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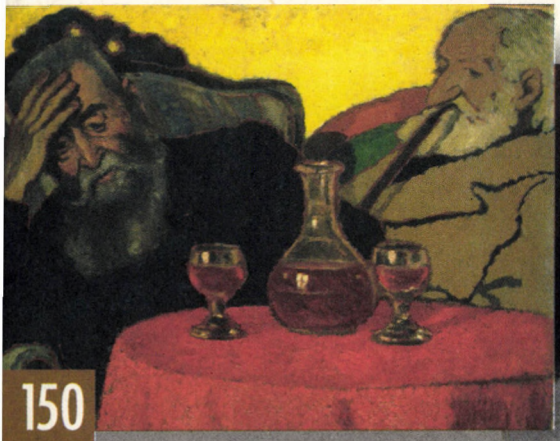

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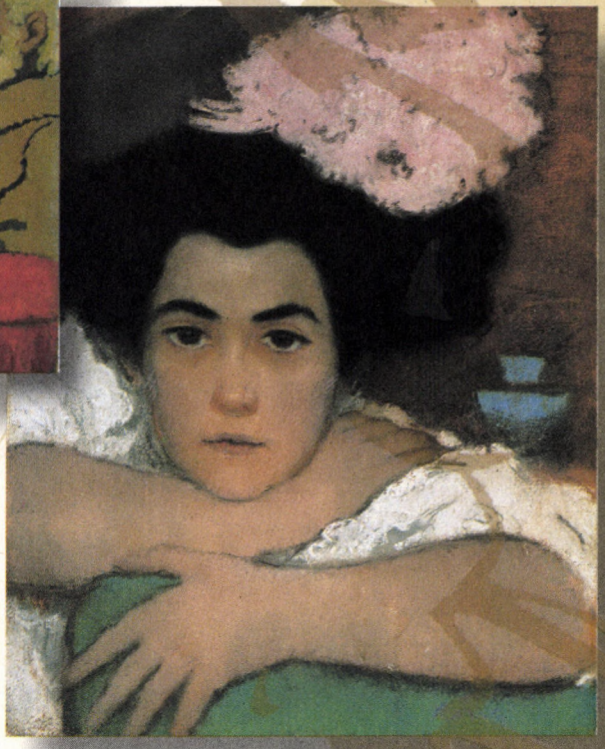

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Cover: Mrs Miska Schiffer with her Daughters. *1911, oil on canvas, 153 x 330 cm;* Mrs László Vágó in her Youth. *Around 1908, pastel on paper, 51.5 x 42 cm;* My Father and Uncle Piacsek Drinking Red Wine. *1907, oil on cardboard, 68 x 100 cm;* Woman in a Red Dress. *1898, embroidered wall hanging, 230 x 125 cm by József Rippl-Rónai.*

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Ildikó Nagy

Rippl-Rónai Seen Whole

"Whoever wishes to familiarize himself with the person of József Rippl-Rónai, before going to the Hotel Royal where the young painter will open his one-man exhibition to an invited public this afternoon, should first head to Andrássy út, and stop in front of the window of the Excelsior photograph office and take a look at five of Rippl-Rónai's photographs. For this is him: József Rippl-Rónai, pure exoticism, pure eccentricism, pure self-centredness, and pure artistry." So writes the great poet Endre Ady in December 1900, on the occasion of the painter Rippl-Rónai's first public exhibition in Budapest.

At the time, Rippl-Rónai had been living in Paris for over a decade, and for years had been assiduously preparing for his return home. The painter, who had had successful shows at the conservative Paris Salon as well as with Siegfried Bing, who showed Art Nouveau works, modern at the time, and whose circle of friends included pre-eminent French painters from members of the *Nabis* group to Aristide Maillol, was not only unknown, but was a veritable stranger in Budapest.

What Ady wrote about him may have been slightly overstated; after all, the friendly, "teddy-bear" of a man was neither that young (he was 39 in 1900), nor was he anywhere as exotic as Gauguin or as eccentric as Alfred Jarry. He only seemed so in Budapest. On the other hand, Ady's phrase "pure artistry" suits Rippl-Rónai's personality as well as his art admirably.

Rippl-Rónai started to develop his image as an artist at the age of 23, when he began his studies at the Academy of Art in Munich. His apparel—a wide-brimmed hat, a long scarf and, later, a cape—his posture (he would stand in front of the camera one foot forward, head slightly tilted), his gestures (he would send favourable French reviews of his work to various important people in Budapest) all served self-promotion by carefully building up an image of the conquering artist. And he needed such gestures: the Hungarian public, conservative, self-important and adverse to all artists from abroad, did not want to accept him. His work

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was rarely seen at the Palace of Exhibitions (Műcsarnok), as his paintings were repeatedly rejected by the jury. If they did manage to slip past the committee, they met with a hostile reception, even those which had won awards in Paris. His exotic, indeed exquisite furnishings for the dining room of Count Andrássy's mansion in Buda, from the stained-glass windows to the soup tureens, brought a shower of imprecations down on his head. (We can hope that the Andrássy family's own unflagging admiration for his work counterbalanced the vitriol.)

From the above it can be seen that Rippl-Rónai was not a darling of the establishment either. Though he occasionally received financial help for his studies, in the early difficult years he was supported by his family, who lived in modest circumstances in the town of Kaposvár, and later, as luck would have it, by Mihály Munkácsy in Paris. Munkácsy's patronage, however, almost led to Rippl-Rónai giving up his identity as a painter, for financial success came his way through his copying and imitation of the paintings of the celebrated older master. The fact that he decided to break away from Munkácsy's influence at the price of facing an uncertain future, sheds light on his determination to become an artist in his own right.

He could not reckon on the important state commissions to celebrate the Millennium, and indeed his art has nothing in common with the nostalgic Historicism of turn-of-the-century Hungary. On the other hand, he knew he could count on his former patrons, such as the family of Count Zichy (between 1882 and 1884 he tutored the Zichy children), his former schoolmates, including several aristocrats—and of course, his own family. With a reputation as a charmeur and a man of the world, Rippl-Rónai was really a family man, who loved to potter about the house, and who enjoyed sending detailed accounts of his days to his parents and his favourite younger brother, Ödön. But he also knew that though these things were important, for him they were not enough. He wanted to make his own way in Hungary, and this meant courting the art-loving public and collectors.

He was preparing to do just this in December, 1900, when he organized a show in an empty apartment in the private quarters of the Hotel Royal. He welcomed visitors in person and acted as guide while they made their way from room to room to view his 203 paintings. In a letter to his brother dated January 1901, he wrote, *"I have made about 1,000 crowns so far from my small, finely worked pictures; for Gyula Andrássy's portrait, 4,000. I must make my money from the portraits, or else I am practically forced to give away my small, delicately executed works... I accomplished miracles, I am telling you!"*

Though the list of the celebrities buying Rippl-Rónai's paintings is impressive, the "miracles" couldn't have been that great. After the exhibition closed, he auctioned off what was left of his works, which at the time was an unusual move for an artist in Budapest. However, it seems that even so Rippl-Rónai did not make enough to live on, for he spent the greater part of 1901 living at his younger

brother's, who was a station-master in a small village in Somogy County. In the summer he spent some time in Ostende, where he was commissioned to paint a portrait, but he had his eye on Russia, and thus in December 1901, he headed for Moscow.

We do not know who counselled the artist to go or what contacts he had there as, apart from his closest friend, the Scottish painter James Pitcairn Knowles, his Parisian circle of acquaintances were all either French or Russian. He was on especially good terms with the painter Theodore (Fyodor) Botkin, whose father was the advisor to the outstanding Russian collector and patron, Sergei Shchukin.[1] It may have been partly due to Botkin's father that Rippl-Rónai received an invitation to go to Moscow to paint several portraits as well as to design sets for the St Petersburg Opera. Soon, however, he found that he could not put up with Russian winters, fell gravely ill, and probably never made it back to St Petersburg. After two weeks, he returned home. *"I am incapable of putting up with the local climate,"* says a letter. *"This means that I must let a very good opportunity slip through my fingers. They want to make me the painter for all the theatres, me and two other Russian artists."*

And so, Rippl-Rónai went to view several fabulous private collections (works by Manet, Pissarro, Degas, Denis, and Renoir), then headed back home—this time for good. From what he made in St Petersburg, he bought a house in Kaposvár, where his parents lived, and at the end of the year held another show in Budapest. This time, he exhibited 328 pictures and drew favourable reviews along with the not so favourable. Gradually, a circle of critics and art historians gathered around him, who understood and appreciated his art and who were to play an important part in his life. His ambitions were coming true. Though only 32 works were sold at the Budapest exhibition, and only five of the 32 were oils (the others were pastels and drawings), some of the buyers, including Ödön and Artur Révai, members of the Hatvani-Deutsch family, Béla Jánossy and Elek Petrovics, became collectors of his work.

The years to come were quietly spent with work. Rippl-Rónai lived in the provinces, where he enjoyed painting his immediate surroundings, his home and relatives. In a letter he wrote, *"These things are good because they are true and I am happy to be surrounded by them and pleased that they share my fate with me."*

In 1906, his efforts were crowned by an exhibition. *"Everyone is talking about my show,"* he wrote to his brother Ödön a week after the opening, *"we've had to replenish the exhibition with new works on three occasions, and the new pictures are also selling well. Even those that three and six years ago were completely ignored are now suddenly finding buyers. There's been a turn-about, I tell you. Tastes, in favour of the modern, are about to change."*

In the space of one month—at the exhibition and the auction that followed—Rippl-Rónai sold 400 works for nearly 46,000 Crowns. He had won over the

1 ■ Based on research by Mária Bernáth.

public, the critics, the art experts and collectors; he had become a successful and celebrated artist. From then on, it would be smooth sailing all the way.

The artist rented a studio in Budapest and spent the winters there. He became a familiar figure in the artistic life of the capital and made friends with the best writers of the age. In 1913 Thomas Mann called at his studio.

In 1908 he bought the Villa Roma on Rome Hill near Kaposvár. It had a large park and 5 hectares of land. He kept peacocks in the park and hens and turkeys in the barnyard. As each of his former homes, this new venue, a combination of a keep and a peasant house, became an inexhaustible source of inspiration. In 1910 he adopted Anella, the niece of his French wife Lazarine Baudrion. He was surrounded by family and friends, and his home was never without guests.

In 1911 he published his memoirs, which included a detailed and enjoyable description of his Parisian years. This idyllic time was disrupted by the war, which found him in France, where he was interned as an enemy alien. Luckily, his French artist friends rushed to his aid, and after six months, he was able to return home via Switzerland. Thanks to his good nature, he took this, like so much else, in stride; during his internment, he made several humorous drawings and continued to paint, and upon his return, organized an exhibition. On the other hand, his affair with an ambitious young woman 35 years his junior, the model for many of his best paintings, disturbed the tranquillity of his later years. He lived beyond his means, and though his income was appreciable, he found himself in financial straits again and again.

Still, he was the most popular and successful painter of his generation. He was prolific, and his works were selling well. As the years passed, every family with refined taste and the means to match would have a Rippl-Rónai painting on the wall. To order a Rippl-Rónai portrait was a mark of social standing. When he walked down the street, people would whisper behind his back, *"See? There goes Rippl-Rónai!"* And this filled him with joy.

In retrospect, Rippl-Rónai's phenomenal success is not surprising, the fact that it took him so long to achieve it is. The first mature period of the oeuvre is linked to Paris, where he lived from March 1887 to the end of 1900. At first he worked in close proximity with and under the influence of Munkácsy, then, from 1889, he gradually began to develop his own colour-reductionist technique, which characterized his Parisian years until 1899. This "black period" received its name from the domination of black on his canvases. It is intriguing that an artist would be willing to forego the use of colour to this extent, and work with recourse to various tones of grey, black and brown only, with just one or two strong colours which illuminate the rest of the canvas. Of course, this love of the monochrome was, to some extent, a preoccupation of contemporary painting. The examples of Carrière and Whistler come immediately to mind. Moreover, for a painter in search of his own artistic identity, the sparse use of colour is actual-

ly desirable, since it helps create pictorial unity.

A distinct element of Rippl-Rónai's art was his choice of subject. Breaking with the genre paintings of the Munkácsy year, created for the salons of elegant villas and town houses, he turned to his immediate surroundings for inspiration. His canvases portray a woman lying in bed, men playing skittles, a merry-go-round, a graveyard, two women in a room, in mourning, his own room with his wife at the pianino, his friends, parents—and above all, women. His women, too, were of all sorts, from the typical *femmes fatales* of the time, depicted in fashionable hats and veils, to countesses, actresses, simple working women, and—to use an expression in vogue back then—women of the night, *perditas.* There were also fascinating idealistic portraits which bear titles derived from their monochrome colour harmony (*Tête gris, Tête blonde,* etc.).

Rippl-Rónai in his Budapest studio in Kelenhegyi utca, in front of his painting Slender Woman with a Vase, *1910. Photograph by Olga Máté. Rippl-Rónai Museum, Kaposvár.*

Occasionally, sophisticated colour combinations enhance the effect: pale profiles against deep blue backgrounds, as well as Mrs. Pataki's mysterious portrait, on which the colour of the rose she holds in her hand veritably shines forth from the canvas. Rippl-Ronai's best works of this period are full-length portraits of lithe women with airy, refined movements, such as *Slender Woman with a Vase, Woman with a Bird-Cage,* and *Woman with Rose,* as well as his disturbing, laconic and penetrating depictions of old women with weary faces and sad eyes. These include *My Grandmother, Old Woman with Violets,* and *Mme Compagnon.* With these and similar portraits, the artist confronts the viewer with all the sadness and solitude of old age. He draws his contours with heavy lines, the representation is two-dimensional, the surroundings of the subject are referred to through just an object or two. At the same time, his interiors wallow in pleasing details; he enjoyed painting his home, with his or his friend Knowles' paintings on the walls, the table with flowers, and enjoyed, too, rendering a slaughterhouse in Paris, a tavern on the outskirts of town, the banks of the Seine at sunset, and the park at night—all themes for his "black period".

Concurrently, he designed wall hangings, which were produced by his wife Lazarine and his sister-in-law Claudine. They either wove these or embroidered them with wool and a special stitching technique.

These textiles are a riot of colour. Unfortunately, many pieces have perished, but lucky for us, a gorgeous piece, *Woman in a Red Dress,* made for the Andrássy dining room, has remained intact to stand as witness to Rippl-Rónai's flair for ornamentation and a pantheistic joy he took in combining the contrast of lush vegetation and linear elegance. On this wall hanging we see, among the foliage of trees, shrubs, grasses, creeping vines, roses, tulips, zinnias and pansies, the beautiful and airy figure of a woman—that of Mrs Tivadar Andrássy — which blossoms forth like some exotic flower.

Rippl-Rónai began designing textiles upon the promptings of his friend Maillol, who in turn turned to sculpture thanks to Rippl-Rónai's inspiration. Their friendship, which began in the 1890s, lasted until Rippl-Rónai's death. The four months he spent in 1899 in Banyuls-sur-Mer, where Maillol lived, saw the end of his "black period" and the beginning of a new chapter in his development.

Rippl-Rónai's canvasses painted in Banyuls were a riot of colour. He took pleasure in depicting the breathtaking beauty of the Pyrenées, the ocean, the rocks, the vineyards, the olive groves and small hamlets snuggled in the laps of the nearby valleys. He also painted several portraits, including *Portrait of Aristide Maillol,* one of his best pieces, and the epitome of his years in France.

Begun under the spell of Gauguin and Whistler, and ending with the Maillol portrait, which shows signs of the painter's admiration for the work of Cézanne, the years spent in France made Rippl-Rónai an accomplished and versatile follower of modernism, which in turn was influenced both by the art of the Orient, especially Japanese woodcuts, and by photography. Rippl-Rónai, like all modern artists in Paris, had a small collection of Oriental art as well as a collection of photographs; indeed, he engaged in photography himself. One of the most interesting essays in the Budapest exhibition catalogue,[2] treats the relationship between photography and the artist discussing also the artist's use of nude photographs, which he posed and snapped himself and from which he painted. His experience with photography also influenced his works by changing his concept of pictorial composition—the point of view from which he painted a landscape or a scene.

At the turn of the century, the contrast offered by Paris, the world's capital of art, and Kaposvár, a small Transdanubian town, which everyone simply called a dusty hole, was dramatic indeed. The change in lifestyle and dwelling place, which Rippl-Rónai took upon himself, would have made many a man unfortu-

2 ■ Csilla Csorba: "Előhívás. Rippl-Rónai József és a fényképezés." (Development. József Rippl-Rónai and Photography) In: *Rippl-Rónai József gyűjteményes kiállítása.* (József Rippl-Rónai's Collected Works). Catalogue. Budapest, 1998. pp. 185–199.

Rippl-Rónai in front of his portrait of Elek Petrovics, future Director of the Museum of Fine Arts, and Simon Meller, the art historian, 1910. Photograph by Olga Máté. Hungarian National Gallery Archives, Budapest.

nate. Many an artistic career was nipped in the bud under similar circumstances. Not so that of Rippl-Rónai, who saw in the small town of his birth not its backwardness, but its domesticity, intimacy, warmth and humour, which he proceeded to depict in his works. His home at number 58 Fő utca with its adjoining rooms, its Biedermeier striped sofa and chairs, its sideboard and writing desk, round tables and easy chairs, became the main subject of his paintings. The walls are hung with his own paintings, the tables are bedecked with flowers, the chairs have colourful shawls with flower designs leisurly flung over them, and everywhere one looks, one sees the family's favourite objects—mirrors, framed photographs, birds in a cage, a bowl of fruit, a philodendron and sanseveria, a gilt baroque statue of an angel, lamps with red shades and the snaking pipe of the iron stove. We see this home at various times of the day and from various angles. We get the feeling that time has come to a standstill. We get an indication of the changing seasons only from the nature of the cut flowers and the fruits, while the tale of a family saga is told by signs such as the absence of the colourful scarves from the easy chairs, sometimes rearranged in order to decorate the walls, or the family using pink coffee cups instead of the polka-dot tea service.

The people themselves are timeless—the artist's wife, parents, siblings and extended circle of relations with Uncle Piacsek, his sister-in-law's father, at their head. Indeed, Uncle Piacsek was one of the artist's favourite models, and we find him variously portrayed, drinking, smoking a pipe, dozing off, reading a letter, listening to music, or just sitting in the background while charming little girls read children's books or play with dolls on an easy-chair.

This painterly disorder is actually highly ordered. We know from the artist's correspondence how scrupulously he planned every detail of his compositions: in this "peace time" home, the rooms glimpsed through the open doors surround their occupants and guests with an air of blissful tranquillity. We feel that it must have been highly attractive to live there, and to recall what life was like there.

It was these pictures of his home and immediate surroundings that brought the painter true popularity. The canvases he painted between 1902 and 1906, known as his "interior period", were always the most popular of his works. At the auction held after his 1906 exhibition, it was one of these that fetched the highest price. *Old Gentleman and Woman Playing the Mandolin* (the old gentleman was, of course, Uncle Piacsek), was bought by a collector for 1,510 crowns. To appreciate what this meant at the time one need only mention that the price of ten such works was enough for Rippl-Rónai to buy the Villa Roma with its extensive grounds. This estate became his permanent home and the scene, subject, and inspiration for his paintings, and later, the museum dedicated to his memory.

The move into the villa in 1908 marks the beginning of the "maize-like pictures", though Rippl-Rónai painted *My Father and Uncle Piacsek Drinking Red Wine,* the first work in this style, a year before. In this painting space is highly restricted, the background is closed off by a wall and there are no doors to add depth. Of the familiar room interior only the top of the round table is visible, on it two wine glasses and a decanter, while the two elderly gentlemen are just barely squeezed in between the table and the wall, the bright red of the tablecloth and the harsh yellow of the background. Rippl's style was evidently undergoing a major transformation. A restricted space, great masses of unified, bright colour separated by brown contours, and the patches of paint applied with a rough hand, lined up one next to the other like so many grains of maize, are typical of Rippl's new "dotted" style. Fewer objects furnish the interiors, and the artist's favourite subject is his own studio, with finished paintings lining the walls and standing on an easel.

At the same time, though, Rippl-Rónai continued to produce his beautiful idealized portraits, this time garden scenes with nudes. From September, 1910 for nearly twelve months, the painter had a houseguest—Fenella Lowell, a strange English girl, who travelled, danced, played music, sang, and had sat as a model for several famous French artists. In the garden scenes her figure recurs, taking

Rippl-Rónai painting his wife Lazarine and her niece Anella in the garden on Rome Hill. 1911. Photograph by Langfeld's Sons. Rippl-Rónai Museum, Kaposvár.

on a multiplicity of poses, not as the subject of some concrete event, but as the embodiment of the abstract ideal of beauty.

The preoccupations of the Parisian years seem to reappear in Rippl-Rónai's canvases, particularly the relish in ornamentation which had characterized his textiles and wonderful applied art objects. These works are really studies for wall paintings; several even bear the title "project" or "fragment", but these studies were never realized. He did design, however, a few stained glass windows, including the well-known one for the Ernst Museum in Budapest, which is also a nude composition. Besides its planar quality and separate "dots" of paints, the "maize-like period" is also characterized by the application of unblended colours, inspired by the colours of the flowers in his garden. *"I have come to love not only the scarlet coloured sage and the red single geranium, and also the pure white flowers, but even more so the chrome-yellow zinnias. I know of no other colour that is warmer than this particular yellow. These are the colours I am presently looking for, practically collecting them, in my home, too, in objects, on shawls and walls,"* he wrote in his *Memoirs*. Rippl-Rónai's "maize-like period", which gave us a number of wonderful portraits, flower still-lifes

and landscapes, especially manor houses and gardens, is the most colourful and high spirited chapter in the history of Hungarian art.

After 1919, Rippl-Rónai painted only pastels. Of these, the portraits of the great Hungarian writers of the time, Zsigmond Móricz, Mihály Babits, Lőrinc Szabó and Frigyes Karinthy, are outstanding—and, of course, his portraits of women, whose hats, fur stoles and gloves now reflected the fashion of the 1920s; the gestures, too, are seductive in a new way, but these women are just as beautiful and desirable and provocative as ever.

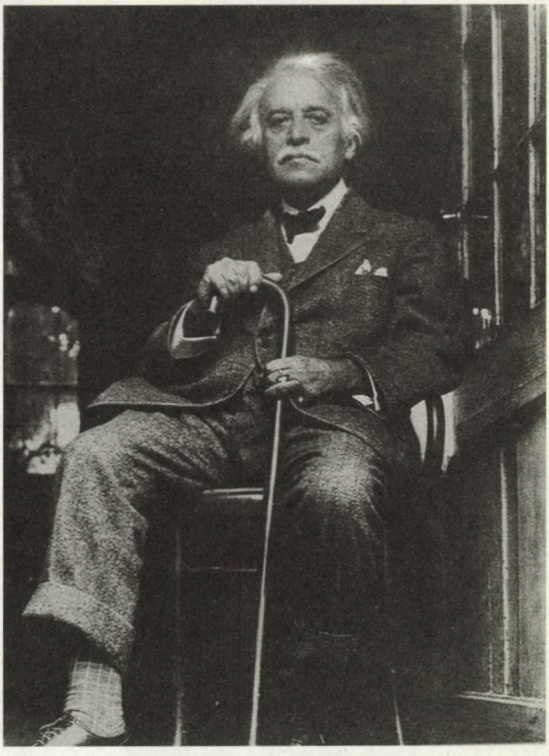
Throughout his working life, Rippl-Rónai continued to paint self-portraits as well. His last work, completed just a couple of months before his death, is also a self-portrait. The lines, drawn in pastel crayon, speak of a trembling hand, the forms are indistinct, as if the artist's face were covered by a veil. The sixty-six-year-old painter appears to us in the guise of a lacklustre old man who has no illusions about what lies ahead, but will not flinch. He has brought to bear the unsparing objectivity of the portraits of old women, made during his "black period", to the portraiture of his passing. Nonetheless, his rapidly depleting energies are for a moment held in check by a still lively spirit, so that the painter, who through his career had presented to us every motif of his life, can now show us this, his last station.

Rippl-Rónai has been praised by the best Hungarian art historians. His bibliography was finished in 1977 and contained 2,144 entries. Apart from a handful of vitriolic reviews during his early years, he has always been considered one of the greatest of Hungarian artists, albeit various periods of his oeuvre met with a varied reception through the years. Art historians hold the works of his French years in the highest regard. They belong to one of the most characteristic schools of art of the age, Les Nabis, who brought startling innovations to painting following the Impressionist years. Initially *My Grandmother* and *Old Woman with Violets* were considered to be his best works, but then the art historian Lajos Fülep called the artist's portrait of Maillol "brilliant", and the best piece of the artist's oeuvre to date. This was in 1910. From then on, the *Portrait of Aristide Maillol* has been discussed as a masterwork and a precursor of a Hungarian modernism inspired by Cézanne. In 1936 the portrait was deposited in the basement of the Musée d'Art Moderne (Jeu de Paume), and shown perhaps once every decade. It has never again been seen in Hungary (nor is it in the National Gallery's exhibition), and it has become something of a legend. It was hailed as the artist's supreme masterpiece, while the paintings that followed, especially the "maize-like" paintings, were considered too weak to stand up to the passing of time.

The change in taste brought about by an appraisal of Art Nouveau changed the evaluation of Rippl-Rónai's oeuvre as well. The works created in that spirit were suddenly admired beyond all his other works, especially the full-length portraits of women in hats, *Woman with a Bird-Cage* preeminent among them.

This painting, which was exhibited all over the world, became celebrated, and reproductions of it abounded, adding to its popularity.

The artist's "maize-like" paintings had to wait for recognition until more recent times. One was shown in Münster, Grenoble and Weimar[3] along with works by Signac, Matisse, the early Kandinsky and Delaunay, as an example of painting that looked on the depiction of the objective world as a mere pretext, of painting that expressed the idea of autonomous form in art. This brought about another reappraisal of Rippl-Rónai's work, discussed in one of the articles[4] in the National Gallery exhibition catalogue.



József Rippl-Rónai in October 1927. Photograph by Árpád Pásztor. Rippl-Rónai Museum, Kaposvár.

Though the exhibition opened in April, it is already clear that the next part of the Rippl-Rónai oeuvre to undergo re-evaluation has become his interiors period. People dealing with the problems and drastic changes in their lives, anxious about the future, find in these works the magic spell of the good old days, the treasured calm of the kind of domesticity which responds to the slightest whims and needs of people. Like all truly great artists, Rippl-Rónai always, and in every age, has something to offer.

Around three thousand paintings by Rippl-Rónai are on record. One hundred and forty-eight are on show at the National Gallery, some of them have not been on public display before. All the major works are there, except for the Maillol portrait. In addition to the paintings, prints and drawings, craft objects and designs are on display.

The catalogue—to which thirty authors contributed—is unprecedented as a comprehensive survey of Rippl-Rónai's art. The introduction (the complete

3 ■ *Farben des Lichts. Paul Signac und der Beginn der Moderne von Matisse bis Mondrian.* Catalogue. Münster, 1996.

4 ■ Mariann Gergely: "Kései elégtétel. Rippl-Rónai József vitatott "pöttyös" korszaka (Belated Amends. József Rippl-Rónai's Controversial "Dotted" Period). In: *Rippl-Rónai József gyűjteményes kiállítása.* (József Rippl-Rónai's Collected Works). Catalogue. Budapest, 1998. pp. 81–88.

text is also printed in English) is by Mária Bernáth, who was also curator of the exhibition. It sums up a quarter of a century of research. It centres on influences and their reception, questions that have to be asked in connection with every Central European artist of the *fin de siècle* and after. She discusses the influence of the Nabis—primarily Vuillard and Denis—and later on the Fauves on Rippl-Rónai, pointing to what is common to them and what is unique, the differences in Rippl-Rónai's treatment of frequently identical subjects.

Rippl-Rónai was the first Hungarian artist who was himself a member of an important school of European painting of his own time. It was through him that Hungarian artists familiarized themselves with the manner of seeing, the style and the modes of expression of modern painting. Stages of this process are discussed by other contributions to the catalogue. His various periods, his craftwork, the typology of his paintings and his relationship to his models are all the subject of separate articles. There are pieces on various venues where he lived his life (France, the Villa Roma) and finally on the subject of photography which had so far been neglected by Rippl-Rónai students. Nonpareil scholarship went into the extensively documented catalogue of the 237 works on show. Around a third were dated afresh. The story of the genesis of each work, the identification of persons depicted, the discussion of variations and analogies all help understanding and sounder judgement. Rippl-Rónai's importance and place in the history of art have been beyond doubt for ninety years. After much fine writing, the time has come for detailed research. This catalogue has made a start. An appendix contains letters by Rippl-Rónai, a register of his exhibitions, a bibliography and a chronology of his life.

In December, 1900, a young man passed the Hotel Royal on his way to school, and every day he went in to see the Rippl-Rónai exhibition. This is when he decided to become a painter himself, and to go to Paris. His name was Béla Czóbel, and three years later, he was in Paris. On his return home, he revolutionalized the Nagybánya Colony's *plein air* style, and through it, all of Hungarian painting. It is a rare moment in the history of art when the manner in which succeeding generations come into contact and put out their hand for a handshake can be so tangibly caught.

József Rippl-Rónai

Memoirs

Excerpts

Degas, as he lives in my memory

It is not easy to write on Degas the man; he shared his private life with few and was, anyway, a difficult man to approach, preferring to live in isolation, the sculptor Bartholomé was, so to speak, his only friend. With his help, Toulouse-Lautrec was the only one of our lot to cross the threshold of Degas' studio. What I know of Degas comes from Lautrec's stories, told in his characteristic, direct manner at our regular afternoon gatherings at the offices of the *Revue Blanche,* where several writers were also there to listen to him, thus Ernest La Jeunesse, Paul Adam, Félix Féneon, the two Natansons and many others, whose names I cannot remember right now. Oh yes!—one of them, to be sure, was that strange man, Alfred Jarry.

Lautrec told us that Degas jealously guards his best pieces, you might say that he alone takes his delight in them. He would not part with them for the world, certainly not to exhibit them. How happy that lucky man will be who now, after his death, will inherit them.

They say that in the late eighties he nearly lost the sight of his eyes. At that time he did not paint but modelled, but what is most intriguing, he fervently turned to photography, but to photography as an art. He posed real Degas pictures but in a painterly version. I have often heard it said that these photographs are marvellous, and since they mirror Degas' mind and soul, they are highly regarded as art. I can understand this love of beautiful, call them spoilt plates, because long before him I had made them myself, or had them made.

The case of Carrière comes to mind, who, as a young man, also almost lost his sight, but not his driving spirit, and so his delicate, fascinating canvases, floating in the mist, could be seen first at the art dealer Thomas, and later, when Thomas told the entire art loving world of Paris how valuable these little nothings were, at the Salon on the Champs de Mars, where they met with great acclaim. Rodin was one of the most enthusiastic admirers of Carrière the artist. The difference between Degas and Carrière is that one was prompted

by near-blindness to paint, the other to take photographs. (This suggests that in general the way artists see things varies greatly; they have many eyes.)

We, who were young at the time and decadent (in the best sense of the term) could see the works of this great painter only at Durand-Ruel's in the company of Toulouse-Lautrec, whose circle also included Maurice Denis, Valloton, Bonnard, and others, and later in the Caillebotte collection at the Galérie Luxembourg. At first we hesitated to do so, afraid to be clipped on the ears by someone in authority in front of Manet's *Olympia,* for instance, but, Renoir, Degas and the others were almost all also considered worse than lepers. To stand in front of any of these, staring at the painting for hours, was asking for trouble. We all remember well the shameless and impudent stipulation that these lepers could only exhibit in a small isolated room in the back, and only if Caillebotte was ready to add his stamp collection which was considered priceless. Preposterous, and my blood still boils when I recall that it was only after giving way to such an infamous demand that these artists—who are today loved by every man of good taste and sound judgement—could be heard or were allowed to breathe. Among them was Degas, the condemned.

I would not say that he was well-disposed towards young, ambitious searching artists of our kind. In fact, he showed little interest and would visit our exhibitions only in secret. And he was not alone in this. Cézanne, too, and Renoir did much the same. They knew scarcely anything about us, albeit we organized group shows at the most distinguished places, including Durand-Ruel's. If we had not helped ourselves, they would never have helped us. We had to stand firm by our convictions if we wanted to reach our goal which, thank the Lord, everyone of us in that small group was able to do. Later all of us, including the sculptor Maillol, made it to dry land. But except for Lautrec, who was more sociable than we were, we could never get near them, especially not into their studios.

Degas' work made the impression on me that he had taken a good look at Daumier, Corot and Constantin Guys. In addition to these, he also spoke with enthusiasm about Ingres, in particular. The ballet dancers as he saw them, proclaim his unique and splendid taste, for ever and ever rendered in a brilliant artistic manner. The draughtsmanship and painting are highly original. The manner in which things are cut out of nature is on the highest level. He is one of the most original artists on the surface of this earth. We owe Degas and all his followers, to the last man, to the Salon des Indépendents.

On the brink of the war, a famous collector held an auction in Paris. Bidding went up to 450,000 francs for a Degas pastel of a ballerina, which he had bought for 500 francs. There is hardly a man who is not familiar with this event, just as is the case with Millet's *Angelus.* They say that Degas was pleased, he thought it very interesting, and he was supposed to have said that when he sold it, he was glad of the 500 francs.

Zsuzsa Bokor

Woman with a Bird-cage. 1892, oil on canvas, 185.5 x 130 cm.
Hungarian National Gallery, Budapest.

József Rippl-Rónai (1861–1927)

ZSUZSA BOKOR

SELF-PORTRAIT IN A BROWN HAT
1897, OIL ON CARDBOARD, 64 X 88 CM.
HUNGARIAN NATIONAL GALLERY, BUDAPEST.

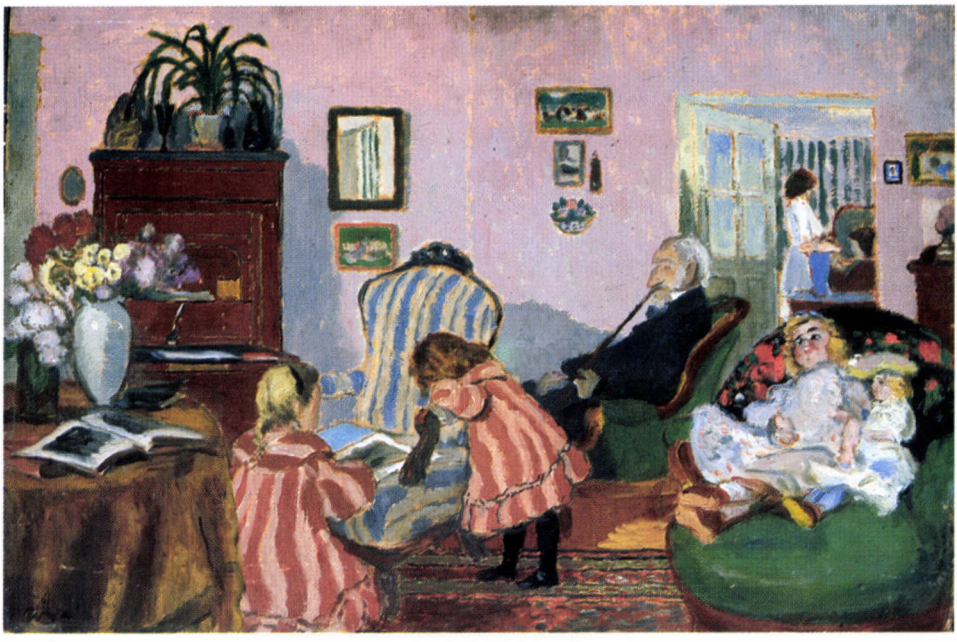
OLD WOMAN WITH VIOLETS
1895, OIL ON CANVAS, 163 X 57 CM.
HUNGARIAN NATIONAL GALLERY, BUDAPEST.

ZSUZSA BOKOR

LADY WITH A BLACK VEIL (MADAME MAZET). 1896, OIL ON CANVAS, 99.7 X 80 CM.
HUNGARIAN NATIONAL GALLERY, BUDAPEST.

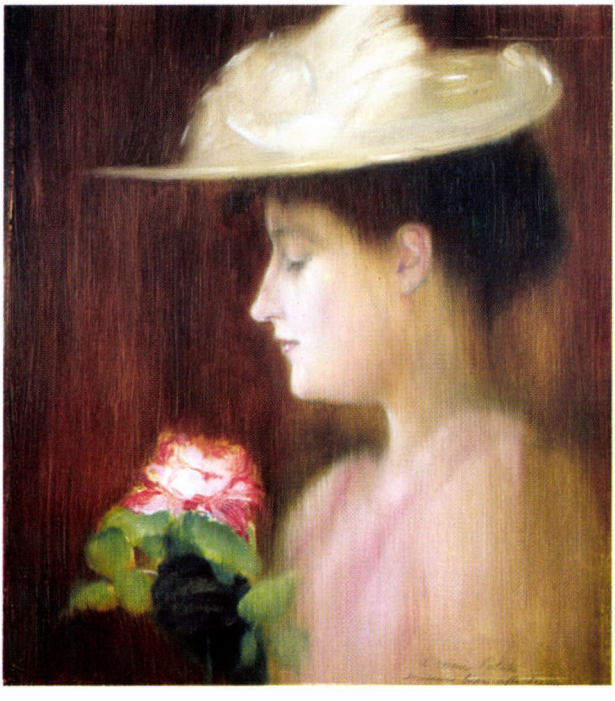
József Rippl-Rónai (1861–1927)

Portrait of Aristide Maillol. 1899, oil on cardboard, 100 x 75 cm.
Musée d'Orsay, Paris. Photo RMV – Jean Schormans.



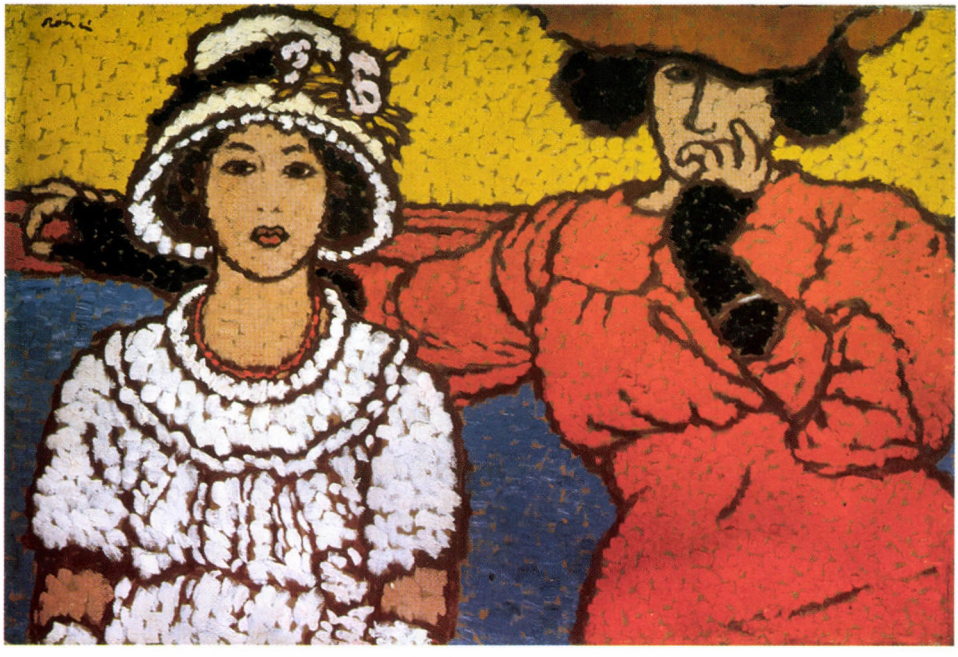
Zsuzsa Bokor

Uncle Piacsek with Dolls
1905, oil on cardboard,
71.3 x 103 cm.
Hungarian National Gallery,
Budapest.



Portrait of Mrs Pataki
1892, oil on canvas,
46 x 38 cm.
Hungarian National Gallery,
Budapest.

József Rippl-Rónai (1861–1927)



Lazarine and Anella. 1911, oil on cardboard, 70 x 100 cm. Privately owned.

My Models in my Kaposvár Garden. 1911, oil on cardboard, 70 x 100 cm.
Rippl-Rónai Museum, Kaposvár.

Zsuzsa Bokor

I am Painting Lazarine and Anella in the Park, Hepi and the Others are Hot. 1910–11, oil on cardboard, 69.5 x 100.5 cm. Hungarian National Gallery, Budapest.

Lajos and Ödön. 1818, oil on cardboard. 71 x 99 cm. Budapest Historical Museum.

Zsuzsa Bokor

József Rippl-Rónai (1861–1927)

Zsuzsa Bokor

Last Self-portrait. 1927, pastel on cardboard, 49 x 40 cm.
Hungarian National Gallery, Budapest.

Let me add that I feel about Degas the way I feel about everyone I love, that I love him, warts and all. I always felt—and this is something I was bold enough to tell my friends in Paris—that one of his gravest mistakes was letting Durand-Ruel frame his beautiful pastels; I did not like it that they used dilettante passpartouts instead of looking for just the right frame.

Munkácsy the man

As a young man I, too, ended up in Paris, like so many other young artists. I walked the streets of this magnificent city unknown, without a penny to my name—the city where so many strange and fascinating lives cross paths. I watched the glitter of this city of lights, the hustle and bustle of this metropolis of a thousand faces. I felt very much a stranger, and very poor. I knew that an outstanding compatriot, Mihály Munkácsy was living in this city, in prosperity and celebrity. I decided time and again that I would look him up, but one thing or another always held me back. I heard it said that he was a strange man. He was in the habit of turning away even the famous and the great. How then would he not turn away me, someone unknown?

Then I decided to look him up after all. I hired a cab by the hour, packed everything I had done in Munich into it, and had myself driven to the Avenue de Villiers, where Munkácsy lived. A footman took my card at the gate downstairs, I explained to him that I had come from Munich and that I had brought a message and greetings for the Maître. The butler then took my card from the doorman and disappeared with it. I was afraid Munkácsy wouldn't see me. At that time so many Hungarians beleaguered him that he turned many away. What if I were to suffer the same fate?

At last the butler came back and said that the Maître was expecting me in his studio. Happy, but with a palpitating heart, I entered the studio, where Munkácsy was working on sketches for the huge Viennese ceiling.[1] *"So, what are the two Sándors up to?"* he asked even before I could open my mouth. He meant Sándor Wágner and Sándor Liezen-Mayer. I quickly recovered my composure and gave him Liezen-Mayer's greetings (at the time I was not yet acquainted with Wágner), and we chatted about life in Munich and Hungarian affairs. His kindness loosened my tongue. I quickly told him all I knew. He asked what I was working on and told me that next time I came, I should bring my work with me to show him. *"I can show you everything right now"* I responded, ran downstairs to the cab, and took my drawings up to him. The Maître laid out the rolled-up worksheets and studied them at length. Some came under repeated scrutiny. At that point a visitor arrived, and seeing his card, Munkácsy hurried away. He led the visitor into his studio personally. He was extremely courteous

1 ■ The ceiling fresco of the Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna.

with him and expostulated on the sketch of the ceiling fresco at some length. He introduced me, too, and only when the visitor left, did I discover that he was the Emperor Francis Joseph's brother.

He then resumed his scrutiny of my work. During our conversation, I mentioned that I wanted to rent a studio, whereupon he said, to my astonishment, *"Isn't my studio big enough for us two?"* I couldn't believe my ears. *"But first, you must see Paris,"* he added. *"I've seen it,"* I responded, and looked around for a corner where I could work. I set about drawing immediately; I was afraid that by the following day he'd forget his promise, and I did not wish to miss this favourable opportunity. A miracle had happened; an hour before I was still wondering whether he'd see me, and I was worried, too, about the financial aspect of finding a studio, and now a world-famous artist, a kind man took care of everything in a moment. When it was time for lunch he asked me to join him, but I was reluctant—I was afraid of losing my place. Neither before nor since in all my life have I met with such goodness and natural ease of manner. I couldn't believe that there was such a good man in the world. He took a friendly grip of my arm and led me into the dining room. From then on, I ate at his table, the next day, and the day after that, and so on, for a very long time. My circumstances improved considerably. I could work by his side. I became his pupil. He became my patron, all due to the goodness of his heart and his highmindedness. This is how I saw, at our very first meeting, not only the artist, but the man as well.

