Faust*? Do we not smile in secret at small-minded professors fumbling around in the vast riches of Beethoven's sonatas? Do we have to consume Brahms's music with the obligatory North German gravy poured on it? *Audiat et altera pars*—every note in Cziffra's piano playing testifies to a justification of otherness in music. This applies even to his performance of Scarlatti's sonatas, especially nowadays when it is almost shameful to admit enjoying early music if it is not performed on authentic instruments. This is not said as firmly, yet still holds, when we look back on the discography of Schumann's Toccata and recall Sviatoslav Richter's or Maurizio Pollini's similarly valid interpretations. But as regards the other pieces on the video, no such qualification is necessary. Nothing is more powerful than the vernacular, nothing can provide greater security for an artist—especially if he has become accustomed to using it in front of audiences from childhood. It is a treasure-trove from whose hidden resources he can extract whatever he wants. And that Liszt's style as *rhapsodos*—the single most important cohesive element in his otherwise rather heterogeneous music—is identical with Cziffra's artistic self is an axiom.

**N**o one can claim that the Liszt pieces may only be approached the way Cziffra does. We know wonderful interpretations, such as Horowitz's or Brendel's, which are born out of a radically different attitude. Yet when recalling certain pieces, God only knows why they emerge in our memory in Cziffra's performance. Why this strong remembrance, sometimes years after superficial impressions? Because the



point of it all is that, irrespective of tone or virtuosity, Cziffra's interpretations fully answer the highest possible expectations concerning the spirituality of the pieces. One does not want the Polonaise in E Major to be played in a more taut, more Polish, or for that matter more Chopinesque manner, yet one willingly accepts the performer giving generously casual treatment to certain parts, which he audibly does in order to emphasize the points of culmination. Let us be honest and admit that we do not want to play the devil's advocate and count the missed notes when the miracle happens in front of our eyes and ears during the recital of the Grand Galop. It does not even occur to us to take Cziffra's occasional meditative ramblings as elements that contain and limit musical shaping. In fact we cannot find a single key or solution whose *raison d'être* would be difficult to find, and this also holds true for the visual. There is nothing out of place here. Boredom, stereotype or stylistic uncertainty are concepts that have no meaning here. Whoever may complain about the pianist's seeming insouciance is heading in the wrong direction—Cziffra is a natural phenomenon against whom such charges simply evaporate. And one of the greatest pianists of all times must have given as much thought to the "reception" of his playing as a fruit

tree does to the reception of its fruit in the market.

So why would I include this video recording newly issued by EMI/BBC in curricula and make it available to the widest possible circle? Because in Cziffra's playing, unique values are embodied that cannot be created artificially. The black-and-white pictures present the viewer with the greatest of gifts—radiant creative power. "This much is what I can offer, I'll undertake it and I'm aware of its worth and if you like it, you could also try"—the most important message of this video cassette could be summed up for the professionals, for music lovers and for posterity.

That this accompanies a production of this magnitude may be paradoxical. But as in nature in general, it is seemingly the simplest, the most taken-for-granted things that hide the greatest mysteries and contradictions.

One more disquieting question remains. Is there a chance to hear anything like this in live performance? There will be no second Cziffra, for the very reasons Liszt mentioned in his obituary of Paganini. Yet if the ideals represented by Cziffra at the highest possible level should disappear—for there are some who deem them less useful for some reason—music would slowly wither and eventually meet its silent demise. ■



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The war museum "in safekeeping" at Count Péter Erdődy's home at Somlyóvár, on the border of Veszprém county, has been broken up by the soldiery and is completely destroyed. Some pieces from the collection of old uniforms can be seen on Gypsies in the village, who derive great pleasure from walking around in the old, ornate dress uniforms of generals. The castle of Rum, in which Count Móric Széchenyi had magnificent 18th-century Hungarian furniture brought from the house at Pápa, also presents a picture of desolation. In the park one can still see an enormous inlaid wardrobe from the time of Maria Theresa, used by the inmates there as a commode.

From: Report to the Minister of Religious and Educational Affairs by Pál C. Voit on Museums, Museum Collections and Privately-Owned Art Works in Western Transdanubia, August 1945  
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