I came to love this extraordinary man very much. He was a thorough gentleman. That he was an extraordinary character was evident even from the way he dressed. Due to his height, he looked very handsome in light, chequered trousers and a long-backed blue coat with the white waistcoat that went with it. He always wore a polka-dotted blue bow-tie, and socks to match under pumps with bows. He was never without them. Add his large head, his tousled, snow-white hair, his high, intelligent forehead, his small, lively, deep-set eyes and ruddy cheeks. The expression on his face showed that he was different from other men.

His wife was a perfect hostess, and this helped his reputation. The Munkácsy soirées were brilliant, even for Paris. Many outstanding personages met here. Dumas fils, Alphonse Daudet, Ambroise Thomas, as well as Ede Reményi, Zsigmond Justh, Jenő Zichy and General Türr were frequent visitors. On one occasion even King Milan of Serbia graced the evening with his presence. It was typical of Madame Munkácsy that for the occasion she managed to dress all the servants of her household in King Milan's livery, in just twenty-four hours.

It was during these soirées that Munkácsy perfected his manners. He was the soft-spoken Hungarian gentleman with whom and about whom they were glad to converse in Paris, although they don't really like foreign artists here. In conversation Munkácsy's superiority was beautifully on display, but never aggressively. Only money matters were beyond his grasp. Money matters were left to the care of his wife. His genius looked on them as of no importance, as trifles.

Maillol, Cézanne, Gauguin, Van Gogh

My Scottish painter friend James Pitcairn Knowles, whom I had known for some time, was different and had different tastes to those I had met in Munkácsy's circle. He was the man whose taste was closest to my own and he was a true friend. With him I found myself in the true context of art in the ideal sense of the term. We talked a lot about good painting and literature ancient and modern; we did much thinking in each other's company, and exchanged ideas. We delved together, and we grew together. He worked mainly in woodcuts; it is in this way that he wished to record his mystical ideas. He worked with great care, devotion, dedication, and love. I mostly painted or made lithographs. Later we lived in the same house, and though we worked on our own, we looked at each other's work every day.

Around 1890 he introduced me to Aristide Maillol, whom he was the first to recognize as a great artistic talent. They came from the same school and were never out of touch for long. For lack of financial success, Maillol was more than once downhearted, but with his words of encouragement Knowles was able each time to bolster his friend's spirits. I also came to like Maillol's works and ideas, and so, after meeting him, I maintained contact with the two of them, and the two of them only, for some time.

Around 1887, Maillol was a student of the Académie des Beaux-Arts and an admirer of the sculptor Bourdelle. He studied sculpture there for some time, until he enrolled in Colarossi's school, where, along with Pitcairn Knowles, he studied under Jean Paul Laurens and Henri Martin. Later he worked in his own home, a very old and neglected *hôtel de ville* on the Rue St. Jacques. He painted large canvases amidst great penury and without the least hope of success. The Salon regularly rejected his works, only later, when he submitted small objects d'art and tapestries did they realize that he was an artist of refined taste. He sent these small pieces to the *objets d'art* section of the Salon, which in Hungary, too, are classified as craft work, because he knew that this was the only way in which he could gain a foothold. This is important because if he had not been able to reach the public in this way perhaps he would not have achieved what he has achieved since then. Later Natanson showed interest in him, supported him, and today Maillol, the sculptor, is a great artist of whom the new French art is deservedly proud.

Among other things it was due to Maillol's prodding that I wanted to try my hand at embroidery and tapestries, which he was making at the time. Our styles differed of course, we produced our *par excellence* decorative craftwork in different ways and using different techniques, so that Paris criticism always dealt with us separately. This is natural, since Maillol was always predisposed towards the archaic. What he did wasn't altogether novel, but rather a Greek incarnation.

There were differences in technique, too; his stitches were further apart and were placed under each other, while mine were thick, long, and sewn one within the other; his handiwork was loose, easily rolled, while mine was hard of texture, like a thick Persian rug. The forms and colours showed an even greater difference. Our wives also helped in the execution of these works.

For several months in 1899, we and the Maillols lived almost like a family; this was in Banyuls, in a small, mountainous, rocky Catalan village, redolent with religion, where Maillol still lives. I painted a lot there and Maillol, who at first also devoted himself exclusively to painting, found what I was doing interesting, and said more than once that my paintings manifested a rare understanding of that unique setting.

Every dawn the Maillol family were under our window, waiting for us with bread and cinnamon-flavoured chocolate, to walk as was our habit to the mountain spring. There we ate figs and chocolates, drank great draughts of spring water, and we'd either set to work right away, or else we'd walk to a nearby homestead to paint. That is, I did the painting, while Maillol set about making sketches for his archaic gobelins with his usual care, love and conviction. He thought a great deal about the way to produce fine yarn, especially the dies. Seeing his experiments with sculpture, however, and since he was likely to listen to me, I prodded him to work more intensively at sculpture. This, as we know, brought results, because it was along those lines that he progressed to his present stature.

Naturally, I met all of the Maillol family in Banyuls. They include a wine merchant, a fisherman, a writer, a musician. The latter, an admirer of Wagner, is Gaspard Ribot Maillol; thanks to me, or because of me, I should say, he started painting. He is grateful to me to this day. He was eighteen at the time, talented, and with good taste. It is typical that he began painting right away, and it was only later that he started to draw. He showed himself to be an interesting person from the start. His uncle, Aristide Maillol, was thunderstruck; he couldn't get it into his head. But three years ago he wrote to me that Gaspard was going to have an exhibition at Druet in Paris, and later, that the exhibition was a success; all of the boy's pen drawings were sold.

I exhibited the painting *My Grandmother* in Paris about fifteen years ago.[2] It caught the attention of a company of artists who had much sympathy for each other's work. Several of them are outstanding artists today, whom everyone talks about. About eight months ago Bernheim showed those of their works which Thadée Natanson now owns. Mirbeau provided a preface for the catalogue. Vuillard, Bonnard and Valloton are well represented. I often saw them after I moved from Paris to nearby Neuilly. They came to visit me on Sundays. Denis, Serusier, Ranson and for a time Cottet were also of the company, and Toulouse-Lautrec, too, until his death. The pioneers, and in part the most im-

2 ■ In 1894.

portant predecessors of these artists were Cézanne, Gauguin, Renoir, Pissarro, Degas, Seurat and Signac among the painters, and Rodin among the sculptors, and of course Maillol, of whom I have previously spoken. I am sure I do not have to explain to anyone familiar with modern art who these artists are.

I met Cézanne only once, when I visited him in his studio. This studio was known for the fact that it contained not a single work by Cézanne; they were all sold at his recent first exhibition, which Vollard, the new, and as yet unprosperous, art dealer organized for him. I was told that he made around thirty-thousand francs from these pictures. He divided this sum into three parts, between his wife, his son and himself, then he sent them on their way, while he continued to work in the company of a very young Swedish writer in Marlotte. I saw only a beautiful old, Italianate figure drawing of a woman and an oil print hung askew from a nail on the wall, and without a frame. (This very interesting and practically incomprehensible thing, that he liked oil prints, was characteristic of Cézanne.) He was reluctant to speak, especially when I asked him about other artists. Perhaps it is worth noting what this undisputedly great artist said about three artists of equal merit. He called Puvis de Chavanne *"a very great artist,"* Renoir *"a talented man"*, and when I asked him about Gauguin, he merely said, *"I don't know the gentleman in question,"* whereas he did. Gauguin was full of wonder and admiration for Cézanne's work.

My Grandmother prompted my meeting with Gauguin. At the Salon de Champs de Mars this was the painting that he, too, liked best. It was as a result of that meeting that he invited me to his studio in the Rue Vercingetorix. He had recently returned for the first time from Tahiti, that is he was already almost the real Gauguin. My meeting with him was as decisive as the meeting with Cézanne in Marlotte, near Fontainebleau, except this was not as simple but more Bohemian in nature, and accordingly more interesting in all its details. I went to see him in the evening. Already in the corridor I saw beautiful things, among them an especially beautiful still-life with fruit, which he had painted earlier, in the manner of Cézanne. (He never denied the latter's good influence on him.) When I entered the studio, I saw several figures in the half-light. A man with curly hair was playing the piano; that was Leclerque. Another, with long hair, was lying on the floor; this was Ruinard, the poet. A rope hang from the ceiling in the middle of the room and a monkey, ever on the move, climbed up and down that. Under it, on the floor, wearing a blue calico frock, sat a woman of a yellowish-blackish complexion, smiling dumbly; she was the artist's mistress. Gauguin was busy at the foot of the bed; this is how he reproduced his characterstic woodcuts. When he finished printing the sheet he was working on we shook hands, and the dark lady offered me tea. After the piano-playing ceased, we talked. He complained about his lack of success. His paintings had recently been on display at the Durand-Ruel gallery, but there were no buyers. The fact

that even the Musée Luxembourg would buy none of his works sent him into fits of despair, and not only him, but almost everyone who sympathized with him. The paintings were returned to the studio where, thanks to the kind offices of friends, the best and most typical Gauguins could be had for fifty or a hundred francs. He could not understand his lack of success and blamed it on the white frames; after the exhibition, he immediately painted them yellow, then hung them up in his studio.

Gauguin treasured his independence so much that, as rumour had it at the time, Durand-Ruel had offered him ten thousand francs a year if he'd work only for him, but he turned this down.

He gave me three woodcuts made in the above-mentioned primitive manner as a souvenir, and I still have them; they are in good company in my studio in Budapest and my property in Kaposvár, together with woodcuts by Maillol and Valloton and my collection of original Chinese and Japanese drawings. These are complemented by some pieces by Denis, Vuillard and Bonnard. Of these artists, Denis showed the most understanding of Gauguin. He and Cottet are Gauguin's heirs and disciples, but Seruzier too could never free himself from his influence. And indeed, we owe Maillol to him. This is a not inconsequential addendum to art history, especially since today Maillol is considered of equal rank with Rodin, who is now the most famous sculptor in the civilized world.

The two of us, my Scots friend and I, also came to love Gauguin's art, not every single item, naturally, but the artist as he was. We spread his fame around Paris as best we could, where they either reviled him or thought he was mad. I might even venture to say that we were the first to improve his reputation.

We exerted ourselves in a similar manner in Maillol's interest.

The others, with the exception of Denis, were discovered by Natanson, not the above-mentioned Thadée, but Stefan Natanson, who did much to nurse French Impressionist painting and its offshoots. At the time the others, Vuillard, Natanson and their circle, paid little attention to Gauguin; they noticed him only after his beautiful, colourful woodcuts hit the market. Once I asked Seruzier why Gauguin was no longer in their company, and he said, *"Il est parti"*—he wants no part of us. Charles Maurice and Camille Mauclair were two literary supporters of Gauguin. Not Mirbeau, even though one can't accuse him of neglecting artists of Gauguin's conviction; after all, thirteen years previously, Vuillard had already mentioned to me when he was in Neuilly that he had seen a characteristic Van Gogh hanging on the wall in Mirbeau's country house. This took courage at a time when *tout Paris* with its philistine tastes considered Van Gogh no better than a leper. And now? Now to be sure they're eager to acquire his works.

These two names, Gauguin and Van Gogh, were left to close this particular "chapter". These are the two to whom—though I travelled along different roads—I was perhaps in the last resort, superficially, most closely related. There is a certain similarity between us, though none of us sought it be. Peculiar coin-

cidences and similarities, rooted in the soul in our understanding of art and nature could well be the fountain in which all three of us delved. Probably all three of us equally admired the Chinese, the Persians, the Egyptians and the Greeks, as well as Giotto, Masaccio, Fra Angelico, Orcagna (along with the Japanese). Even unwillingly, we felt their influence. Yet I am convinced that we are each different. Our starting points are different, the intermediate stages are different, and so are the final results. Gauguin's *Noa-Noa* is entirely different from Van Gogh's *Sunflowers*, or my own *My Father with Uncle Piacsek Drinking Red Wine.*

I painted my "black" paintings series in Neuilly. This was not because I saw things black, but because I wanted to paint things with black as my starting point. I was supported in this by the conviction that this was as legitimate as taking a purple blue, or any other colour as its starting point. I was very much interested in the colours black and grey at the time, and I was excited by the problem of using them in art. In short, I tried to interpret my motifs with these two colours. The contour lines so obvious in my current, highly-coloured works, were present in my "black" paintings, too, and if they're not as obvious in these earlier works, it is because the large dark areas overshadow them, which is only natural. These are not due to poor draughtsmanship, as some would like to think, but are the natural consequence of my painting methods.

The paintings shown with those of my companions at Durand-Ruel's are from this series. The other exhibitors included Maurice Denis, Vuillard, Valloton, Bonnard, Ranson, Seruzier, Besnard, Filiger, X. Roussel, Rysselberghe, Cross, Signac, Luce, Rochefoucauld and other painters, and the Belgian sculptor Minne. Maillol was not yet one of the company. The exhibition was well received by the critics, and my "black" paintings stood out among the brilliantly colourful pictures of the others; of these Geoffroy, for example, a member of the Académie Goncourt, praised my *Small Bar* with its many bottles especially highly in the papers, the same, needless to say, which back home brought the most adverse criticism. The paintings *My Grandmother* and *My Parents After Forty Years of Marriage* are from this series, the former being one of the earliest, the latter one of the last; this larger canvas I painted in 1897, when I visited my parents at Kaposvár. Chronologically, *The Seine at Night* is a typical bridge between the two. (I mention some of my paintings by title because I am not in the habit of dating them, and should anyone be interested in the phases I went through as I developed my style, this may perhaps help to guide them.)

It was from Neuilly that Maillol enticed me to his native parts in Banyuls, whose environs had not till then been exploited by artists, even though it is one of the most picturesque regions I have ever seen. Here, I soon saw everything in colour, though not yet as "sunny". This is where I painted those works of mine whose religiously simple yet colourful motifs served as a transition from the "black" series to the "sunny" or—if you will—stridently coloured series. It was

the intensive blue of the ocean which provided the impetus. This was the turning-point. My present ideas and searches in painting date from this period. My studies and paintings done at that time convinced me, above all, that paintings should be executed at once; what's more, that the power of the colours must be intensified in the simplest way possible.

I have full confidence in the power and beauty of painting all at once. Thus, my main objective is that whatever I paint and on whatever scale—to the extent, of course, that this is physically possible—should be painted at once or, as painters say, at one sitting. This manner of painting reminds me of a flower or fruit that is still dewy. It had been my conviction for some time that this was the only way to paint, but my conviction was strengthened by studying the frescoes of the old Italian masters. These, too, are painted all at once, even if in pieces. This is why they are so masterly fresh and are incomparably more beautiful than the oil paintings that the same great artists repeatedly corrected.

I consider the "equal" manner of painting as part of painting in one sitting, by which I mean that every part of the work in progress must be kept in the same state, and must be finished together. I am firmly convinced that this is the only way to produce a good picture; it is the only way to paint things that are complete.

As I have said, my studies of nature at Banyuls taught me that painting in one sitting is not enough, the application to the canvas of thinner or heavier coats of colour, the filling in of a drawing with colour, in short, *valeur* is not enough; it is important, in fact, it is more important to learn how to intensify the power of colour. Since I have realized this, I have given up "undercoating," I do not care whether a colour will seem cold or warm because of the base under it. Theories of technique learned from others must be cast aside, regardless of whose they are, and technique must be reduced to the simplest form possible. This means that colours must not be superimposed under any circumstances. Every colour is there in the tube and need only be taken out and used just the way it is, always keeping a unified style in mind, the colour simply needs to be applied to the canvas. But it needs to be put where it belongs, and so that it can stay there, just as we have applied it! If mixing colours becomes necessary, it must be done on the palette. We do not mix anything on the canvas; this is the negative imperative of the empowerment of colour.

This trumpeting of colours probably comes from my present mood. This is what my surroundings are now, and that's the effect they have on me. Colours like this surround us in my new house and garden in Kaposvár. I have come to love not only the scarlet-coloured sage and the red single geranium, and also the pure white flowers, but even more so the chrome-yellow zinnias. These are the colours I am presently looking for, practically collecting them, in my home, too, in objects, on shawls and walls.

Toulouse-Lautrec was a bit of a slob; he drank and stayed up nights, and so I, who did not like to stay up, spoke to him mostly during the early hours of various soirées. At such times he'd often invite me to make lithographs at Ancourt's printing office, where he was an habitué. Next to the smell of absinthe, he liked the smell of printer's ink best. He often drew on stone. He sketched the ladies from the cabaret into a small notebook, and on this basis he created his brilliant works out of a few characteristic strokes. A few lines with gorgeous, decorative colours, this is what his best works are like. At the time, he made many drawings of Yvette Guilbert, but he'd also paint, even if less frequently, the famous Goulue, a can-can dancer at the Moulin Rouge. In his studio I also saw a large painting of another famous person, the cabaret singer Aristide Bruant, with a large red choker tied around his neck. He also kept an old Forain drawing, which he loved.

My last meeting with him was in his studio in Montmartre. God, what a number of absinthe bottles and glasses were there on a table, right by the door! Two young gentlemen, one was his cousin, lay on a bed with a baldachin, when I went in. It was Bohemian of him that Lautrec didn't even introduce me to his cousin, and yet we talked through the afternoon with what he termed "a sip" (always just a sip) of absinthe. His studio was full of easels, on them drawings for his posters. Before we left his studio together, the two cousins engaged in a bout of fencing. This match or rather physical exercise was a strange sight: the bow-legged Lautrec, barely taller than one metre, and the other exceptionally tall and thin man as they fenced. On top of this, they both wore glasses. What can I say, there is no human dignity in ridiculous situations.

Even though he had a number of strange characteristics, Lautrec was the most important artist in our group. His was indeed a unique talent. Posters of sophistication and taste to adorn street walls were his particular achievement. There hasn't been a poster-making lithographer nearly anything like him since he died. His are on a par with the Japanese prints. If we credit Chéret with creating posters with the simplest means possible, then it was Lautrec who perfected these means. He is of incomparably higher artistic quality than Chéret.

Valloton, the Frenchified Swiss artist, made some first rate woodcuts in the nineties. He drew attention to himself with his paintings as well, and had followers, setting a trend for many new artists together with other more important members of our company, a trend of which Matisse and Picasso are now the chief representatives. The woodcuts established his reputation as an artist. His black-and-white woodcuts, which brought him most success, were published in Berlin, in the journal *Pan,* published in Berlin by Meier-Graefe and Julius Bierbaum. Of our company, Lautrec's lithographs and Knowles' drawings also appeared in *Pan.* The editors were soon disheartened by the intrigues of Berlin

artists and writers. They resigned, and the admirable internationalism on which it was based failed, and the journal turned into the *Pan* of German artists of "heavy" tastes. It became useless in my eyes, and I did not send them even my first larger lithograph, intended specifically for them—a drawing of a young American girl in a large hat and a long Empire dress.

Vuillard and Bonnard, just like Monet and Sisley, would have never become what they were without each other. They had a great need of each other. Vuillard's art was at its most interesting when he appeared with his small blackish-gray and reddish-brown pictures. Many of his decorative works characterized by tiny spots, stripes and dark colours speak of an artist of refined taste. Bonnard is somewhat more colourful, and always treats his motifs with humour, and from their playful side. He is one of the most witty of French artists. His drawings and illustrations are also very interesting and powerful. His forms, intellect and art make him a true Montmartre figure.

However, let us return to Paris and my artist friends, whom I had left behind only in space, while visiting them in spirit time and time again. Last year[3] I went to see them with my own eyes. They have kept up the friendship which began fifteen years ago at the Julian. They meet, as in times past, in each other's homes. They take the trouble of a Sunday to go out to Roussel, or on Saturdays to Denis in St. Germain; on Tuesdays to Maillol at Marly-le-Roy; just as these latter will go from these country places on a Friday to Vuillard for *déjeuner,* on Monday to Bonnard, at the Rue Lepic near the Moulin de la Galette. Now that my wife and I spent some time in Paris, we were also expected at Vuillard's every Friday. Here I met all my acquaintances, partly because they were happy to see us again, and partly because this was the only day that Vuillard was free. As long as he is alive he wants to keep in touch with his old pals, even those who no longer fulfill his standards but are kind and good men—and married. With the latter it is thanks to the wives that he is in touch; formerly they were either his models or their girlfriends. Today they are respected and charming French ladies. Bonnard's wife, too, is a sweet woman. She invited us to dinner the first time on the day of the opening of the Bonnard exhibition with Bernheim. This young and gay Parisian woman was waiting for us in their lovely, light, *coquette* small apartment; she was wearing silver slippers, a light silk dress, and a fringe covering her forehead. Next to her their large dog wagged his tail in a friendly manner. The large, lion-headed musical composer Claude Terrasse was there, too, Bonnard's brother in law, and the writer Romain Coolus. There was a well laid table, and on it many fine wines, champagne, delicious fish and meats. After dinner we went to the Moulin de la Galette, then on to all the dives which by today have changed character, having become elegant and expensive, such as the old Chat-Noir and the old Moulin Rouge, Toulouse-Lautrec's home from home. All these around the Place Pigalle, not far from the old Chat-Noir, as if they were the offshoots of the

3 ■ In 1910.

other famous nightspot, the nest of the can-can dancer Goulue, but nursed by other men. As day broke, they took us to a place to eat choucroute.

Another acquaintance of mine, who perhaps is worthy of mention in this place, was the young writer Alfred Jarry. I think I met him even before I met the Lautrec lot, this in a company of young writers who usually met in a drinking place on the Rue Saint-Honoré. Hirsch of the double name was one of the company, who is now a regular contributor to *Le Figaro;* so was his brother, and perhaps also the poet Cremnitz, I think, of whom I later painted a pastel portrait owned by Marcell Nemes, and others, too, including the above-mentioned Jarry. The same Jarry whose eccentricities were so widely discussed; first, his room decorated with skulls, then his play, *Ubu, le roi,* which started with the word *"merde".* He was a gifted and fascinating man, who later became a serious writer. His reviews were published in the *Revue Blanche.* It seems he liked my work, because on the occasion when *My Grandmother* was exhibited, he wrote only about this in his review, as well as of Whistler and Cottet, ignoring the other thousand paintings on display. He even threatened to write my biography, but he could not carry that out, because I left Paris for Hungary

It was during the Whistler fever that the Irishman Oscar Wilde was first heard of and Beardsley, the English draughtsman, established a name for himself among the French. Paris was fascinated by both of them. Wilde kept the most intellectual company; the *Revue Blanche* also favoured him: it devoted much space to his works, especially his *bon mots* with their many interesting paradoxes. I have always regretted that by pure chance we never actually met, though we both frequented more or less the same circles. He spent many evenings at the Café L'Avenue next to the Montparnasse railway station. If my memory serves me right, he was closely acquainted with Jean Lorrain, Montesquieu-Fesensac, Gandara, and probably also with Caran d'Ache, since they all belonged to the same circle and, as far as I know, Whistler frequented their company, as well as the musician Dussotoy and the painter Helleu at one time.

Of their group, Gandara also made a reputation for himself as an interesting artist; this was around 1890, but subsequently his opportunism got the better of him; he became the painter of duchesses and great lords, like Sargent in England. Helleu held on longer, but he, too, changed directions for the worse and is producing drawings and woodcuts for English journals, the nature of which is determined by place, time and the money they are expected to fetch.

Around that time, another very interesting group gathered every Tuesday in the home of the poet Stéphane Mallarmé. Whistler was there, too, who had the habit of settling himself in a corner and listening, through a haze of smoke, to the florid conversation of his host. The writers in the company, including Mallarmé, were favoured by the *Revue Blanche* and the *Mercure de France;* here, they found not only a refuge but staunch support, too, in the face of the many deceitful attacks to which they were subjected by conservatives. There was good

reason for searching for this support since these highly gifted writers were as persecuted by "official" writers as the Impressionist painters were by "official" painters and like-minded thickheads.

When I went to Paris, Rimbaud's spirit was still in the air, but this gradually quietened. Even Rimbaud suffered a crisis of confidence in himself and his writings. But if we mention just five names from the field of battle: Verlaine, Mallarmé, Puvis de Chavannes, Rodin and Cézanne, we can safely say that this new era was a beautiful and "successful" one.

Already around 1894, I was turning the pages of Stéphane Mallarmé's beautiful book, *Les Pages,* which was printed in Brussels. A copy of it was dedicated to me by Doctor Bourbon, while I, rather immodestly, placed within its pages, by way of decoration, small coloured contour drawings that I made while I was reading it. My French friends were surprised, to say the least, when they came to Neuilly and found on my table Mallarmé's book with my "illustrations"; they thought that the drawings really were illustrations, a legitimate part of the book. How did I come by this great honour, to be thus commissioned, they asked. I told them how, while the book, which many found eccentric because of the exceptionally beautiful language, on my part I couldn't read enough of it due precisely to the fragrant language that was issuing forth from its pages. In my eyes, only Rabelais and Ronsard could come up to its standards.

József Rippl-Rónai: Bar with Bottles. *Whereabouts unknown.*

Christopher Kelen

Szoborpark

Good and evil get beyond themselves,
the stone cold do the liberating.
At Szoborpark there are tiny tins
for the tourists with fake Russian labels
that say the last breath of communism.

It's all orderly wreckage here
in the graveyard of the undead:
arms thrown up or back, launching the body,
the doves still only just taken off, flag aloft
and the star of unmeaning, which none worship,
paling over the unconvinced, settled into the smog of glory.

There's the handshake: the stocky Hungarian—little fellah
resolved at last to take in both his hands a hard climate
—the big bear all paw who receives and delivers the truth
in equal measures, doomed, as if love of humanity
had to shame life away.

This is the art of wounds, man made featureless, dark
with purpose; man rusting, hammered back to shape,
collected in one image framed by woman: the feather bearer
—contributing, but uselessly. This is where history comes
to learn of us—experimental man, all muscle.

Here we learn it's war which makes life monumental,
war's the money spinner, soaks us for a future, war the ploughshares
reminisce. Peace is too heavy to get off the gound.

Christopher Kelen
is an Australian of Hungarian descent, who has visited Hungary several times. The winner of a number of Australian and international awards, his first book, The Naming of the Harbour and the Trees, *received an Elder Award in 1993. In 1996 he was Writer-in-Residence for the Australia Council at the B.R. Whiting Library in Rome.*

And after the terrors of every colour at the end of our
puny century of deciding, you too could be the unknown
patriot praying to be relieved of hope once and for all.

Now the queues are forming, the rich and the poor
—everyone's joining. Who can afford
the tin full of air which is only a gesture?

The dead were always under this future.
Where should we find them now?

In a park full of sledgehammers we're all of us tourists
I'm imagining another museum already for the next time
after capitalism: full of those subtle monuments freed of ideology,
freed of all styles of consciousness. You know—the flashing,
the lights, the fifty storey minimal statements, hymns to debt.

I'm waiting for a bus here still in the old smog at the edge
of old abandoned tomorrow. Something frail in tin spins over
this starless sky of cloud: new money risking all for joy,
for a string of showy moments, which let us all know that
it's not enough to be among those whom forever is wronging.
Making the world out of wounds is never enough.

George Szirtes

Translating Zsuzsa Rakovszky

There are many poems I would like to have written. In English there is Thomas Wyatt's "They Flee from Me Who Sometime Did Me Seek", George Peele's "The Voice from the Well", Edward Taylor's "Upon a Wasp Chilled with Cold", to take a few examples from the lyric poems of the sixteenth and seventeenth century alone. Then we pass through a century or two of some twenty or thirty desired poems and move into our own century with Robert Frost's "Home Burial", Edward Thomas's "Rain", Theodore Roethke's "Dolour", not to mention "The Wasteland", the choruses from Auden and Isherwood's "The Dog Beneath the Skin", Wallace Stevens's "The Idea of Order at Key West", Louis MacNeice's "Snow", almost anything by Elizabeth Bishop, and so the list goes on, like some delightful party game.

The next best game is called Lines I Would Like to Have Written. These would include "to cease upon the midnight with no pain", "I am a gentleman in a dustcoat trying", "Love set you going like a fat gold watch","Tears are round, the sea is deep / Roll them overboard and sleep", etc., etc. The pleasures of my own poems are less involved in particular lines than in images and developments which work across and against lines, though there are some lines I simply like and look forward to saying at a reading, such as: "And down the door the rain has worn small grooves / You don't know what it is that means or moves", "And ice creams wobble in their goblets", "The pendulum is still / And time runs down like water from the hill".

Such things are seductions and enchantments, and I genuinely believe that without seductions and enchantments, without, if you like, inducements to enter the more complex and demandingly furnished rooms or *stanze* of poetry—the Italian word stanza actually means "a room"—I might not have entered poetry at all. Some might call this a decadent pleasure. I don't particularly care.

George Szirtes's Selected Poems 1976–1996 *was published by Oxford University Press in 1996. His latest collection,* Portrait of My Father in an English Landscape, *was published by OUP in 1998.*

The English poet Martin Bell, who had been my tutor, once said that poetry was a secret and subversive pleasure, and so it remains. Pleasure is pleasure whatever the context. No true poet can absolutely despise Tennyson who made some of the richest, most cello-like noises in English verse. T.S. Eliot regretted Tennyson's slow mind, the contemporary Irish poet Tom Paulin laments the cheapness of his effects—we ourselves can hear the Victorian clutter of his rhetoric and dissect the constructed and calculated plangency of his grand style of melancholy, but we can also feel its delights. "With blackest moss the flower pots were thickly crusted one and all". "The blue fly sung in the pane", "Now sleeps the crimson petal, now the white..." are perfectly functioning models of seduction. I'd like to persist with this apparently tawdry analogy just a little longer. The poems or lines a poet admires in others are not necessarily the lines he himself, or she herself, could write (incidentally, I use this clumsy he/she formula once, and from now on I hope it may be assumed and will indeed be apparent from what I say, that the poet is of either gender). If, to continue the argument, the poems or lines were ones the writer himself could write, his admiration would be merely self-love or a form of patronage. One condition of admiration is that the poem lie outside the writer-reader's scope. The seduction analogy, however, suggests that the fact of the poem corresponds to a personal or cultural need, in much the same way as a desired human partner does. In other words, the admired work is not antithetical to the character of the writer-reader but completes some element of him. In certain lines, in certain poems, we become aware of a voice fulfilling and perfecting itself on its own terms, a voice that moves so naturally into the realm of song that it seems to rise from some hidden part of us, we the writer-readers. We feel they belong to us but feel no guilt in having appropriated someone else's property. The writer-reader falls in love with the poem, with its specific lines, its overall shape and its inherent "voice", then begins to intepret it, and being a writer, does so in almost a craftsmanlike, how-is-it-done manner. He is less concerned with the social construction of the voice than in its mechanism. He is not concerned to posit some theory of society or history or language on it but is aware that, like himself, the poet has arrived somewhere fascinating by a series of feints, leaps, forays, surrenders and tricks, and the enactment of these possibilities becomes a central part of his pleasure as reader. There is, in other words, a notional chance of him learning these tricks and manners, of becoming someone like the poet. At the same time, the tantalizing otherness of the poet bewitches him. Without it there would only be the tricks, and ultimately he knows the tricks themselves won't do. He will remember Emily Dickinson's definition of a poem as "a house that tries to be haunted". It might not be too ridiculous to see the body of the desired in this way.

Let me take an example. The last line of Ottó Orbán's sonnet-length poem *"A tavalyi hó"* reads in Hungarian *"míg tamponnak a világ nyílt sebére süketnémán dűl a hó"*. The title of the poem clearly refers to Villon and its first four

lines bear this out: *"Hol van Miszter Orbán, a tavalyi vendégprofesszor? / Hol furcsa kiejtése, szokatlan szempontja? / A domb, a domb, a domb mélyében alszik / mint Lee Masters kisvárosának más lakói is..."* When I was translating some thirty-five poems by Orbán in the summer of 1989, I was puzzling over the rhythm of these lines, a rhythm that clearly constituted his particular manner of saying and would unlock the paradoxes of the voice that rang through this and other of his poems, a voice that could sound the high trumpets and deep basses of rhetoric and successfully mix them with brays and farts and wisecracks. My usual English metres couldn't do it. In one of our early conversations on the subject, Orbán told me to think of his lines as the ghosts of classical hexameters. Of course. Hungarian verse scans by stress and quantity, while English traditionally only makes use of stress. But this means that the actual meaning of the hexameter is different. Put like this the suggestion sounded more like a problem than a solution. At the same time, however, I was also working with István Vas on some of his poems, and I asked him to read me some of his verses in stricter hexameters, accenting the metre. I began to hear it. Not in the same way he did, nor in the way Orbán did of course, but as a kind of usable English music. The few notable uses of hexameter in English are interesting if corrupt: Golding's translations of Ovid and Clough's *"Amours de Voyages"* are two of the more successful experiments. In my own time, however, the scabrous social poet Peter Reading had adopted the whole classical system of scansion to his own highly colloquial manner and I had become somewhat acclimatized to his music. My crude feeling was that the movement of the verse could be summed up as a kind of a sequence of run, hesitate, and lilt in various combinations with a preponderance of feminine endings, and that it was this that would characterize Orbán's poetry for an English reader. Out of this crude sense of the line unit I began to assemble a sound that might work naturally. The first four lines of *"A tavalyi hó"* (or The Snows of Yesteryear, in echo of the most famous translation of the Villon poem into English) came out as

> *Where is Mr Orbán, last year's visiting professor?*
> *Where is his queer accent, his strange opinions?*
> *Deep, deep deep in the hill he sleeps*
> *like other citizens of the Spoon River.*

I had noticed that Orbán himself does not keep to any particular pattern in his lines. It was the swing and the overall movement that mattered. The metres they were ghosts of determined that swing, but did not dominate it. My attitude would be the same. *A domb, a domb, a domb,* would have sounded like a breathless hiccup as The hill, the hill, the hill. I heard deep bells in his lines, and the word *"mélyében"* provided the necessary hook to swing them from. It was a matter of priorities. In the same way, my fourth line substitutes the Spoon River

for the name of Lee Masters. The straight English translation would have sounded like a footnote—this swung. So it went on. Until I came to the last line by which time I was moving with the poem, much like a dancer with her partner (the partner was leading, I was taking the traditional female role). And here a wonderful thing happened. A tampon in English has only one direct association and that is with the staunching of menstrual blood. Too strong, too distracting. What was wanted was a surgical dressing with other applications too. But the sound of the word "dressing" is too high-pitched in context, too deliberate. Orbán's long line, ending *"süketnémán dől a hó"*, suggested something tragic and helpless. Suddenly the English appeared all by itself:

and the dumb snow falls like lint on the open wound of the world.

I was mesmerized by this line and to some degree still am. I know I have lost the deaf part of *"süketnémán"*, and I know my line is slightly shorter than his, but the way the line moved and exhausted itself was pure magic. It grunted softly at the end, but swung like a bell on the word "lint". The bell was muffled, as though it were swathed in bandages. Long after the translation was finished, I remember saying to someone after a reading: "I wish I had written that line", then immediately thinking, "Well, I *have* written it." Yet I do not own it—it is the original poem that possesses it entire. Walter Benjamin says a poem completes itself through translation into other languages. It may be so. The line came out of me, but entirely elicited and conditioned by Orbán's line.

I could go on like this, because it is by no means an isolated occurence. The two lines from István Vas's *"Rapszódia egy őszi kertben"* that emerged in my translation as

What do the flowers of vegetation know?
Imperious rockets, pursue your explosive trajectories

probably remain the two most joyful and spiralling lines I have ever written, and they are quite different in sound from Ottó Orbán. Lines like these contain the delight of writing, which may best be described as a kind of addiction. When it is going well there is nothing to compare with it. One lives for such moments.

Before I turn to the specific issue of Zsuzsa Rakovszky's poem I would like briefly to distil the experience I have just described into a kind of argument or working principle. It is more working principle than theory because I can think of exceptions to it. The principle refers to notions of poetic form. I know there is a tendency in Hungary to posit a kind of antithesis between tight form (or *zárt forma*) and free verse. The first is associated with traditional or ironic post-modernist verse, the second with modernism. I was recently sent an interesting anthology of American verse called *Rebel Angels,* which consists of poems—some

good, some bad—by people referred to and referring to themselves as the New Formalists, most of whom are not ironic or post-modern in technique. They sent it to me because my own verse is often highly formal with ornate rhyme schemes and, less often, strict metrical patterns. The reasons for this are complex, possibly even unconscious. If I had to sum up my conscious attitude to form it would be to regard it as counterpoint. I listen to Frost's description of the basic unit of verse being the sentence, which I take to be the point, and I pin this out against the complex patterns of stanza structure—counterpoint. In other words, I too like the ghosts of form—form gives me whispers, sentences give me statements. These are personal practices and reflexes. I do, however, enjoy both the power of the end-stopped line as practised by poets like Pope, Marvell, Byron, Auden, Hecht, etc., and the free Biblical run of Blake's prophetic verse as well as Whitman's and Ginsberg's adaptations of it, not to mention Pound or the late Plath. Preferences and practices aside, it seems to me obvious that the poet's choice of form is an integral part of the poem as phenomenon. To translate a strictly formal poet into free verse seems a slightly incomplete enterprise—not because the result is in itself bad poetry as the various translations of Mandelstam into English, or Ted Hughes's versions of Pilinszky and Ovid demonstrate—but because it is missing something worth having. It is also to regard form as decoration rather than structure, and I know, as a formal poet, that form is at least as structural as counterpoint in music.

On the other hand, I also know that like words, idioms and local references, form too changes meaning as it is transferred into another language and literary tradition. Even as I say this I am aware that under these words lurks an argument about the fundamentals of literature—about what kind of writing we recognize as literature, about whether such a category exists as a distinct entity, about the possibility of a kind of poetic language of literary translation arising in a symbiotic relationship with the languages of specific literary traditions, about the common cultural roots of specific literatures—but these are theoretical discussions I cannot enter into here and must leave to another occasion. To compress all this, I am pretty well convinced that slavish reproduction of sound patterns and the dynamics of specific lines and stanzas will not in itself, as a master principle, produce something worth reading. It constitutes what the English idiom so charmingly refers to as a red herring. The English genius has often been referred to as the gift for pragmatic compromise, and that—with all my forty years of English domicile—is what I offer you here as my own working principle, subject to all the usual exceptions. This compromise says that there are certain forms: the sonnet, the ballad, the *terza rima,* for example, which the poet enters on a highly conscious level. When he does so he must know that he is engaging in negotiation with a range of specific expectations, that he is, in some ways, as I have said elsewhere, kissing the feet of the icon. Many generations have done so before him, hoping for some spiritual or physical benefit, each new set of

kisses contributing to the notional potency of the image. Of course there are various kinds of icon and various kinds of sonnet, and, as literature develops, various new strains or mutations of sonnet appear—Lowell's, Berryman's, Orbán's. On this level, I think, it probably helps to render historical forms as historical forms. It is not so much the mechanism of this or that line that guides the voice of the poem but the notion of the whole.

On another level the compromise recognizes that there are poets for whom the sheer verbal ingenuity of a form—Kosztolányi in Hungarian, the late Byron in English, for example—is a highly visible element of the the poem's dynamic and functions as a kind of specific spell. As a translator I want to recognize how far this ingenuity is foregrounded and strive to foreground it in the same way. If the poet draws attention to a complex rhyme scheme or metrical structure which is strictly and ostentatiously adhered to, I think I must do something similar. While the translation continues to be guided by the shape of the whole rather than by local effects, these local effects gain a higher profile. If, on the other hand, a poet uses loose quatrains where the length of lines varies and the place of the rhyme is rather more erratic and improvised, I feel no particular compunction to reproduce the length of each individual line or the precise placing of the rhyme. I strive to understand the condition of the poem and what makes it work. My pedantry is placed at the service of an understanding of that condition.

This is not to say I am necessarily right in proceeding along these lines. I am not talking about common errors here. I make ordinary mistakes often enough, mistakes in interpretation or vocabulary or idiom or context, much as anyone does. But the notion of correctness or rightness is more complicated than this. Ten of us reading the same poem in our own language will supply ten variant readings. Certain matters of interpretation are open to resolution, others, being more personal and associative, are not. Our condition as readers comprises both positions. Being a poet myself I know my intentions in writing a poem are far from clear even to me, even as I write. The various methodologies of criticism are like the various coloured lenses of a spectroscopist. They bring out certain features and obscure others. The power of the poem resides outside the intentions of its writer or of this or that specific reader. Nevertheless, each specific reader assumes the pleasures and responsibilities of reading. Reading across languages and cultures clearly multiplies the possibilities. A translation of a poem is in effect a reading of the poem. As such, I am convinced, it has no ultimate authority. It either persuades or it doesn't. It either functions as a poem or it fails to do so. Each translation deepens the reading of the original. Of course, and here I return my tawdry sexual analogy, we may fall in love with a translation and regard it as our partner for eternity, for life, or for as long as it lasts before a more enticing specimen comes along. That is a subjective matter. My own translations of Hungarian writers are like advertisements in the personal column of the newspaper, in this respect. You know they are there. You could meet

them. You might think they are majestic Cleopatras, Queens of the Nile, or you might think they are slightly desperate loners in cheap costume, best avoided. You will not entirely forget that translations are interventions in the public arena too, in however small a corner of it, and that some basic sort of critical consensus will be available and may colour your own reading, which, you will be aware, may in itself be deconstructed, possibly by yourself.

After all this preamble and digression it may seem rather late in the day to pick up my main theme, which is the translation of Zsuzsa Rakovszky's poems into English, but I feel happier having cleared or defined a certain ground.

I should say that I have most often been commissioned to translate particular books or particular writers but in this case I assumed responsibility for myself. I proposed the project to myself and sold the book to Oxford University Press on my own behalf. Why choose Rakovszky? I knew her name from various sources: one of my earliest contacts in Hungary, whom I consider to be one of the greatest of Hungary's twentieth century poets, Ágnes Nemes Nagy, had praised her work to me, as had a number of other friends. I couldn't help but see her name in print, even though I am not an avid subscriber to Hungarian periodicals, nor an academic who spends time in specialized libraries. I simply knew she existed. I had even seen some translations of her poems in English, by George Gömöri and Clive Wilmer, in a rather poor anthology of Eastern European poetry, edited by Michael March, *Child of Europe,* which I reviewed for an English magazine. Her selection in *Child of Europe* consisted entirely of intense personal love poems: "Snapshot", "Noon", "Evening", "No Longer" and "Summer Solstice". I don't think I would have translated her on the basis of these English texts alone, but the opinion of Nemes Nagy rang in my ears, so I felt obliged to read her in Hungarian. (Before 1984 I hadn't spoken Hungarian in twenty-eight years and even in 1990 the evaluation of a Hungarian poem in itself was a little beyond me—I had in fact to translate a poem into English before I could appreciate it.) Together with Győző Ferencz, I had planned an anthology of modern Hungarian poetry of the *Újhold* tradition and legacy and he had photocopied some of Rakovszky's early poems for me. Győző too had spoken highly of her and clearly regarded her as someone working within the formal tradition, though this was far from obvious in the *Child of Europe* selection. So I bought or got hold of her books and began working things out for myself. I could see that the early poems owed something to Plath but that they had a political content beyond the personal. The poems were not always easy and at some points I felt they were very difficult indeed, but what was clear was that they did manage to synthesize both personal and public experience at a potent level, that the form provided a kind of intellectual discipline, and that—most importantly—there was something in the sensibility I recognized. Her then most recent volume, *Fehér-fekete,* owed something to the work of a contemporary English poet,

Carol Ann Duffy, whose poems I knew and I admired, though the debt was more in terms of project (a series of dramatic monologues) than in voice. Nevertheless, though I didn't think every poem in *Fehér-fekete* worked, or would have worked in English, I thought the best poems were not only translatable into contemporary English, but were actually better than their supposed models; that the Rakovszky poems contained more and at a higher level of structure than Duffy's. There was ample evidence of a lived-through, tried and tested intellect, which I think is missing in the English poet. When I went back to the poems in *Tovább egy házzal,* this impression was confirmed. The poet was enacting experiences I recognized—not just of Hungary or Budapest, not just of social types, but of a modern life whose terms were comprehensible in London or Leeds as much as in Central Europe.

But I am getting ahead of myself. This process of reading went hand in hand with translation. The experiences available in Rakovszky were of course poetic experiences, experiences of the imagination working its way through, and partly created by, poetic structure. It hadn't escaped my attention that Rakovszky was a woman, and that most of her protagonists were also women. Some people might claim that because this is the case I couldn't, or didn't have the right, to attempt to understand and translate her. It may well be true that my reading of her poems is conditioned by my non-femaleness, but I do not feel it is determined by it. We all offer daily proof of our belief in the power of the imagination. We imagine being ourselves for a start, then we imagine being someone else, we imagine being older or younger or sick or well, or tall or handsome or beautiful. We imagine what we might have said or done under different circumstances. We imagine what it is like listening to or seeing us. We can imagine ourselves being a cat or a dog or a giant insect on a bed. It is, I think, unnecessarily pessimistic to suggest that we are wholly trapped by our externally defined identities. It was clear that Rakovszky's was a female voice, but I had heard echoes of it before, within my own mind. Recognition is not definition.

Nevertheless, it took a few months to learn the Rakovszky voice range, or, if you prefer, to create a voice range that I could believe in as her own. You might remember my original image of the poem as a model of seduction or desire, my argument being that it wasn't the image of himself or herself a person fell in love with but something that seemed to complete him or her. Now I am absolutely certain that my Madách, my Orbán, my Vas, my Kosztolányi, my Nemes Nagy and my Rakovszky (to take a few examples) do not sound very much like each other. Nevertheless, I accept that in my best translations there will be some element of what I needed and desired in the translated poet. One or two reviewers (but only one or two) have suggested that my Rakovszky translations sound like me, but my reply is that this is no more the case with Rakovszky than with Orbán or Vas or Nemes Nagy, and they are all clearly different and distinct from each other. With Rakovszky I am clearly attracted to her mixture of passionate

and off-hand diction, to her linguistic shudder and shrug, to her tendency to work against the strongly formal structures of her verse and her ability to leap off in startling directions from a single dramatic base. I also love the way in which the personal material of her poetry remains intensely inward but is not cocooned from the world outside: the way it is, in some mysterious way, a product of the world yet retains its fragile centre of integrity. That, I believe, is the central drama of the poems. The fragile sense of the self is continually being tested against the powers of the world, whether these appear in the guise of politics, social circumstances, expectations, love or conscience. I like the way she does not allow the self-mythologizing element to dominate her persona, which is what differentiates her from Plath. There is little public showing of the stigmata in Rakovszky.

These are moral and aesthetic reasons for admiring her verse. I cannot remember whether I met her personally until I started to translate her but, in any case, she adopted a policy of non-intervention in my work. By this time I had a general idea of the voice I was after for her and of how that voice operated, so her corrections, had there been any, would have concerned primarily lexicographical or idiomatic matters.

I ought now to look at three or four specific translations in the light of what I have so far said, but this would be an enormously time-absorbing process. Anyone wishing to compare the originals with my translations can do so without my own comments on the process, which would be retrospective and far from accurate since the majority of *New Life,* my Oxford University Press selection from the work of Zsuzsa Rakovszky, was translated in a great rush in a few weeks after the inital months of careful prodding and sounding. In my own opinion the best work in that volume consists chiefly of the longer poems, "Old Women of my Childhood", "Decline and Fall", "Addict" and the title poem, "New Life". These seem to me to define the nature and scope of Rakovszky in English: either these are successful grand poems or the volume is a failure. The lesser highlights include the shorter love poems, the two sonnets and the song-like verses, all of which have an extraordinary intensity and grace but comprehend a narrower range of experience. In the circumstances I will comment briefly on only two poems, one, *"Avart égettek"* or "They Were Burning Dead Leaves", a short love song, the other, *"Gyerekkori öreg nők",* or "Old Women of my Childhood", a poem working through form and encompassing a personal yet monumental vision of time and manners passing through culture.

The very title of *"Avart égettek"* constitutes a problem. I could not think of an adequate English word for *avar.* The word "mulch" or "mulsh" suggests damp leaves, whereas *avar* means dead dry leaves and, in any case, the sound of "mulch" is rather bathetic. There is, however, a very fine English poem of the modern Georgian period beginning "Now is the time for the burning of the leaves", by Laurence Binyon, which I had read as a First World War elegy, and

this was enough to make a start on. Somehow, somewhere, an association with an existing literary emotion is necessary. We know and feel what the burning of dead leaves signifies, especially in a cultural context. It didn't take long to discover that the three quatrains of the poem which rhymed ABAB and worked as a 10-5-10-5 syllabic pattern, the first two verses affirming and highlighting the fullness of statement in that structure, the last cutting across and questioning it. The last verse was clearly unsettling, an invitation into the underworld. There was also no question about the full-blown sensuality of the music. *"Dőlt a must szaga"* blows and exudes a rich heady scent, almost Keatsian in weight. The mouth had to make blowing noises and exhale the perfumes implicit in the first almost neutral statement: that at least was my first priority. "They were burning dead leaves" hangs on the "b" of burning and, while remaining plain spoken, contains the promise of exhalation in the faint pulse of dying sound in "dead leaves". The next phrase had to amplify that promise and swell to a crescendo. Fortunately *"must",* though it has a different sound in English, means much the same. I lost the delicate "sh", so had to work all the harder to capture the power of *dőlt.* The word "oozed"—a Keatsian onomatopoeia, suggested itself. Then the word "scent" could hiss more powerfully in the reader's face. *Buzgott a kátrány* referred to the burning leaves and enacted to the sound of buzzing and clicking. My stove is louder and more bellylike. Its voluptuousness is more full-bodied than Rakovszky's but, I argued, the dynamic of sensuality mattered more here than the precise location of its source. Somehow there appeared a suggestion of vats and mulled wine, a bubbling tarry mixture which captivated me. But I was working away from the original here and if I were not careful I would lose contact with it. Besides, there were the exigencies of rhyme to consider, which, in this poem, were vitally important for its full lyrical achievement. I was in a music of "b"s and "g"s with a slight accompaniment of "zz"s. My grammatical expression of the next two lines is slightly fuller than Rakovszky's, but there is a difference in the form of the Hungarian and English sentence, which gives different values to ellipsis. I had to understand the Hungarian first, to see what she was seeing, then express it relatively plainly, for the dynamic of the song was moving here from sound to visual image. My use of the word "like" is intended as a kind of brake on the metaphorical angularity of the image in English: simile naturalizes a startling image. The delicate half rhyme of "blew" with "rainbow" would pin it down ever so lightly. Naturally, my translation was developing its own dynamic as a poem in its own right. First verse, first unit over. A rest. Time to reconsider and take stock. The next word again contains a mild ellipsis—*az utca erdő*—literally, "The street, forest". I felt I couldn't stray too far from the patterns of English speech, so in went the prosaic "was a". It would lengthen my line by a syllable or two but I had to decide on priorities, and I didn't want any staccato. The first part of the sentence here is merely a straight metaphorical statement—it has to convince us that a personal impression had become a fact,

so simple grammar was the best solution. The statement suggestion gains momentum in its concomitant *mélyebb ősz fele / lejtett az este.* This, in some mysterious way, was the result of the street having turned into a forest. Admit the first claim and the second seems inevitable. The two most active words here are an adjective and a verb—*mélyebb* and *lejtett,* "deeper" and "descended". The poem is sliding into the underworld, involuntarily drawn there by its passions. It almost didn't matter what these two words were attached to. They were like instructions from a hypnotic if hidden voice telling us to slide deeper. In my poem the slide is steep. "Night slid into the heart of deepest autumn". Here, comparative has become superlative, deeper become deepest, in order to steepen that slide and add to its urgency in English. Night is helpless because we are helpless because the leaves are burning and the scent is overpowering. In the second two lines of the Hungarian quatrain, the end house is torn apart by an accusing music. The main idea here is of guilt as an explosive force. I had to take a risk for the sake of rhyme and specify the generalized music to a fife and drum. There is the memory of a song I used to sing in my first English school, which went: "O soldier soldier, won't you marry me / with your musket, pipe and drum?" And also of a more martial music of doom—the word "fife" suggesting something suppressed, more explosive than the thinner, more easily relieved sound of "pipe". It was the coming explosion that mattered. I move from "b" to "p" to "f" to the dull thud of "d" in "A guilty music blew the house apart / with its fife and drum". I wanted that house blown to pieces with its guilty music and its hints of stolen love or adultery. By now I am riding this poem and understanding its wildness, but everything I do is in response to it. To come back to my dancing analogy, the poem is leading and I am merely trying to follow its bodily pressures. It must tell me what to do but I have my own freedoms as its partner. In the last verse comes the exhalation at the end of that pressure: the desire asserts itself by repetition, *ezt, csak ezt,* "this again, just this", and concludes with its halting promise which is itself ghostlike. Again I slightly lengthen the long lines but the short lines remain strictly five syllable. It is a poem of descents into exactness, which resolves itself in short breathless answers and the last effort has to run into the same pattern but in—if you like—a post-coital fashion, a kind of turning away into the dark and seeking reassurance there. Rakovszky's hesitation is in the middle of the second line, mine is more at the end of the third, in the way the adjective is separated from its noun, but it is the reaching after lost things: *sosem* straining towards *többé,* "your" straining after "hand" that matters. A female Orpheus is straining after a possibly male Eurydice. I admit I love the Hungarian poem, but I love my English one, which is its ghostly partner, almost as much. I can't tell whether someone else will come along and see it differently or read something else in it. Somebody may find my version too voluptuous, not strict enough. Why these extra three syllables in the poem? Couldn't you have kept to the 10-5-10-5

pattern, employed full rhymes, done away with that tar, eliminated the fife and drum, placed your caesuras where she places hers? Others will say, why bother with the rhymes at all, could you not be more lexicographically accurate, seek for precision of transcription rather than impose your own understanding of the effect of the poem which is, after all, a personal reading, nothing more? I leave these questions hanging in the air, partly because I have no authoritative answers for them. Nor, by the way, do I have an authoritative answer regarding the reading of my own poems.

"They Were Burning Dead Leaves" does not strike me as a particularly representative Rakovszky poem—not representative in terms of style at any rate, yet it is in an odd way quite quintessential. Whatever drives the rest of the oeuvre through its various technical gates is driving this one too, and with even greater intensity, albeit through a slightly different gate.

"Old Women of My Childhood" is a more typical middle period poem (if a poet as young as Rakovszky can be said to have a middle period at all), in that it is narrative, employs a kind of rhymed blank verse, and moves towards a more universal, less specifically personal understanding of the world, though it does so through intimately personal memory. It comprises social life, politics and philosophy while keeping its eye firmly on the subject. Its tone is immediate, weary, sharp and ironic, but at the same time very tender—one might almost say mercilessly tender. Half way through the poem the narrative, which begins as a series of contemplations and questions, suddenly focuses on a single person who concentrates all that has been said within her own identity, and allows Rakovszky, in the last part of the poem, to transfer her attention to a photograph which then opens out to a poignant and terrible vision of mortality, a mortality, however, that is rooted in a particular historical period and circumstance.

I cannot go through this line by line because it would take far too long (though the effort would almost certainly be worth it). My translation of the poem is, as I have already said, to a large extent my reading of the poem as it negotiates its way into the English language and the English literary tradition. Like many of the best middle period works, the poem arranges itself into rhymes and assonances but the syntax runs across the lines, moving colloquially in sentences as Frost recommends, though its colloquialisms are far removed from Frost's. My first thought was that I recognized this tone of voice, I had heard it in my mother and her friends, and could still hear it in the homes of my Hungarian friends. I thought I could also hear it in a British context—slightly edgy, urban, desperate, ironic. Good realistic detective fiction—of the most superior kind—sometimes presents us with voices a little like this. The working woman in her thirties, who appears as a friend of the victim, who may briefly be under suspicion herself: a tough, hurt character, not a literary but a professional type, humane, proud and disillusioned. An aesthete who can find no place or use for her aestheticism.

You see, I am spinning—somewhat retrospectively—a character, a pure fiction, out of relatively little: as I said before, a voice is something one recognizes, not describes. This voice I am now recognizing, has just enough in common with Rakovszky's narrator to establish a connection. I have to listen very carefully for the individual details in case I am wrong. I may need to modify my impression. The balance of tone in English is given for me in lines like:

> *...Why furnish a room*
> *with two tall facing mirrors? To reflect the gloom*
> *of an unlit damp apartment, with neither kids nor maid?...*

and

> *... What hope obliged them to preserve old-fashioned*
> *gowns in the purgatory of the laundry chest?*
> *Did they imagine themselves elegantly dressed*
> *on promenades in fashionable parks, wearing one of those?*
> *When did they realize that earnest suitors would not propose*
> *to me in country residences while under the spell*
> *of my dazzling rendition of* Für Elise? *Who can tell*
> *what delusions they laboured under, the poor fools...*

The slang word "kids" balanced against the high irony of "obliged them to"; the contrast between the rococo parody of "promenades in fashionable parks" and its downbeat ending "wearing one of those", the sad sarcasm of "my dazzling rendition of *Für Elise*", complemented by the mock formality of "delusions they laboured under", form the polarities of the poem's diction. Diction is the true hero of this poem: it must suggest despair, scorn, pity and exhaustion. Diction is also, interestingly, the point at which many formally faithful translations fail. This failure shows itself as a lapse in register and this occurs in a particularly acute form when a natural or colloquial ease suddenly loses contact with what can actually be said in the same breath. Loss of register can be fatal. In this case it is more important than the externals of poetic form, though they are by no means negligible in themselves since the rhyming couplets form the intellectual spine of the poem: they are the poem's mode of necessity. In "Old Women of My Childhood" I am trying to make a voice I believed in in Hungarian believable in English by employing dictions that would occur naturally in combination in the speech of a certain kind of person, a person no longer a character actor but someone whose language is internalized and elevated into poetry. The poem is, after all, a variant on the Browningesque dramatic monologue, more oblique in its manner than, for example, the poem about the drug addict, *Narkomán*. "The poor fools" is my own phrase but seems quite at home in that weave of irony, bathos and disappointment, leading us on to the not too easily achieved pity of the Alice passage. It is true that Karlsbad has been turned into "a German town"—factually wrong of course, but to a British reader the sound

is German and the idea of German towns has a kind of resonance which is useful here. For the poem at large it matters little whether the town is Karlsbad or Dresden or Salzburg or Pressburg, the name has a generalized specificity. It is important to know the cup is a souvenir from somewhere, then we pass on, as the pace of the poem demands we should.

Pace too is vital to the poem, indeed to Rakovszky's poetry as a whole. In my introduction to the English volume I referred to that pace as fast and flittering; I meant like rapid and nervous hand movements or the flight of a bat. Of course there remain individual lines or groups of lines that have to sing vividly in their own right. I am still delighted by the sound of the passage:

> *Meanwhile the clocks chime on and hours unroll*
> *as if time still existed and was somehow theirs*
> *bringing a green-white froth of roseblight to squares*
> *never referred to by new official names,*
> *or twisting snow into apparitional white flames.*

lines which thrill me as English verse. As with the Orbán line I mentioned earlier, I feel both envious of the poet who devised the image, and proud and astonished that the mouth that actually released them into English should have been mine.

These are translator's pleasures and poet's pleasures too. And naturally, like any translator, I am highly fallible, fully aware that my bad work is very bad indeed, willing and able to defend the defensible but not unto the last ditch which would, I am convinced, be a foolish and vainglorious gesture. It is perfectly possible that Karlsbad should have remained Karlsbad, that "the poor fools" should never have entered the poem, that the bits of fluff that cling like snow in "New Life" should have remained simply bits of fluff, since Rakovszky herself never turned them into snow, that the "fife and drum" might have been replaced by something else. The reader has to judge whether the tonal balance of the Hungarian voice corresponds to the balance in my English version. It is enough to say that I believed in these things at the time in exactly the same way as I believe in any other poem, mine or someone else's, and translation—literary translation at least—is no more a precise science than are the arts of reading and listening.

Reading is, or should be, a matter of excitement. A bad translation of a good poem is a bad poem. An overweening and arrogant translation of a good poem into a different good poem is not a translation. In between these polarities are the varieties of reading, listening, intepreting and making. I want the translations of Zsuzsa Rakovszky's poems to thrill me at the same level as her own exciting poems do. Furthermore, I want them to feed me and enrich me. To make me a better poet. In this respect, translation which can and often does appear to be a hopeless chore, is a pleasure and an education. It is also a kind of love affair with the complementary Other whose shadow you have decided temporarily to become. ❧

Pál Békés

The Fort Madison Rodeo

(A Traveller's Tale)

First you've got to find Interstate 80. Then follow it. For a long time. If you start off from the East Coast, for two to three days; from the West Coast, three to four. It all depends on how long you're capable of staying behind the wheel at a stretch. For this you need to be something of a fanatic, but there are plenty of them. Most people start off from somewhere closer. Those who come from the west invariably pass by Omaha and Des Moines, while those who approach Interstate 80 from the north have to pass through Kossuth County, followed immediately by Waterloo. Those coming from the south board a ferry in Warsaw, right on the bend on the Mississippi, and dock twenty minutes later at the town opposite, Alexandria, from where it's just a hop, skip, and a jump. From the east the possibilities are numerous, one crossing after another: Cordoba, Andalusia, Montpelier, Gutenberg. Most people then leave Interstate 80 at Iowa City, drive some fifty miles on U.S. Highway 218, and then, just short of the state line, turn yet again, this time to the east, onto Route 2. In half an hour you arrive in Fort Madison, on the Mississippi, roughly half-way between locks 18 and 19.

All this can be done by train, ship, or plane too, of course. These may be more comfortable; but trains, ships, and planes rarely take horses. And the way to arrive at the Fort Madison Rodeo is with a horse.

Not on a horse, but with a horse, in a horse-box hitched to your dusty Dodge Ram or Ford Ranger, a worn down Oldsmobile Dynasty or Chevrolet Bellevue, a rust-ridden Mercury Grand Voyager, a twenty-year-old Buick Prairie—if you have one horse, that is. If you have more, then you might opt for a semi, whose front looks like a truck, while its rear is a certified horse-transport tent-on-wheels; hitched to this is a motor home and a trailer loaded with bales of oats. But serious breeders rent a serious vehicle, and may even pull their entire stable to

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the scene with an oversized, forty-ton Mack, Kenworth, Peterbilt, or Freigatliner, with predatory hood, spear-like antenna, and a chimney-like exhaust pipe which puffs straight up into the sky.

By the last weekend of September everyone arrives in Fort Madison, in the southeastern corner of Iowa near the Missouri and Illinois statelines. Trucks, motor homes, semis, and trailers cover the rectangular arena which is home to the fiftieth, the Jubilee Tri-State Rodeo. The drone of televisions in the rambling rodeo encampment, which stretches all the way to the lock on the Mississippi, can be heard from the motor homes; the smell of smoke and sausage wafts through the air, the horses hitched to the vehicles, are either burying their heads in the oat trailers or wriggling their haunches carnally while being groomed under the brush.

By evening all is set. Long-haired cowgirls parade round and round the sand-strewn arena on beribboned mares with radiant hair and mane-like tails, spurring them into a gallop, then making them rear up—they are establishing a mood.

With an air of amused superiority this all-knowing Central European sophisticate awaits the start of a spectacle of the *tschikosch-gulasch-party* type aimed at gullible foreigners. The Central European sophisticate is convinced that it has seen all this before. The crowd of thirty thousand on the bleachers is a bit dubious. Perhaps there aren't so many foreigners in such a tiny city after all. All the same, the Central European intellect noses about to validate its superiority. It noses about for the chance to exchange winks with a like mind, and awaits that jovial moment when he can nudge a neighbour in the ribs, as if to say: "What ninnies, huh?" And in reply he gets: "Isn't this just a bunch of baloney?" But there's no one to exchange glances with. Thirty-thousand perfectly blue pairs of eyes consummately unsuited to exchange winks. Thirty-thousand wide-brimmed hats on thirty-thousand blonde heads of hair—so many can't just be wearing them as a joke. Which is to say, if so many are wearing them, it's no longer a joke... it's just gear.

This is not the America that the Central European sophisticate thinks it knows. This is not New York, Washington, San Francisco, Los Angeles; it is neither the East Coast nor the West, but the in-between. Some say this is the real America. Others say this is the part of America that America doesn't need. The prairies. Nothing, in other words. The Midwest. Cornfields seventy-two hours across, as many hours north to south. Countless hogs, even more cattle. (Iowans were thrown into a fever last August: a two-headed pig was born in New Vienna. The news media followed its development day by day, thank God it lived, and now it's a symbol, though just what it symbolizes is yet unclear.)

Here, black people are mostly seen on television only.

Germans, Swedes, Czechs, Irish, and Poles settled hereabouts some one hundred and fifty years ago. Hungarians, too, but they moved on. There are two

Norwegian towns as well. Their ancestors mingled, and brought into being the midwestern farmer: hefty, milky white, beef and corn-fed folk who work from dusk to dawn. Any single family farm is as big as one of the old Hungarian state cooperatives, its fleet of equipment is even bigger; here there's no stopping for a break, only a rodeo now and then. Here, people don't wear checkered flannel shirts and jeans because they're in style, but because these are their clothes; and they don't wear wide-brimmed hats because they saw them in the movies, but because they offer protection from rain and sun. People in these parts don't follow fashion, it was they who became fashion; they don't imitate the movies, the movies are based on them.

Believing them isn't easy. It isn't easy, that is, to believe that all this is true. The Central European sophisticate, used to something quite different, keeps waiting for the revelation, the twist, the punch line. There is none. It awaits the opportunity to muse over the irony of all this, but has no musing partner. Then it gives up, fearing that by pushing things too far it might just run up against a freckled shovel of a palm.

Standing on the podium at one end of the rectangular arena is the MC, the old soldier of rodeos of old, not one for words, speaking in starts into the microphone, following the race for points as displayed on the computer screen, on a first-name basis with all present, or if not, sure acting that way as the competitors wave and the old soldier of rodeos of old nods amiably toward them.

The first event: bareback on an unbroken horse, one hand on the bridle. Eight seconds. Each competitor must last at least this long on his partner, embittered and madly kicking. Somehow on the TV screen—indeed, everyone has seen this sort of thing on TV—it seems easier than from up close, in real life. Although the screen brings the spectacle closer, what can't be seen on television is the foaming mouth, the web of bloody veins across the eyes, rolling in deathly panic; and what can't be felt is that the horse is writhing madly, as if fighting for its life.

Nonetheless, everyone achieves the minimum time apart from Sjörensen, from Illinois, who flies off the horse at 7.4 seconds (Swiss Timing). As if this weren't bad enough for poor Sjörensen, he has sprained his ankle. All the same, he waves defiantly to indicate he won't throw in the towel, but will be starting in the next event as well.

Results are announced for the combined events as well as for the individual. This means Sjörensen's hopes may have been dashed for the combined events, but that not all is lost yet.

Everyone in the next event embarks on their own horse.

This is why they dragged their animals half way across the state, half way across the world. The owners lead horses adorned with ornate saddles, their radiant hair iron-grey and dun, to the stalls at the opposite end of the arena from the MC's podium. Naturally they bring the harnesses along from home. They

simply have them. Or else inherited them. They save them and use them as surely as a run-down Dodge, Buick, Chevrolet—make no mistake about it, what's going on here is not some forced attempt to resurrect dead traditions.

The second event: calf-tipping.

In one stall stands the horse and rider, at the ready. In the other, a well-built calf. Someone gives the calf a good whack on the hind quarters, the door springs open, and the frightened animal gallops frantically into the arena. Exactly a second later the next other stall door springs open, and the horseman follows. The clock starts only now, with the opening of the second door. Once he catches up to the calf, the competitor throws a lasso around its neck and reins in the horse, whereupon the lasso, attached to the massive saddle, tugs mightily on the calf, which twirls about, the rope about its neck. The competitor jumps off the saddle, throws the calf, climbs atop the beast and, using a thong whipped out from his belt, binds two of its legs, either the left foreleg and the right hind leg, or vice-versa. He ties a knot to ensure that the calf can't budge, then springs to his feet and throws his arms into the air: done!

The assistants untie the dizzied calf and drive it out of the arena; they lead away the horse. The next competitor can begin.

The best times are around six seconds. Bergman, from Iowa, is unable to throw the calf on the first try, so instead he bundles it into his arms, lifts it up and throws it to the ground, which, while it draws applause, means lost time. Stolzfuss, also from Iowa, binds all four legs, an achievement akin to winning a beauty contest. The best is Nizinsky, from Missouri. In just 5.4 seconds he buries the calf under himself and ties it in knots. A feat of daring that earns him a standing ovation. (Poor Sjörensen is further hounded by bad luck. After botching the lassoing, and limping he chases the fleeing animal until he finally manages to bring it down, but the twenty seconds that this takes is too much to even fuel hope. More than simply being out of form, sheer amateurism. How we shake our heads, we, the experts.

During the brief intermission that follows, while the organizers get things set for the next event, spectators have a chance to relax. Some buy wide-brimmed hats in the stands set up around the arena; on hand are the finest hatters from the neighbouring towns of Davenport and Burlington. All colours and shapes are available; leather, wool, felt, men's sizes, women's sizes, children's sizes; with mirrors a metre long on hand to check the overall effect. Others stand in line for tacos, nachos, hot dogs and sundry snacks. Beer can be had only within limits—poor, watery beer available for tickets and under police supervision. No drunken brawls, here. Its blue siren flashing, a Ford rolls in behind the arena, a two-meter, overblown giant wriggles out, a dappled kerchief round his neck, a 45 Colt on his side, a silver star on his chest with the words, "Lee County Sheriff." The Central European sophisticate struggles against the temptation to chuckle—"You guys want to sell me this Western nonsense?" it thinks. Only, Fort Madison

is in Lee County, and what's more, counties have sheriffs; besides, his son took part in the calf-tipping event, so his being here is only to be expected, not to mention that it's his job to provide official supervision of beer sales, so, after all, there's no question but that he's got to be here.

The intermission is more spectacular than even the competition, for who makes his appearance, but the King. The king of rodeo clowns. As the MC puts it, the King evokes the golden age of Hollywood through his very own and singular means, and the act he will now perform was a big hit in Las Vegas. At this even the taco and nacho lines thin out, as everyone scrambles back to their seats.

A hole-ridden metal box pulled along by a tiny tractor rolls into the middle of the arena, with the King, that veteran Las Vegas showman in a black costume right behind. His black steed bounds after him from inside a stall, straight out of Zorro. The lovely animal shows off its talents at the sound of a whistle, and more or less knows those tricks those who've visited the Spanish Equestrian School know as well: kneels, lies down, side-steps. An overbred, fragile beauty whose improbably thin ankles are protected by a white bandage, one after another it performs all imaginable moves incompatible with a horse's nature and movements, very nearly doing pirouettes toward the end, then leaves the arena amidst whoops and applause.

All this simply served to establish a mood, however; the real thing begins only now.

The door of the forgotten, hole-ridden metal box now pops up. Five goats stagger out. Sheared like veritable gentlemen, every one of these bearded little beasts blink with the incomprehension of a hopelessly academic, absent-minded professor; they have no idea how they got here. Another whistle prompts a newer creature to gallop out of the metal box. It must originally have been a dog and a monkey, separately that is, but they've now got a bit mixed. A saddle rests on the German shepherd; astride the saddle is a long-tailed monkey, in black cowboy-garb no less—his black-clothed owner's monkey-double. They head off after the goats. The monkey, bound to the dog with an insidious web of strings, so it can't fall off, tilts loosely to the side, forward and back. While performing what seem like impossible horse tricks, this dog-monkey creature pesters the indignantly bleating group of academics, and after three rounds of the arena drives them back into the box as the audience gives a standing ovation.

The highlight comes after the intermission: bull-nagging. Perhaps the most well-known event of all. The object is the same as in the first: one must stay on the animal's back for eight seconds, but now on a saddle, and the competitor can hold on with one hand around the pommel. Let's face it, the competitors have pulled off lamentably poor performances at this, the highlight of the Tri-State Jubilee Rodeo. Only Nizinsky, from Missouri, endures the eight seconds,

and even he does so by a hair. The others fail, and fly. The first to go is Sjörensen, who has thus far succeeded only in garnering the lowest of scores and is in ever-more pitiful condition. Now he ploughs across the arena within a second, smacking against the protective wall like a pat of butter; what's more, if the assistants charged with distracting the bulls weren't equal to their task, the bull in question would trample Sjörensen to boot. When all is said and done, today isn't Sjörensen's day.

The truth is, that on looking closely at such an infuriated mass of flesh, one's inclination to banter seeps away. (Once I tried all the same, silently and in Hungarian, yet I was struck by the uncertain feeling that the bull was raising its tiny, swollen eyes to take a good look at me; I promptly fell silent.)

The rodeo closes on a wholly different note, a free and easy repose, the icing on the cake, the draining off of the weightier events of the day, and at the same time an independent sport, outside the combined events. Nor are the participants the same.

The tiny tractor pulls three empty oil drums to the scene, out of which a pyramid is formed, and the judges set up a laser-timing apparatus on top. No sooner have they done so than the top woman competitor, outfitted in a black hat, red duster, and leather leggings, steams in, her hair fluttering as the chestnut mare underneath her gallops along, well-nigh falling and laying down at sharp turns, then whizzing out of the arena, all this in eighteen seconds.

The cowgirls arrive in succession, all of them with hair hung loose, as if hair-fluttering were obligatory, too, and the hoof tracks plough loops resembling an erratic spider-web around the drums. When all is said and done, this is Missouri's day, the women's equestrian event included.

This year's winner will be someone to reckon with only at next year's Miss Rodeo contest, however. For now the queen is still Jessica Lynn Kokjohn, the winner of last year's women's events. It is her duty to present the awards to the winners of the men's combined and individual events, and after the ceremony, decked out in royal regalia, to receive the faithful in the combined press and beer tent. A vest sewn from an American flag covers her red shirt; a tastefully fitted silver crown sits atop her red hat; and this is not to mention her thick bronze wristband, her heavy bronze belt buckle, the massive spurs on her shiny boots, and the title etched into every single piece of metal adorning her slender body: Miss Rodeo Iowa 1997. A short girl of twenty with classical blue eyes, her face is coated thickly with make-up as she carries out her duty: signing her press photos for all, in which she is posing in the very same costume she now wears. The line meanders before her, she shakes hands with and introduces herself to one and all, and delivers twittering replies to the questions that come her way: she wants to be a kindergarden teacher, yes, so she can begin to instruct even small children in riding. Then she calls the attention of those who bought her photo to the list of sponsors on the back. She can thank them for her outward appear-

ance; for example, the crown was a gift from Trailer Sales, a company which sells horse boxes; the spurs, from the Peter Dodd Threshing and Grocery plant; the wristband from John Ham Elevator Repair and Roofing, the bronze belt buckle from a local car battery and rubber factory. This is not to mention the heap of others without whose support—so she repeats several times—she wouldn't look like she does. Miss Rodeo seems a little nearsighted while signing her name above the photos. With her face and hand quite close together, one cannot help but notice the incongruity: just below the faultless make-up, a pair of rough, red overworked hands whose nails are all but cut and chewed away.

Finale time. The students of Fort Madison pour onto the scene, and a chaotic piece of scaffolding erected on a truck rolls in as well. The students wear blue jeans and white T-shirts; cowboy hats and neckties adorn every one of the approximately one-hundred lovely, healthy, singing fourteen, fifteen, and sixteen year-olds. While singing excerpts from famous Broadway musicals they assume gymnastic formations and perform scenes. They are spitting images of Budapest secondary school students back in the seventies who would present gymnastic formations before the grandstand on Heroes' Square each and every May Day, but to muse on this is Central European maliciousness itself, which fizzles consummately, inexplicably into nothingness on this, the Jubilee Tri-State, Fort Madison Rodeo. And so I watch them; I see red, white, and blue fireworks whiz up into the air from the scaffolding, and listen to the students' spirited rendition of the Star Spangled Banner. I watch as they wave *V*s for "Victory" to the audience, which responds in kind (*we* didn't stoop to such gestures), as the better part of the crowd joins in on the National Anthem, and, well now, who of all people produces the most impassioned bellow? Sure enough, the Shame of Illinois, half-conscious and bleeding from a hundred wounds, Sjörensen. ❧

George Gömöri

Polishing October

Like cleaning a silver bowl years locked away,
the shine of it all tarnished now and spotted:
that's how, Revolution, I clean you.
I won't tell facts about you any longer:
in the October wind the holed-through banners fluttering,
the words fleeing freely, that wild ecstasy,
tanks charging along in terror, their guns firing,
graves for teenagers dug in public squares...
No, what I'll say can be grasped by anyone,
by those not there to see it or born later:
I could never before say the word "Hungarian"
with my head raised so high and with such certainty,
so conscious of my integrity as a human.
I never before had the right to be proud of my nation.
And I'm sure that when at the bar of posterity
are judged the glorious deeds and the pitiful deeds of nations,
I need say no more than "56" and "Hungary"—
and then our countless sins will be forgiven
and if anything survives of us, this will, and will forever.

Translated by the author and Clive Wilmer

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is a Budapest-born poet, translator, critic and scholar living in Britain since 1956 and teaching Polish and Hungarian literature at the University of Cambridge. He has published several volumes of his poems in Hungarian as well as translations of Polish poetry and English translations of Hungarian poems.

László Mravik

Hungary's Pillaged Art Heritage

Part Two: The Fate of the Hatvany Collection

The Hatvanys were amongst the most prominent Jewish families in Hungary. Wealth and culture went hand in hand in this financially powerful and influential clan. Legend has it that their maternal ancestors were influential financiers in Buda in the 15th century, as usurers to King Matthias Corvinus. Shortly afterwards, they moved to Prague and Warsaw, to the lands of the Jagiellons; at the end of the 18th century some of the family resettled in Hungary. The alleged creator of the Golem, the mysterious Rabbi Loew of Prague, also belonged to this family. Paternally, they traced their ancestry to a prominent mid-18th century Great Hungarian Plain family, in and around the town of Cegléd. In the reign of the Emperor Joseph II, at the time of Germanization, being "good Jews", they acquired the name Deutsch. Like the majority of the Jews in Hungary, the Deutsches identified emotionally with the Magyars. The Sterns—a family that produced one of the most valiant soldiers of the Hungarian Revolution and War of Independence of 1848–49, the legendary Sergeant-Major Csillag (the name was already Magyarized)—merged with the Deutsches. The Hatvanys cherished their militant traditions, several of them were of the left in the 20th century, not necessarily as activists but certainly in spirit.

The immense family fortune was founded by Ignác Deutsch, who set up businesses first in Arad, a city on the easternmost fringe of the Great Plain, and later in the rest of the country and in Budapest. Although they owned a great number of businesses, their astronomical wealth was derived mainly from sugar refining, which was truly vertically integrated. They leased and purchased enormous estates on which they grew sugar-beet, financed by their own bank (Ignác Deutsch and Sons) and they were involved in the wholesaling of sugar. Their principal refineries were in Hatvan, Sárvár and Nagysurány. The Treaty of Trianon affected the family only slightly, since their wealth was based upon refineries in the Great Plain and Transdanubia, and upon arable land. Their true home remained the Great Hungarian Plain and Budapest.

The descendants of the rabbis of yore were no longer religious. Many converted to Christianity in one form or another. A number returned to the ancient faith of their family and were looked upon as curiosities. They never denied their

Jewish origins, and in the increasingly fascist atmosphere of 1930s Hungary, they expressed solidarity with poor and persecuted Jews. This much will have to suffice just a glimpse of the individuals and spirit of this great family. The full, detailed history is far more spectacular, and would deserve a volume of its own.

The dispersion and destruction of the Hatvany collections is a late event. The shrinking of most large Hungarian art collections began in the late 1920s, for financial reasons. In the Hatvanys' case, however, their financial position was unassailable, and they continued to collect up to the early 1940s, albeit at a slower rate. The heyday of their collecting was between 1905 and 1914, the golden sunset of Austria-Hungary. The results of this collecting spree survived until 1944–45.

The most famous art collection was that of Baron Ferenc Hatvany (1881–1958), himself a reputable painter. In his villa in Buda, were found outstanding Impressionists—Manet, Renoir, Pissarro, Degas—and also 19th-century French classicists, romantics and realists: Ingres, Chasseriau, Géricault, Delacroix, Corot and Courbet. Nor was the collection short on old masters, with Solario, Tintoretto, Longhi, El Greco and Lucas Cranach the Elder deserving special mention. The most valuable items, both in price and rarity, were two objects: the fragment of a 16th-century animal carpet, and a tapestry showing a coronation scene from Brussels, made around 1500. Of Hungarian paintings, works by Bertalan Székely, Mihály Munkácsy, Károly Lotz, Pál Szinyei Merse, Tivadar Csontváry Kosztka, József Rippl-Rónai, Károly Ferenczy were rightly acclaimed. Ferenc Hatvany's collection numbered some 750 items. The building, a summer house built by the great 19th century Hungarian architect, Miklós Ybl, which housed the collection, was situated on one of the lower bastions of Buda Castle and offered a marvellous panorama of the city. This elegant house was destroyed towards the end of the Second World War. For some time a playground stood on the site, where excavations are currently going on.

Baroness József Hatvany (1884–1964) owned one of the world's largest collections of china, containing the choicest products of Meissen, Vienna, Fulda, Frankenthal, Copenhagen, Derby, Sèvres and other manufacturies. The arrangement of the collection was professional, as was the acquisition policy. The collection, displayed in showcases, numbered well over 1000 items. Several gobelins, old and 19th-century paintings (Lely, Brocky), bronze statues and Jewish liturgical and other religious artworks adorned their baroque town house in Werbőczy (today Táncsics Mihály) utca, which had earlier been owned by the Counts Erdődy. When Beethoven visited Buda, he stayed at this house. Today, after a botched renovation, it houses the Institute for Musicology of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences.

The same building was the home of the interesting collections of Mrs József Hatvany's (Fanni Hatvany) two sons. Apart from his old masters, the core of

Baron Endre Hatvany's (1892–†?) collection was made up by his oriental carpets and rugs, which, though relatively few in number (around 50), were carefully selected from 17th–18th century masterpieces, mainly from Asia Minor.

Baron Bertalan Hatvany (1900–1980), an enthusiastic Orientalist, collected from the Far East, including stone remains and ceramics. The collection was not large, but around 70–80 pieces were extraordinary, including a Parinirvana composition (the dying Buddha with his disciples). Through financing the publication of the literary journal *Szép szó,* he supported possibly the greatest Hungarian poet of the century, Attila József. Bertalan Hatvany published an interesting though controversial book, *Ázsia lelke* (The Soul of Asia) on his oriental journeys and meditations.

The third of Fanni's children, Baroness Lilly Hatvany (1890–1967), owned many Hungarian paintings and some outstanding items of furniture, but these were not widely known. Not an ambitious collector herself, she used her collection to decorate her home in Werbőczy utca.

Baron Károly Hatvany (1863–1943) was known for his first-class china collection, his prize possessions being large ornamental vases made in the Berlin factory at the time of Frederick II of Prussia. His collection of paintings included outstanding Dutch works. He was well-known as a passionate collector of weapons. After his death, his widow administered the collection for some time.

Rightly famous for his patronage of literature in the first place, Baron Lajos Hatvany (1880–1961), the friend of Thomas Mann, Karel Čapek, Arthur Koestler, the patron of Endre Ady, Dezső Kosztolányi and other great Hungarian writers, owned a collection of paintings, in which works by József Rippl-Rónai were the most significant. He also owned a large number of works by artist friends.

Other members of the family collected art but listing them by name would go far beyond the purview of this paper. It is noteworthy, however, that an immense amount of art objects were accumulated in the Hatvany château in Hatvan (formerly owned by Prince Grassalkovich). Here each piece had its own owner. These objects were, however, rarely removed to the family's houses in Budapest. All these taken together constituted the largest family collection in Hungary. In quantitative terms, only the Esterházys could match the Hatvany art treasures, but by the thirties the Esterházys only owned craftwork of great worth, most of their paintings had been dispersed.

It is not all that easy to decide whether Hungary was the ally of Nazi Germany in the Second World War, or its captive. Possibly both. Within this situation Hungarian Jewry were doubly captive: their rights were legally limited, and these limitations after 1942 also affected their property and their lands. At that time, however, the lives of Jews were not yet directly endangered. All this changed fundamentally on 19 March 1944, when the German army occupied Hungary, which had been trying to pull out of the war and was increasingly an unreliable

and reluctant ally of Hitler's. Under Eichmann's direction, a ruthless "de-jewification" commenced. The life and property of Jews were permanently in jeopardy due to the Germans and the Hungarian agencies serving them.

Some members of the Hatvany family had left the country earlier to wait out the end of the war in safety. Many others were forced into hiding, for rich Jews were the choice prey of the Germans. In the darkest months of 1944, Ferenc Hatvany, the greatest collector of the family, as well as Endre Hatvany, had to go into hiding. They could devote only limited attention to their art works, but this care was as thorough as possible under the circumstances. They had to secure them from constant allied bombing, from the pillaging of the Germans and the atrocities of the Hungarian fascists. Not least, with military defeat seeming inevitable to most people, the collections had to be protected from the future occupying forces. Partly to fend off the Germans' looting of art works, the Hungarian government sequestered and collected many of the art treasures in Jewish ownership through an agency called the Jewish Government Commission. Some were understandably wary of this procedure, which suspended but did not cancel the ownership rights, and hid their collections — or at least parts of them—so as not to attract attention. In any case, it was advisable to disperse an art collection and store it in different places.

Ferenc Hatvany packed some 160–165 pieces of his collection in 13 lockers (including the most valuable items) and deposited them at three large banks in Budapest, in the names of two of his employees. Other large works and vulnerable pieces were carefully wrapped and put in the cellar of his house, a few were handed to relatives living in safer locations. A considerable portion of the collection, however, remained in the rooms of his villa in Hunyadi János utca. This building was taken over by Nazi officers, who only admitted the Jewish Commission after much wrangling. They only found some 60 paintings and drawings worth sequestering. The SS officers would not permit the works to be removed into museums. The list is, however, highly valuable because it informs posterity that Courbet's *Wrestlers* and Munkácsy's *Parisienne* were still there at the time. This part of the collection was thus abandoned by Ferenc Hatvany to its fate, as it were. Most collectors were forced to act in this way, since the disappearance of entire collections would have aroused the unwanted curiosity of the authorities.

As several sources reveal, Mrs József Hatvany left the mainstay of her collection, the porcelain items, in the Erdődy-Hatvany mansion, and only the paintings and sculptures were put under lock and key by the Jewish Commission. The choicest pieces were packed in trunks and stored in more protected rooms of the palace. The situation is still not clear, as some recollect that several items were taken over to Pest and deposited in the family's bank—the Hungarian Commercial Bank—in Mérleg utca. The same applies to Bertalan Hatvany's

Oriental art works. Of Lilly Hatvany's collection, only some items were sequestered by the Commission, with most of the furniture remaining in place.

A separate chapter could be written on the fate of Endre Hatvany's treasures. Several of his painings came under the protection of the Jewish Commission, but none of his carpets are even mentioned. Although after 1945 he went to great lengths to recover his lost goods and reported his losses to several authorities, he always kept silent about the rugs. Though it is only a hypothesis that he was one of the successful "treasure-hiders", no other explanation is plausible. The collection found its way to England—possibly with the connivance of Endre Hatvany. Today, most pieces of the old collection belong—true, not *bona fide*—to one of the most famous collectors in London, coincidentally of Hungarian origin.

Károly Hatvany's collections were sequestered by the Jewish Government Commission; his weapons collection was entrusted to the War Museum, which deposited them in a rural storehouse. His paintings and china have vanished almost without trace.

The furnishings of the château in Hatvan remained in place, with only a few pieces taken to Budapest. The local Finance Authority packed the voluminous treasure into crates and shipped them to Budapest accompanied by relatively precise and reliable inventory lists. It was only after this that German troops were stationed in the château, and nothing of great value was left behind by then.

In the spring following the liberation of Budapest, the Ministerial Committee for Displaced Art Works began to take stock of the losses. The list of works taken to the West was easy to compile because consignment lists were available, and so were the lists of sequestered items. The difficult job was to piece together what had been placed in bank vaults, that is the Soviet trophy. Neither the banks nor private individuals could give full information, the former for legal, the latter for various other reasons, one being that they were no longer alive. Some 90–95 per cent of those who deposited their treasures with banks were declared Jews. Hence the Soviet authorities that seized the bank deposits were simply continuing the "work" of the Nazis, with different tools. Despite the difficulties, a volume of lists was compiled of the damage caused by Soviet looting; but after 1948 work on this was stopped, what had been discovered was hidden at the bottom of archives, or destroyed.

That part of Ferenc Hatvany's collection which was placed in bank custody shared the fate of innumerable other treasures. This fact has never been verified item by item, although the archives of Hungarian banks and financial institutions continue to hold the necessary documents. The bulk, perhaps all, of the art works he left in his home were taken away by German officers billeted there, some presumably perished on the spot, or later, in the Mauthner and Kornfeld

villas in Buda, where the Germans stored looted treasures. A small portion of his treasures was later reacquired by the Baron. He promptly smuggled them abroad, with the few exceptions that were sold at home.

All the collections disappeared as discussed below from Fanni Hatvany's house in Werbőczy utca. The same must have happened with the pieces in the bank in Mérleg utca, including the Oriental collection of Bertalan Hatvany. A single item of the latter was later recovered and is now in the Ráth György Museum, but not even the museum knows exactly how it acquired it. Much of the material in the Hatvany-Grassalkovich château was "evacuated" by the fascist Szálasi government to Austria at the end of 1944. A considerable part was returned to Hungary by the American military authorities, in compliance with the Potsdam agreement.

Over the years, a tiny, statistically insignificant number of the art treasures deposited at banks has been found. The amount seized by the specialized art looting units of the Soviet army, the "Economic Officers' Committees", was enormous. The lists were in the archives of the Central Corporation of Banking Companies and the Hungarian National Bank in the 1970s, and are possibly still there. Of these, I chanced upon the documents concerning the Hatvany collections. These suggest that the documents were being worked on in the 1960s and '70s, in the strictest secrecy. They show that the Soviet Union looted all the Hungarian banking institutions and public storehouses upon their arrival, worst hit being the four largest Budapest banks (Hungarian Credit Bank, Hungarian Commercial Bank of Pest, First Hungarian Savings Bank, Hungarian Discount and Exchange Bank). The Hungarian Commerical Bank of Pest was one of the first to assess the losses. Deputy Director Antal Vidoni set up an ad hoc committee in the knowledge of the events. The minutes of the committee's meeting on 20 February 1945 outline a clear picture and have survived. The essential passage reads:

> After the meeting had been opened, the Board established, on the basis of a report by Deputy Director Antal Vidoni, as well as of the personal experiences of Board members, that at the end of January this year a military commission sent by the occupying Russian military authorities appeared in the Bank and opened the strongroom housing the armoured compartments rented by customers and the so-called locked deposits. After this, the above-mentioned Russian military commission—using crowbars—forcibly opened almost all the strongroom compartments, along with the parcels, chests and other receptacles containing the locked deposits. When the Russian military commission had finished its above work, which lasted for some days, it took away almost all the valuables it found in the strongroom compartments, parcels, chests, and other containers, leaving strewn about the place things from the strongroom compartments, parcels, and other containers it did not consider valuable (documents, books, etc.).
>
> Since the sorting of the remaining items has become necessary in order that these may be put at the disposal of their rightful owners, the Board instructed

> Deputy Director Antal Vidoni that he should, with regard to the great quantity of the material and its completely scattered and mixed-up state, by the careful selection and putting to work, under his own personal supervision and control, of bank officials in his own sphere of authority, and with the involvement of Legal Counsellor Dr József Mártony, begin and complete the great work of sorting out everything. It also instructed him to draw up a formal inventory of the material sorted and, on completion of the work, to submit it to the Board, until which time he should make a weekly report to Managing Director Dr György Raisz on the state of the work.

Thus, the Soviets had removed all the valuables by this date, but many documents and other items were left which the bank deemed important to preserve. One can only hope that these can still be tracked down. At any rate, there was some hope in the bank of recovering the objects. So far we have only been able to obtain access to a summary list which enumerates the deposits captured by the Russians. This shows that under 517 separate depository numbers, 916 packing units were seized, including 360 wooden lockers, 178 wrapped parcels (bales, sacks, packages), 316 large suitcases (also travelling chests), totalling 854 deposited items, all possibly containing objects. It is hard to calculate the total number of items. No reliable estimate can be made on the basis of the available information. We can only estimate that about 30 objects were in a single deposit, so the loss of the Commercial Bank must have been 21 to 24,000 works, in which a china cup and a Renoir painting are each an individual item.

Baron Ferenc Hatvany stored his important art treasures in thirteen chests, nine of which were deposited at this bank. Of these, he managed to recover half a chestful. The rest left Hungary. They were not registered at the bank in his name but in the names of two of his employees, János Horváth and Károly Veszely. The occupation troops seized the remaining 4 trunks from the other two banks.

The Soviet authorities carried off all movable items in every bank, beginning with cash, foreign and national currency deposits, the bank's own property, stocks, and bonds. Within a few days they managed to subject the Hungarian economy to their control. Through the National Bank, the Hungarian banking institutes turned to the Minister of Foreign Affairs asking for the restitution of what had been looted. They hoped that the scandalous Soviet action could be remedied through diplomacy. The document was dated 7 May 1945. The central issue was the recovery of the stocks of cash indispensable for the reconstruction of the country. The damage suffered by the leading banks is listed in detail. The weight of the affair is illuminated by the following passage of the document:

> The significance of the subtraction of the monetary assets of credit-granting institutions from the money supply is illustrated by the data given below, which indicate the volume of money present at the Budapest banks at the time the capital was liberated:

Anglo-Hungarian Bank Co. P 22,150.000; Inner City Savings Bank 3,596.102.41; Budapest Metropolitan and Village Savings Bank Co. 60,638.000; Creditanstalt-Bankverein Hungarian Division 4,398.844.30; Motherland Bank Co. 4,087.952.74; Hermes General Hungarian Exchange Office 282.657.19; Central Exchange Office Co. 35.985.50; Hungarian General Banking and Commodity Trading CO. 6.707.10; Hungarian General Credit Bank 114,744.085.40; Hungarian Mortgage and Credit Bank 993.127; Hungarian Discount and Exchange Bank 30,005.000; Hungarian-Italian Bank Co. 17,350.000; National Hungarian Central Savings Bank 30,000.000; National Credit Institute Co. 158.526; National Industry Bank Co. 161.000; National Central Credit Co-operative 11,762.740; First Hungarian Savings-Bank Association of Pest 30,922.383.64; Hungarian Commercial Bank of Pest 73,228.519.64.

Total: P 404,521.630.92*

Thus the total volume of cash removed from the deposits at the major metropolitan monetary institutions equalled 404,521.630.92 P [P = pengő, the Hungarian currency before its replacement by the forint in 1946]. Furthermore, the banknotes held by the metropolitan and provincial branches of the Budapest banks, as well as the stocks of banknotes at other metropolitan and provincial monetary institutions, at public financial offices, at the Town Hall, and at other public authorities all shared the fate of the monetary stocks seized from banks. The subtraction of this vast amount from the supply of money brought about those acute difficulties which are now perceptible primarily in connection with the payment of salaries and civil servant allowances, and which at the same time can be experienced in paying for the tangible assets necessary for production and, generally, in the conducting of product merchandising, while also decisively slowing down the rate of economic advance. Obviously, this is the reason why at present none of the monetary institutions is capable of making even part payments from deposits in savings accounts and bank accounts, which in the case of small depositors, who in social terms would need protection, is leading to critical complications, and which, in connection with the future development of capital accumulation (which has never been adequate in Hungary and which is based on confidence in the monetary institutions) may result in very disadvantageous consequences. [...] This is why we first of all respectfully ask that you speak in an emphatic manner to the Allied Control Commission in order to achieve that the volume of banknotes to be found in the stockrooms of the monetary institutions at the time of the liberation and held by them should once again be at the disposal of the institutions.

The Russian military authorities treated the securities found at the institutions in the same way as they treated the stocks of money, regardless of whether these belonged to the institutes themselves or whether they had been deposited by customers. The result of this has been the emergence of total legal uncertainty because the securities which represent rights in business are at unknown locations and therefore unavailable to their owners. [...]

In addition, we also respectfully request you to endorse, as in the case of the securities, the return of the bills confiscated by the Russian military authorities from monetary institutions located in Budapest.

* These are accounted for in units of 100 Pengő. The total is believed to be virtually the country's entire cash deposits.

They urged measures in conection with valuables of cultural kind and in safe-custody deposits with banks:

> We consider it our obligation to give a report on valuables also, of which the great majority at monetary institutions where our customers rented safe were taken away by the Russian military authorities, as also occurred in the case of customers' deposit-boxes placed in safe custody at the monetary institutions. In connection with the above, permit us to mention that in many cases the recent storage of valuables in safes and deposit-boxes took place primarily in order to protect them from the dangers caused by air-raids, and that often the valuables housed in banks were the most treasured belongings of individuals and families living in moderate circumstances. Apart from this social consideration, it should also be borne in mind that the safety of valuables is an important element in the confidence crucial to the successful operation of a credit-granting organization. With reference to the above, we also kindly request Your Excellency persuasively to address the Allied Control Commission in order to re-establish the rights of the owners of the aforementioned valuables.

The government also tackled the issue, through the Foreign Ministry, the Ministry of Religion and Public Education and the Premier's Office. Béla Dálnoki Miklós, who headed the provisional government, tried to approach the question with great circumspection. He engaged experts, trying to avoid mistakes, although he lost time in this way. He was briefed in detail on the legal ramifications of spoils of war. On this subject, he received an exhaustive and still valid report from Lieutenant General Pokorny of the Armistice Section, Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Let the crucial points be cited here:

> His Excellency the Minister of Finance has requested clarification as to whether the goods in Hungarian public and private possession since the conclusion of the armistice agreement can be regarded as spoils of war.
>
> It gives me pleasure to answer the aforementioned question as follows.
>
> An armistice concluded by belligerents by mutual agreement merely interrupts warfare, and does not eliminate the state of war. Therefore, during the period of the validity of an armistice, international law regulations appropriate under a state of war remain legitimate between the contracting nations, naturally with certain modifications included in the armistice agreement in question. [...] Furthermore, the Hungarian-Russian armistice agreement uses the term "spoils of war" only once, in Clause 7, as follows: "The Government and Supreme Headquarters of Hungary undertake the obligation to provide the Allied (Soviet) Headquarters with all German military equipment, including the ships of the German Fleet, as spoils of war."
>
> The regulations of international law concerning land warfare are contained in the Appendix of the 4th Hague Treaty of 1907 (codified as Article 43 in 1913). Hereinafter we list the regulations of international law valid for the utilizations applicable for the invading powers with reference to the Hague criteria. [...]

As general rule it is forbidden—whether in the case of state-owned or private property—arbitrarily to confiscate or destroy property unconnected to the waging of war. On the other hand, if it is done to meet requirements or demands made by the waging of war, then the equitable confiscation and utilization of property, and in special cases the exercising of full command over it, can be regarded as just.

Private property is afforded special respect and therefore cannot be confiscated (Article 46).

The protection of property is complemented by the regulation strictly prohibiting any kind of looting (Article 47). This is applicable even when the attacking military occupies fortified sites or towns after a siege (Article 28). [...]

d) Assets of settlements and assets belonging to institutions of religious, charity, public education, cultural and scientific organizations must be treated by an invading army in the same way as private property, even when these assets belong to the State. Obviously, if war objectives justify it, they may also be used for military purposes on a temporary basis. For example, troops can be billeted in schools, hospitals can be set up in convents, etc.

Apart from this temporary utilization, the general rule is that seizure and destruction of such and similar institutions, as well as that of monuments of historic, artistic or scientific value, is most strictly prohibited and is punishable. (Article 56).

On the basis of this report, the legal situation regarding looted artworks was unequivocal. This launched a summary listing of actual damage, the task being assigned to the officials of the Ministry of Religion and Public Education. Since, in hope of survival, the banks kept silent, they tried to get information from the aggrieved persons and some bank clerks informally, as well as from persons who were in contact with the Soviet trophy brigades. In early August, the ministry drafted a summary report, possibly for the government. It is dated 3 August 1945. Let the relatively short but important text be cited here in full:

SUMMARY PREPARED BY THE MINISTRY OF RELIGION AND PUBLIC EDUCATION ON THE WORKS OF ART REMOVED FROM THE VAULTS OF BUDAPEST BANKS BY THE RED ARMY

I. List of the Banks in Question and Catalogue of the Items Deposited at These Institutions

Pesti Magyar Kereskedelmi Bank (Hungarian Commercial Bank of Pest). This was where the many important documents of the 400-year-old Sárospatak College were stored, namely 124 items of old printed material, unique books, rare books and manuscripts, including the oldest register of students the College possessed. Paintings belonging to Adolf Wertheimer, a resident of Budapest, by old Hungarian masters Kupeczky, Bertalan Székely, Barabás, László Paál, Károly Ferenczy, Benczúr, Lotz, et al., and two boxes of porcelain. The paintings and other items belonging to János Horváth and Károly Veszely consisting of old Hungarian masters and tapestries. The painter Aurél Bernáth also deposited here, in two boxes,

pastels by himself, documents and a list of his works. Also, 150 drawings belonging to Bertalan Neményi, Hungarian paintings: Csontváry, Gulácsy, etc.

A part of the medallion collection belonging to Sárospatak College and a large number of very valuable old and rare Hungarian books were stored at the Első Hazai Takarékpénztár Részvénytársaság (First Hungarian Savings Bank Co.)

Under the name of János Horváth, several paintings, tapestries and smaller works found shelter in the steel vaults of the Magyar Általános Hitelbank (Hungarian General Credit Bank). Dr Andor Ulmann also stored his old paintings, carpets and collection of antiques at this place.

Dr Károly Veszely deposited several of his paintings, tapestries and other valuables in the vaults of the Leszámitoló és Pénzváltó Bank Rt. (Discount and Exchange Bank Co.)

II. The Circumstances Under Which the Items Were Taken into Custody and Their Current Locations, According to the Data Available.

According to the information obtained, the valuables found there were taken away from the Pesti Magyar Kereskedelmi Bank by soldiers of the Russian Front Committee in Hungary, quartered at Kőbánya, Állomás u. 1.

The head of the detail was Guards Major Kozlov, and, after his departure, the removal of the items was directed by a political commissar with the rank of first lieutenant. Description of the latter: tall with black hair, crooked nose and his uniform was made of elegant extra-fine material. He was seen recently in Budapest, with his head now shaved. During the course of the work connected with taking the items under protection, Colonel Susmanovich was to be seen in the bank on many occasions. Throughout the entire time it was going on, a bank director from Moscow was present. His description: dark face, tall, corpulent, probably of Jewish origin and with a good command of German. According to our information, his name may be Sadukov.

The clearing of the Első Hazai Takarékpénztár Részvénytársaság took place in similar manner and at approximately the same time. The above-mentioned bank director from Moscow was present, who, according to information from those there, is the director of the Soviet National Bank. Also in attendance was a Russian soldier by the name of Vladimir Surkovsky (?), who is 28 years old and an accountant at a sugar refinery in Odessa. He is at present serving in Buda at the Pilsudszky út headquarters or at the Central Headquarters in Attila út. The name of another Russian soldier who was also present: Ivan ..... . He is performing guard duties at the headquarters in Veres Pálné u. He has one eye, his right eye being constantly covered with a black patch. The above-mentioned bank director from Moscow is also stationed in Budapest.

The listing of the above persons has become necessary so that, with their assistance, we can establish more accurately than hitherto the present whereabouts of the items in question, since, according to the indications, it was this detail which undertook the removal of the items placed in all the above banks.

According to our information to date, the items taken away from the monetary institutions listed above were taken to the following locations:

Hungarian Mint, Üllői út,

Francis Joseph Infantry Barracks, Üllői út,

Russian City Headquarters, Múzeum u. 11.,
Vaults of the Magyar Általános Hitelbank,
Vaults of the Pénzintézeti Központ (Centre for Monetary Institutions).

Verification of the identity and the supplementing of the list with the help of the detailed notes in our possession would necessitate on-site inspections. We request that our representative should be able to inspect the items sought and asked back at the locations listed.

János Horváth and Károly Veszely have already been mentioned. All the data in the document that can be checked today are authentic. It can be made out from the text that the Russians worked with precision, and although they were non-committal, they were not unfriendly. However, since the looting of the banks the authorities had failed to regain anything, and the word spread that preparations were going on for shipping the spoils out of the country. Therefore, the Minister of Religion and Public Education, Géza Teleki, wrote a letter dated 3 August 1945 to Marshal Voroshilov, the Chairman of the Allied Control Commission in Hungary:

We are aware of those efforts of the Soviet Union which are worthy of being followed and which aim to maintain and strengthen the cultures of small nations, and we know that cultural treasures are deeply respected in the Soviet Union and are under protection. Conscious of all this, we take the liberty of submitting the following request.

Because of the dangers of war, various scientific and educational institutions and private persons deposited famous and historical cultural material in the safes and strongrooms of Budapest banks. These cultural treasures were taken into custody by the liberating Red Army, and are still in custody today.

The collections and works of art in question represent irreplaceable national treasures, including unique books and manuscripts, as well as works of historical value by Hungarian painters and goldsmiths.

Some of these items were deposited in the safes of banks, the names of which are given on the attached list. The list also includes the destinations to which, according to the data available, the Red Army had them transferred from the places where they had been.

At the same time, we also indicate the circumstances under which the Red Army took them into custody, and we also identify their likely locations at present.

The forfeiture of these items would be an irreplaceable loss for democratic Hungary, which is under construction but which is still weak. We can reconstruct our destroyed bridges and make good all the other devastation caused by the barbarous fascists, but if our artistic treasures of historical value are lost, these we cannot replace. The items in question do not represent any war objective, and their monetary value internationally could hardly be termed significant. Yet the books are indispensable for purposes of scientific research. Owing to their enormous national value, we request that they be returned to the Hungarian State and to their owners.

We hope that the Soviet Union, which is the supporter of the culture and the friendship of peoples, will address this question in the manner requested.

The letter makes no reference to the documents and conventions of international law. The Allies of the Soviet Union would have taken a dim view, since at that time (and ever since) an allied power was (and is) not to be defamed as trampling the law underfoot. There is a clumsy slip in the letter where it speaks about the modest international money value of the seized objects. The amount was of course modest compared to an entire national economy, but as a sum total in the art market, it was very considerable. True, this was possibly not so clearly seen at that time as today. The letter reached Voroshilov too late. Had it got to him earlier, it would not have changed matters—as can be said with hindsight. The next day a senior clerk, János Szentmihályi, wrote down a memorandum for his superiors on his personal experience at the largest art work depository used by the Russians. All he could do was to register the disappearance and destruction of works of art. To quote:

> Today I went out to the former Francis Joseph—currently János Kiss—Infantry Barracks. I established that art treasures and art objects taken into custody by the Red Army had been stored in the two warehouses at the barracks, from where they were carried away during the course of July this year. The crates and containers were burnt in the courtyard, and around the places where the fires were there is still an enormous amount of broken porcelain and faïence. According to information from the officials there, the things stored in the warehouses had, to the best of their knowledge, been brought there from the Kereskedelmi Bank (Commercial Bank) and the Hitelbank (Credit Bank), and at the time mentioned above had been loaded onto trucks and taken away to an unknown destination. The material found there is absolutely without value, consisting as it does of small fragments. Nevertheless, from the point of view of searching out the owners and the safekeeping of items of greater value which might still be found, I would recommend that the fragments be gathered together in a place in which they can be afforded the appropriate protection.

A sad confirmation of all this comes from the lines of chief archivist Pál Szabó, addressed to the management of the Hungarian Commercial Bank of Pest on 5 August 1945:

> In the afternoon of August 14, 1945 the wife of the painter Aurél Bernáth called on me. She informed me that the Russians had pulled out of the Francis Joseph Cavalry Barracks, where the Russian army had been keeping valuables taken from Hungarian banks. She said that some valuables could nevertheless still be found there. On instructions from Managing Director Dr Lányi and Legal Advisor Gullya, together with Company Secretary Hidassy I immediately went out to the barracks to ascertain the correctness of the above. Mme Aurél Bernáth, who was looking for valuables of her own taken from our strongrooms, came with us.
>
> József Papp, the barracks manager, and Ödön Jarovszky, a plumber, declared the following. Under the direction of Lt. Mozichenko and Capt. Girulnik, the Russian

commission gathered at the barracks valuables from a number of Budapest banks, but mainly from the Commercial Bank. The sorting of these went on for many months. Silver items were melted down at the mint in Üllői út to make silver bars; those paintings that found favour were taken away, while the rest were burnt on a bonfire in the yard. This was the fate of the Wertheimer and Baron Hatvany collections, along with many other treasures—for example, porcelain, stamps, items of clothing, photographs, documents, etc. At our request we were shown the remains of the bonfire in the barracks yard, and found an enormous quantity of broken porcelain, smashed glass, half-burnt documents, photographs and stamps. Amongst the remnants of one chest Company Secretary Hidassy recognized deposits by our customers, and we also found customers' papers, along with correspondence and records. Everything was strewn all over the place, crumpled up, torn into strips or even mouldered away by the rain. Naturally, we found nothing that was undamaged or of any value. Most of the stamp collections had been burnt; many had been handed out in the barracks and lay scattered around in the yard.

Apparently the Russians pulled out of the barracks approximately three to four weeks ago. Accompanied by some officials, Company Secretary Hidassy will go out to the barracks again in order to collect together surviving documents, accounting records, porcelain fragments, etc., and to bring them to the bank.

We are reduced to hoping that the statement about the silverware only applies to commercial items and not to art treasures. Only the Soviet authorities could resolve this dilemma but they are tight-lipped. Seeing that the Foreign Ministry and the cultural authorities had failed, knowing that private persons had also failed, the Prime Minister's office decided to take steps. The Premier wrote the following letter—again addressed to Marshal Voroshilov:

Priceless treasures of Hungarian culture were lost as a result of the enormous thefts by the Germans and by the Arrow-Cross, and of the sieges and hard-fought battles in different parts of the country. For a long time to come, art collectors in Hungary will be unable to consider replacement of these treasures, or the acquisition of new collections, because they themselves are very much impoverished, having been robbed many times over during eighteen months of disasters.

In connection with the fate of Hungarian art treasures, may I please call your attention to the following:

Treasures from a number of outstanding private collections came into the hands of the Soviet army of liberation from among the Hungarian art treasures stored in the vaults of the larger banks. Through the Society of the Friends of Art Museums, the owners of these collections have declared that should their collections be returned, they would give certain selected pieces to the Hungarian Museum of Fine Arts.

Knowing your fine attitude towards Hungary and Hungarian art treasures, I turn to you with the request that you do us the honour of facilitating the return of many valuable and irreplaceable treasures of Hungarian fine arts culture.

This noble endeavour would significantly mitigate the serious losses caused by the German and Arrow-Cross thefts, for which Hungarian culture would be very thankful to its great benefactor.

These treasures are timeless treasures of Hungarian fine arts culture, and their irretrievable loss would be very painful, especially on top of the many great and irreplaceable losses which have afflicted its stock of art treasures during the past year.

I therefore request you, Marshal, to do us the honour of making it possible, through your decision, for the nation to recover a part of its cultural treasures.

On 19 March 1947, Ferenc Hatvany submitted a new report about the contents of his trunks stolen from the banks. This list only contained the items deemed by Hatvany to be highly valuable or personally significant but it was accurate enough for the authorities to form a picture of what the Soviets had looted of Ferenc Hatvany's property. Also, as of that year, the Hungarian government was entitled to lay claim to the looted treasures, for on 10 February 1947 the Hungarian peace treaty had been signed in Paris and its relevant articles substantiated the rightfulness of the claim. The treaty fixed the extent of the war damage reparations (where naturally no word is said about seized works of art), and it also laid down what the Soviet Union had no right to claim. Article 23 of the Peace Treaty signed in Paris in 1947 obliged Hungary to pay $300 million in war reparations, two-thirds of which had to be paid to the Soviet Union. This, of course, took no account of the valuables carried off from the banks. In addition, Hungary had to pay very precise compensation with regard to property owned by citizens of the Allied and Associated Powers. Among such persons were included former Hungarian citizens who had left the country as refugees. Other measures handed over German property in Hungary to the Soviet Union, and provision was also made for the temporary or permanent Soviet requisitioning of additional, Hungarian goods, landed property and other assets. However, the Peace Treaty exempted the property of those who had been discriminated against on the above mentioned grounds, and upheld rights relating to literature and art. (These favourable clauses in the Peace Treaty have to this day not been enforced.)

The year 1948 entered the history of Hungary as the infamous "year of the turn". The vestiges of democracy were abolished, and from that date on, Hungary became a *de facto* colony of the Soviet Union, without autonomous political action, as servants of Moscow were the holders of every office. Political and police terror stifled all dissidents. Every significant decision concerning Hungary was taken in Moscow. No step for restitution could be imagined under these circumstances.

In Germany, compensation for the possessions of the Jews lost in the war was as stipulated by the peace treaties. However, procedures concerning the largest fortunes and indemnification for each country were progressing slowly because of the difficulties of obtaining evidence, and the problematic testimony of witnesses.

Edgar Degas: After Bathing ("Woman with a Towel"), *with the stamp of the Degas Estate. Now in Russia. Pastel, presumably on cardboard, 75.5 X 50 cm (or 75 x 47.5 cm).*

Up to his death in 1958, Baron Ferenc Hatvany took no steps to seek compensation for the damage he had suffered. Several reasons possibly accounted for that. First, he was aware that the most valuable part of his collection had been taken by the Soviets. Second, he himself had sold possessions he had taken out of the country illegally, so no compensation was possible there. Third, he had recovered the latter objects from the Russians in a highly peculiar manner, about which he was not eager to testify in a court. Fourth, he and members of his family were all involved in smuggling works of art, which is illegal even if the smuggled objects were their own. Apart from these, he might have had other personal reasons which are not known to me.

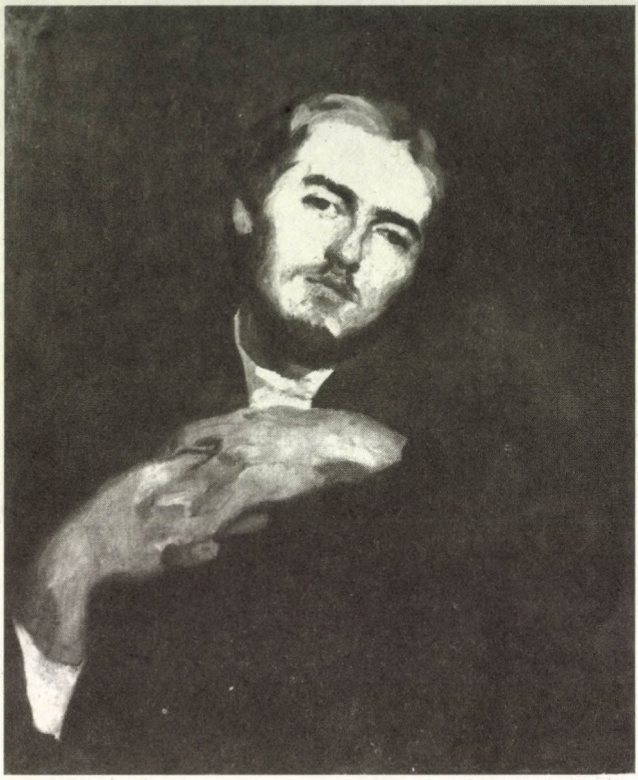
After his death, his family, partly upon the encouragement of an advocate, Dr Hans Deutsch, submitted their claim and negotiations began with the German authorities. Various amounts of money were wrangled about on the basis of the evidence submitted. Eventually, the agreement between the German state and the family settled on a sum of DM 35 million to be paid in two instalments, the first being due immediately. The case was prepared with the utmost meticulousness. Besides minor items, the compensation was for three major units: Ferenc Hatvany's art collection, Mrs József Hatvany's china collection and the furnishings of the Hatvany-Grassalkovich château. Before the second instalment was due, however, the German authorities received information suggesting that several art treasures formerly in the Hatvany villa in Buda and the china in the Hatvany-Erdődy palace had not been looted by the Germans. The information seemed reliable and the case was brought to trial. Previously, Dr Deutsch had been summoned to the Federal Ministry of Finance to collect the second instalment of 17.5 million. This, however, was a simple trap: Deutsch was arrested and remained in detention for over eighteen months.

The investigators went back to the restitution cases begun in 1945 and called the available German officers interrogated at that time for a second hearing.

The drawing room of the Lónyai-Hatvany villa, with pieces from the collection of Baron Ferenc Hatvany, which are now in Russia.. Above the mantelpiece: The Wave *by Gustave Courbet. Signed, dated 1870. Oil on canvas, 70 x 102 cm. On the right:* Conversation *by Auguste Renoir. Signed, painted before 1879. Oil on canvas, 44,5 x 36,5 cm. Above the table on the left:* Portrait of Mariette Gambey *("*La Songerie de Mariette*", or* Méditation*) by Camille Corot. Signed 1869–70. Oil on canvas, 80 x 59 cm. (or 80 x 58.5 cm), and paintings by Ingres and Chasseriau.*

They also found Hungarian witnesses who could provide new information about the collections, primarily army officers who had been billeted in buildings owned by the Hatvanys in Buda in late 1944. They also contacted the Hungarian authorities, suspecting that the most credible data could well be stored away in Budapest. They were not mistaken, but the Hungarian financial agencies were Janus-faced, to say the least, in their attitude. They did take a thorough look at the case, to do them justice, and several documents were written. One of them is a memorandum dated 1 February 1966, which clearly characterizes the atmosphere and carries a wealth of information. The document sums up the facts in 12 detailed points and draws the conclusion:

In answer to the question put by the OMGUS (Office of US Military Government Department) for the Restitution of War Objects in its letter dated June 28, 1948, Friedrich Wilcke former SS officer replied, on July 2, 1948, that the contents of the mansion at Werbőczy u. 7 were completely intact when he left Budapest on December 23, 1944. He later stuck to this assertion, with the modification that the OMGUS letter had asked only



Károly Ferenczy: Portrait of Béni Ferenczy *(Béni with a Beard). Painted at Nagybánya, 1912. Now in Russia.*

about the glass and porcelain collections, and that, with the exception of these collections, the Germans had taken all art works to Munich via Vienna.

It seems from the record of the interrogation made on July 31, 1961 (Point 4) that the OMGUS letter of June 28 was not, and perhaps still is not, in the hands of the State Prosecutor's Office. Here we would refer to the fact that the OMGUS letter sent to G. Glasen (Point 5) was word-for-word the same as the one sent to Wilcke. Accordingly, we have two pieces of evidence considering that, in the letter in question, OMGUS asked Wilcke not only about the porcelain collection, but about the picture collection, too.

Wilcke arrived in Budapest, where he had been stationed, in March 1944. According to his statement of July 25, 1961 (Point 3), in the mansion in Werbőczy utca he saw, among the rugs covering the floor, an Ispahan rug'. (This was one of te oldest of the oldest and most valuable carpets in the world.) Wilcke's statement does not correspond to the facts, since Ferenc Hatvany had deposited this Ispahan rug, packed into Chest No. XIII, in the vaults of the Commercial Bank. Chest No. XIII disappeared in the first week of February 1945, along with the other chests kept there. We would remark that, according to Bank records, the chests deposited at the Credit Bank and at the Discount Bank came into the custody of these banks in September 1942 (Point 7, a–b). It can therefore be supposed that the chests at the Commercial Bank were deposited at about the same time. As we have already stated, the archive material of the Commercial Bank has passed to the Veszprém archive of the National Bank of Hungary, and it is to be hoped that during the planned sorting of the data in March we shall be able to find information regarding the precise time of the deposit.

Hatvany's brother-in-law András Nagy, a former captain of gendarmes, also believed he saw this rug in the villa—although not—as did Wilcke—on the floor, but hanging on a wall. In his statement he mentioned that he and his wife had "intimate knowledge" of the Hatvany family's private and business affairs. It seems

strange that, being in possession of confidential information of this kind, he did not know that the Ispahan rug was deposited with a bank and was not hanging on a wall.

Courbet's *Les Lutteurs* mentioned by Wilcke could not have reached Germany. It was not deposited with a bank, but was taken to the Mauthner villa in Budakeszi út, where, according to Hatvany's information, it was rescued before the villa burnt down (Point 6). The picture is currently in the Hungarian National Museum.

Neither could Wilcke have seen Courbet's *Femme nue couché* painting in the Hatvany mansion, because this picture had been deposited at the Credit Bank in September 1942 (in Chest No. II), and passed out of the bank's custody only in February 1945. The same goes for Corot's painting *Portrait de Madame Mariette,* insofar as the picture is the same as the picture indicated by Hatvany as *Kékruhás nő—Songerie de Mariette* (Point 6/b).

We would also mention that in the claim lists submitted to the Americans (Point 10) we could ask back only those art objects on whose fate Hatvany was unable to give information to the ministerial commissioner entrusted with finding art objects which had been taken away. It is therefore probable that these were taken to Germany. No works by Manet, Courbet and Corot were among them. On the other hand, those art objects on the whereabouts of which Hatvany gave information in his letter in question we could not claim back, since these did not leave the territory of the country.

This document provides posterity with a host of important facts. The most momentous of them is stated at the end, i.e., the Russians had the lion's share

Coronation scene (Triptych). Brussels workshop, perhaps Maître Philippe Cartonnier, early 16th century. Tapestry, wool, 324 x 525 cm. Now in Russia.

in eliminating the Hatvany collection. It is also obvious that the documentation concerning the art booty has been preserved by the institutions; this material is still not accessible to scholars. It is curious that the Hungarian agencies knew more about the cases than the Germans both in general and in particular, and also, that the American authorities, who were more or less as competent as the Hungarians, did not help the Germans. It is also hard to understand Friedrich Wilke's wavering: one true, one false, and another true testimony. There is no knowing who got him to commit perjury. It is not impossible that his volte-face in favour of the Hatvany family was not without self-interest. Most probably, however, his action was motivated by an irrational drive to make amends, by the bad historical conscience of Germans in relation to the Jews. It is made clear by the document that the huge collection of Mrs József Hatvany was not seized by the Germans. The Soviet agencies, however, transferred a multitude of chests from her mansion in Werbőczy utca, for which there is eye-witness confirmation. Moreover, when the banks in the capital were being looted, the Deutsch-Hatvany family bank was also temporarily controlled by the Russians.

The remainder of the documents make it clear that the Hungarian authorities were ready to help their German counterparts. The collaboration was, however, tainted by the fact that this help had to remain selective, for the sheer size of the art theft committed by the Red Army in 1945, and even later, in Hungary, was never revealed. The Hatvany case dragged on, becoming a Europe-wide scandal. As late as 1971–72 it was still being investigated. At that time, German–Hungarian relations were massively improving, which explains the helpful fidgets hidden behind the Hungarian official's lines.

The investigation in Veszprém mentioned in the above document did take place—though two years later, in 1968. The full documentation of the nine Hatvany chests deposited there was found.

A year later, János Horváth, who was authorized to act on all matters of the Hatvany deposits, made a statement. He revealed a curious instance, which entangled the threads even more intricately, clarifying a few things and dimming the fate of others even more. It reads:

> As the treasurer of the Ignác Deutsch and Sons Co., and the administrator of company member Ferenc Hatvany's private affairs for decades, as someone familiar with his collection, I bear witness to the following:
>
> In the summer of 1946, Ferenc Hatvany was visited at his apartment in Mérleg utca, district V, Budapest, by a Hungarian man unknown by name. He offered Ferenc Hatvany the chance to buy back some pictures from the vanished collection which were important to him. He asked a uniform 10,000 forints per picture. Ferenc Hatvany discussed this offer with me as his confidant and the treasurer

of his company. He asked if he could draw a voluminous sum from his account for this purpose. The then company director, Endre Hatvany, only consented to 100,000 forints, thus Ferenc Hatvany could only buy back ten pictures. If I remember right, the repurchased pictures included:

1 Delacroix (Arabian camp)
1 Ingres (nude)
2 Courbets (a lying nude, the origin of the world)
2 Manets (1 woman with a dog, 1 suicide)
1 Renoir (woman in a pink dress)
1 Marées (self-portrait, or the dead hero)
1 K. Markó (forest landscape)
I can't remember the tenth painting.

In February 1947, Ferenc Hatvany left the country and as far as I know, he had sent the pictures abroad prior to this. His messages from Paris let me know that he sold 3 or 4 of these paintings. To my knowledge, the rest of the pictures are still in the possession of the family.

Certification on the reverse:
For domestic use. Ref. no.: 60581/1969
I herewith certify that pensioner János Horváth, a resident at 11 Mérleg utca, Budapest V., who has identified himself with his identification card, signed the document on the other side in his own hand, in my presence.

Budapest, 1969, 27 June

Dr Pál Török, State Notary

Ferenc Hatvany certainly got back his Delacroix and Ingres, one of his Courbets, Manet's *Suicide,* Marées's *Self-Portrait.* But he could not recover the rest, and probably many of the claimed artworks went to the Soviet Union, including Courbet's *Nude in White Stockings* and Manet's *Mary Laurent* (the latter was seen in the Grabar Institute of Restoration in Moscow). It is unknown who the "unnamed Hungarian", the go-between, was. He was presumably one of the Hungarians employed by the Red Army. It should be noted that there is not a single reference to the Red Army in the statement.

The German and the West European mass media in general, had a lot to say on this notorious scandal, with frequent mentions of the sticky fingers of the Soviets. The other side of the press, by contrast, put the blame for the disappearance of the entire Hatvany collection on the Nazis. A book was also published in Germany based on this theory, and several Hungarian witnesses also confirmed this (including a certain Dr Szilvay, who dealt with Jewish property cases in Budapest in 1944, but his testimony shows a dilettante historian and superficial official). It cannot be accidental that the Soviet agencies deemed it necessary to return an insignificant fragment of the booty to Hungary, including objects from Ferenc Hatvany's collection. The Soviets, incidentally, lied at the

time to the then Hungarian government on the origin of the art objects. The document below confirms this:

Confidential! To Comrade Gönyei, for his information. Please turn to Comrade Orbán. (signed) Ilku. VII. 31

Comrade György Aczél,
Member of the Political Committee, Secretary of the Central Committee,
Budapest

Dear Comrade Aczél,

Today I received a visit from Comrade Pavlov, the Soviet Union's Ambassador to Budapest. He told me that in the Berlin area at the end of the war many paintings came into the hands of the Soviet army of liberation. These were taken to Moscow, and in the course of time it was established that fifteen of these paintings (I enclose the list of these which was handed over) may have been owned by Hungarian citizens, and that the paintings may have reached Germany from Budapest.

The Ambassador informed me that the Soviet Government has decided to return these paintings to the Hungarian state.

The Ambassador asked us to send to Moscow a team of a few specialists which could look at the the paintings and discuss the question of their handover and acceptance with the Soviet Ministry of Cultural Affairs.

I propose:

1. It would be good if you could acknowledge this fraternal gesture in a letter to Comrade Gemichev.
2. We should send out a team of two or three people as early as August and, with the involvement of our embassy in Moscow, agree with the Cultural Affairs Ministry there on the circumstances for the handover.
3. When the paintings reach Budapest (depending on their state), we should hold an exhibition, on the occasion of which the press should write about this fraternal gesture.

Budapest, July 31, 1971

With comradely greetings,
(Pál Ilku)

The phrase "these might have been owned by Hungarian citizens and the paintings may have reached Germany from Budapest" is a Soviet fabrication, on which they have insisted to this day. The documents, however, unambiguously reveal that the plundering was the Soviets' doing. What is more important here is that the Hungarian government naturally wanted to give ample publicity to the "generous gesture", but it was stopped by Moscow and the whole material was classified (as it still is). The Russians must have realized early on that were the action to become public, many other abuses of theirs might be inquired into. The last relevant letter to be cited was written upon higher orders,

contradicting his own previous opinion, by the head of a ministry division to the director of the Museum of Fine Arts:

Comrade Dr Klára Garas, Director-General,
Museum of Fine Arts — Top Secret!

Dear Comrade Garas,

I hereby inform you that six paintings belonging to the collection profile of the Museum of Fine Arts can be taken over from Head of Department Dr /.../ at the Hungarian National Gallery. The pictures must be inventorized at the Museum of Fine Arts. The Ministry of Culture and Public Education must be indicated as their source. Since among the pictures there may be some whose ownership has not yet been clarified, I ask you to be so kind as to establish, as a matter of urgency, which these are and what sort of prices should be set for them in the event of purchase. Please send your report on this directly to me by January 1, 1973. Supplementary information must not be given to the press or to outside persons, but those pictures which unequivocally belong to the Hungarian state may be used in exhibitions. Obviously, since the pictures need to be restored, they will not all be exhibited at one time. Hans Canon's *Portrait of a Woman* should not be exhibited for the time being, and should you wish to exhibit it, please inform me in advance. The possible issuing of publications /on these paintings/ serving scientific or educational purposes may occur only after the final settling of the ownership question.

I ask you to be so kind as to send to me—directly, as above—the inventory numbers of the pictures after inventorizing has taken place.

Budapest, November 8, 1972

With comradely greetings,
(Antal Gönyei)
head of division

Much kneading and moulding was done even later. The documents were surrendered to a private person involved in the Hatvany case, who passed them on to the German authorities for 150,000 DM. He then duly handed over this sum to the appropriate Hungarian authority. At last, the Germans learnt the truth and a court judgment could be issued. No second instalment of the indemnity was paid. The Hatvany family went quiet. Only Hungarian culture, however, received nothing but blows, from both East and West. ❧

APPENDIX

The more important of the collections deposited with banks, together with their short description

The modest remains of the once enormous Andrássy collection were deposited with banks by the heirs of Count Gyula Andrássy. This material included pictures by Ján Kupezky, J. M. W. Turner, Claude Monet, Jules Dupré, Mihály Munkácsy and László Paál. Dr Gyula Bencze was inclined to collect Hungarian paintings, and these were not always of the first order, although a Raphael canvas owned by him qualifies as significant. The painter Aurél Bernáth deposited about a dozen of his own works in a bank, principally those of which he had the highest opinion. Henrietta Bíró's rich collection of Hungarian and foreign paintings disappeared the same way. It included works by 17th-century Dutch and Italian masters and also outstanding pieces by Nagybánya artists, including very fine pictures by Károly Ferenczy. Among the almost exclusively Hungarian pictures belonging to Dr László Brázay were a number of family portraits, by representatives of the Late Academic trend. The careers of a number of valuable pieces from the home of Dr Ferenc Chorin also ended in a bank vault, among them outstanding pieces by Jan van Goyen, Millet, Daubigny and Sisley. Of the few distinguished pieces belonging to Dr Pál Fellner, special mention should be made of a Courbet painting and a Munkácsy painting. The former, an important work by the great French master, has been sought in vain ever since. In all probability Dr Fülöp Grünwald's Jewish liturgical objects were not a private collection, but belonged to a synagogue that had been closed; they were placed in a bank vault in the belief that they would be safe there. Baron Sándor Harkányi, the heir to a celebrated family of art collectors, entrusted just a few important works to the banks. These were mainly his Dutch pictures, among which a work by Gabriel Metsu was especially worthy of note, but there were also fine works by Ruysdael, Raeburn, Lenbach, Markó and Munkácsy. The owner's father, Frigyes Harkányi, was a friend of Munkácsy, who dedicated a number of paintings to him. No mention shall be made of the Hatvanys here. Mme Henrik Herz's collection consisted mainly of old ceramics and silver, but her Oriental treasures were also worthy of note.

In addition, a large number of items intended for sale were deposited with the banks. It is very unclear how large the deposits by the Baron Herzog family were. Today we can say with certainty that the Budapest Court of Wards deposited with the banks a significant amount of the material belonging to Baron András Herzog. The great part of it was presumably table silver, prompting the conclusion that this enormous collection disappeared almost without trace. Dr Leó Holländer deposited four family portraits painted by the 19th-century Hungarian artist János Rombauer; these were first-rate examples of Hungarian Biedermeier portraiture from 1828. By the time the war came, little remained of the foreign

and Hungarian picture and sculpture material of Baron Adolf Kohner, who was famous internationally in his own time. On the other hand the Antique, Renaissance and Baroque gems and old jewellery remained in the family and were placed in bank custody.

In all respects Baron Móric Kornfeld's sculpture collection, which contained numerous outstanding examples of large medieval sculptures, ranked as special. Of the bigger wooden ones, approximately twelve ended up with the banks, as did the family's Oriental collection, old Persian ceramics, porcelain and its especially valuable, mainly German and Hungarian incunabula. Of the sculptures I was able to see eight in Moscow. It should be noted that the part of the material not deposited with the banks passed into Nazi hands as a result of informers and was carried off to Germany. However, after the war this was returned to Hungary; it contained, unfortunately, works of only modest quality.

Dr László Laub, a retired consultant physician in Budapest, had a small Oriental collection, but the principal part of the material he deposited with the banks consisted of outstanding Mednyánszky paintings selected over many years, including several of the master's principal creations. Dr Zoltán Máriássy placed his highly valuable treasures in banks and public warehouses, and the Russians took them all, as was their wont. Outstanding among his paintings were a Lorenzo Costa and a special one by Ádám Mányoki, but his Oriental and European ceramics and porcelain were also first-rate. He also had silver (mainly Oriental) and some magnificent carpets.

Prince Nándor Montenuovo—who was able consciously to combine aristocratic exclusivity and bourgeois principle, and who in the period before the German occupation urged Regent Horthy to pull out of the war—was a direct descendant of Archduchess Marie Louise, Napoleon's second wife. He had one of the most important collections of Napoleonica in the world. Originally Prince Montenuovo had wanted to deposit these early and outstanding examples of the Empire style—selected works by Biennais, Proudhon and Isabey—with the Swedish legation in Budapest. This, however, was already full, with the result that these matchless treasures, packed up into seven chests, were deposited in the vaults of the Centre for Monetary Institutions.

Of the Hungarian paintings belonging to Dr Miklós Moskovits, those by Károly Ferenczy were famous. (The collector was on friendly terms with this leading Hungarian master.) Along with the pictures he also deposited his collection of early Meissen porcelain in a bank for safekeeping.

A special place is warranted for Dr Bertalan Németyi, a strange figure who was constantly seeking—and finding—things that were new. With regard to Hungarian artists, he collected those who were on the margins and who were able to break with tradition, which by the second decade of the 20th century were hardening into constraints. He was one of the first admirers of Tivadar Csontváry Kosztka, and was attracted by his atmospheric works, owning 13 in all. A similar-

ly "decadent" artist was Lajos Gulácsy, of whose work Neményi acquired 12 paintings and some 50 drawings. But Neményi also had a large collection of works by József Rippl-Rónai, and he displayed on his walls many outstanding by the earlier masters Bertalan Székely and Pál Szinyei Merse. Of his younger contemporaries he favoured Gyula Derkovits the most, owning four paintings and many first class drawings and woodcuts by him. It was a curious feature of his collection that it contained many works by the best representatives of modern Western trends; indeed, in this it was unique in Hungary. With regard to the enormous Neményi material, only a few characteristic artists can be mentioned here. These classic ones were Manet, Utrillo, Trübner, Liebermann, Böcklin, and Munch (one painting each). Also worthy of mention were Egon Schiele (3 paintings, 3 large watercolours, 4 drawings), Archipenko (1 painting, 2 drawings), Matisse (2 drawings), Pascin (3 drawings), Léger (4 drawings), Chagall (1 picture), Rouault (1 painting), Kandinsky (1 mixed technique painting), Modigliani (2 drawings), Stuck (1 painting, 1 drawing) Klee (1 mixed technique, 2 drawings), Kokoschka (3 drawings), Dix (3 drawings), Grosz (1 picture, 3 drawings), Feininger (1 drawing) and Klimt (6 drawings). The disappearance of the Neményi collection represented a huge spiritual and material loss.

The Calvinist College at Sárospatak deposited its most precious Mss and printed books, as well as its gold coins and medallions, in a bank for safekeeping. The most precious was one of the very earliest codices in Polish, a Bible, all traces of which have of course been lost. Among the printed books there were some rarities, but taken as a whole the library, which has been much discussed in the Hungarian press, was not, with the exception of the Polish Bible, as important as proclaimed by sheer good intention mixed with dillettantism.

In its own way the porcelain and silver bequeathed by Mme Zelma Kisbábi, née Strasser was extraordinary. Outstanding among these items were very early Vienna "Hausmaler" works, magnificent pieces made by the Meissen factory and intended for the palace tables of the Grand-Duke of Mecklenburg-Schwerin, and two exceptional services: an 18th-century Vienna freemason's *solitaire* and a *tête à tête* embellished with Danish flowers, one of the greatest masterpieces of Copenhagen porcelain, made for the French Minister to Copenhagen on the orders of King Christian VII of Denmark. Dr Dezső Szeben's small gallery of pictures contained first-rate pieces, works by Schiavone, Palma Vecchio, Marco d'Oggiono, Tintoretto, Allori, Moroni, Magnasco, Vrancx, Verkolje, Borsos and Rippl-Rónai. Dr Andor Ullmann deposited many paintings and carpets with the banks, but in his case the greatest treasure was his old silver, which included works by Tamás Stihn and Sebastianus Hann, the greatest goldsmiths of Transylvania. Two capital works by Hann were acquired abroad by Ullmann and brought home by him.

All this is just a selection of the material so far known to us, material which is, at most, 1 to 2 per cent of the material taken away by the Soviets. ❧

Ken Smith

The Secret Police

They are listening in the wires,
in the walls, under the eaves
in the wings of house martins,
in the ears of old women,
in the mouths of children.

They are listening to this now.

So let's hear it for the secret police,
a much misunderstood minority.
After all, they have their rights,
their own particular ways of seeing things,
saying things, cooking things,
they too have a culture uniquely their own.

And we think
they should have their own state
where they could speak their own
incomprehensible tongues, write
their confessions, their own unknown histories,
cultivate their habits of watching
by watching each other, and fly
their own flags there, at attention
on parade in their medals at their monuments
on their secret anniversaries, making speeches,
singing praises to the God of Paranoia.

And at the end of the day
bury their dead, publish coded obituaries
to each other, and rest at last
in their own kind of peace, forever.

Ken Smith
is an English poet living in London. His last collection, Tender to the Queen of Spain, *was published by Bloodaxe. His poem on the 1526 Battle of Mohács appeared in* HQ *144.*

CLOSE-UP

Zsuzsanna Vajda

Childhood and How Children Live Now

The intricate relations that characterize human communities are just as important parameters of an age as political events or statistics. An especially important factor is the prevailing concept of childhood, along with the character of the relationship between parents and children.

In the second part of my survey some typical elements of the situation of children in the Hungary of the 1990s are discussed. The resulting picture will, in many respects, be inaccurate and incidental as are photographs, yet no one would deny that they can reveal a great deal about the mood and the conditions of an age.

For the past hundred and fifty years or so, the concepts of childhood and child raising have been the subject of public discourse in this country, with newspapers regularly addressing issues concerning education as early as the mid-nineteenth century. More or less simultaneously with other European countries, the attitude towards and the treatment of children changed from being a spontaneous factor into something reflected on and, at least at the level of intent, something deliberate for an increasing range of people. At that time, and for quite some time to come, significant differences existed in attitudes towards children. Taking into account the huge differences in wealth and lifestyle, and also bearing in mind the late introduction of compulsory education, we have good reasons to assume that these differences were not reduced significantly right until the middle of the twentieth century. Up to the Second World War, or perhaps until as recently as the 1950s, a significant percentage of Hungarians lived on the land. In these families a child grew up more or less under the same conditions that Ariès (1977) typically associated with the age prior to the discovery of the child. According to the observations of the ethnographer Mária Kresz, in the predominantly Hungarian region of Kalotaszeg in interwar Transylvania, the world of small children was the same as the adults' world both in time and in space: they were taken to the fields or to wedding feasts while still wrapped in swaddling clothes, and were integrated into the family division of labour at a very young age. Nevertheless, until the day of their confirmation, they were not regarded as full members of the family: *"whether it was food or bed, they got the poorer share, they could not eat at the same table where the adults ate, and*

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when a child died, not many tears were shed." (Quoted in: A. Hermann, 1986, p. 71) The situation was similar everywhere amongst the poorest of the peasant families. This has been confirmed by the recently published autobiography of Ádám Szirtes (1997), a popular actor of peasant stock. In addition to the deprivations, quite unbelievable by modern standards, and the hard daily grind that even tested the mettle of adults, Szirtes' greatest resentment was over the lack of the expression of motherly love. With birth control virtually unknown in the poorest regions of the country, keeping children fed was an everyday problem for parents even as late as in the 1940s. From a very tender age on, the poorest children in the village had to help around the house or, in some cases, they were expected to provide for themselves. Serious deprivation and poverty were the lot of the parents of those now in their forties. Telling signs have been preserved in many customs and habits, sometimes plainly visible and sometimes concealed.

At the same time, in the country's large cities—thus in Budapest or in the major towns and cities of Transylvania (now Romania) and Upper-Hungary (now Slovakia), a highly-educated middle-class employed in the professions emerged, whose members were not only familiar with the latest educational theories, but to some degree were responsible for formulating them. In the period before the Second World War, Budapest was widely reputed to be the second most important centre of psychoanalysis after Vienna, with outstanding psychologists of such other schools as that of Piaget, *Gestalt* psychology and pedology, along with a large number of experts who worked for educational reform. This is evidence of the importance of the reform movements where a number of these psychologists were accepted by conservative official educationists, who held positions of power in Hungary. The standard and professionalism of the popular literature of education were enviably high. From these documents, but also from the official criticism of the Communist regime emerging after the war, we learn that the issues of children and child-raising eventually shifted to the centre of family life among the educated, with the gap between the positions of grandparents and parents gradually diminishing and normative and authoritarian methods in the treatment of children continuously losing ground. This duality—which of course incorporated a whole spectrum—was characteristic of the rearing of children until the Second World War. (Vajda, 1995).

In the more than fifty years which have passed since, the differences in the way the various social groups rear their children have considerably narrowed. This was primarily due to the disappearance of traditional societal differences and the shift toward the middle classes; furthermore, all the changes that took place in the concept of childhood and in the educational values in Western European countries eventually made their way to Hungary too. The role that the Communist establishment played in this was controversial, although far from being unequivocally negative—more on that later.

In line with the stereotypical prejudices employed when comparing the characteristic mindsets of the various regions of Europe, Central Europe has been associated with authoritarian, Prussian educational methods, while Western Europe has been regarded as the land of democratic ways. This association has not been based on factual information. For example, E. Roberts (1995), who carried out research in the Midlands region of England, observed that relationships between parents and their children in the interwar period,

especially among factory workers, were decidedly authoritarian and detached in character. Regarding the events of the second half of the century, we can only rely on impressions, when in fact genuine evaluation, thorough analysis and comparison would be required. As far as it is possible to judge from the psychological literature, works of art and the media, in postwar Western Europe there was a continuous process of liberalization in attitudes to education; this gained momentum with the student movements of the late 1960s, reaching the stage at the end of the 1980s when the traditionally segregated and, in some aspects, subordinate role of children was being fundamentally questioned. That was also the time when liberal educational ideas, which advocated the emancipation of children and warned of the harmful effects of adults imposing restrictions, came to dominate, ideas primarily associated with the "humanistic school" and trademarked by the two Americans, Rogers and Maslow. From that time onwards substantial changes were effected in the structure and method of evaluation of schools.

Expert opinion on the changes of the past two decades in Western Europe and in the United States is divided. Those who criticize the changes are worried about the disappearance of childhood protection and the deterioration of children's living conditions. (Winn, M. 1980; Postman, N. 1983)

In the meantime, a major liberalization process took place in Hungary, driven by the centralized educational policies of the government. The efforts to introduce compulsory schooling, along with measures taken by the government to protect children, reduced dependency on parents and eventually led to the prohibition of child labour. The pressures driving families to resort to child labour gradually eased off, before vanishing in the mid-1960s. In the official educational ethos, which was popularized in various publications, with a homogeneity befitting a strongly centralized government, and which was made mandatory for schools, there were several modern elements in correspondence with the psychological approach. For example, corporal punishment was banned in schools; blind obedience and the suppression of individuality were condemned. Beginning with the 1960s, debates were held about teaching and education, with the result that a growing number of experimental curricula and schools appeared in the late 1970s, along with some plans to reform education. However, with regard to school structure, child protection and child-parent relations, the liberalization process failed to undermine the traditional framework of child rearing to the same degree that it had in Western Europe.

The years following the political transition saw the emergence of complete chaos and disarray in all areas of life, not least in the rearing of children. With the criticism of socialist practices, the pluralistic values of post-modern philosophy and neo-liberal ideologies received a tremendous boost. Quite a few children's institutions, which were associated with the regime only by virtue of the fact that they were established during the socialist era, have been swept away by the tide of criticism, regardless of the fact that, from the organizational and the educational viewpoints alike, they compared favourably with similar institutions in a good many of the countries of Western Europe. It should be pointed out here that, according to one of the postulates of the humanistic-phenomenological school, parents were continuously in conflict with their children throughout the history of the world, and it was only the conditions and scientific achievements of the current era that made it possible to change the situation. In a

book (1990), which became extremely popular even among experts in Hungary, Thomas Gordon maintains that parents have been raising their children in a way that has practically remained unchanged for two thousand years, suggesting that it is about time that we transform the one-sided relationship into a two-sided one. In Hungary, this attitude was linked both to the criticism of the educational methods the Socialist era produced and to an idealization of "Western European methods", or what has been perceived as such. Naturally, the market was very quick to capitalize on ultra-liberal ideologies: readers were swamped by popular books, which were not subject to critical control and reflection by those involved in the professional field. The training in which these ideologies promise to change parents' or teachers' mentality, typically runs to a couple of weeks. (Gordon training is one of these ideologies.)

The role of the state, of authority, also failed to receive objective analysis and evaluation. The difficult issue of the emancipation of children, the question of genuine representation of children's rights is still unresolved. The 1997 family legislation confirmed the rights of parents in this respect: the authorities are allowed to interfere in family affairs only as a last resort, if at all. This rendered thousands of children even more helpless. In Budapest, as well as in the other larger cities, we find children living and begging in the streets; Hungary is regarded by many as the Central-European capital of child pornography and prostitution. The same attitude is to blame for the schools' turning a blind eye to older children's absence from school during the seasons when tomatoes are planted or picked. Regulations preventing ambitious parents from starting their children out in some careers—sports, theatre, dancing, singing—at a very tender age have also been lifted or relaxed. Quite a few drama schools for children are operating in Budapest at the present time which accept money from television studios for providing underage actors. Recently a boy of seven, while taking part in a motor-cross race for children, suffered serious brain damage and stayed in a coma for weeks. (It should be noted that such extreme absolutization of the individual has not been confined to education: in several European countries the possession of firearms, advertising and smoking are regulated by much tougher laws.)

We conducted the interviews in 1990 in C., a border village with a population of three thousand, tucked away somewhere in the East of the country, in one of the poorest and least advanced of the regions. This village displays a peculiar mixture of the economical and political developments of past and present.

To the question why they decided to have children, most parents reply either that it is only natural for couples to have children, or that people's, and most notably women's, lives are desolate without children, or that there is a need for progeny, as life without children would be unnatural. They all refer to the cases of couples who would do anything to conceive a child. A professional foster mother, living in a remote village, took on the care of unwanted children at the age of fifty, with her own offspring having left home by that time. When asked about her motives, she commented that, although she no longer wanted to have babies, she still felt too young to live without children.

In answering the question in what way the situation of childless couples and parents differed, curiously enough hardly anyone mentioned financial considerations. One of the mothers said that she had been taught a great many things by her children: they expanded her horizon and changed

her attitude towards the main issues of life. Many people saw virtue in being forced, by having children, to take care of others. Several ostressed that the sacrifices of bringing up children were rewarded.

In general, children in Hungary stay home with their mothers until the age of three, with a minority attending crèches at the age of one or one and a half. The latter is more typical of cities and large towns. Nursing is an area where different traditions survive: I found that in C., mothers breast-feed their babies for much longer than urban mothers. A number of mothers who answered the questionnaire, breast-fed their babies until the age of one and a half or two, with one particular woman nursing her baby until the age of three. In conjunction with this, they usually lay emphasis on toilet-training, sometimes using a variety of forms of coercion.

The nursing habits of the urban middle classes are characterized by a distinctive anxiety and uncertainty, with a kind of medical approach also prominent. A benefit of the censored journalism under Socialism was that unverifiable and sensationalized information received much less publicity. In the past year various articles in high circulation national papers on cot deaths scared Hungarian mothers, providing as they did misleading information on frequency. Theories attributing great significance to the relationship between mother and foetus in the future development of the baby's personality also produced a scare, and found, especially among wealthier mothers, a ready market. (Such assumptions have not been supported by any kind of scientific evidence.) In some sense the articles on post-natal depression worked as self-fulfilling prophecies. Mothers are under pressure from the media to buy disposable nappies, vitamins, baby toilet articles in advertisements that feature people presented as doctors or other experts.

Most children between the age of three and six, over ninety per cent of them to be precise, attend kindergarden, which is part of the public education system. The children are fed three times a day, and usually return home between 4 and 6 p.m. The size of kindergarden classes is limited to a maximum of 20 children. There are two kindergarden teachers assigned to each group, and every effort is made to make sure that at least one of them stays with a group throughout the three or four years the children are there.

The final year of kindergarden operates as a pre-school. Enrollment in school proper is flexible: parents of six-year-olds who were born between May 31 and September 31 can decide in which year to start school. Under the present conditions most parents choose the later date, with the result that by the time they start school, the majority of children are closer to seven than to six.

In elementary grades, most children attend day-care schools, which means that they eat and do their homework in school. Such children, too, go home between 5 and 6 p.m. Many children as old as nine or ten are still escorted home by their parents. Among the urban population a substantial relocation has begun: the wealthier are moving from city flats to suburban houses. As a result, the children are transported to and from school by car; this was considered an exception rather than the rule even as recently as ten or fifteen years ago. Predominantly the children's homework is supervised if the parents are professionals. Mathematics poses most problems for most children.

The majority of children either sleep in their own room, or share a room with one or more siblings. However, the practice of parents and children sleeping in the same room is much more frequent in this part of the world than it is in the Western half of

Europe. That poverty is not to blame for the custom of sharing a bed or a room with children would already follow from the earlier mentioned survey in the Midlands of Great Britain, where even the poorest families had more than one bedroom. In Hungary the custom of sleeping together with the children survived even in large, two-story family houses. In rural areas it occasionally happens that children sleep in their parents' bed until they are of school age; then they get their own bed, but still sleep in the same room. This custom is surprisingly common in towns. Its persistence is shown by the evidence of interviews conducted in a large village near the eastern border, mentioned earlier in this paper. Foster parents also share their bedrooms with the children in their care, in one case with all five of them. The earlier quoted professional foster mother told us that it was after going to bed that they had time to have a chat with the children, talking about what had happened during the day. Television viewing habits also back the custom of sleeping in one room: the family watches together from the family bed, then falls asleep together. Another not unusual situation is that the mother sleeps with the children, while the father sleeps alone, in a separate room.

According to the evidence of interviews with children between the ages of six and nine, about sixty or seventy per cent of them tell everything, or almost everything, to their parents, primarily to their mother. Ranking first among the things they tend to be silent about are bad marks, scolding or punishment at school. However, some children in the age group of ten to twelve point out that they, too, sometimes have secrets. Most of the families have their evening meal together, which is also a chance for them to talk. Among the topics most frequently discussed at the dinner table are the problems children and parents face at school or at work, relatives, friends and money. Some of the children point out that they never talk about politics at the dinner table.

Bedtime stories are told to about half of the children who still cannot read; here the parents' level of education is a major factor. Every child watches television. At the time of the survey, the new commercial channels still did not exist; children mostly watched cartoons and series. Other surveys suggest that the major consideration of those Hungarian parents who limit the viewing habits of their children, is time, rather than content. Hungarian audiences were not prepared for the arrival of violent media products that first flooded the country in the 1980s. No one advised the parents of the possible side effects, and it was only recently that civil associations were organized to limit the screening of violent films. Often, trailers for violent action movies are shown before cartoons or family movies aimed at children.

Computers only made a marginal appearance in the interviews completed by the mid-1990s: the spread of the Internet will probably change that. In 1997 the Ministry of Culture and Education launched a giant project called Suli-net that provides state-of-the-art PCs in large numbers of secondary schools all over the country along with free lines.

Most children are punished in one way or another: primarily by scolding and a ban on watching television. Less frequently, corporal punishment is applied: forcing them to sit silent in a room or kneel on the floor, or giving them a smack on the bottom. The usual causes are fighting between siblings, arriving home late, bad marks at school and failure to tidy up their room. Children are expected to keep their room tidy as well as to help with the chores regardless of their gender. In most cases, mothers take the decisions on

bringing up children: they are the ones who listen to the events of the school day, help with the homework, prepare meals, tell bedtime stories; they are also the ones who get "mad" when something happens, and also the ones who more readily resort to corporal punishment. Mothers attend parent and teacher meetings and they maintain contact with the school.

Corporal punishment is more frequent in families where the available information suggests the existence of social problems: unemployed parents, a large number of children, small living space. As is also confirmed by research in other countries, family relations very sensitively react to a decline in living standards. We are able to learn about the consequences of this problem indirectly from the children's answers: the topic of discussion at the dinner table is money in at least half the number of cases; children's greatest ambition is to have enough money to be able to take their parents on a journey. Figures reveal that one third of the children live in one-parent families. The situation of single mothers in the economic transition is especially difficult. Private businesses are the best means of securing adequate economic conditions for the family; however, even if the mother were in possession of the capital and the expertise, she would have no time or energy left for the family, for the children; if she wants to succeed financially, she has to give up much of the time that she could otherwise spend with her children.

The answers clearly indicate that children are even more depressed by the problems that seem insoluble to their parents: *"What an awful world we live in!"; "Daddy is going to lose his job"; "We have no money"*. Other things that make children suffer the most are problems at school, fights between the parents, divorce, illnesses and death. The typical rewards children are likely to receive are praise, kisses and the occasional presents. Despite efforts by the educational community and the press, in a large number of families good marks are rewarded with money.

Christmas is the greatest holiday, when children receive especially valuable presents: a bicycle (the cheapest cost roughly as much as the current minimum monthly wage in Hungary), a pair of roller skates, expensive gear and the rest. In rural areas once frequently visited by famine, people celebrate their child's finishing secondary school by feasting, with a hundred or so guests invited and traditional food served in outrageous quantities (soup, boiled meat, breaded cutlet, stuffed cabbages, blood sausages, cakes and desserts).

Among the wealthier sections of the urban population the tendency to move from urban flats to suburban detached houses is widespread. More than ninety per cent of the better-off urban children have their own room, with forty per cent of them sleeping alone in their room. About two thirds of the children who answered the questionnaire had gone to different schools earlier, suggesting that a significant part of the families in question recently moved to their newly built houses. The formation of the so-called local community, which play such an important part in the lives of British or American schools, has not yet taken place under the existing conditions, as geographical mobility, either inter or intra-local, is relatively strong. Similarly to other parts of the world, the relationship between families in newly established communities is either non-existent or only extremely superficial. For similar reasons, personal contacts between children living in an urban environment are steadily diminishing, as well as changing in character. Since many of the children travel long distances to their secondary schools, the schoolmates often live long ways from each other. Thus, despite greatly improved

housing conditions and more cars, children visit each other much less frequently than they used to do just one generation earlier. When they do come together, it usually happens either in the form of costly children's parties organized by the parents or within the scheme of a school function. Unfortunately, the latter are far and far between, as a result of the diminishing presence of schools in children's sparetime. School parties and festivities are increasingly falling victim to the deteriorating standards of public safety. (Recently a Saturday-night dance party in one of the elite high schools of Budapest was supervised by security guards all wearing black uniforms.)

In talking about their children, parents first of all tend to point out that young people today are much freer and much more independent than used to be the case a generation earlier. In the course of a survey carried out in Budapest, about one-third of parents thought that they regard knowledge and education for their own sakes as a priority for their children. Another third expected their children to be educated according to their abilities, interests and inclinations. And finally, the last third expected their children to acquire skills and knowledge that were practical and pertinent in many areas of life.

In the expectations with regard to their children's character and personal qualities, the traditional bourgeois values dominate: sincerity, uprightness, honesty, hard work. I gained the impression, unsubstantiated by data so far, that expectations differed according to social position. Lower-middle-class parents tend to lay emphasis on qualities such as compliance, friendliness and the observation of norms. The better-off parents in business stress the importance of independence and autonomous judgement.

About one-third of the parents filling out the questionnaire expressed objections to children's behaviour, either their own or of children in general, criticizing them for their alleged lack of compliance. In defence of their use of firm punishment, parents usually claim that children are not dutiful enough and do not co-operate with their parents as much as they should. When they compare the behaviour of today's children with their childhood memories, they once again emphasise greater co-operation, in the past as against a better financial situation for this generation.

But parents in general do not expect their children to be obedient in all respects, taking a positive view of independence. The overwhelming majority thinks of the parent's superior position as indispensable, with many of them being also of the opinion that mutual respect between parents and children is preferable.

In many instances, the children of the *nouveaux riches* encounter difficulties both in studying and in making friends. The behaviour of parents, whose own education is often found wanting, reveals a duality which children find very taxing: on the one hand the parents expect their children to comply with rules they lay down for them, and on the other hand they demonstratively shower expensive clothes and consumer goods on them. In the course of the survey we interviewed a seventeen-year-old girl with a severe psychological disorder, who told us that her father made a point of demonstrating that hers was the richest family in her class. At the same time, he checked every minute of the girl's life, either with the help of a cellular phone or personally, regularly locking her up in their home and taking the key. There is another father, whose business is now growing into something of an empire, dealing in everything from travel agencies to book publishing. His three marriages provided him with children who get every-

thing that money can buy. He has extended his generosity even to the school: he has agreed to finance a major reconstruction project. (Whether the school's acceptance of the offer was ethical is a different question altogether.) He told us that he himself owed a great deal to his old school and former teachers. He therefore expected his children to adapt to the school and to learn to accept the fact that some teachers were more likeable than others. However, his children were neither good students nor popular with their classmates. The father fails to regard this as any great tragedy: he believes that with his money and connections he will be able to create an empire which can satisfy any interest the children might develop: *"If she wants a private nursery, I'll buy her one; or if she wants to work in a travel agency, that can be arranged, too,"* he says.

Of the mothers interviewed in village C, even the relatively younger ones (between the ages of 20 and 30) addressed their own parents in a formal manner, as did everyone else in their own generation, they told us. However, they all planned to change that, even including the mother who otherwise explained to us that motherly love had nothing to do with the formal manner of address. Regardless of all this, however, it was precisely in contrast to this treatment that they tried to formulate their own ideas on bringing up children, at least in part. They were unanimous in the hope that they would have a closer relationship with their own offspring. One mother in particular was very keen on making sure that her children were not afraid of her. Another young mother in her twenties especially resented the fact that she had received no sex education at all, while her mother had been worried sick of the possibility that her daughter might get pregnant, never letting her go out at night even when she was well into her teens. According to the older mothers, those aged between 40 and 50, girls should not be allowed to go out with boys; instead, the proper form of courting required boys to visit the girls at home. Even in the late eighties, more girls got married straight after leaving secondary school in that village than their coevals in towns; yet those girls who, instead of getting married, continued their studies and tried to lead an independent life, attracted less pre-judice.

In continuation of the tradition established in East Central Europe by the extended families in a peasant economy, parents are involved in the lives of their children even after the latter had started their own families. It is a generally accepted practice that parents provide for their children's start in married life: the custom in the village in question requires, for example, that the parents of one party buy the house and those of the other party supply the furniture. The grandparents very often take an active part in child rearing.

In the village, grandmothers have often enjoyed the respect of their married daughters. The young mothers told us that their own mothers often criticized their child care habits. It is not unusual for child-care to be divided between the young parents and the grandparents: the children often sleep over at their grandparent's place, feeling quite at home in both houses.

The young mothers resort to the grandparents' help in towns, too; the grandmothers-to-be often time their retirement so that they can help with the grandchildren. It is frequently observed—even in towns—that the grandmother moves to her daughter's place for a few weeks after a birth, or that she visits her every day. The traditional involvement of grandmothers perhaps explains the fact that fathers in

Hungary play a lesser role in bringing up children, especially while they are small. However, the fathers' involvement is further limited by the fact that they work extremely long hours. Even during the Socialist days, the fear of losing social standing forced men to have a second job, or to work at home, in the garden or in a small workshop. This pressure has not been eliminated after the political changes: in the overwhelming majority of cases, maintaining acceptable living standards can only be done at the expense of working tremendously long hours. What has stopped is the practice of fathers working in the capital—a distance of 250 kilometres—and coming home for weekends (and not necessarily every weekend.) That used to mean considerable sacrifices and risked the harmonious life of the family. But with an end to this commuting, people's regular income and security also vanished. The majority of the men were unemployed at the time of conducting the survey: their only source of income outside the dole was connected with trading across the border, usually illegally.

Fashion and the requirements of the new age appear in people's thinking and decisions in strange ways. A young mother of twin girls, a skilled worker, wanted to move to the town mainly because she heard that children in the town's nursery schools could learn foreign languages there. And if that was not possible, she would be prepared to teach her children to speak a foreign language herself, with the help of tapes and books, she claims. The only hitch is that neither she nor her husband speak any foreign language.

Recently it has become something of a fad in C. to give exotic, foreign-sounding names to children, with the result that the old custom of naming children after their parents or close relatives has steadily declined. For example, within a short period two girls were named Amanda in the village, a name unheard of in Hungary before; this is a trend that can be observed up and down in the country, with even the smallest hamlets resounding with names such as Nikolett, Krisztián and Timea. The wealthier parents get the most expensive prams money can buy, even in those villages where the conditions of the footpaths are utterly unsuitable for them, not to mention the fact that they are not essential for airing the babies; people also tend to dress toddlers for the sand-box in expensive and flashy clothes.

The observations presented here do not lend themselves to a summary conclusion. Perhaps they will contribute to a more vivid and more comprehensible picture of the everyday life of children in a country going through sweeping changes for a century or more. ❧

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Children of the Changeover

In 1996 1.8 million children under the age of 14 lived in Hungary . The number of young people between 15 and 19 was approximately 810,000. (For all figures, see *Mikrocenzus 1996*). The number of babies born had been declining for nearly fifty years. Consequently, while in the early 1960s a quarter of the total population was made up by those under 14, this ratio in the 90s has declined to about 18 per cent. The number of "only" children is also growing, and the number of children with two or more siblings is becoming ever more rare.

Some of the few encouraging figures show improved schooling. Since the 1980s, the ratio of those who failed to complete the 8 years of primary school by the age of 16 decreased from around 7 per cent to 4 per cent. The ratio of those going on to secondary school continued to grow in the 90s (even though it is still low), and so has that of university or higher education students among those between the ages of 18 and 24. More and more speak foreign languages and more are computer literate.

But there are some other, equally important aspects, which make it very hard to draw up a balance when comparing today's children to their parents twenty or twenty-five years ago. It appears that children today are freer, have a better view of the adult world, and they find much less there that remains a mystery to them. The electronic media are largely responsible for this. In any event, it is much harder for parents and teachers to regulate and control what today's children should see and hear and what they should not, and what kind of information to make accessible—or inaccessible—to them (Postman, 1982; Vajda, no date.).

The changes due to the modern mass media, however, are highly controversial and the subject of much disagreement. Television, for instance, has definitely broadened the horizon of many children, yet at the same time it has had an adverse effect on reading skills and the desire to read (Terestyéni, 1966). New values and formal characteristics, different from old-fashioned literacy, may be detected in the culture of young people. The assessment of the new body of knowledge and skills has yet to be undertaken and only then can a redrawing of the school curriculum be taken into consideration.

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Finally, there are some unambiguously worrying tendencies: the health of the young is deteriorating (as confirmed by army doctors year after year), the diet and life style of the majority is unhealthy, less time is spent on sports by fewer young people than before. Poverty and deprivation is on the rise among children, the number of those smoking and drinking is increasing, drug abuse is growing, and so is juvenile vandalism and crime.

There is a great deal of evidence that society and public opinion as a whole are not able to handle these developments. A couple of years ago, when gangs of children were throwing stones at the windows of passing trains causing serious injuries, the reaction was one of complete incomprehension. That reaction was aptly summed up by a child welfare officer: *"In the wake of the stone-throwing incidents of 1995, it was mooted that the age of criminal responsibility be lowered to 12 years, since the stone-throwers were probably children. At the same time, hardly anybody asked questions like what children were doing during the summer holiday, whether they were given any help by anybody in planning, organizing and financing leisure activities for their vacation."* (Herczog, 1997: pp. 119–120).

One source of the growth in the potential for violence is mass culture. Apart from television and videos, children are exposed to a cult of violence at the popular game arcades, and on the pages of comic books. The same cult is spread by numerous toys. Violence has an important role in pop culture, in the music cultivated by children, in the way boys dress, etc. There is much evidence that the violent scenes of movies seen on TV are imitated mostly by those children who themselves live in an environment where physical violence is common (Vetró–Csapó, 1991).

Economic factors

The factors behind the current situation of children take various times to make their impact felt. In addition to longer-term or demographic trends, children and families are exposed to sudden transformation of the labour market, national or local social welfare measures and the current problems in health care and educational institutions.

A third of all families receive aid regularly and unskilled parents, those living in small settlements and families with many children now find themselves in the worst position. All over East and Central Europe, it is families with children who suffer the brunt—even more than the elderly—of the disadvantages produced by the change of the system (UNICEF, 1997). This is due mainly to the fact that the majority of child-rearing families live in households with below-average incomes. The burdens involved with the bringing up of children have been growing since the 80s. Social support extended to families has increasingly fallen behind. The real value of this support has fallen in a greater measure than even the real value of incomes.

A 1990 study found that *"...the existence of children in need is no longer a threatening picture but hard reality"* (Harcsa, 1990: 25). The percentage of those with a below subsistence level income is being put at between 20 to 30 per cent of the population, and, even more alarmingly, among those living below subsistence level, the ratio of children and juveniles is between 45 and 50 per cent. According to a recent survey, some 150,000 children now attend school hungry, and consequently fall behind in their physical and mental development.

All this is very closely connected with the fact that in the last decade the living

standards and housing situation of families with children have declined, their incomes and consumption have diminished. Many parents are no longer able to provide even the minimum conditions—heating, hot water and food—children need. The number of children at risk is growing. In the meantime, the living standards of families with more substantial incomes have also declined. There has been a radical change in the way children spend their summer and winter holidays. Summer camps and vacations were a major social welfare institution under the previous regime. Since then, the majority of permanent camps and holiday homes (run by employers and trade unions) have closed down or been privatized, and for most children there is not enough money for vacations. This accounts for the now common sight of children in the streets.

The ratio of those employed dropped by 30 per cent in a society where there had been full employment for several decades. In 1995, 17 per cent of households with children had no active breadwinner (Central Bureau of Statistics, 1997). In numerous families, the breadwinner lost his or her job or chose early retirement,and many school-leavers were pushed out of the labour market.

After 1989, juvenile unemployment has also grown rapidly. In 1990, still only 3 per cent of those entering the labour market between the ages of 14 and 18 found themselves without a job; by 1993 that figure was over 10 per cent. Vocational training, just as the entire educational system, reacted belatedly to the changes in the Hungarian labour market, transformed by large-scale privatization (See Garami–Szabó, 1995). That belated reaction reflected economic necessity rather than values accepted in Hungary, when parliament passed an act on children's rights.

Uncertainty has been typical of the life of families for years now. The second economy has not been eliminated by privatization and the onset of the market economy, nor has the importance of invisible incomes diminished—on the contrary, it has grown. At any rate, the majority of families still have more than one foot in the economy: beside incomes and perks from main jobs, earnings from supplementary jobs, occasional extra labour, small-scale production and self-support or "reciprocal" work or services performed through personal contacts continue to be indispensable.

This nicely illustrates the peculiar nature of the Hungarian—and, in general, East and Central European—situation in the 1990s. Its essence consists of an unusual combination of sweeping changes (transformations of the political and constitutional system, etc.) and slow social processes. The life of children and families is also determined by this strange combination.

Economic factors are undoubtedly to be blamed for a sense of uncertainty in the family. There are, however, other factors that aggravate it.

Pluralism in family patterns

The usual family model people have in mind is that of two young children living with their biological parents. However, the number of children living in families of a different composition or character is continuously growing. The most frequent types are the following *(Mikrocenzus* 1996):

■ parents have one child only (roughly a third of all families fall into this category). The "only child" has long been a problem for Hungarian demography. Quite apart from the ambiguous ideological context, development and education problems arising from the loneliness of the child are very real;

■ single parent households, some 15 per cent of all families, called by many an "incomplete" family;

■ common-law marriage and a "new family": one of the child's or children's parents, together with a new partner or spouse lives with the child, perhaps with more, "new" children. The exact number of households of this kind is not known but one revealing figure of the Microcensus of 1996 shows that, while the number of married couples has been steadily declining since 1990, the number of unmarried couples (de facto marriages), both with children and without, shows a marked growth. (It must be noted that this structure is actually not excluded by the above mentioned "incomplete" family form. It is quite common that, following a divorce, the child lives in the same household with the mother, but also has a place in another, new family established by the father and a new companion or wife, and in which another child or children may also live.)

■ mixed, combined or the extended household and the extended family: one of the parents and one or more relatives live in a household with the child, or several families live in the same household. (The ratio of families and households of this type is low, around 3 per cent, though the ratio of people involved is of course higher than that.)

■ the child (alone or together with a sibling) is being brought up by adoptive parents; numbers here are rapidly growing, too;

■ orphans in state/official care live with foster parents.

These family types, and sub-types, have come into being in the wake of demographic processes which, besides a diminishing birthrate, are primarily responsible for the plurality of family structures and life styles in modern society. In the mid-1990s, every fourth child was born out of wedlock. But among the processes in question, it is the separations and recouplings, divorces, early widowhood and remarriages or new cohabitation of parents that have the greatest impact on the development of children.

In Hungary the divorce rate has been high for some time. If the current rate persists, nearly a third of the marriages concluded in the mid-90s can be expected to end in a divorce. In divorces, the proportion of cases involving one or more children is also increasing. In the 1950s, cases of this kind made up about 50 per cent of all divorces, versus 75 per cent in the 90s.

Some 10 to 15 per cent of today's fathers and mothers themselves grew up without one or the other parent, mainly because of divorce (Kamarás, 1995) and, according to some estimates, 16 to 18 per cent of children currently live in such households (Hoóz, 1995). In the majority of single-parent families, it is the mother who lives with a child or several children. In all social classes the living standards of such families are lower than those of complete families. Children living in single parent families are more likely to fall ill, are more at risk, are more prone to turn to crime or end up in state/official care than others.

However, it is not the actual fact of divorce that has a shattering impact on the state of mind of the child, or leads to irresolvable tensions, but the deterioration of the parents' relationship. That may start quite often even before the birth of the child, or during pregnancy.

Parents and child-caring

As in every country in Europe, the weakening of authoritarian educational models and their replacement by permissive models could be observed in Hungary from the 1960s. The latter models were

based on a growing recognition of the values of the children's world and the change in generation and culture. The new generation of parents is no longer averse to play and study with their children, to go shopping or do handicraft work with them, or to spend weekends and holidays together. Television has also helped to introduce a model different from the model of the previous period, since it had an integrating rather than a separating effect on the evening leisure of parents and children.

With an increasing number of women taking jobs, role swapping within the family has become more frequent, affecting the process of how sexual identity develops in childhood.

However, permissive educational principles in practice may often entail a neglect of the child, an absence of responsibility. With little attention or any special care or love from parents or other adults, the child has no sense of self-importance. In the new housing developments, latchkey children, left to fend for themselves by their parents and teachers, were already common in the 1970s.

Such phenomena are closely related with families' and parents' own sense of uncertainty. Parents today rely increasingly on professional counselling in infant and child care, education, choice of profession for their children, but also in sexual matters and their own interpersonal conflicts. In the West, the development of a kind of "expert industry", the growing prestige of counselling, and the spread of "psycho-business" were observable in the 70s. From the 1980s on, the same began to cover an ever-growing area involving childhood socialization in Hungary, too, from the manufacturing of children's furniture and clothes to electronic entertainment, toys, publishing and the film industry, to medicines and cosmetics and food.

In Hungary, as in the West, the "expert" culture and the therapeutic view have come under increasing criticism (Lasch, 1984; Vajda, 1994) as has also government regulation of parental practice and family life. Authoritarian educational practices and corporal punishment are far from extinct, nor is violence that threatens a child's health and development. Heavily abused children are found in all age groups from a few months old to those on the threshold of adulthood. This is supported by the evidence from social workers, pediatricians, kindergarten and school teachers (Barkó, 1995). It is known that 80 per cent of all crimes whose victims are children are committed by family members.

Inequalities in child-care institutions

On the whole, child-care and education can be said to be satisfactory; kindergardens are probably the best part of that network. However, as a consequence of the economic changes, firms now in private ownership have made every effort to rid themselves of social policy costs and expenses. This is shown especially by the decline in the number of company-run crèches. In the 80s, 15 per cent of children to the age of 3 years were in all-day crèches. At present that figure is 10 per cent, and children are mainly in municipally run crèches. The majority of kindergartens, the network of which has survived, is run by local governments. That is a major achievement, even according to international investigations (UNICEF, 1977), which point out that in the region, only Hungary and Slovenia have managed to maintain high-standard kindergarten education on a large scale, even though the number of kindergarten-age children has declined. This has resulted in a growing ratio of children attending kindergarten within

that age group (from 78 per cent in 1980 it rose to 87 per cent by the mid-90s), which also means that the children/teacher ratio is smaller than earlier.

Similar trends are observable in junior primary schools, where classes with 10 to 15 pupils are no longer unusual. This has offered a chance for a really meaningful, personalized education. The opportunity has not been taken fully advantage of. Major educational experiments are going on at some elite schools, but there seems to be no sign of a large-scale educational effort or attempt to create special facilities for gifted children or for those with individual needs.

The answer probably lies in the changes in teaching methods, the loss by the profession of its old status of prestige and in extremely low salaries. But there are other factors as well. With the introduction of a free choice of schools, the appearance of private schools and with a variety in school types now available, the Hungarian school system has became totally different to what it was in the 1980s. Freedom of choice for children and parents has grown significantly, but so have the differentials in the chances of a good education and mobility in general within different groups of children.

The changes have been clearly advantageous for more affluent (and/or more educated) families in the capital and a few larger towns. Schools were free in name only under state socialism, since parents had to pay for textbooks, exercise books, extra music and language teaching, school excursions and many other things. By now, however, payment has become the rule rather than the exception, since schools need more and more financial support from parents. This means that they continue to actually intensify inequalities between children. A marked tendency toward selection begins to assert itself at an ever younger age. Today even six-years-olds have to sit for tests for admission to the better primary schools.

Inequalities are even more marked where out-of-school education and learning are concerned, for instance in the cultural market, in the ability to buy various articles (such as computers, books, records, musical instruments, etc.) and in the accessibility of special classes, language courses, music and dancing lessons, summer camps, travel, etc. How can children, whose parents are unable to pay for extra lessons in English, possibly compete with other children whose parents can afford to send them to English-speaking countries? The same goes for food, physical education, sports, hobbies and many other things. The withdrawal of the state and the increased financial burdens on the family have, for the majority, increased inequalities.

Special mention must be made in this context of a large proportion of Gypsy children in Hungary. Many of the about 600,000 Gypsies, some 6 per cent of the country's population, acquired a fixed domicile from the 1950s and that was when their employment in industry and agriculture actually started. Gypsy children also started to attend school at that time. This process was halted by the political and economic changes of the 1990s. Today more than half of the Gypsy children live in households with no active earner, two thirds of adults being unemployed. Yet it is the Gypsies who have the largest families, and Gypsies are over-represented among those living on welfare. Gypsy children are disadvantaged in practically every respect regarding the material conditions they live in, from housing to food. Their school handicaps are also obvious. (Kemény, 1996). The proportion of children who do not finish primary school by the age of 16 is 4 to 5 per cent, and the overwhelming

majority of them are Gypsies. Gypsy children are much more likely to fall ill, to be committed to state care or to become juvenile delinquents, and the proportion of those going on to secondary school is much lower (only 3.5 per cent of the 14 to 18 year old, 58.3 per cent among non-Gypsies).

The educational objectives and methods of schools and of Gypsy families are difficult to harmonize owing to their totally different values and attitudes (Forray, 1997). Gypsies presume schools to have limited duties only—teaching in the narrow sense, the family being responsible for education in the real sense. Many of even the Gypsy children who live in better conditions go to school not properly prepared. They do no homework, have no suitable teaching aids, and they seldom have a room—often not even a desk or a shelf—to themselves. The majority are hungry, leaving home without breakfast, and without bringing lunch with them. They often arrive late for classes, and many are absent much of the time—staying at home to take care of younger brothers or sisters.

Schools are not able to overcome all the handicaps of Gypsy families, and the majority of teachers can do little to help. In the mid-90s, various kinds of segregation were exercised in primary schools. Gypsy children believed to be infested with vermin are sometimes separated from the others on public health grounds (the Ombudsman for Minority Rights recently made a statement in defence of Gypsy children in a case of this kind). The most frequently applied procedure is that primary school teachers pass the buck to a type of institution called at first "supplementary school", later "primary school for the mildly subnormal", and finally simply "special school". The job of such schools is supposed to help pupils classified as too immature to attend school or as mildly subnormal. What it does in reality is to separate the children of the most disadvantaged families, mainly Gypsies, from their peers and from the public education system.Thus the programme of "catching up" becomes its own opposite, preventing, as it does, these children from ever studying together and so catching up with the others (Gerő–Csanádi–Lányi, 1966).

Children at risk

In the last decade there has been a steep rise in the number of children at risk. In 1973, the number registered was still only 75,000, and it was 330,000 in 1966. Since 1988, however, there has been a 250 per cent rise. Here again, the decline in material living conditions is mostly responsible. An investigation of the development of infant hazards over time (Horvát, 1995) found that the rate of premature births and degeneration stagnated in the past decade, but the frequency of what are called "other causes" in infant and child-care statistics—and which usually concern the diet, health and environment of the mother—has increased. Two thirds of the cases were due to parental alcoholism.

Parental neglect or violence means lasting lack of care, insufficient food and clothing for children, no protection against illness, no education and no emotional bonds. An investigation conducted in County Borsod found that 5.7 per cent of the children suffered serious violence at the hands of their parents or were otherwise neglected. The researchers listed the following forms of behaviour (Velkey, 1994): children are taken to a doctor's surgery in a state of hypothermia, starvation or general deterioration, at an advanced stage of illness; disregarding the advice of the family doctor, the child is taken to hospital too late, no interest is shown in him/her during treatment, the

child is taken home well after discharge is possible; when the child is treated at home, he is not given medication in time, if at all. Beside neglect, emotional and physical abuse (heavy torture, truncation) also occurs, and so does sexual harassment, abuse and incest.

Unemployment, poverty, an unhealthy life and institutional segregation and rejection are frequently found where children are in jeopardy. In such environments various deviations are repeated and are also learnt by the children. In some cases it is precisely the parents who force their children to drink, steal or to prostitute themselves. In Hungary, just as in every developed country, new deviations (e.g., drug abuse) are on the rise, with criminals hungry for profit preying mainly on children and the young. According to an investigation covering secondary school pupils in Budapest (Elekes–Paksi, 1994), more than 20 per cent of 17 year olds were regular smokers, 30 per cent drank, and the ratio of those using illegal drugs could be put at some 25 per cent.

One of the most negative consequences of the socio-economic and political changes in Hungary has been the spread of crime and, within that, the growth in children (below 14) and juvenile (14–18) delinquency. Since 1989, the proportion of perpetrators younger than 18 has doubled against the total number of criminals. Delinquents are growing younger and younger, the average age is about 13. The most common crime in that age group is larceny. The majority of children involved, however, are not recruited from those in jeopardy (fewer than 15 per cent), and it is also remarkable that the majority do not come from broken homes either. Those in state care, on the other hand, are conspicuously over-represented, with their ratio being around 10 per cent (Németh, 1995: pp. 2–3.).

The complex causal chain made up by macro- and micro-sociological factors contributing to juvenile delinquency cannot be accurately established. Here I would like to call attention to a single link in that chain, namely domestic violence against children. Some 15,000 cases of dangerous neglect or abuse come to the knowledge of the health services every year. Some of these imply physical violence, a fifth is of an emotional character, and a fifth involves sexual abuse (Barkó, 1995). There is, however, a consensus among all concerned that these figures are only the tip of the iceberg, that the number of children abused is far higher, and many more adults are at fault. Still, in the 1990s, a growing acceptance of the fact of children being at risk and of the "decriminalization" of neglect and violence are clearly observable (Kerezsi, 1995: p. 89). Criminal proceedings are ever more rarely initiated by child welfare authorities. In 1987, the number of people convicted of child abuse was 468; in the 1990s that number was below 200 annually (Gulyás, 1995).

Yet the spiral of violence and its inhuman mechanism are clearly shown by the cases of self-induced abortion or infanticide by teenage girls. Many of them are in state care themselves, others are on the run from their parental homes or their boyfriends or spouses, becoming pregnant because of ignorance or indifference towards pregnancy. Infanticide is strongly condemned by public opinion in Hungary, but the same public is indifferent to the problems of pregnant underage girls or the fate of their babies.

Child protection and public life

Major changes are taking place in the system of child protection today. The current system is seen by many as slow, heavy-handed, bureaucratic and dysfunc-

tional. Up to 1989, only official institutions operated, because Church institutions and civic organizations were not permitted to attend to such work. The introduction of new, more humane forms of child-care, welfare, counselling, therapy and education was difficult and took time.

In 1947, fewer than 20 per cent of those in state care lived in institutions called "children's homes". That proportion rose to 75 per cent by 1957, and has remained largely unchanged ever since. In these overcrowded institutions, children live in large groups of the same age and sex, and have hardly any privacy. Siblings are often separated and placed in institutions far from each other and from their parents, thus making parental visits even more difficult. The majority of institutions have strict rules concerning visits, and it is hard to find even the space for parents and children to spend at least a few hours in an intimate atmosphere in each other's company (Herczog, 1997: p. 91).

These institutions clearly show the major disfunction of the earlier practice of child protection, namely that it failed to help solve family difficulties. Child welfare authorities simply stood by, mostly impotently, and could resort only to the law. In other words, the only way to save a child from abuse was to take the child into state care, and nobody offered any help to the family so that it could build up a home.

From the mid-80s on, while the number of abused children has grown year by year, the number of those in state care began to decline (in 1990, 33,000 children and juveniles were still in state care, in 1995 that number was down to 22,000, less than 1 per cent of the age group covered). At the same time, the ratio of those under the age of 10 among those in state care has been diminishing, and the proportion of older children and those with more problems has been rising.

The new Child Protection Act passed by parliament in 1997 is meant to address these severe problems. This law changes the institutions of special child care, abolishing the earlier Child and Juvenile Protection Institutes. It tries to place the role and responsibility of families in the protection of children at the centre. Those explaining the law make no secret of the fact that the new system of child protection must cut costs (Iványi, 1997). Accordingly, the emphasis is to devolve services and responsibilities onto local governments rather than onto legal authority. (Authority is delegated on notaries and child custody offices and the services—the prevention of abuse, education, child and family care, psychological and life style counselling, after-care, etc.—are the business of the Child Welfare Service, an organization to be established by every local government).

The impact of the law and the consequences of the attempt to cut costs are hard to assess as yet. What can be observed is the fact that state child protection continues to be of the "damage control" kind. Again, it must be stressed that the various funds spent on child support have been cut by the government. This goes for the most important single form of support, child allowance (to which everybody was earlier entitled by right of citizenship, and which has been subjected to a means test since 1996) as well as for a variety of pregnancy, childbirth, child-care and educational aids and supports. While child protection authorities keep on talking about strengthening the family, local governments are impinging on the life of families by a variety of measures, for instance by evictions.

There are new services, self-support groups, child and youth foundations and various civic organizations involved in education, information and in child and

youth protection. However, some reservations must be added to these encouraging developments. One is that civil society in Hungary is still underdeveloped, and the primacy accorded to the private sphere seriously obstructs those neighbours, acquaintances and others in the environment who might be willing to intervene—it even prevents day-care nurses and teachers from interfering when children are under threat. In addition, there is a lack of up-to-date legislation on voluntary activities, which makes the operations of non-profit organizations especially difficult. Their scope of action is rather narrow anyway, their activity cannot make up for the entitlements of citizens and for the security which should spring from the redistribution of goods and services, from family and child-rearing allowances, old age pensions and other sources. The curtailment of social rights ultimately undermines the basis of middle-class life.

The protection of children is least effective when in the hands of schools. Protection is being undertaken by teachers who have neither the professional skills nor the means for efficient social care. Consequently, their activity is narrowed down to occasional poverty relief or tasks that should devolve on the authorities.

Under the socialist regime children were obliged to be members of the schools' Pioneer organization, and this was more or less true also for secondary and university students in the Young Communist League (KISZ). The latter disbanded even before the change of regime, and the Pioneer organizations of under-14s had to compete with the boy scouts and other organizations that appeared after 1989. The organizers of some of these wanted nothing but the government support promised. Efforts to revive the youth organizations of the pre-war era were made by right-wing parties. These movements, however, were unable to bring in the greater part of children and young people. Most of them, perhaps all, are still kept alive by government support.

Consequently, the majority of children and young people do not belong to any organization or larger movement. Nor are they encouraged to do so by the school self-governments, most of which are purely formal—and they get no encouragement from their adult environment either. ❧

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Éva Voszka

Privatization—A Preliminary Balance-Sheet

Be it by distribution or sale, for good money or as a bargain, amid corruption and scandal, or by fair trading—by early 1998 the bulk of state-owned property in Hungary was in private ownership. According to the official documents, the objectives of privatization ranged from reducing government spending to improving the management of firms, from creating a sizable property owning middle-class to increasing government revenues.

Occasionally as many as eight to ten intermediate aims were specified in the privatization acts and the government's guidelines on economic strategy, as well as in the government's annually declared policies on property management. It is hardly surprising then, if all the frequently conflicting expectations could not be met at one and the same time. Restructuring production might act against maintaining levels of employment; similarly, the modernization and utilization of additional resources might be in conflict with the primary goal of broad-scale Hungarian property ownership, just as the objective of preserving monopolies (with their potential better sell-off price) might turn out to be irreconcilable with ideas on invigorating competition.

Looking back on the past ten years, it appears that governments have been more successful in reaching economic targets than in realizing social policy aims. The two successive administrations were effective in influencing privatization directly and in minute detail, and short-term effects were achieved. In the long term, however—and this is what matters as regards the social structure—the effects were often dampened by various other factors.

The first phase of Hungarian ownership reform in the late 1980s was marked by a reduction in government subsidies and a liberalization of regulations, above all in foreign trade. Sometimes applying half-measures and sometimes swimming with the tide, the government withdrew from the day-to-day financing of firms. At the same time, however, in the interest of

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maintaining a functioning economy, the government made sure that bankruptcies were kept to a minimum: acting either in the guise of the larger banks or government agencies, the government was not a tough creditor. Instead of applying preferential treatment—i.e., remittal or rescheduling of loan repayments—the government sold some large firms to foreign investors on an individual basis (Tungsram, Ganz Railway Vehicle Works). In view of the prevailing political and economic uncertainties and the weak financial position of firms concerned, the main objective in these deals could not be maximum revenue. What the government expected from this privatization was that these struggling firms would continue operating.

The same motives were behind the government's decision not to block the other escape route available, i.e., organizational transformation. With their markets lost and debts spiralling, many firms broke up into a cluster of smaller companies, raising outside capital or offering a debt-equity swap to banks willing to remit loan repayments (Medicor, Ganz Danubius Shipyard). These firms were thus able to gain momentary relief and a chance for survival without having to appeal for direct government intervention. Some of these smaller units were able to survive the critical years, while the "holdings" (the former enterprise centres) often collapsed under the weight of the debts they inherited (Hungarian Optical Works, Cement and Lime Factory). In some cases, all the successor firms simply disappeared (Ganz Danubius Shipyard, Machine Tool Factory, Panyova).

Although this process was called spontaneous privatization, it was neither privatization nor spontaneous. On the one hand, the role of private capital was still minimal: the old government enterprises were usually the majority shareholders of the smaller share companies and limited liability firms spun off from them. On the other hand, centrally formulated constraints and opportunities provided the important driving force. The regulations encouraged reorganization into companies or founding joint ventures via tax breaks, and created legal loopholes whereby the constraints on regulations concerning wages, export/import and cost deduction could be avoided. All this can indeed be regarded as the last gift that the politically and economically weakening state presented to the weakening firms. In the late 1980s, enterprises abandoned a state badly shaken financially and in its authority, and the state, too, abandoned its enterprises—at the same time ridding itself of the burden of their accumulated debts and the need to finance their losses.

After the parliamentary elections of 1990, the situation dramatically changed. With the MDF (Hungarian Democratic Forum), as the dominant party, the government first decided to concentrate the rights to sell state-owned property—and thus also the revenues resulting from it. Then, after making transformation into corporations mandatory and abolishing enterprise councils in 1992, it transferred all ownership rights to the ÁVÜ (State Property Agency) and to ÁV Rt. (State Holding Company), which were set up respectively to handle privatization and to manage firms left in state ownership for the long run. This centralizing move once again brought politics and the economy closer to one another, although one of the main slogans of the new arrangement urged the separation of the two.

The aims of centralized privatization were diverse. Just as forty years ago, when the party leadership anticipated nothing but advantages from nationalization, now privatization seemed to be the key both to

stabilization and to the invigoration of the economy. The government wanted to sell firms quickly and without prior restructuring. "The best way to manage state-owned property is to privatize it," they declared and wanted to leave everything to private capital: repayment of debts, acquisition of new resources and markets, and maintenance of both output and employment. In contradiction to this, however, the strategic guidelines of privatization issued between 1990 and 1992 also declared that getting a "realistic price" was preferable to hasty privatization. As to the resulting revenues, most would have to be plugged back into the economy so as to encourage growth, beside repaying the national debt.

Nevertheless, the centralized sales of enterprises proceeded very slowly. Of the twenty firms listed in the First Privatization Programme, only two were sold to new owners in eighteen months; neither the Second Privatization Programme nor the programme targeting the construction industry and the wine industry even got off the ground. After 1992 restructuring firms was given priority over privatization, and the distribution of state-property over their sale. Although it was never stated unequivocally in any of the documents meant for the public eye, a classified government resolution (3271/1992) was unequivocal: "Instead of maximizing revenues, the goal of a faster privatization should be the creation of a broad and vigorous propertied middle class in Hungary, that is the basis for the establishment of a viable economy."

In order to encourage middle-class ownership, the government used various methods to hand out free, or at a discounted price, state-owned assets. There were several compensation schemes, various options available to employees to buy shares in their companies, a subsidized loan programme (the Existence Loan), occasional leasing and installment plans, and a form of coupon-system privatization, the Programme of Share Purchase for Small Proprietors. The economic objectives behind these methods designed to stimulate the economy through viable small enterprises were hardly met at all. It soon became obvious that issuing government decrees was not an effective way of creating private entrepreneurs. For the majority of the beneficiaries, their property allocation was a one-off bonus payment. Many people were either unable or unwilling to behave as investors, they quickly converted the assets into cash, even if that meant selling below price. First informally, but later also in a legalized form, the idea of "employee ownership" strengthened the positions of company management as shareholders. Hard-pressed either by lack of capital or by debt, the new entrepreneurs sold their shares to outsiders, who were quite often foreign investors. These methods undoubtedly helped in the accumulation of private fortunes, but not in the breadth the government had hoped, nor did they benefit the social strata targeted by the measures—the people eligible for compensation or hardworking capital-starved small entrepreneurs.It also became obvious that the government would be able to control only the first round of the transfer of property, but not any subsequent transfers—in other words, not the long-term development of the ownership structure.

The distribution of state-owned property affected institutions as well. Local governments and the state social security, the Churches and various foundations were all given shares in state-owned companies. In this case, the objective was to provide these organizations with a measure of financial independence, or to make them less dependent on government subsidies; however, this scheme of establishing new

owners was no more successful than the previous. Local governments and the other non-profit institutions managed the property hardly any better than the central government. (The organizational problems and inadequate strategies of the property management departments of social security are all too well known; similarly, there have been frequent reports in the media on the difficulties and controversial business transactions of local government administrations.)

A more general use of redistribution methods was primarily hindered by the poor condition of the companies, rather than by theoretical or practical considerations. People want no truck with shares and portfolios that perform badly, even when they are given them for nothing: the companies had to be put in good shape first. The government was forced into this course also by the growing number of companies near to bankruptcy in the early 1990s (in which the domino effect of the recently introduced Bankruptcy Act played a major part). Some managers were even inclined to assume that the government had deliberately made the situation impossible for a large number of companies. According to the sceptic view inherited from the era of the planned economy—no political force would benefit from the general bankruptcy of the economy—the only purpose of tough regulations was to enable the government to hand-pick those companies worth rescuing.

The fact is, however, that the period when the government's re-distributive role became extensive coincided with the time when the distribution of state assets started in 1992. The individual emergency rescue operations were followed by discrimination in the treatment of the "dirty dozen plus one" (thirteen large companies), followed by several waves of credit, bank and debtor consolidation. (The last one alone cost 400 billion forints, which was almost as much as the highest annual privatization revenue so far.) Hidden forms of government intervention, those that had no direct effect on state expenditure or showed up only in the reduction of revenues, came to play an important role in the spread of government subsidies: the handing over of privatization incomes to companies; re-scheduling or cancelling of debts; capital raising; and government guarantees. Some of the several hundred billion forints thus invested was recovered in future sales (as in the case of the chemical plant TVK or Gördülőcsapágy Művek, a factory producing roller bearings), while the rest was only enough to keep the companies concerned afloat (the metallurgical plant at Diósgyőr, the Ikarus bus factory).

After a period of hesitation lasting up to one year, the Socialist-Liberal coalition that took office in 1994 brought some changes into the economy and into privatization. The measures of the "Bokros package", annouced in March 1995 with the aim of balancing the budget, were devised not only to cut expenditure but also to increase revenue and, by virtue of this, to reduce the state debt and interest repayments. Privatization, and specifically privatization for cash, was the obvious means to achieve this. Hence the sale of the mammoth enterprises in the raw material and energy sectors commenced. That was the time when the gas and electricity suppliers were sold, along with some of the electricity power plants and the first allotment of shares of the Hungarian Oil Industry Company (MOL). In this way, within a few months at the turn of 1995 and 1996, the government took as proceeds nearly three times as much in hard currency (equivalent to almost 440 billion forints), than the total government revenues from privatization during the previous five years.

A certain psychological urge to prove their commitment to a market economy on the part of the Socialist majority could have played a part in the spectacular acceleration of privatization, along with some pressure from its smaller coalition partner, the Alliance of Free Democrats, and various groups in the private enterprise sector. The most important motivation in this period, however, resulted from economic considerations: using revenue to cut the state debt and to get rid of companies heavily indebted or unable to develop through their own resources. The success of the stabilization process then improved the conditions for privatization. In the past eighteen months, steadily rising stock exchange prices, the growing number of firms introduced to the Budapest Stock Exchange, as well as the increasing number of investors, both corporate and private, testify for the growing confidence of both Hungarian and foreign investors.

Despite the clear breakthrough in the area of cash sales and regardless of general economic restrictions, there was no suspension in the redistribution of either state-owned assets or incomes in the mid-1990s. Although keeping a low profile and using ever more disguised forms, the government continued the consolidation of financial institutions (Mezőbank, Postabank); it also cancelled or rescheduled the debts of several large companies, occasionally even helping them to cover their deficits (the metallurgical works of Diósgyőr and Ózd); it gave some of the proceeds from privatization back to the firms (aluminium industry); and it also increased government guarantees. State Privatization and Holding Company (the amalgamation of ÁVÜ and ÁVRT) spent more than one-third (or in the first half of 1997 almost thirty per cent) of its revenues on re-organization and similar investments—such a high percentage was reached only in 1993–1994 again, with parliamentary elections coming up.

The government was legally bound, either by commitments undertaken earlier or by legislation regarding compensation, social security and local governments, to continue with the transfer of state ownership to private hands at a discounted price or completely free of charge. The initial values of the shares of state-owned companies introduced to the stock market remained relatively low (in other words, the share price went up steeply in secondary dealings). It produced an especially good return for the employees of the companies concerned, who were able to buy shares at a special option price. In several cases, other small investors were given preferences such as delayed payment or interest-free loans. It is still possible to buy shares using compensation bonds or money borrowed within the Existence Loan Scheme—although the advantages of the latter are now less significant. Within the framework of "simplified privatization" affecting a couple of hundreds of smaller companies, employers have further advantages in buying shares. To sum up, privatization in Hungary was of a changing and mixed nature from the viewpoint of both objectives and methods. This had the disadvantages of making the processes unpredictable and of a certain lack of transparency. We must not forget, however, the evident advantages. The flexible and pragmatic approach offered great opportunities to various social groups, thus helping the transfer of ownership, which was relatively rapid even by international standards.

Now the government can declare at any moment that institutionalized privatization, as the heart and soul of economic policies, has come to an end. The ownership structure of the Hungarian economy is not substantially different from that of

other market economies. According to official figures, by the end of 1997, private enterprise accounted for nearly eighty per cent of GDP, and almost three-quarters of capital was privately owned. Hungarian individuals, companies, corporations and ESOP organizations have a 38 per cent share in the latter, with foreigners owning roughly one third. (The survey regards all foreign investments as privately controlled, although it is clear that some of these—primarily in the energy sector, telecommunications and the engineering industry—are owned by foreign governments or municipalities, although often facing or undergoing privatization themselves.) Of the remaining twenty-eight per cent, eighteen per cent belong to the government, nearly eight per cent being owned by local governments, with the rest controlled by other communal organizations.

It must be added that these figures are not only the result of the privatization process. On the one hand, they include Hungarian private enterprises developing from their own resources along with greenfield investments by foreigners. On the other hand, they also reflect the loss of assets and the liquidation of state-owned enterprises. What seems certain, however, is that the sale of state-owned property, companies and shares played a major part in the declining stake of the government.

The most important result of privatization has been the increase in private ownership, or if you like the realization of privatization as a goal in itself. Within this, outstanding significance has to be assigned to the fact that the majority of the formerly state-owned enterprises were transferred to real private owners, rather than to some form of indirect governmental or communal control, highly impregnable to private investors. International experience has confirmed the view that the presence and control of private owners of this type—when complemented by the appropriate experience in management and sufficient capital—were the indispensable conditions for restructuring production, finances and market strategies, which all enterprises had to carry out after the end of the 1980s. This was what made possible deep changes, enabled the majority of firms to stabilize their positions, repay their debts and improve competitiveness.

On the other hand, the most vulnerable point of privatization is the social ambiguity surrounding the legitimization of the ownership status. A broad section of citizens look upon the fortunes made in privatization—or in some other ways—with a great deal of suspicion. Fuelled by evidence of limited public control, continuous and direct political influence and slight consequences in the unveiled cases, the public view of this matter seems unlikely to change in the near future. To effect such a change, people would have to be convinced by their everyday experience that prosperity is linked to performance. The initial acquisition of property is not a life-time guarantee for success—competition eliminates incompetent owners, and new entrepreneurs can appear on the market relatively easily.

The completion of the privatization campaign does not mean that the transfer of state-owned property to the private sphere should be stopped. According to figures published in March 1998, the State Privatization and Holding Company portfolio still contains the assets of 278 companies, worth nearly 500 billion forints. According to current legislation, long-term state-ownership should be maintained in 85 companies, worth 200 billion forints. Another 65 companies under ministerial control belong to this category, including such giants as the railway and postal services.

By revising the list of companies assigned to long-term state-ownership, and by modifying the percentage of share blocks to be retained, this group can be narrowed down further. But even as of today, property worth 160 billion forints now in the possession of these companies could be offered for sale. Assets to the value of 123 billion forints of another 193 companies await full privatization. This means that almost 300 billion forints worth of state-owned property could be put on the market in the near future, most of them majority shareholdings.

Even when these sales will have been completed, changes in the ownership structure will, naturally, continue. It is anticipated that those institutions to which property was assigned, primarily the social security and local governments, will continually sell off some of their shares and assets. (In 1997 the sale of assets was required by budgetary regulations of the social security. Even more significant was privatization carried out by local governments, the two largest items of which involved selling shares in the municipal utilities of Budapest and in the electricity and gas distribution companies.)

The main form of transactions in the future, however, will be the trading of shares between private investors. There have already been numerous signs of this secondary change of ownership. The two most important trends are increasing concentration in some industries and acquisition of financially weak companies by investors, often with the purpose of reorganizing them and then selling them off.

Most of the examples for company mergers are in the tinned food, sugar, meat and dairy products industries. A similar process is taking place in wholesale pharmaceuticals, an industry now concentrated in the hands of one financial and three pharmaceutical groups. Companies with Hungarian private owners are also active in this secondary trade.

A new phenomenon, that might have growing importance in the coming years, is capital export by Hungarian companies. A significant group of firms with new owners and well under way to stabilization, already show an interest in investments abroad. Many of their plans of this kind have been realized in recent years. As privatization is gathering speed in the neighbouring countries, opportunities are growing. In such deals, Hungarian companies will be able to profit from experiences gained in their own privatization. ❧

Gyula Varga

Hungarian Agriculture and the EU

In the past half a century, Hungarian agriculture has survived five major changes in its whole structure This is evidence for its resilience and adaptability as well as for the Hungarian farmers' capacity to adjust and to renew, since as a rule, the resource in the shortest supply—capital—was always wastefully treated, and so was the price we as consumers had to pay.

Starting it all over again, ambitious plans are in the making once again about the development of agriculture, for creating an agricultural structure to meet the challenges of the EU.

Starting position

Following the 1980s, the Hungarian agricultural economy was—and still is—going through a prolonged and profound crisis, to restore the damage of which will, in all likelihood, take a long time. This has been a part of the general crisis following the change of the political and economic system, but it has also had certain specific features. These had many political implications, both as cause and effect. At the same time, it must be noted that while the Hungarian economy as a whole is now experiencing an upturn and has regained its spearhead economic position in the region, it still has been unable to tackle most of the problems in agriculture.

This is so even though the Hungarian economy was awaiting the changes in a relatively high state of preparedness. It was in Hungary that the ratio of market-type solutions was highest among the European "socialist" countries, the ownership structure the most varied, the proportion of private ownership the largest, and the range of organizational structures in operation the widest. Hungary was also able to boast of the highest number of agricultural firms whose organizational and technological standards and economic performance were of sufficient quality to make them well-reputed players in foreign markets. Beside providing a dependable supply for domestic needs, the agrarian sphere exported a great many of its products both to the East and West. In consequence, it had an important balancing role in maintaining the always vulnerable external economic and financial position of the country at an acceptable level.

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Yet in the first half of the 1990s, agriculture became the area where the problems of the national economy appeared in their most spectacular form. It was here that employment dropped most drastically, incomes were the lowest, and ownership titles the most doubtful. The plant and company structure disintegrated, production fell by an all-time record of nearly 40 per cent. Agriculture had to pay an unreasonably high price for the unavoidable problems of the transformation.

While the crisis in the national economy undoubtedly played a major part in the agricultural crisis that began in 1990, there are at least three more major reasons to be mentioned:

■ The heritage of the past, mainly in a decade-long relative isolation from the world market. Quantitative development and insistance on the ideal of self-sufficiency.

■ The drastic shrinkage of markets in which, sad to say, the greatest part was that of the domestic market, due to the decline in living standards. Also, while Hungarian agriculture was being severely affected by the dramatic loss of Eastern markets (including those of the former Soviet Union and the GDR), protectionism on the part of the European Union actually grew rather than diminished. It can be said that such a huge drop in demand would have jolted any country just as much, whether market conditions prevailed or not.

■ The third cause of the crisis lay in the thinking, policy and actual practice of the conservative government that came to power in 1990. This policy was characterized, beside a complete and indiscriminate rejection of the "agricultural legacy" of the previous system, by the predominance of outdated ideologies, naive romanticism and, a lack of international information all coupled with mistaken ideas uncritically taken from foreign advisors, with little knowledge of the Hungarian situation, and a near-pathological hostility to large-scale farming.

In fact, the only positive outcome, that of making the private sector predominant, could have been achieved not only more simply and at a lesser price, but also more rapidly. For the agricultural crisis, pathetically denied even in 1993 by the administration at that time, is going to extend over a far longer period than would have been justified, even if every possible opportunity to resolve it is being made use of. A number of measures and processes, including the tragically botched-up ownership compensation, will have to be completed first and only after that can a new agricultural policy be put into effect. That period of restoration will be combined with preparations for accession to the Union, itself a large enough challenge to the country. (Discussions to prepare accession were scheduled to begin in March 1998.)

Agricultural production between 1945 and 1960

Given the country's traditional backwardness and the economic policies forced upon it, agriculture has played an above-average part up to the present day. Only recently has a radical change begun, although the contribution of agriculture is very important both for employment in rural areas and for maintaining the external economic balance. For a better view of the highly complex and involved processes of today, a historical summary of development in the recent decades is required, as is a brief description of the direct antecedents.

At the end of the Second World War, Hungarian agriculture was characterized by extremely backward production conditions (further damaged by the war) and by a semi-feudal structure of ownership.

Those engaged in agriculture accounted for over 50 per cent of the population, but the overwhelming majority owned less than 1 hectare or no land at all. Much of the land, some 20 per cent of all cultivated land, was owned by Catholic Church institutions. The ensuing highly radical land reform, long overdue as it was, practically eliminated all large units, and created a system of small holdings. The peasants who thus obtained land, were able to make up for the war losses within a couple of years, even though modern production equipment was almost completely lacking.

By the 1950s it became clear that farming and land ownership conditions were unsuitable for modernization. Nevertheless, it was much less this recognition than the desire to faithfully copy the Soviet model which led to the policy of forced collectivization, attempted in several waves. This did not succeed in making the system of large-scale farming general by 1956 but in fact impoverished the farmers and led to increasingly serious problems in the food supply. One of the causes triggering off the 1956 Revolution was bad agricultural policy and the resultant food shortages. One of the major achievements of the Revolution was a break with Stalinist agrarian policies.

Even though the Revolution failed, Hungary managed to throw off a major burden that the rest of the socialist countries continued to carry right until the 1989 changes: it shed itself of compulsory agricultural produce delivery. At the same time, planned economic management, based on predetermined production targets, was gradually (if somewhat slower than necessary) replaced by the rules of a market economy, introduced within certain limits. Following 1956, an agricultural boom, unlike anything before, started, broken—luckily only temporarily—by the process of total collectivization, involving numerous elements of force, which was completed under Soviet pressure in 1959. Fortunately, the organization of collectives, which took place in the period of the boom, was carried out with many compromises and concessions made to the farmers, giving room for a wide range of private initiatives.

In Hungary, unlike in the other countries of the Soviet Bloc—and learning somewhat from the lessons of the previous years—the new collectives were able to start operating with considerable financial support and in a secure market position. The fundamental goal was to increase—whatever the cost—the volume of agricultural production that was to determine Hungary's agricultural policy almost until the 1990s. Figure 1, showing growth, illustrates well that between 1966 and 1985, the efforts to achieve this goal (partly justified because of poor internal food distribution, low consumption rates, yields barely exceeding those of the 1930s and by the general conditions of production) were largely successful. However, it was also the lack of change in agricultural policy which caused the subsequent halt, stagnation and, finally, the decline of the mid-1980s. On the other hand, the data regarding the last seven years in Figure 1 clearly indicate that following 1990, the problem was no longer stagnation but a deep crisis.

Of the factors that had a role in the growth of production, the following deserve special attention:

- A price policy allowing for increasing profit margins, coupled with a complete security of sales (in which fixed prices, guaranteed by the government, had the determining role), served as an effective, if not cheap, incentive to continually increase the volume of production.
- Hungarian agricultural policy as a whole, unlike in other socialist countries, incorporated a number of liberal elements and market-type mechanisms.

Table I

Indeces of productivity between 1961 and 1996

Product	Unit of measurement	1961–1965	1971-1975	1981–1985	1986–1990	1991-1996
Wheat	t/ha	1,9	3,3	4,6	4,9	4,1
Barley	t/ha	1,9	2,9	3,7	4,2	3,4
Maize	t/ha	2,6	4,2	6,1	5,6	4,6
Potatoes	t/ha	7,9	11,7	18,2	17,7	15,3
Sugarbeet	t/ha	24,6	33,0	38,9	38,4	32,8
Sunflower seeds	t/ha	1,0	1,2	2,0	2,0	1,8
Milk	l/cow	2193	2222	4150	4807	4663
Beef	kg/cow	307	425	446	421	373
Pork	kg/sow	1175	1715	1665	1735	1740

■ Within the national economy, the agricultural sector was where private property and private enterprise were allowed the widest scope, and it was where the ratio of state property was also the smallest.

■ Agricultural production was given a new technological basis. The use of chemical fertilizers rose from its 1961 to 1965 level of 43 kg/ha to 230kg/ha by the 1980s, and there was a three to four-fold increase in tractor capacity. The use of improved seeds and hybrids became general. In animal husbandry, there was a change in breeds. All this resulted in a rapid 2–3-fold increase in yields, thus approaching or actually reaching the standards of the most highly developed countries. This was an unparalleled development in East and Central Europe (Table 1). At the same time, fluctuation in yields was radically reduced.

Despite the fact that the issue of quality was treated as secondary and the need to adapt to the market was painfully neglected, the increase in production of those decades was still highly spectacular. The development came to a halt in the 1990s, partly because of the lack of well-established new markets, and partly because of the unexpected loss of existing ones.

In the dramatic decline of agricultural performance after 1989, production dropped back to a pre-1970 level. This did not follow from the pursuit of some evident goal or clearly defined objective, but was experienced as a kind of general collapse in which, beside social and political misdirection, economic disorientation and a loss of incomes and markets, even unfavourable weather conditions, played a part. How much damage can be attributed to nature? Probably a great deal, but mainly because, just like during the legendary poor weather period of the 1950s, the cultivation of arable land was once again unprotected from drought by a general neglect of, and disregard for, all other factors. The drop in production did not go along with any major structural change. In other words, trauma, deterioration and drifting were far more characteristic than adaptation to the market.

In recent years, as a natural consequence of the drop in production, agriculture has become that sector of the economy which has shed most of its work force. The decline is due mainly to the almost complete disappearance of the supporting activities (industrial, commercial, etc.) of the "supplementary branches" of the co-

operatives, along with the loss of other rural jobs. The number of those earning a living from farming in the narrowest sense of the term has also been halved. Overemployment, just as in other branches of the economy, was undeniably present in agriculture. Large farms—especially the co-operatives—had established many unprofitable or money-losing jobs because of political considerations and obligations. These were the first to fall victim to rationalization.

Today some 55 per cent of the total number of unemployed live in villages, as against the fact that the rural population makes up only 36 per cent of the country's inhabitants. Finally, it must also be mentioned that, in correspondence with the picture concerning the loss of jobs, the income of those employed in agriculture has been gradually falling behind the average income level. From 1989 to 1996, that difference grew from 11 per cent to 25 per cent.

It will probably take decades of effort to improve this situation, as has been indicated by the modest achievements in the years since 1994.

Changes in ownership

Privatization and the other techniques of devolving ownership—as is now quite evident in retrospect—exceeded the moral authority and expertise of those in charge in every field. In agriculture, which had actually been in the best starting position, the transformation process involved an especially large number of mistakes. The result has been great damage whose full extent is still not completely known. The cause of most failures in policy must be sought in the ideological approach to agriculture, in the predominance of ideals outdated from a modern European perspective, and in the undue emphasis on property compensation, lacking all economic rationale. The centre-right coalition coming to power in 1990 (now themselves looking for scapegoats) gave in to populist demands which they had themselves regarded as absurd before. The parties then in opposition tacitly helped or stood idly by while new and ever more unrealistic processes—which will take decades of effort to overcome—were taking place in the redistribution of landed property and in a transformation which made the position of co-operatives untenable.

All this happened despite the fact that the ground for successful reforms had been well prepared by legislation in the second half of the 1980s. (Such as those on the free purchase of land and real property, the abolition of the obligation of co-operative members to put in land, the partial divisibility of co-operative property and its transferability between members, transformation into incorporated companies, etc.). Instead of continuing the reforms, however, the government decided on rapid and radical changes and a complete break with the past. Their political assessment of the situation, which was to prove wrong in nearly every respect, played a major part in their choosing the radical solution.

■ The so-called "historical compensation," designed to redress injustices and damage done to private property became, in practice, a source of conflict and disillusionment rather than a vehicle of national reconciliation and moral settlement.

■ The earlier structure was put into disarray by partial land compensation in kind, carried out through compensation vouchers. This, by dividing land ownership into extremely small holdings, prevented rather than facilitated the establishment of the property basis of new economic enterprises.

■ The farmers—quite contrary to the expectations of policy-makers—did not want to, or could not, establish family farms under such conditions. Along with

the obligatory distribution of former co-operative property, co-operatives lost their security, and property became partly devalued. In other words, the majority lost a great deal more during the process than it gained, not to mention the disappointment of expectations.

■ It became clear that the small family farm is only viable in the forms that had existed before, that is within a large-scale integration.[1] As opposed to the irresponsible slogans and demagoguery promising increased employment in agriculture and the absorption of the industrial unemployed in rural areas, the bitter reality was that the majority of the unemployed now belonged to the agriculture sector.

Under the compensation process, the only real investment opportunity for compensation vouchers (which lost value from the moment they were issued), was the purchase of land. The bulk of the land used by the government to compensate practically everyone with a legitimate claim was land owned by the co-operatives (that is, originally by private persons). This meant, in the last resort, that farmers were made to pay for the cost of compensation. By making it possible for one to buy land for compensation vouchers, the government deprived those working the land of its ownership. Today, 75 to 80 per cent of land is owned by old-age pensioners and people who live in towns.

The Compensation Acts

The 1st, 2nd and 3rd Compensation Acts, coming into force respectively on 8 June 1991, 2 July 1991 and 22 May 1992, as well as Law II/ 1992 on the obligatory transformation of co-operatives, were all conceived on the basis of the considerations described above. The deadline for the compensation processes involving land has had to be extended several times. (The original completion date was Spring 1994, declared by the government in power at the time.) It was only in 1997 that the consequences of compensation became more or less possible to handle, although they have not yet been settled. Legal disputes may last for many years yet.

The essence of compensation is the partial indemnification—in a degressive manner—of the value of lost or damaged private property. In the case of land, this is done through auctions, a method both complicated and involving many problems. Just to take one: those compensated may bid in three different places (where they live, where they work, and where their land was located), which has increased the demand for land in favourably situated villages—to the disadvantage of local residents. No countermeasure was taken against the fragmenting of land, and the fall in value of paths or roads between the investments, plantations, units of real estate and plots established on the land has meant a loss for the previous investors (co-operatives, state-owned farms). That in turn led to the liquidation of otherwise viable enterprises and to massive job losses.

The land meant to serve as compensation was carved out of the common property of the co-operatives and, to a lesser extent, out of state-owned lands. An overview of this is given in Table 2. To help in our interpretation of the figures, the fol-

1 ■ During the socialist era, one of the fundamental elements of the so-called "Hungarian model" was the household plot engaged in auxiliary activities. On this, despite its size, it was possible to engage in self-supporting production, and, through the services provided by the large farms, this was stably linked to the market. The household plot may be regarded in many respects as an upkeep of peasant traditions as well as an antecedent of specialized, private farms, and shows many similarities with the part-time small farms common all over the world.

Table 2

Changes in the land holdings of cooperatives following compensation

	Area, 1000 ha	Per cent
Total area cultivated by cooperatives	5596	100,0
of this: was and remained members' property	2028	36,3
formerly state property	154	2,7
formerly common cooperative property	3414	61,0
Demand for common land reported by compensation agencies	2431	100,0
Common and state land compulsorily and actually designed for compensation*	1873	77,0
Common land compulsorily allotted to the landless**	81	23,8
Commonly held land that may freely be distributed among members**	764	22,4

* Total demand for land in per cent

** Common cooperative property in per cent

Source: Land and property distribution in the agricultural cooperatives. Budapest, August 1992

lowing should be added. The majority of the members of the co-operatives had continued to retain ownership of their land, thus being only technically but not legally affected by the process. That was the area of the land which, beside compensating the former owners, was available for those without any land or for those owning less than 1.5 hectares. This so-called "share-proportion ownership" is the main cause of the cutting up of land into dwarf units, although it is hard to deny that it would have been less than just to exclude from property ownership those actively engaged in agricultural work.

By early 1998, the legal completion of division came into sight but this does not mean the end of the process. In reality, those concerned are now beginning to realize that—because of minuscule size, difficulty of access and distance from homes of the majority of their owners—for most of them the only purpose the newly acquired land can serve is leasing. If the neighbours have a different intention, the new owner is not likely to find a tenant. In fact the chances of leasing are far better in places where the large farms have not been completely liquidated, and where the interests of the landowners are identical. The only other option, selling the land, was effectively prevented by the most recent decision of Parliament, which—along with banning foreign citizens from purchasing land in Hungary—also made Hungarian firms ineligible for land purchase, thus blocking the creation of real market conditions.

It has become obvious that land alone, in the absence of other means, is of little use. With the passing of time, however, those living in the country show a growing unwillingness to give up the chance to acquire land. With the shortage of employment, land has become the only thing to hold on to for a rapidly impoverishing rural

population. Small units of land are increasingly taking on a social welfare function, becoming an important means for subsistence, replacing the non-existent welfare net. Land, as a basis of private enterprise, has become a privilege of the few, and the owners of the more sizeable holdings themselves are not cultivators but much more often leasers of land bought up at ridiculous prices, for investment purposes. This all means that those cultivating land have become leaseholders. In agriculture, which has profound competitiveness problems anyway, paying for the leasehold has become part of the production costs.

The transformation of co-operatives

The co-operatives, which had played a crucial part in production, were obliged by new legislation to undergo legal transformation and to divide up their old common property. Despite the unrealistically short time granted and the almost insoluble problem of assessment and division, nearly every co-operative succeeded in completing this job by the deadline. The result—beyond shortcomings resulting from haste or fraudulent action, which have to be legally redressed—is full of question marks. Co-operatives had to eliminate their indivisible common property, characteristic of co-operatives all over the world, and the so-called "externals", heirs to former members but not members themselves, also became owners of co-operative property. Parliament did make an effort to correct these mistakes, but was unable to reach a consensus. The damage suffered in the process can no longer be undone. Similarly problematic is the discriminative point in the Land Act, according to which agricultural co-operatives, as legal identities, may not buy land. It is self-evident that this measure will have to be changed, yet because of the present political opposition, the problem is unlikely to be solved in the near future. The time and the confidence lost can never be made up for.

The division of the property of co-operatives, or more exactly, the "nominalization" of property (i.e. establishing the property share owned by the members) was carried out on the basis of vague principles, by considering the property once put in by the members, which can no longer be evaluated today, and by taking into account the readiness of the members to compromise.

Some 41 per cent of the property went to members of an active age, engaged full time in agriculture, who make up some 25 per cent of those with entitlements. It is they whose interest lies in exploiting and increasing the property and keeping jobs in the long term. In other words, in distributing incomes according to work rather than according to property. Their interests are hard to assert because of their numbers and property ratio.

The amount of property going to old-age pensioners is nearly as large as that which has passed into the hands of the active, but their numbers are higher (31 per cent). They are no longer interested in labour income. Their intention of increasing their property is secondary to that of increasing dividends.

A fifth of the property went to the large camp of outsiders. Here again, policy-makers were generous in dividing what had been owned by co-operative members, while the ex-workers of the state-owned farms were not entitled to any part of the property of their former employers. The outsiders would be most interested in sharing profits, in dividends. However, as most co-operatives produce no such thing, they would be happiest if they could sell their share as soon as possible and at the best possible price. Since, however, de-

mand is little or non-existent, they are forced to leave their property inside the co-operative.

Along with the transformation, major changes took place in the numbers and membership figures of the co-operatives, and in the legal and corporate framework of their economic activities. Apart from negative political influences, economic conditions also turned for the worse in the 1990s. The market for agricultural products narrowed drastically and the gap between the prices of agricultural and industrial products opened faster and wider than ever before. Nearly 30 per cent of agricultural co-operatives ended up in a state of bankruptcy or close to it. By 1994, a total of 174 co-operatives went into liquidation (13 per cent) but only 17 were dissolved of the free will of members. Individual or group withdrawals played a more important part. The majority of members thus leaving took their property in kind (livestock, fodder, machinery, buildings, etc.), some to use in production as private farmers and some to sell, to get money as fast as they could. In the end, by 1994, the 1333 co-operatives of previous times had turned into 1447 co-operatives, 469 limited companies, 27 shareholders' companies and 44 other types of corporation. Divisions and, in part, liquidations continue too, as evidenced by Table 3.

It is worth mentioning that 28 per cent of the co-operatives were not left by any of their members, groups separated from 6 per cent, individuals from 50 per cent. All this together did not exceed a tenth of all active members, and the number of pensioners leaving of their own will was even lower. True, their chance for a new start was even smaller. A fifth of those going into private farming gave up within a year, and some two thirds of the livestock ended up in the slaughterhouse. Unfortunately, the co-operatives still functioning also made use of every opportunity to alleviate their liquidity problems, from the slaughtering of livestock to the postponement of investments, and from neglecting maintenance, to even neglecting to fertilize the soil. Decline in production and the greater dependence on weather conditions were consequences of all this.

Today's co-operatives cover, on an average, half the area that they covered a decade ago, and employ a quarter of their previous work force. For various reasons and circumstances, many of which have not yet been explored, neither the division of jointly owned land nor that of other common property had the positive effect that even pessimistic forecasts, (as that of this author) had taken for granted in the area of labour morale or profit-mindedness. The discrediting of professionals and expertise as such, farming made as a scapegoat and thus judged in a negative manner, as well as the lack of proper crisis management, all played a part.

Privatization of state farms

The state sector of agriculture in Hungary never played a crucial role, even though, due to its better than average capital and high prestige, it was generally able to enjoy some measure of security in the socialist economy. The state-owned companies played an especially important role in the adoption of modern technology and in their integration. In the early stages it seems that the firms earmarked to be retained by the treasury would be able to weather the storms created by politics. That hope, however, dissipated soon enough. Transformation plans changed from day to day. One fixed point was the premise, unproved so far, that there can be no owner worse than the state. Another was that the state wanted to keep its property at any cost.

Table 3

Private farms in terms of their area, 1994

Category	Number of units 1000s	Distribution per cent	Area	Distribution per cent
Under 1,0 ha	978.1	81.4	231.7	16.7
1.0–5.0	173.2	14.4	378.9	27.4
5.0–10.0	28.7	2.4	198.3	14.4
10.0–30.0	16.3	1.4	261.9	18.9
30.0–100.0	4.1	0.3	198.9	14.4
100.0–300.0	0.5	0.1	76.4	5.5
300.0–	0.1	0.0	37.2	2.7
Total	1,201.0	100.0	1,383.2	100.0

Source: Food production in 1994, Central Office of Statistics, Budapest 1995.

During these shifts in approach, what took place was "de-centralized privatization", which involved the carving up of the large farms as an end in itself, and especially the selling of all saleable plants and individual units of property, often "at any price". The result was mixed at best: the purchase shares in some that were doing well turned out to be good business for their new owners, and in some cases firms were able to get rid of property which was indeed superfluous, thus alleviating their liquidity problems, while in other places the most profitable activity was lost by the mother company, which, without that activity, found itself in an even worse position than before. Genuine privatization was rare. Several firms had to be liquidated because of their financial problems and, after a long hesitation, legislation was passed in 1995, which allowed 28 large agricultural plants—now using about half of their former area—to remain, partly or completely, in state ownership for a longer period. Today those firms constitute the firmest and most up-to-date section of Hungarian agriculture. In their case, it appears that the best approach would be a combination of a stock exchange launch and worker buy-outs.

All in all, some half of the property of the state farms ended up in private hands. The expected influx of foreign capital, however, never materialized. The main reason is to be found in the restrictions put on foreign ownership and in the legal uncertainty surrounding the institution of permanent leasing, meant to solve the problems caused by the conflicts the restrictions induce. The victory of feelings over common sense evidently avenges itself in this area too, since at the start there was a marked foreign interest in the purchase of the large plants in particular.

The new enterprise and farm structure

To this day, we have no precise knowledge of the ultimate effect of these transformations on the ownership structure. There is a great deal of incomplete information and rumour about illegal acquisition of property by foreigners, tax-evading land sales, on enterprise forms where the owner and the operator of the plant, in Hungarian legal terms, is a pri-

vate person but the actual cultivator of the land is an economic corporation or co-operative. Neither is the leasing of land free of problems, since when the tenant is a private person, the real leasehold payment does not have to be declared, whereas in the case of firms, this is not possible. All this has to be pointed out in order to provide a framework for the interpretation of the statistics to be discussed below, calling attention to the necessary caution with which they should be handled. (This caution is justified also because of continuous changes.) In the last resort, however, it may be said that, as far as the main trends are concerned, we can safely rely on the statistical figures, with the proviso that the real figures relating to the private sphere are probably smaller than those declared.

The figures in Table 3 indicate the tiny size of private farms, and the fact that out of the figure of 1.2 million private producers so often mentioned in political rhetoric, only some 20,000 are probably true private enterprises. Among firms, the most important form is the limited company, followed, according to the number of people involved, by the co-operative. These figures, however, do not provide us with information regarding their economic strength, and the value of production is not treated in detail by the relevant statistical publications. Therefore, we have to estimate. As of 31 May 1994, the distribution of agricultural area was the following:

Agricultural area of agricultural enterprises	1163,5 hectares
of which limited companies	487,7 hectares
Co-operatives	2306,1 hectares
Other producers	2740,5 hectares
of which private farmers	1719,0 hectares
Total	**6210,1 hectares**

The figures relating to **livestock** on 31 December 1994 were as follows:

cattle	agricultural companies	253 000
	companies	
	co-operatives	415 000
	other businesses	242 000
pigs	agricultural companies	1186 000
	co-operatives	1074 000
	other businesses	2096 000
poultry	agricultural companies	6953 000
	co-operatives	4575 000
	other businesses	22 137 000

The list shows that with regard to area division, the share of large farms is still overwhelming. A leading role is still played by the co-operatives, whereas in livestock, the leading part is played by the "other businesses", the majority of which are owned by private farmers. Thus the division of labour is still very much reminiscent of that of the 1980s, when labour-intensive activities were the domain of private farmers and those that could be basically automated were those of the big farms.

Very little is known of the private farms themselves except that family farming as a full-time occupation is spreading slowly, and the majority of private producers are still engaged in this as a part-time job. In other words, they are the same as those who used to engage in work on private plots or auxiliary activities. Table 3 provides figures on that. As a final result, some 10 to 15,000 enterprises may be estimated to be viable on the basis of categorization by area, and at best 3 to 5.000 on the basis of livestock. Large private farms, however, have a much better chance, the number of which, in the case of crop-growing businesses, can be estimated at 600, and 400 in the case of livestock.

Challenges by the EU

Following the Luxembourg decision, Hungary's efforts to achieve accession seem to have reached the final stage. Agriculture is certain to be one of the most sensitive

issues in the negotiations, even though the facts discussed above do not justify the fears within the EU that Hungarian agriculture is a threat to the Union's farmers. Hungary wishes to improve its economy not through its agriculture but through its industrial production, which has proved quite expansive in recent years. (However, it remains true that achieving the earlier agricultural performance once again is a fundamental endeavour.) The objective is to have a competitive and export-oriented agricultural sector capable of providing a livelihood to a now radically reduced agrarian population, with a new product structure better adapted to the market.

Transformation, now in its final stage, has completely secured the dominance of private ownership, and with that dominance as a basis growth is a question of capital. True, this is the item which has so far been scarcest, and changing the current law restricting the market in land is probably the most important single condition for its influx. The promising developments in agriculture imply two elements that deserve special mention. One is the competitiveness of the food processing industry. Since its privatization was different from that of agriculture, it is back on its feet and already producing growth. With more than half of it now owned by foreign, mainly multinational, companies, Hungary already has "one foot in the EU", and has direct experience of the requirements of this market with respect to both quality and choice. The interest of this sector in the development and modernization of agriculture is no negligible quantity. The other important feature is the mixed company and farming structure, surviving despite the fragmentation of landed property, in which the market role of competitive large plants remains predominant. To preserve this is one of the country's elementary interests, and the greatest threat in that respect is posed by ideological prejudice.

The question as to what will be the conditions in which Hungary may become a participant in the common agricultural policy, whether it shall have to ask for, or take on, a period of transition, and whether as a new member, it will fully partake in the advantages of the older ones, must be clarified in the course of the negotiations. In that respect, Hungary's position is clear: the country is willing to accept the common burdens as well as the common advantages, and wishes to be a member of equal rank of the Union where agricultural issues are concerned. ❧

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Éva Standeisky

Hungary in the Early 1960s

Ivor Pink, the British Envoy, Reports

Ivor Pink, the British Minister and Envoy Extraordinary in Budapest, wrote a comprehensive memorandum to the Foreign Secretary about cultural life in Hungary. In his assessment, which was based on official and informal sources alike, he tried to find an explanation for the causes behind the events. His paper showed a thorough familiarity with the Hungarian situation. Sometimes he even noticed interconnections that escaped the attention of most observers of Eastern Europe. Hungarian analysts usually paid little attention to what was going on in the other satellite states, nor were they genuinely interested in events taking place in the heart of the empire, unless these had a direct bearing on Hungarian developments.

Cultural and intellectual life in Hungary was of little concern to Moscow in the early 1960s. The reverse was also true: eager to consolidate the political situation, the Kádár leadership looked for acceptance by the intelligentsia and very rarely brought up the Soviet example in arguing their case. They had a very good reason to do so, and this was not just the country's traditional anti-Russian feelings, which might not have been as strong as Poland's, but were still considerably stronger than those of the other satellite countries.

The intellectual ferment in Hungary began in 1953, immediately in the wake of the changes in the Soviet Union. In putting their case to the Stalinist leadership of the Rákosi regime, the Hungarian Reform Communists very often argued that the overall political climate was more liberal in Moscow than in Hungary. This was particularly true for the period following the 20th Congress of the Soviet Communist Party (February 1956), when it became possible to confront the Hungarian dictator, Rákosi, with references to Khrushchev, who had exposed the hideous features of Stalinism. And although it was Soviet military force that suppressed the Hungarian Revolution in 1956, and it was Khrushchev who put János Kádár in power, the ambivalent feelings towards the Soviets persisted. Thus the 22nd Congress, held in late 1961, had a good reception in Hungary, especially among that part of the intelligentsia which still clung to socialist ideals. The overall majority of the people,

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however, saw the Soviets as oppressors: they saw in them the inescapable evil with whom one has to reckon, because there is no real chance of its vanishing in the foreseeable future. It was the bitter lesson of the 1956 Revolution in Hungary that the readjustment of the international balance of power, which had emerged after the Second World War, was not in the interest of the Western powers. Western propaganda had fine words for the insurgents to encourage their resistance, but when it came to action to prove their commitment, the Western states kept silent and stood aside, leaving the credulous and incited masses to their fate.

Despite all the setbacks, the late 1950s and the early 1960s were a period of political thaw and de-Stalinization. Both the Soviet and the Hungarian leadership struggled with the Stalinists within their own ranks; the space race between the superpowers was on. However, the balance in military potential advised the opposing foes to hold back. The political solution of the Cuban crisis, which threatened a Third World War at the end of 1962, eventually increased the influence of those advocating peaceful coexistence.

"Live as well as you can"—this became the motto of the Hungarian people in the years following the crushing of the 1956 Revolution: what they meant by this was that they ought to exploit every opportunity that the authorities allowed them. And the authorities became increasingly tolerant in their ways. The Kádár government and the Kádár Communist leadership changed their methods of control and administration. They made an effort to meet consumer demands and tried to keep out of people's private life. This was in stark contrast with the practices of the previous decade.

> In socialism, the nation has experienced a revival. We have gotten over 1956. General welfare, ever increasing political activity, a genuine, deep-rooted people's democracy, and the publication of a new book by a contemporary Hungarian writer every week: these things, and things like these, characterize life in Hungary today,

a committed Communist writer wrote in Autumn 1959 in *Népszabadság*, the official daily of the HSWP.[1]

"All those who are not against us, are with us", János Kádár, the First Secretary of the CC of the HSWP declared to the world at the Party Congress in 1962. This quote, which became the motto of the goulash Communism of the Kádár era, was rightly included in Ivor Pink's report.

Reality was, however, much more complicated than these official opinions seemed to suggest. The one-party state under Kádár's rule did indeed make a growth in consumption possible, but it continued to keep intellectual life under control. As was also noted in the report, the idea of peaceful coexistence could not be extended to matters of ideology either in the Soviet Union or in Hungary. Officially there could be no ideological or artistic line other than that of the Communists. The only accepted ideology was Marxism-Leninism. Freedom of the press did not exist; writers, artists and scientists continued to be subjected to censorship, which worked either indirectly—through the publishers and editors of books, magazines and newspapers—or in the form of self-censorship by the writer.

This soft dictatorship was inconsistent and often unpredictable. With no strictly implemented central control over every aspect of intellectual life, dissidents could at least have a little breathing space. The par-

1 ■ Lajos Mesterházi: "What This Debate Reveals", *Népszabadság*, September 23, 1959.

ty leadership, and most notably János Kádár, were of the opinion that the Party should control the daily newspapers, the radio and the theatres, i.e. the platforms reaching large numbers of people. From the political viewpoint, the literary magazines played a secondary role. *"I don't care what they print there,"* Kádár announced at a Politburo meeting. (The Minutes of the December 20, 1960 meeting of the HSWP's Politburo. Hungarian National Archives, 288. Fond, group 5, unit 214.)

Dissident views were accessible to a limited audience: magazines published in provincial towns sometimes included surprisingly modern literary works, provided they did not comment on the politics of the day. In the early 1960s *"the phenomena described as 'modern' (later called neo-avant-garde and post-modern) already appeared in Hungarian writing,"* observes Tibor Tüskés, who was then editor of the prestigious literary monthly, the Pécs-based *Jelenkor.*[2] Tüskés was in charge of the magazine between 1959 and 1964. The above-mentioned Kádár "tolerance" was denied to him. He was forced to step down as editor of the magazine, because he published the works of writers and poets branded by the official line as "bourgeois" (Iván Mándy, Miklós Mészöly, János Pilinszky). The Communist-control-led county councils had the power to appoint and to dismiss local editors.

Painting and sculpture also experienced a revival in this period, although the public at large could see very little of this. The visitors to short-lived exhibitions in provincial towns (Székesfehérvár, Pécs) had a chance to see some works of abstract art. The author of the report was right: the avant-garde was officially accepted in Hungary neither before the Second World War, nor in the decades following 1945. In the 1910s and 1920s, however, the avant-garde movements had been present in Hungary, too. Their most prominent representative, the poet, novelist, painter, critic, art theoretician and editor Lajos Kassák had an important public function in the coalition period (1945–48), giving his support to the introduction of modern art movements in Hungary. In the 1950s, he disappeared from public life. In the early 1960s he was rediscovered in Paris; in Hungary, however, his works were not on view for some time still.[3]

The author of the report makes an interesting comparison between the Soviet party leader's reaction to abstract art and the corresponding attitude of his opposite number in the Hungarian Communist Party. Khrushchev, who had a volatile temper and who often bragged about his lack of education, made violent attacks on Soviet abstract art: by contrast, Kádár, whose education was similarly lacking but who was much more deliberate and restrained in his ways, did not try to emulate Khrushchev. He, too, could have found opportunities to confront the "abstracts", yet he believed that it was unnecessary to pay attention to art discussions confined to a small circle. (See his remark quoted earlier in connection with literature.)

Ivor Pink showed great acumen in pointing out the ambivalent relations between the authorities and the various art associations. These art associations,

2 ■ Tibor Tüskés: *Időrosta. Egy szerkesztő emlékei* (Time Sieve. The Recollections of an Editor) Pannónia Könyvek, Pécs 1994. p. 8.

3 ■ On the colourful art scene of the period, see: *Hatvanas évek. Új törekvések a magyar képzőművészetben. Kiállítás a Magyar Nemzeti Galériában 1991. március 14–június 30.* (The Sixties. New Endeavours in Hungarian Fine Art. An Exhibition in the Hungarian National Gallery March 14–June 30, 1991). Képzőművészeti Kiadó–Magyar Nemzeti Galéria–Ludwig Múzeum, Budapest.

founded on the Soviet pattern, served the ultimate purpose of enabling the party and state functionaries to exercise control. The softening of the dictatorship, however, inevitably led to these organizations becoming platforms of resistance to the authorities. This was especially true in the case of the Writers' Association: the Reform Communists there were the first to speak out against the Stalinist methods in Hungary. Kádár punished the writers for their part in the ideological preparation of the "counter-revolution": many of them were imprisoned (including Tibor Déry, also mentioned by name in the report, who was sentenced to nine years in the Autumn of 1957), and the Writers' Association was broken up in 1957. The authorities allowed the art associations to reconstitute themselves again only in 1959, making every effort to ensure that the key positions go to people loyal to the government. Nevertheless, a secret ballot was difficult to manipulate. This was illustrated in the report by the story of the art critic Nóra Aradi, a former State Security officer, turned art historian, who failed to get elected.

The authorities were particularly afraid of writers, who have always been regarded in Hungary as the nation's prophets, and whose popularity prevented the authorities from resorting to the kind of harsh and brutal retaliation that they never hesitated to use against the rank and file of the Revolution: the soldiers and the workers. Although the Writers' Association was reconstituted in 1959, all attempts to reorganize its local Communist branch failed even three years later, in 1962. No wonder, since it was the Communist Party branch of the Writers' Association that provided the platform for the writers' rebellion—some of them were in prison, and most of them were forbidden to publish after 1956. These people were not in a hurry to join the Communist Party under Kádár's leadership even when the conditions improved. On their part, the authorities wanted to prevent any further rebellion, and for this reason they had a tightly controlled organization in mind. At the same time, they wanted to have prestigious writers representing the politics of the HSWP. These two objectives turned out to be irreconcilable.

In the early 1960s, the forms of social gathering and relaxation were distinctly at variance with the preferences of the cultural organizations of the one-party state. At private gatherings people listened to, and discussed, modern, atonal music, and jazz and rock music rapidly gained in popularity.

From time to time, the authorities made attempts to restore order. They disciplined, lectured and sacked people, or just the opposite: they handed out privileges and prizes. (The examples mentioned in the report faithfully illustrated this ambivalence of Hungarian cultural life, for example, by bringing up the case of the novelist József Lengyel, a veteran Muscovite Communist and ex-Gulag denizen, who received a state award first, and was severely reprimanded immediately after that). As the administrative measures often had a subjective and improvised character, it was sometimes possible to evade them. The ruling elite seemed to be securely holding the high ground, controlling both persons and finances. Even if their desire to keep the consolidation process on course sometimes restrained them in their urge to tighten up, the "insolence of office" was enough to do considerable harm to the morale and creative mood of writers and artists, who were often reprimanded and constantly frustrated in realizing their ideas. This was the time when, exploiting more liberal travel arrangements, many artists chose to emigrate.

Another one of Ivor Pink's discerning comments concerned the screened and limited nature of western cultural influ-

ence. Only those books, plays and movies could reach Hungary through official channels which were critical of the "capitalist" life and whose authors were of the left. This, however, did not limit their liberating effect. The high artistic standard of these works was a revelation when set against the aesthetic barrenness of official art in Hungary before 1956.

Even this relatively meager offer was enough to invigorate the thinking, and reshape the lifestyle, of the generation whose members became consumers of popular culture in a period of radical changes. In the 1950s, when there was still no television in Hungary (except for an experimental programme first shown in 1956, which was watched by a select group of Party bosses and intellectuals; communal singing and cinema going were the most common forms of social life. All such social events were, however, spoilt by an ever-present ideology, boring meetings and the mandatory ceremonies and parades, with the participants marching to revolutionary songs. Western-style dances were branded as the products of the "decadent bourgeoisie". All this changed in the early 1960s. As an illustration, I include here a contemporary satirical song, which, beside showing the popularity of the new craze, the twist, captured the economic process that came to have a profound effect on society: the abolition of private farming.

I have joined the cooperative, twist!
With my only head of cattle, twist!
Let that stupid cow soon find out
What joint ownership is all 'bout!
I have joined the cooperative, twist!

The lyrics illustrates that part of the report, which described how people in Hungary had given up dancing the *csárdás* in favour of the twist and the madison. Although the *csárdás* had long before ceased to be popular, the majority preferring ball-room dancing, the twist craze swept through the country, enchanting people in public places and at private parties alike. (I cannot comment on the popularity of the madison.)

Collective farming was one form of socialist agricultural production. It was in this period that the Soviet-styled "voluntary" agricultural associations, the revised and modernized versions of the *kolkhoz*, gained dominance. Between 1945 and 1959, the majority of arable land was still owned by private farmers. In 1959 and 1960, in a campaign launched by the leaders of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party and the heads of the Revolutionary Workers' and Peasants' Government, land ownership in Hungary was drastically changed: the peasants were forced to join collective farms, transferring to the cooperatives ownership not only of their land but also of their livestock and equipment. In addition to their "jointly owned" possessions, referred to in the above little song, the peasants were allowed to keep around half a hectare as a household plot, where they could grow vegetables and fruit for their own consumption, as well as for sale on local markets.

The twist and the cooperative can serve to illustrate the peaceful coexistence of East and West. During the Rákosi era (1948–1956) it was forbidden to adhere to Western patterns. The officials treated with contempt not only those who tried to follow Western fashions, but even those who propagated in Hungary what was in the sciences and art if they came from the West. To give an idea of the scale of Sovietization in Hungary, one has to know that for most students, Russian was the only foreign language they could learn. Western languages formed no part of the curriculum. After 1956, the situation improved to some extent, but Russian still remained a compulsory subject for all. In the eyes of high-

school and university students, Russian was the language of the hated Empire, the symbol of Hungary's loss of sovereignty, and never the language of Pushkin and Tolstoy. In their search for a new life, young people tried to learn English by listening to the beat songs of Radio Free Europe.

In his report, Ivor Pink put the beginning of "Kádár liberalism" at the Autumn of 1961. Although the first signs of the softening of the dictatorship were evident as early as that, the consolidation of the Kádár regime was not completed before the Spring of 1963: that was when the government declared a general amnesty, and also, when the Hungarian issue was taken off the United Nations' agenda (the two events were interconnected). The essence of the system (a combination of socialist ideology and totalitarian state administration, which was gradually introduced in Hungary after 1945 on the Soviet pattern) was left unchanged in the early 1960s. What did change, however, was the relationship between the authorities and society. Both sides made concessions. Two examples of the system's "liberalization" in literature are in the report: László Németh's play *Az utazás* (The Journey) was staged and Tibor Déry was allowed to travel to the West. Both of these eminent Hungarian writers took an active part in the 1956 Revolution: the former, who was not a Communist, was neglected in the Rákosi era, and the latter, a Stalinist-turned Reform Communist, was released from prison in 1960. By 1963, both had been integrated into society: by that time it was no longer required of an author to write a play legitimizing the regime, as Németh did; nor was it necessary to pledge allegiance to socialism in front of Western journalists, as Déry did. The tolerance of the authorities expanded the range of freedom, which many years later led to the corruption of the system. In 1963, and for a good many years after that, this outcome could still not be predicted with certainty. ❧

CONFIDENTIAL

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British Legation,
Budapest,
March 22, 1963.

The Right Honourable, The Earl of Home, K. T., etc.,etc., etc., Foreign Office, S. W. 1.

My Lord,

I have the honour in this despatch to report on developments in art and literature in Hungary since the beginning of the period of "Kádár-liberalism" which followed the 22nd Congress of the Soviet Communist Party in October, 1961. For various reasons, which I shall try to explain, art and literature in Hungary have not been greatly affected by the zephyrs and squalls of the cultural wind from Moscow. The new spirit referred to in Prague despatch No. 8 of the 17th of January had little influence here. This is because the Hungarian intellectuals are not only allergic to Soviet ideas but have always maintained a wide degree of independence from Government control. Consequently, the back-pedalling in the Soviet Union, as reported in Moscow despatch No. 4 of the 4th of January, was not necessary here. The Hungarian communists, for their part, have been very cautious, indeed negative, in their official attitude to the arts. This is typified by their reaction to the recent spate of concentration camp literature. According to a reliable report, "A Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich" was only published in a

Hungarian periodical (Nagy Világ) at the insistence of the Soviet Embassy. Later it was printed in a cheap pocket edition in 13,500 copies—not nearly enough to satisfy the demand. Similarly, the Editor of *Új Írás* (New Writing) was reprimanded for publishing József Lengyel's story "From the Beginning to the End" which also dealt with prison camp life. Then, to everyone's surprise, Lengyel, who has published little else in recent years, received a Kossuth prize last week. As reinsurance, and perhaps in the light of Mr. Khrushchev's recent warning not to overdo de-Stalinisation, Party periodicals have now turned to criticising Lengyel. Mr. Khrushchev's views on abstract painting produced little reaction in Hungary, where such art had never been approved. In any case, Mr Kádár has no known views on painting. He may well be as much of a Philistine as Mr Khrushchev, but at least he does not air his views in public. While the authorities have maintained a consistently orthodox and circumspect attitude to culture, there has been in practice a moderate degree of liberalisation characterised mainly by the growth of official cultural relations with the West and by increased opportunities for certain kinds of Western literature and plays.

2. Hungary's cultural background is Magyar and West European, not Slav. The attempt, between 1948 and 1956, to substitute Soviet for Western inspiration failed completely. The leading role of the intellectuals in the 1956 Revolt showed that, in spite of intensive propaganda, Hungarian authors and artists had refused to accept the culture of their Soviet masters. Immediately after the Revolution the government tried to control cultural and intellectual developments by imprisoning or silencing the patriotic writers and by encouraging Muscovite cultural stooges. But so called socialist art and literature was generally received with scorn and contempt. Soviet books remained unread and Soviet plays and films were performed in empty theatres and cinemas. Communist blandishments, including release from detention and even free trips to the Soviet Union, failed to make the silenced writers speak up for Socialism. Those few who accepted the financial and social advantages of return to work published only non-political work. Even some of the talented young writers and artists, who at first allowed themselves to be officially lionised, later turned away from socialist realism.

3. Communist cultural agitation and propaganda, with cheap books, cinema and theatre tickets, the growth of public and travelling libraries and national book weeks have, however, increased the public demand for culture. So in order to satisfy an appetite of their own creation, the publishing houses and the theatres and cinemas had to turn to the West for material and to allow their own protegés to produce non-political works. Apart from the usual Eurpean classics, works by English writers such as John Galsworthy, Graham Greene, C. P. Snow, Somerset Maugham, Muriel Spark, Kingsley Amis, William Cooper, Agatha Christie and others have been translated and published in many thousands of copies. In the theatre, there is a great vogue for Shakespeare, Molière, Shaw, O'Neill, Priestley and especially for Tennessee Williams, Arthur Miller, John Osborne, Shelagh Delaney and other contemporary Western playwrights who have the double advantage of belonging to the left wing and of depicting the sordid side of life in the West. American and West European films are also chosen mainly for unflattering revelations about life in their country of origin, e.g. *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning, A Taste of Honey, A Kind of Loving, La Dolce Vita* etcetera. Thus plays, films and books by Western authors have subsidised the empty houses and the

The British Foreign Office View

Before the Second World War, the British Foreign Office showed relatively little interest in Eastern Europe. One despatch from the British minister in Budapest was minuted, "The Budapest Legation lacks all capacity for condensation, and interesting points are buried in a mass of commonplaces" (Public Record Office FO 371/18407/R 2783), and other despatches were not minuted at all. Almost no attention was given to cultural affairs: it was noted of Emil Nagy, Minister of Justice in 1923, that "His numerous prosy articles on British institutions and opinion are strangely lacking in literary charm" (FO 371/20395/R 153), but in general art and literature were regarded as falling outside the Foreign Office's purview.

With the establishment of the Soviet bloc after 1945, however, attitudes changed. The internal affairs of the Soviet Union's unwilling allies became a subject of absorbing interest for Cold Warriors, especially as, for all the talk of monolithic dictatorship, each of the Soviet bloc nations had their own distinct social, legal, administrative and political arrangements. And since there was no real autonomous public life, freely reported in a free press, separate from the orchestrated clog-dancing of the ruling Communist parties, developments in the artistic and literary sphere came to be seen as an important indicator of possible shifts in both public opinion and government policy: certainly much more worth monitoring than hitherto. The Public Record Office—Britain's National Archive—contains a number of reports on cultural affairs from legations in Eastern Europe based, it seems, at least partly on informal conversations with sympathetic locals at embasy drinks parties and other public occasions. The following is a report by Ivor Pink (1910–66) who was British minister, later ambassador, at Budapest from 1961 till 1965. Some readers will remember him as Sir Ivor Pink: this despatch was written shortly before he received his knighthood.

A. D. Harvey

***A. D. Harvey**'s next book,* A Muse of Fire: Literature, Art and War *is soon to be published by the Hambleden Press.*

unsold printings of homespun or fraternal socialist realist literature. Painting and sculpture, on the other hand, remained in the doldrums. There were few foreign exhibitions of interest and the good Hungarian artists were swamped by a spate of mediocrity. For years the annual "Academy" exhibition has made communist painting and sculpture the laughing stock of the artistic world. Musical com-position remains dominated by the octogenerian Kodaly (sic!) and the ghost of Bartok (sic!). At the other end of the scale a surprising degree of freedom and even of political criticism is permitted. For example, there is a political variety show which specialises in debunking the bureaucracy and Stalinism. Leading members of the Party patronise it and Mr Kádár himself was a recent visitor. There is plenty of sex humour in the other variety theatres and even a rather stately strip tease at the "Budapest" night club. The Twist and, they tell me, the Madison are all the

rage with the youth who despise the traditional Csardas. (sic!) The weekly political comic has a regular feature entitled "Down with bureaucracy". All this is safety valve stuff.

4. In this situation the Party could boast that the writers were free and claim statistical if not intellectual progress in Hungarian culture. But the free breezes blowing after the 22nd Congress of the Soviet Communist Party, and especially Mr Kádár's new "liberalism", set the Party ideologists quite a problem. Higher living standards, greater personal liberty, relative freedom of speech, technical exchanges with the West, were one thing. Unfettered thinking, let alone publishing, was another. So the intellectuals continued on a tight rein during 1962. Freedom to live well at home and even to travel abroad and to have limited contacts with Western culture had to compensate for continued restrictions on what could be published or exhibited in Hungary. The occasional exception, like László Németh's play *The Journey*, was permitted in order to give the impression of liberalism. Similarly Tibor Déry has been permitted to travel abroad mainly because he, too, seems to have reconciled himself to Mr Kádár's brand of liberal Communism. I suspect that the main reason why the new culture freedom in the Soviet Union, about which we heard so much last year, found little echo in Hungary was official caution based on bitter experience of what happens when the intellectuals are given their head. At their 8th Party Congress last November, the Hungarian communists reiterated Mr Khrushchev's warning that peaceful co-existence did not extend to ideology. Mr Kádár warned everyone to beware of the corrupting influence of Western ideas. *Új Írás* (New Writing), the authoritative literary periodical, wrote at that time "Imperialist penetration will exist so long as there remains an opening for imperialist ideology". Mr Kádár made it clear at the Congress that his slogan "Those who are not against us are with us" should not provide this opening. A welder could think petty bourgeois thoughts with impunity while welding for socialism. But a writer or even a painter must build socialism with his thoughts.

5. Recent authoritative articles in *Új Írás* and *Pártélet* (Party Life) explained that literature must be entirely and exclusively at the service of socialist evolution: "The ultimate aim is to develop a form of literature with a uniform socialist content". It is not sufficient to fight against "bourgeois decadent formalism, pseudo-modernism and schematism". Even more dangerous are the philosophy of "the third road", the theory "that artistic ethics and socialist ethics are two different conceptions" and the pernicious idea that "insistence on socialist realism is a step back in the direction of dogmatism". The Party ideologists are particularly sensitive to the heresy that ideology is one thing and art or literature something quite apart. The Hungarian intellectuals, for their part, seem skilfully to have touched a sore point in hinting that socialist realism is related to rightist dogmatism. They have also won a degree of immunity for themselves. The official line is that the Party fights opinions not persons. While criticising an artist's work, they must still try to retain his confidence as a man.

6. In my despatch No. 27 'S' of the 17th of April, 1962, I reported that Mr Kádár's appeal for reconciliation had largely failed to bring in the intellectuals. This remains true a year later. In this connection, it is interesting to note that it was only in May 1962 that, in preparation for last November's Party Congress, a Party Cell was set up in the potentially dangerous Writers' Federation. According to a recent press report the cell is far from well established. Work virtually started only last September,

there have been few meetings and even the question of membership fees has not yet been settled. At recent elections to the board of the Artists' Federation, nearly all the "Stalinists" were dropped and replaced by non-party members. Budapest anecdote has it that Nóra Aradi, the former chairman of the board, who got only eight votes in the genuine secret ballot, complained that not even her numerous lovers had voted for her.

7. The Government's preoccupation with the intellectuals reflects the special position they hold in this country. By historical tradition they are regarded, particularly in times of national peril, as the true representatives of the national spirit. Many of them are of Transylvanian origin and in the late XVI and XVII centuries the Principality of Transylvania was the only part of Hungary which maintained its national identity and managed to avoid being occupated either by the Turks or by the Austrians. After the expulsion of the Turks the intellectuals were prominent in the various national revolts against the Habsburgs, particularly in the War of Independence of 1848–1849, when the Austrians were obliged to call in the armies of the Tsar to help them defeat the insurgents. History repeated itself in 1956, when the nationalist movement, inspired by the intellectuals, was again defeated by Russian bayonets. It is therefore not surprising that the present Government should fear their influence and attempt to diminish it by a combination of the carrot and the stick. Nor is it surprising that the Government's attempt to impose an alien "socialist" culture should have had so little success.

8. I am sending copies of this despatch to Her Majesty's Representatives at Moscow, Warsaw, Prague, Bucharest, Sofia, Belgrade and Vienna.

I have the honour to be,
with the highest respect,
My Lord,
Your Lordship's obedient Servant,

Ivor Pink

László Szarka

Three Minority Groups Through Western Eyes

Edwin Bakker: *Minority Conflicts in Slovakia and Hungary?* Thesis Rijksuniversiteit Groningen. Capelle a/d Ijssel, Labyrint Publication, 1997, 279 pp.

Whether a heritage of the 19th century or products of the 20th century, the national and ethnic minorities of East-Central Europe have proven to be a particularly fertile ground for antagonism. The civil war in which the ethnic and religious conflicts of the former Yugoslavia issued has directed the attention of political analysts in Western Europe and of scholars in the social sciences to the minorities of this region. The Clingendael Institute of International Relations in The Hague has contributed to the examination of the ethnic conflicts of the region on a regular basis since 1989. The Institute invites politicians and scholars of the countries and minorities concerned to conferences, and publishes the papers delivered at these conferences.[1]

There have been only a handful of Western studies discussing the situation of the Hungarian minority outside Hungary or of the non-Hungarian minorities within Hungary. No doubt this lack has made a judicious assessment of the issues by Western European decision-makers even more difficult.

The past few years have seen the completion and publication of the first German-language political analyses on the minorities of the region. However, apart from a few comparative projects completed in international cooperation, most published studies do not go beyond an examination of particular problems or a mere recapitulation of the official government positions with regard to the issue at hand.[2]

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is on the staff of the Institute of History of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. He is the author of Csehország a Habsburg Monarchiában *(Bohemia in the Habsburg Monarchy, Budapest, 1989) and* A szlovákok története *(A History of the Slovaks, Budapest, 1993).*

1 ■ The proceedings of the conference on Hungarian-Slovak relations are published in German and English in: Robert Aspeslagh/Hans Renner/Hans van der Meulen (ed.), *Im historischen Würgegruff: Die Beziehungen zwischen Ungarn und der Slowakei in der Vergangenheit, Gegenwart und Zukunft.* Baden-Baden, Verlagsgesellschaft, 1994, 180 pp.

2 ■ Notable exceptions are the studies published by the Südost-Institut in Munich and edited by Gerhard Seewann, and the works by Georg Brunner, who works at the Ostrecht Institut of the University of Cologne. There are also English-language publications from both countries, such as *The Slovak State Language Law and the Minorities: Critical Analyses and Remarks.* Budapest, Minority Protection Association, 1995; *Situation of the Hungarian Minority in the Slovak Republic* (Comparison with International Documents, Bratislava, Slovak Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1995.

Edwin Bakker's study should be all the more welcome. Bakker, a Ph.D. student at the University of Groningen, decided to continue the geographical interests of his father and to write his dissertation on the ethnic conflicts of the East-Central European region, using the examples of the Hungarian minorities in Slovakia and the Slovak and German minorities in Hungary. He repeatedly visited both countries, immersed himself in all available sources pertaining to his topic, and, assisted by his Slovak wife, familiarized himself with the cultures and languages of both countries.

His study has three parts and six chapters. Its theoretical and methodological introduction explains the basic concepts, research goals and methods informing the examination. According to Bakker, the East-Central European region has been characterized by numerous contradictions in the period following 1989. In particular, that between the consolidation of democracies and the escalation of ethnic conflicts has been a central problem for the countries of the region, which have tried to define themselves as nation-states, in spite of the considerable presence of ethnic minorities. As Bakker aptly points out, among the fourteen states that have recently become independent, the Czech Republic is the only one whose linguistic and national minorities make up less than ten per cent of its population.

Minority conflicts arise, writes Bakker, because the majority or dominant national government wants to establish the same conditions in regions where the majority population belongs to a minority as in other regions of that state. Political representatives of the minorities, on the other hand, formulate *"specific demands for cultural and educational self-determination and/or regional self-determination"* (p. 11) and seek to secure a special legal status for the minority region. The essence of such conflict resides, therefore, in an *"active antagonism over the sharing of the control over the territory of the state"*. He construes the somewhat scary term *"minority conflict"* accordingly: *"This kind of conflict is defined as a form of active antagonism between the government of a state and representatives of a minority over the extent of opportunities of minorities to influence the use and organization of the (sub-state) territories they inhabit"* (ibid.).

By defining minority conflicts in terms of territory, Bakker narrows down the concept of conflict and identifies it with the symbolic and actual political struggle for ethnic territories. This definition appears especially problematic in the case of minorities of different types, such as the three target groups selected by the author. Discussing the political, cultural and legal situation of Hungarians in Slovakia, Germans and Slovaks in Hungary, Bakker's investigation focuses on the reality and depth of their conflicts, which are linked to territorial issues, and examines the relations among the various factors responsible for the intensification of antagonism. The ultimate objective of his inquiries is to assess and compare the potential for conflict inherent in the three minorities.

The theoretical introduction already makes it clear that Bakker, though trying to assimilate recent studies concerning the three minorities, relied chiefly on the most recent results and on the theoretical and methodological considerations of Western European and American minority studies. Although most of the East Central European research into minorities is still limited to mere description, recently East Central European scholars have been attempting to adopt the theoretical conclusions drawn from the comparative examination of minorities in other regions of the world. To be sure, these attempts are still only methodological in nature and scope.

One thing is clear, however. It is absurd that Hungarian minority research—on the pathbreaking minority local representation in Hungary, on the political struggles of Hungarian minorities in East Central Europe which have attracted international attention, or on the Gypsy issue in Hungary, Slovakia and Romania, which threatens to give rise to a permanent ethnic conflict—should be conducted mostly without regard to research abroad.

While Bakker insists on the importance of establishing the exact nature of the differences among the three minority groups in the comparative examination based on his case studies, neither in the introduction nor in the conclusion does he provide a sufficient formulation of the differences among the typologically different groups.

The second part of the book consists of the three case studies. The longest chapter in the entire work is devoted to the Hungarian minority in Slovakia (pp. 37–137). The rather crude and imprecise historical introduction is presumably a kind of obligatory excursus. Suffice it to point out three errors: Bakker claims that the legal status of the Hungarians remaining in Slovakia after the Vienna Award was the same as in Masaryk's Czechoslovakia. He suggests that of the Hungarians who were expelled to Hungary from Slovakia in accordance with the 1946–48 population exchange, some left their birthplace voluntarily and others were forced to do so, and that it took the intervention of Moscow to save them from the fate of the Germans of the Sudetenland (p. 39).

The first Republic of Slovakia, which existed between 1939 and 1945, only granted representation to the unified national parties of the German and Hungarian minorities according to the German principle of *"Volksgruppenpolitik"*, that is, with a single Parliament mandate each. Moreover, as regards the Hungarian minority, the Slovak constitution imposed a rigid principle of reciprocity based on the rights of Slovaks in Hungary. Deprived of political, linguistic and social rights as well as possessions, the Hungarians of Slovakia cannot be said to have left their territory voluntarily, even though a few hundred Hungarians, out of about a hundred thousand, did actually apply for population exchange. Approximately 98–99 per cent of the fugitives and those transferred in the course of the population exchange left their territory under the pressure of the Czechoslovak authorities. Until the end of 1948, Moscow supported the elimination of the Hungarian minority in Slovakia through population exchange and through the unilateral transfer of Hungarians.

Yet not even the most brutal deprivation of rights could force Hungarians to flee in such numbers as the Germans did. Moreover, neither in Potsdam, nor at the peace conference in Paris did the Western powers give their consent to the complete transfer of Hungarians from Slovakia. By threatening to veto such a resolution, the delegations of the United States, Britain, New Zealand, and Australia managed to prevent Czechoslovakian measures aimed at a complete transfer. Moscow and Prague had to back down in the face of a threatened American veto. After 1948, Prague and Bratislava were prepared to take further measures to transfer Hungarians, but the protest from Budapest motivated Moscow to drop the issue.

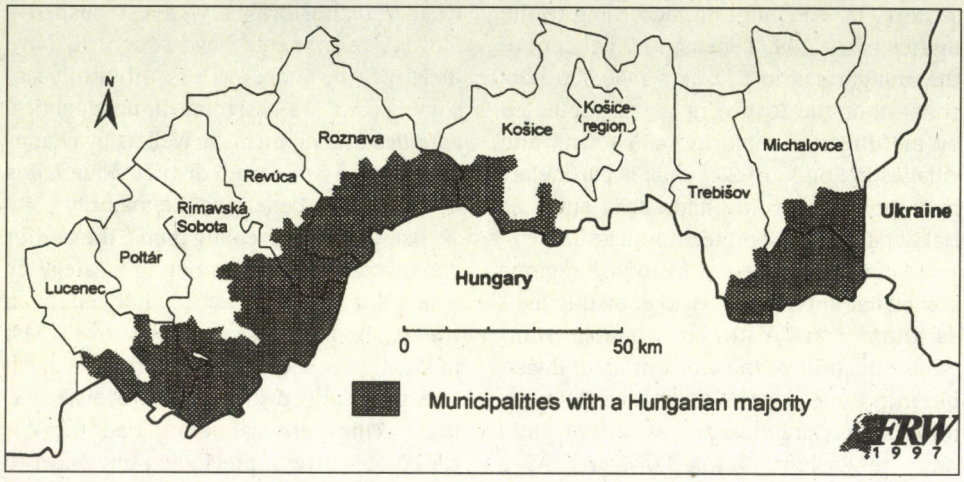
The sections devoted to the demographic and legal situation and to the regional distribution of the Hungarian minority in Slovakia, to Hungarian-language education, to minority cultural and religious life, and to the Hungarian minority parties provide a well-documented, vivid picture of the negative trend in minority politics which has prevailed in the government policies of independent Slovakia

since 1993. The fact that, according to the figures of the 1990 census, 77.7 per cent of the Hungarians in Slovakia (440,000 persons) continue to live in areas populated by a Hungarian majority (435 towns and villages in Southern Slovakia) is particularly important for an approach, such as Bakker's, focusing on territorial issues.

Using the names of historical regions somewhat imprecisely, Bakker distinguishes three areas with considerable Hungarian majorities: the western area, divisible into three regions (Csallóköz, Mátyusföld, Alsó Garammente), with Palócföld and the Eastern Slovak Lowlands. As a consequence of the borders the Trianon peace treaties established, those areas with a Hungarian minority had to overcome numerous disadvantages in its development. Especially important was the low level of urbanization, with three quarters of Hungarians still living in villages, and an unemployment rate significantly higher than the Slovak average. It is, then, not only in a geographical sense that the Hungarian regions were on the periphery as far as those directing Slovak regional politics were concerned. The distances separating various regions are great and communication is inadequate.

Slovak minority politics has persistently tried to deny in demographic terms the existence of regions with a Hungarian majority in Slovakia and to eliminate the Hungarian presence in these areas. Edwin Bakker's book attempts to give a judicious picture of the means and consequences of this policy. In 1970 the Hungarians living in a local majority made up 88 per cent of the entire Hungarian minority community, but in 1980 this figure was down to 83 per cent, and the last population census established it at 77 per cent (p. 47). Since it was in regional centres that such a transformation of the ethnical make-up of the population was the most rapid, after 1918—when Czechoslovakia was established—Slovak governments have sought to have their way by more or less arbitrarily assigning and re-assigning municipalities, counties and districts, as well as by changing election and court district boundaries in ways which benefitted the majority.

Using highly revealing maps, the author demonstrates the redistricting strategy by which the zone of land inhabited by a Hungarian majority, stretching from East to West, was sliced into fifteen parts, each integrated in a district with a Slovak majority. This gerrymandering had the declared objective of precluding any effort to seek autonomy that might emerge in regions with a Hungarian majority. Indeed, the state nationalist approach, which is also that of the third Meciar-government, is so intent on thinking in terms of "enemy" figures that it sees the most important benefit of the new administrative boundaries in "the final elimination of Hungarian irredentism". What Bakker emphasizes when discussing the territorial politics of the Hungarian Coalition (the umbrella of the Hungarian minority parties in Slovakia), however, is the fact that initially the minority programmes were based on the principles laid down in 1985 by the Council of Europe in the European Charter of Self-Governments. When evaluating the Komarno proposal, for territorial self-government, made in January 1994, the author suggests that it was a mistake on the Hungarian minority's part to demand the administrative-regional integrity of the South Slovak regions with a Hungarian majority. According to the Komarno Proposal, the Hungarian-majority region—or the three regions specified in the alternative proposal—would be made up of twenty-one administrative sub-regions. Three of these subregions would have a Hungarian majority, eighteen Slovak. Nothing shows better the ethnically het-



Results of gerrymandering in the course of the 1996 redrawing of boundaries of the south-central and south-eastern districts of Slovakia

erogeneous nature of the regions adjacent to the Hungarian–Slovak border (political or linguistic) than the fact that seven of the twenty-one regions specified in the Komarno Proposal have a minority (Slovak or Hungarian) larger than 40 per cent. Ten of the regional centres have a Slovak majority, in seven the proportion of the Slovak minority exceeds 30 per cent.

In his summary, the author distinguishes four reasons for the intensification of Hungarian self-government demands in Slovakia. Negative Czechoslovak and Slovak government policies towards the Hungarian minority in the past; present Slovak government policies against Hungarians; the territorial fragmentation of the Hungarian minority; and finally, foreign influences favouring minorities. The latter include international documents on general human rights and minority rights; international non-governmental organizations and inter-governmental organizations monitoring general human and minority rights; the support of Budapest; foreign models of positive minority policies. Bakker blames the anti-Hungarian minority policies practiced by the Slovaks and, partly, the "unbridled" reactions of the Hungarian minority for the exacerbating conflict.

> At the political level, anti-Hungarian government policies and the sometimes unbridled reactions of representatives of the Hungarian minority have resulted in an increasingly hostile relationship between the two sides. Moreover, at the personal level, members of the Hungarian minority feel more and more that they are being treated as second-class citizens. That perception is the basis for a growing fear of, and a negative attitude towards, Slovakia's authorities (p. 132).

A dangerous situation has emerged already, as a result of the limitations imposed on the use of minority languages by the Slovakian language laws, the policies aimed at a gradual elimination of Hungarian-language education, the redistricting, and the fervent protestations of the Hungarian political parties. *"Gradually, particularly since the installation of the third Meciar government, antagonism between the government and representatives of the Hungarian minority has taken the form of a non-violent minority conflict"*

(p. 136). In his conclusion, the author unequivocally establishes the responsibility of the "nationalist and neo-communist groups" of the third Meciar government for the situation of the Hungarian minority in the South Slovak regions. These groups consider the entire area of Slovakia as an exclusive property of the Slovakian nation, and therefore believe that only Slovakians can lay claim to political control over this area; and this view has the effect that *"their influence has increased at the expense of oppositional political groups in general and representatives of the Hungarian minority in particular"* (p. 137).

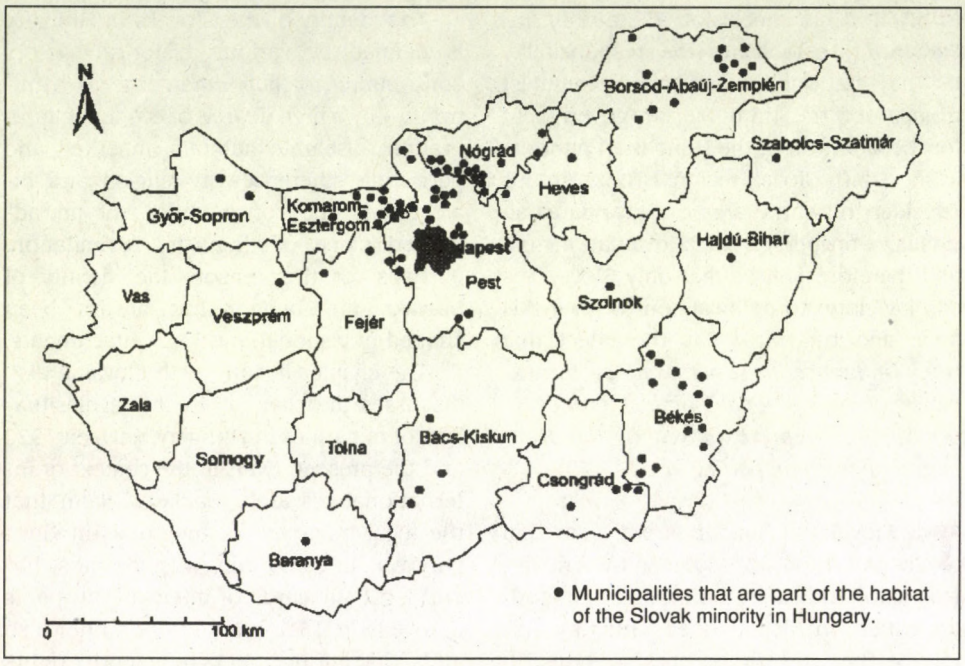
The Slovaks in Hungary are discussed in Chapter 4 (pp. 139–201). As the brief introduction indicates, the Slovakian minority settled in depopulated Hungary following the Turkish occupation (16–17th centuries) during the first half of the 18th century. They inhabit four fairly disparate enclaves. Slovak villages in Komárom/Komarno, Pest and Veszprém counties constitute the Slovak enclave west of the Danube. East of the Danube, we find the following regions: a contiguous Slovak enclave in Pest and Nógrád counties, villages in Borsod Abaúj–Torna and Zemplén county within the Trianon borders, as well as the Slovak area in the Great Plains (Békés and Csongrád counties). With the help of the map provided, the author specifies the ninety-nine municipalities with at least a hundred Slovak native speakers. There are eleven municipalities where more than one-thousand Slovak speakers live, of which there is only one in which Slovaks form a local majority, namely, Pilisszentkereszt with 1338 Slovak inhabitants. In ten villages with fewer than one-thousand inhabitants, the Slovak-speakers constitute a local majority (five in Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén, three in Pest, one each in Nógrád and Békés counties).

The identity of the Slovaks in Hungary is defined by various historical factors contributing to their emergence as a minority—by a high degree of economic integration, disparate habitats, inherited and persisting differences in religion and dialect, and the consequences of an advanced stage of linguistic assimilation. Perhaps for this reason, the identity of Slovaks in Hungary has always been shaped by regional and local attachments.

The chapter dealing with Slovakia also discusses the changes in the legal situation of minorities in Hungary between 1920 and the present. Even in the context of international research, Bakker's claim that the legal treatment of minorities in Hungary was in conformity with the most liberal legal standards of interwar Europe, is a novelty (p. 151); granted, the author also adds, that infringements on minority rights were frequent. However, he evaluates the Act on the Rights of the National and Ethnic Minorities of 1993 in quite positive terms.

Examining the "symbolic importance and functioning" of the local Slovak governments elected in 1994–95, he identifies the main characteristics of the controversial first few years—intense activity and enthusiasm coupled with an absence of experience in self-government and the lack of the financial means necessary for functioning. As for the politicians of the majority nation, Bakker also points out that deeply-ingrained negative attitudes have persisted: *"For decades, politicians have ignored the interests of minorities, if not trying to assimilate them. This tradition occasionally hampers the full implementation and proper functioning of local minority self-governments"* (pp. 186–187).

Bakker succeeds admirably in avoiding the pitfalls of the verbal battle typical of Hungarian–Slovak minority politics, increasingly reminiscent of a dialogue of the deaf. Thus, he suggests that Slovak views



Habitat of the Slovak minority in Hungary, 1990
Source: Hungary's population census of 1990

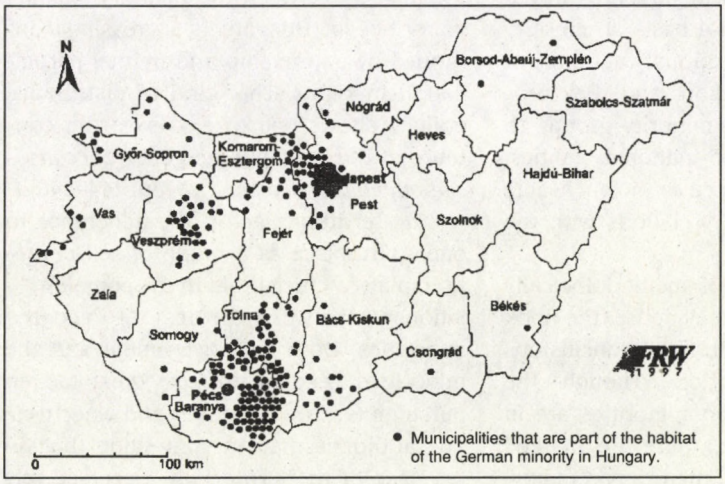
contesting the legitimacy of the Slovak national minority self-government can only be vindicated by the upcoming municipal elections. Equally unequivocal is his opinion concerning the parliamentary representation of minorities: in order for the relatively small Hungarian minorities to receive parliamentary mandates, the Hungarian Parliament would have to amend election laws practising positive discrimination, making it considerably easier to elect minority candidates. He calls attention to the fact, also conspicuous in other minority groups, that members of national minority self-governments seem much more content with the present state of affairs than the representatives of local minority self-governments, who have to deal with the bureaucracy of the local majority council on a daily basis in order to act within their competence or to acquire financial resources.

There is one issue, however, that even Bakker discusses at the superficial level of daily politics, namely, the optimal education arrangements for Slovaks living in Hungary. As far as the younger age groups are concerned, the process of assimilation has been nearly completed in the past twenty or thirty years; this means that Slovak-language instruction would have exactly the opposite effect than what its minority proponents intend to achieve. There can be no doubt, however, that the only evidence for the success of any kind of minority policy would be the slowing down or indeed the halting of assimilation. In this respect no miracles can be expected from the recent functioning of minority self-governments. Indeed, I share the author's caution in predicting whether the principle of self-government will actually manage to reverse the process of assimilation which has had such large effects on

younger people. Bakker lists a number of reasons why Hungarian Slovaks have not better used the opportunities offered by self-government. (For instance, they did not manage to find any adequate arrangements for dividing work and responsibilities between self-governments and the Democratic Alliance of Hungarian Slovaks; relations among various Slovak organizations are vitiated by personal antagonisms, and the role of the Slovak government and the Matica Slovenská, which is supposed to support Slovaks abroad, *"has been far from constructive in this matter"* (p. 198).

By and large the author finds that the 1993 Hungarian minority law provides an adequate framework for realizing the programme of the Slovak minority. Accordingly, the primary task of the Slovak minority organizations and politicians is to better use the opportunities opened up by law. Consequently, in the case of the Slovaks, the minority conflict suggested by the title of Bakker's book really does not exist: *"Since 1993, it is more appropriate to use the term competition to label any remaining antagonism between the Hungarian government and representatives of the Slovak minority"* (p. 193). Bakker thinks that minority self-government offers a good chance to strengthen Slovak identity by means of political and cultural activities at the local level. Future possibilities are perhaps indicated by the fact that out of eleven municipalities with a Slovak majority only the self-governments of six municipalities were transformed into Slovak minority self-governments.

Chapter Five of Bakker's study examines the situation of Germans in Hungary (pp. 205–241). Similarly to the Slovak minority, the Germans in Hungary have four major habitats: in the counties of Tolna and Baranya (in the area of what used to be called "Swabian Turkey"), East of the Danube in the South-West of Bács-Kiskun county, in the region where the counties Komárom-Esztergom, Fejér, and Pest adjoin (a remnant of the "Swabian ring" that used to surround Budapest), and in Veszprém county. Similarly to the Slovaks, two-thirds of the 38,000 German-speaking Hungarians live in villages, which shows that, just as in the case of Hungarians in Slovakia, resistance to assimilation is greater in the traditional context of villages. Hungarian and German estimates assess the number of German-speaking individuals or those of German origin at two hundred thousand, and there are 224 municipalities in Hungary where their number exceeds fifty persons or five per cent of the local population.



Habitat of the German minority in Hungary, 1990
Source: Hungary's population census of 1990

Since the Alliance of Hungarian Germans broke up in 1995, the political interests of the German minority are promoted exclusively by the minority self-governments established by the 1993 minority laws. There are 163 local German self-governments, nineteen of which are identical with the local municipal governments.

For the geographically dispersed German minority in Hungary, stopping assimilation is a pivotal issue. Adhering to the definition of "minority conflict" proposed in the Introduction, Bakker focuses on the minority and government politics that prevail in areas populated by Germans.

The central claim of his discussion of the Slovaks is that there is no minority conflict in the German villages of Hungary. *"The key concept in the management of potentially active antagonism has been the combination of local and state-wide self-determiantion in the fields of culture and education"* (p. 240). Nonetheless, Bakker's territorially-oriented analysis of minority conflict has not been in vain in the case of the two minorities in Hungary, either. It is a significant insight emerging from his examination that the Slovak and German self-governments in Hungary are at the same time the territorial basis of minority politics, the local institutional guarantee of resistance to assimilation, and they provide opportunities for minority groups to have some input into national politics. Moreover, their presence is indispensable to maintaining friendly relations with the majority population.

Based on a body of methodologically uncovered and secured evidence, the book draws some comparative conclusions which deserve attention. Though the Slovak and the German minorities are in many respects similar, there are marked differences in favour of the German minority, when it comes to the revitalization of language, to the degree of organization and the capacity to draw on financial resources other than public money:

> Those minorities whose members are aware of their identity can derive many opportunities to preserve that identity from Hungary's minority act of 1993. Minorities with a low consciousness of their distinct identity have to rely fully on public money to organize their minority life find it far more difficult to use the opportunities provided by the act. (p. 244).

In his concluding comparison between the minority policies of Slovakia and Hungary, Bakker emphasizes the restrictive programme of the dominant nationalists in the Slovak government. Characteristic of their programme are efforts to restrict Hungarian-language education, which is still felt by Hungarians in Slovakia to be indispensable, the policy of administrative re-districting, and decisions to deny state support to Hungarian cultural institutions, and so on. As a consequence of this policy, a kind of *"centrifugally pluralist democratic"* model has been in emergence, one, that is, which is characterized by an opposition, indeed antagonism, between majority power and the minorities. By contrast, the relation between the majority and the minorities in Hungary is increasingly informed by partnership and mutual participation in rights. This kind of distributive politics allows one to en-visage the contours of the gradual emergence of *"consociational plural democracy"* (pp. 244–245).

The territorial factor, the adherence to one's birthplace as a mode of self-definition, plays a crucial role in the complex relationship between the majority and the minorities. Both the government and the minorities need to exercise great tact in pursuing territorial motives and objectives. The author is right in suggesting that, in the case of the territorially dispersed minorities in Hungary, it is easier and less risky from the standpoint of the majority

or the integrity of the state to put into practice the principle of self-government. But we must also agree with his view that self-government is the only means to developing mutually acceptable solutions. Bakker's concluding evaluation of the two countries on the basis of their treatment of minority issues deserves to be quoted:

> Minority conflicts, as defined in terms of manifestations of active antagonism over the existing and desired opportunities, do not exist in the case of Hungary's Slovak and German minorities. The Hungarian government has managed to prevent potential minority conflicts by political arrangements that accommodated the most important desires of its minorities. (p. 250).

Hungary earned this assessment with the 1993 Minority Act and with the development of partnership with the legitimate organizations of its minorities. The flipside of the coin is the restrictive minority policy and practice of the Slovak government.

> The liberal minority policies by Budapest constitute a sharp contrast to the restrictive minority policies by the government in Bratislava. Since the coming to power of nationalistic Slovak Governments in 1992, the antagonism over the opportunities of minorities to influence the use and organization of the territories they inhabit has gradually taken the form of a conflict (Ibid.).

It is a measure of the author's sobriety that he refrains from projecting apocalyptic scenarios with regard to the assimilatory tendencies of minorities in Hungary as well as in connection to the restrictive minority policies of the Slovak government, however pregnant with potential for conflict. He denies that the ethnic minority conflicts in Slovakia could lead to a Yugoslav-type ethnic war. His view is based on the restrained reactions of the Slovak Hungarian parties and citizens. Nonetheless, he does not rule out the possibility that the discontent generated by Slovak nationalism could compel ordinary citizens to give wider and more resolute expression to their protest. Nor does he exclude the possibility of the more radical ways of standing up for minority rights that one finds in Western Europe.

Edwin Bakker's recently published dissertation is an example of Western European research on East-Central Europe which deserves to be continued. Having meticulously mapped out his research and studied the details of his chosen topic, he nonetheless manages to preserve his detachment. When portraying the Slovak– Hungarian conflict as it has been played out in the press and in official politics, he refuses to take the claims of either side at face value and consistently checks their truth content in other sources. What is equally impressive is that he chose to focus on a problematic component of the East-Central European minority question that even Hungarian analysts have frequently treated as a taboo, namely, the territorial implications and motives of the minority issue.

Bakker's book also formulates some truly significant conclusions about the self-government ambitions of the minorities in this region. Most important among these conclusions, in my opinion, is the insight that the freedom of self-definition and the right to minority identities cannot be discussed without taking into account the territorial aspect (pursuit of the interests of the local majorities, acknowledgment in practice of the right to live at one's place of birth, recognition of the special legal status of minority regions, etc.)

No doubt, it would be most beneficial if the government officials in charge of minority issues in the two countries, as well as the leaders of the three minorities also became familiar with the crucial theses of Bakker's book. ❧

Johanna Granville

Home Sick Home

Sándor Márai: *Memoir of Hungary (1944–1948)*. Trans. by Albert Tezla
Budapest: Corvina Books, 1996. 393 pp.

Sándor Márai's *Memoir of Hungary* (1944–1948) provides an interesting glimpse of post Second World War Hungary under Soviet occupation. Like some other memoirs by Hungarian writers and statesmen, it was first published in the West, because it could not be published in the Hungary of the post-1956 Kadar era.[1] Márai was the author of forty-six books, mostly novels, and was considered as one of Hungary's most influential representatives of middle-class literature between the two world wars. He seeks his true identity both in his profession and through a geographic attachment: first to Hungary, then to Europe, and finally to the West. He decided to leave his homeland in September 1948.

The English version of the memoir was published posthumously; Márai took his own life in 1989, the same year that he was awarded the prestigious Kossuth Prize, Hungary's highest award for artistic achievement.[2] Whether or not Márai intended it, this memoir makes the reader wonder what influenced Márai to commit suicide, despite his literary success. Was it the bleak environment of Soviet-occupied Hungary, emigration from his homeland, or the inner dreams of a sensitive and expressive man?

Written in the first person, this book has certain strengths, absent from secondary works. Márai gives the reader a keen sense of the humiliation Hungarians felt in living under Nazi and then Soviet domination. Márai also entertains as a diarist, and later generalizes about his experiences in a way that endears him to his readers. Like a good playwright, he engages the audience on several levels, but none better than the homesick artist who, ironically, had grown sick of home. (These strengths make the volume an excellent choice for undergraduate and graduate courses on the history of the Central European region.)

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1 ■ See, for example, Géza Lakatos, *As I Saw It: The Tragedy of Hungary*. Trans by Mario D. Fenyo (Englewood, N.J.: Universe Publishing, 1993). This memoir also covers the 1944–1948 time period in part. Worth reading is Nándor Dreisziger's illuminating review of this memoir published by HABSBURG, http://www.hnet.msu.edu/reviews/ showrev.cgi?path=15977873320934.

2 ■ The book was originally published in Hungarian as *Föld, föld!* (Land, Land!) in 1972 by Stephen Vörösváry-Weller Publishing Co., Toronto, in 1972. It was then reprinted in 1991 by Akadémiai Kiadó, Budapest.

On the other hand, Márai's memoir does not provide a dispassionate, critical defense of a central argument with supporting evidence and dissenting opinions. Precisely because it is a diary, the book lacks a governing theme, containing several competing themes instead. One gets the impression that Márai is writing more out of an inner need to articulate his thoughts for himself, rather than to persuade or impress an audience. Thus it would be inappropriate to evaluate this work as one would a scholarly argument. Development of a thesis and selection of sources are irrelevant here. Márai's ideas are original and spring from his own experiences. While he cleverly incorporates quotes from great writers and poets, both Hungarians and foreign, these are simply tools for expressing his own thoughts.

In addition, the title of this memoir is a bit of a misnomer, since the book does not discuss Hungarian politics in the 1944–1948 period chronologically. Only in a couple of places does he refer to the "returned Hungarian Communists," the Muscovites. As a subjective diary, it often digresses. One whole section provides details about the daily habits of his wife Lola's grandmother; no larger interpretation accompanies the section.

As traumatic as war-time Hungary must have been, Márai found it in some ways preferable to living there after 1945. According to Márai, the Second World War fostered a sense of human collectivity. People felt closer to each other during the siege of Budapest because their lives were threatened. After the war, however, people focused on the retrieval of their material possessions, and the spirit of cooperation and unity disappeared.

Márai and his wife had been forced to flee their home in Budapest for a small house in a village. There he lacked everything a writer needed: good lighting, quiet, and privacy. There was no electricity, and candles were scarce. Márai lived there with escapees and refugees from the war. After the Soviet occupation in September 1944, random groups of soldiers stopped by Márai's village house, often in the middle of the night, without knocking. They stole scarce food and supplies. Others stayed for longer periods of time. Once a group of soldiers set up a repair shop in his house. Noise was continuous; tools banged and a record of an Ukrainian children's choir played around the clock. Márai had to sleep in one room with the others in the household. He also had to witness atrocities. Once a group of soldiers shot the husband of a woman they were abusing. Márai's opinion of the Soviets did not improve with this close contact, to say the least. He writes: "We lived for weeks with the thirty men like animals in a cage, slept on the same straw, did their laundry, cooked their meals and helped them with their work."(p. 85)

At the same time, it would be incorrect to say that Márai despised the Russians. Instead he was curious about them, and he often pitied them. Despite these intimate living arrangements, Márai continued to find the Russians very strange. The Russians, he writes, *"brought Cyrillic letters and all that 'difference,' that mysterious strangeness which Western man never understands and which even this compulsory and very intimate living together could not dispel* (p. 85)."

While he admired the Soviet military for defeating the Nazis at Stalingrad ("turning around the wagon shaft of world history"), he also knew that the source of Soviet military power was its inexhaustible reserves, not its organizational and technical skills (p. 36). *"This Eastern army,"* he writes in almost Churchillian fashion, *"gave the impression of some instinctive biological power—human variants of ants*

or termites—that had assumed a military shape." (p. 80)

Unlike many Hungarians at the time, Márai knew these Russian were not liberators; they could not bring freedom because they lacked it themselves. They merely continued the thieving and murdering that the Nazis had begun (p. 75). Indeed, this memoir bears similarities to the memoirs of Jewish writers persecuted by the Nazis, in particular to the recently published diary of Victor Klemperer, a Jewish professor of Romance languages in Dresden during the Second World War.[3] Both writers use their journals partly to substitute for their emotions, partly to maintain their sanity. Both know that if their journals are found by the wrong people, it could mean imprisonment or death. But both also sense in their Nazi or Soviet oppressors a concealed awe of writers.

The dangers of journal-keeping are brought home to the reader when Márai tells the story of his friend Poldi Krausz, who in 1944 suddenly showed up outside Márai's door (in Budapest), asking Márai to safeguard his personal album. Krausz knew the Nazis would soon arrest him. Márai advised his friend to ask someone else, because his house would not be any safer than Krausz's. Indeed, literally the next day, Márai and his wife were forced to abandon their house. When they returned years later, after the siege, the house lay in ruins (pp. 347–8).

Márai realizes that the Soviet military was no less ruthless than the Nazi military. Like the Soviet political system as a whole, it was not a meritocracy. Outstanding performance was not rewarded. Instead, Márai writes, *"what always counted in the Soviet system was whether it could use a human being, the raw material, today, Thursday, at 4:30 p.m."* (p. 83) The system subsisted primarily on forced labour.

Moreover, Márai is struck by the Russians' frenzied looting, which he views as the manifestation of *"some blind, biological instinct."* He noted that the Soviet soldiers *"pounced"* on a village, a house, a family, and destroyed everything they needed or did not need. Thus *"for years and years on barges, trucks, and trains, they hauled away from these rich lands the wheat, iron, coal, oil, and lard, and also human resources, German technicians and Baltic workers."* (p. 69) In response, the Hungarian peasants—*"just as in the time of the Turks"*—took the cows into the woods, buried the potatoes in pits, and hid the women. This looting also explained Soviet military power, Márai claims, since *"without the domestic and kidnapped scientists, spies, forced labor of an entire Russian generation,"* and American aid, *"Soviet industry could not have built ballistic missiles, new airplanes, the atom bomb, and a navy."* (p. 81)

Indeed, Márai concludes that Soviet soldiers plundered so zealously, including property they did not need, because of the abject poverty they had endured for decades. Poverty—not ideology—motivated them, since they robbed both the proletariat and the bourgeoisie indiscriminately (p. 65). Poverty also engendered corruption. Márai saw how Russians would sell a healthy horse for just one liter of brandy (p. 71).

For Márai the factors he notes in individual Russians' behaviour—the lack of freedom, submission to compulsory labour, indiscriminate looting—help to explain Soviet behavior in world politics. For

3 ■ Victor Klemperer: *Ich will Zeugnis ablegen bis zum letzten, 1933–1945.* 2 vols. (Berlin: Aufbau-Verlag, 1995). This book was reviewed by Anthony Northey on H-Holocaust, http://www.h-net.msu.edu/reviews/showrev.cgi?path= 25772851617659.

example, the Soviet leaders relied on compulsory solutions *vis-à-vis* relations with Central Europe: rigging or banning free elections to ensure that the Communists govern. While the Soviets did not shy away from the use of military force, they used it prudently—only when sure that no one would retaliate. To describe Soviet behaviour in the 1945–1947 period in particular, Márai uses the metaphor of a sniper, who warily takes a step, looks around silently to see what effect it has produced. If the sniper suspects serious opposition, he steps back prudently, in order to take two steps forward at the next turn (p. 122).

Márai tries to connect the idea of the Russians' lack of freedom and individuality to alleged distinguishing characteristics of Easterners in general. The Buddhist mystics themselves, he writes, encourage the *"dissolution of the personality,"* because only then—when a human transcends his individuality—does it *"mingle with the world rhythm"* (p. 107).

He implies that Hungary, in contrast to the Soviet Union, never sought Communism; the most influential Communists in Hungary had lived for many years in exile in Moscow. Now back in Hungary leading the new Communist regime, they were still marionettes, still intimidated by the Kremlin (p. 84)

Márai's traumatic experiences with the Soviet occupiers lead him to generalize about Hungary's unique history and place in the world. He sees Hungarians as "a people, in awful isolation, companionless among the peoples of the world." (p. 73) The more he witnesses the brutal side of the Russians, the more he identifies Hungary as non-Slavic and Western. At one point he speculates on Hungary's good fortune that it did not *"vanish in the Slavic melting pot,"* which he thinks could have happened in 900 A.D., when the Hungarians renounced paganism and embraced Christianity. At that time Hungary opted for the Western Roman Church instead of the Byzantine church, *"which Slavic characteristics had permeated by then."* (p. 73)

Maligning the Soviet Union and everything "Eastern" serves a special purpose for Márai. The more backward he can portray the East, the more enlightened he can become by contrast as a Hungarian and "Westerner." Indeed, one senses that Márai is groping for an identity in his geographical location. Beneath the seemingly objective and dispassionate observance of events is a talented and sensitive writer searching for an unaltering identity.

The reader discovers, however, that Márai's attempt at self-identification on the basis of geographic location is relative. As he travels toward the West, he notes certain negative qualities of the people there, and begins to see himself as an "Easterner" after all. In 1947 he travels to Switzerland, Italy, and France. Switzerland, with its brightly lit streets, abundant display windows, and thoroughly swept streets, strikes Márai as too clean. Like a castrated animal, Switzerland is "sterile" because it had remained neutral during the Second World War. He feels claustrophobic there because everything is done on the basis of "systems," not individual personal contacts. Italy seems a bit friendlier because, like Hungary, it is one of the poverty-stricken, vanquished powers of the Second World War. France brings back old memories of his last visit there right after the First World War. In all three Western European countries, however, Márai perceives a condescending attitude toward him (beneath the polite veneer) because he is an "Easterner." In contrast, the Russians and other Slavic peoples treat Márai violently but with *"a measure of un-*

derlying respect", because to them he is a Westerner and a writer.

Throughout his memoir, Márai engages in an agonizing debate: should he stay in Hungary permanently, or should he emigrate? His ruminations about the East versus the West represent his attempt to decide this issue. He had first confronted this dilemma while in Paris after World War One. At that time he decided to return to his native Hungary because he wanted to write only in Magyar for his fellow Hungarians, since so few Europeans outside Hungary knew the language. After World War Two he finds himself in the same dilemma—only this time in a Hungary under communist dictatorship. He wrote:

> In critical times, the moment arrives for the writer when he must decide whether he must relate what he has to say with perhaps corroded words in the linguistic sense but freely [in exile], or to lie in his pure native language with gasping circumlocution. This is a grating, difficult moment. But it cannot be avoided.[4]

Márai realizes that if he stayed in Hungary, not only would he have to *"write for the desk drawer,"* but that he would lack even the *"freedom to remain silent."* Without an audience, Márai knew he would lose all incentive to write.

Thus, Márai decided to leave Hungary for good. Realizing that he would have to wait a whole year before emigrating, Márai spent the time reading books by *"second tier"* Hungarian writers, since their books would be nearly impossible to find outside Hungary (p. 370). Márai valued these writers and poets *"who got lost in the pandemonium of the literary hubbub* [because] *they would not allow themselves to create something inferior"* (p. 371). Gyula Szini was one of these writers, a "slight, professorial-mannered, bespectacled man" who usually sat alone in the Balaton Cafe on Rákóczi Road with a *"briefcase bulging with French and literary newspapers."* Other writers and poets included Tömörkény, Lovik, Cholnoky, Kosztolányi, Moly, and Térey (pp. 372–3).

The book thus ends at a beginning—the beginning of a new life in permanent, voluntary exile. At the same time, the volume marks the end of his painful inner debate. It ends, moreover, on a sad, paradoxical note. Throughout the memoir, Márai emphasizes the innate freedom of the intellectually creative writer, be he in the *"catacomb or the prison."* Always the detached recorder of his experiences and his emotions, including fear, the creative writer remains in a sense free from them. Yet, as the train pulls out from the Budapest station for the last time, Márai feels afraid.

Perhaps the ending of this memoir seems sad because the reader knows that the author eventually commits suicide. Like the memoirs of many writers who took their own lives—Ernest Hemingway, Arthur Koestler, Sylvia Plath—his writings become all the more prophetic. Márai decided to emigrate because he feared losing his individuality in Communist-controlled Hungary, and yet he never felt at home in any other country. As a result, he took the most destructive step of all. In the final analysis, a combination of the trauma of Soviet occupation and the identity crisis of a writer torn between East and West led to self-elimination. ❧

4 ■ This passage appears in a later memoir written by Sándor Márai, entitled *1968–1975 Journal.* Albert Tezla cited the book on page 16 of his introduction in *Memoir of Hungary, 1944–1948.* No full citation was provided.

György Szabó

A Recent Chronicle of Hungarian–Italian Connections

György Réti: *Italia e Ungheria. Cronaca illustrata di storia comune* (Italy and Hungary. The Illustrated Chronicle of our Relationship). With a Foreword by Árpád Göncz. Rome–Budapest, ed. Fratelli Palombi, 1997, VII. + 158 pp., illustrated.

The Italian presence in Hungary goes back two thousand years. Under the reign of Emperor Augustus (between 12 and 9 BC.) the Roman legions conquered the area west of the Danube, and the province of Pannonia, as it was then called, was added to the empire, remaining part of it right up to its fall, unlike Dacia, a region occupied a hundred years later which included Transylvania but was evacuated earlier. Surviving signs of that civilization are still much in evidence. This was the region through which the "Amber Road" led to the North, running east of just where Vienna was to be founded later; camps, towns and sanctuaries were built, which came to set the pattern for later settlement. (Thus the capital of Lower Pannonia, Aquincum, was one of the predecessors of the city of Budapest.) Agriculture, most notably viticulture, still preserves the memories of this early connection; thus Italian visitors of today should find the countryside familiar.

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For long centuries, there was a steady influx of scholars, priests and artisans from Italy. Admittedly, there were some difficult years too, when the peninsula lacked the power to defend itself against the barbarian invasions from the north; these were precisely the kind of attacks the Hungarians themselves were to launch frequently when they conquered the Danubian region in the Carpathian Basin, after they had been ousted from their ancient steppe homelands. *"De sagittis Hungarorum libera nos Domine!"*, the prayer was frequently heard in the towns of Northern Italy (first in Modena, if my information is correct), as the Asiatic horsemen kept not only Italy but also the Frankish Empire and Hispania in terror with their relentless raids. However, when the Holy Roman Emperor scored a decisive victory over the Hungarians, the Hungarian tribes organized themselves into a modern state (balancing carefully between Byzantium and Rome), under the crown of Saint Stephen and this opened the way to cooperation between the two great powers of the region, the House of Árpád and Venice.

This is the point where the diplomat and historian György Réti's chronicle actually picks up the story, offering a wealth of information and lavish illustrations collected with sound instinct to present the one thousand years of history that Italy

and Hungary have in common. The text is bilingual and the scholarship is meticulous. Nor is the latter achieved at the expense of the book's readability; there are so many story lines that it all reads like a novel. The text is actually arranged in the form of a string of short novels, with their stories unfolding through the ages, beginning with the Middle Ages, through the Renaissance and on to the Modern Age, right up to the present. In addition to romances and war, cultural and the increasingly important commercial interactions are also recorded. As an author of several books on Italy, I am convinced that the latter were extremely important from the viewpoint of Hungary's intellectual and economic development, especially before the Ottoman invasion early in the 16th century, which brought a decisive and long-enduring setback to a cooperation with Italy that had hitherto seen so much success. The Italian presence was perhaps at its height under the reign of the Humanist king, Matthias Corvinus, before the annihilation of the Hungarian army by the Turks at Mohács (1526). It was then that the court historian Maestro Bonfini recorded that the Hungarian sovereign *"wanted to turn Pannonia into a second Italy"*. King Matthias' famous Corvina library (unmatched in the region), the elegance of the Royal Palaces at Buda and Visegrád, and his various architectural projects were all symbols of a flourishing European state. After the catastrophe of Mohács, however, all links with Italy were severed for a long time, and the Latin influence was gradually overtaken by the ascendancy of German culture, the philosophy of which was a far cry from Latin gaiety.

Therefore, the history of Hungarian-Italian relations can be divided into two major phases. The first phase—beginning with the connections of the kings of the House of Árpád through the continuously improving economic links right up to the Renaissance—is packed with interesting episodes. The country's joining the Christian fold (a necessary move to guarantee Hungary's survival) in the first months of the same millennium which is now drawing to a close, already provided a link to Italy and Southern France. To fend off the "protection" of secular powers, Stephen, who was later canonized, turned to the Pope in Rome for a crown, and Bishop Gerhardus (Gellért in Hungarian), who came to play such a major role in organizing the Catholic Church in Hungary, arrived from Venice. (Those who opposed this peculiar "consolidation" would never forgive the bishop: they later dumped him into a barrel which they hurled off the hill in Buda which now bears his name.) Stephen married off his sister to the Doge of Venice, and their son eventually succeeded to the Hungarian throne; King Ladislas got as far as the borders of the city state at the end of the 11th century; and Coloman Beauclerk married the daughter of the King of Sicily. Andrew II (1205–1235) took his wife from Ferrara: the elderly man was unable to resist the charms of a girl known for her fiery temper as well as for her habit of quaffing wine at dinner; Elizabeth, Andrew II's daughter from his first marriage, was canonized for her works of charity. The period abounds in stories of excess, sometimes ending in romance and sometimes in tragedy — it is a pity that Shakespeare had no knowledge of Hungarian history.

But the connections were not confined to dynastic ones. The majority of scholars of the time studied in Bologna: Janus Pannonius, the great Humanist and also a master of Latin erotic poetry, learned his art in Italy. The inhabitants of the peninsula frequently saw people from Hungary. (King Louis the Great, for example, was at one point the sovereign ruler of both Sicily

and Jerusalem), while Venice, which relied on the continent for its food, could not survive without cattle from Hungary. The Hungarian presence in Italy was so natural (just as natural as the Italian presence in Hungary) that Dante mentioned Hungary as "a happy land" in the *Divine Comedy*.

In the second major phase of Italian-Hungarian relations, the partnership was no longer that between sovereign states; instead, throughout the northern, wealthier regions of the peninsula, the Italian people shared the Hungarians' experience of Habsburg rule, as well as the desire to shake it off. In 1686, when a European army recaptured Buda Castle from the Turks, the first soldier to enter the fortifications was Baron Michele D'Aste (there is a plaque on the wall of the Coronation Church to commemorate this). There was also an Italian legion that fought in the Hungarian cause in 1848/49, when the Hungarian people (following the Italian example) rose in arms against Austrian domination. In a way, the Hungarian people returned the compliment after the crushing of their own revolution, when many of those actively involved joined the army that Garibaldi led for the unification of Italy. They were especially involved in Sicily, where one of the main streets of Palermo is still named after a Hungarian. Also, the poets of the two countries frequently expressed their mutual respect for one another in their verse.

These cultural aspects, too, are covered in György Réti's summary: he quotes passages from the poems; he mentions Ferenc Liszt's Italian connections; and provides an account of all those writers who translated Hungarian literature. In the second half of the last century, the translation of foreign literature became something of a national pastime in Hungary, a country of linguistic isolation, with the result that almost all the major Italian literary oeuvres can be read in Hungarian. Joint historical research projects were launched to search the archives. Some theatrical interconnections were formed. Fiume enjoyed a special status while under Hungarian rule, with Trieste and Venice being within easy reach: there was an excellent railway connection to these cities. Honeymooning in Venice was fashionable.

Then, in 1915, when Italy left the Triple Alliance and entered the war on the side of the Entente, the two countries came to face each other on the battlefield. The fighting took a massive toll in casualties at the river Isonzo (Soča), where many Hungarian soldiers were engaged in battle, and Austria-Hungary suffered its last great defeat along the river Piave. Hundreds of thousands of Hungarian soldiers sacrificed their lives there, and their cemeteries are kept up to this day. (A good ten years ago I took part in making a full-length documentary on the reunion of surviving veterans of that battle on site; perhaps the most emotional pictures in the film showed former enemies embracing each other while the two national anthems were played.)

When Hitler's menacing shadow began to loom on the horizon, Hungarian foreign policy once again tried to find an ally in Italy; however, Mussolini (although he actually mobilized his army in support of Austria) eventually shrunk back, and the hopes of that anti-German league were shattered. The alliance on the wrong side was worth nothing. And when the Iron Curtain was lowered after the Second World War, the links between the two countries were severed. Nevertheless, some connections in the field of literature were preserved: eminent Italian writers (Quasimodo, Pasolini, Moravia, Vigorelli) visited Hungary and Hungarian publishers tried to keep abreast of what contempo-

rary writers were producing. After the Hungarian Revolution of 1956, which made a great impact in Italy, things slowly started to move in the direction of a political thaw and cooperation, a process that came to maturity only after the Iron Curtain vanished. Drawing on his personal experiences, the chronicler gives a thorough account of all these events, including the steady improvement of the market economy flourishing under democratic conditions. Italy became one of Hungary's leading trading partners in the 1990s. One example of these economic relations is the planned Trieste-Budapest-Kiev motorway, the construction of which, under the aegis of the Central European Initiative, will soon be under way; when completed, it will not only aid trade between the two countries, it will make it easier for tourists to visit Italy more frequently.

The book comes with an extensive bibliography and notes, with the latter listing the names of all the eminent intellectuals, Italian and Hungarian, who cooperated with the author. It is an indispensable book for anyone actively engaged in this particular field, regardless of their profession. ❧

Oskar Kokoschka (left) and Rippl-Rónai (centre) in the Great War. 29 July, 1916. Hungarian National Gallery Archives, Budapest

Tamás Koltai

Heroism and Failure

Imre Madách: *Az ember tragédiája* (The Tragedy of Man) • Mór Jókai: *A kőszívű ember fiai* (The Baron's Sons) • Jenő Huszka: *Mária főhadnagy* (Lieutenant Maria) • Mihály Csokonai Vitéz: *Özvegy Karnyóné* (The Widow Karnyó) • Zsigmond Móricz: *Úri muri* (Gentry Fun) • Péter Kárpáti: Díszelőadás (Honorary Performance) • Árpád Schilling: *Kicsi avagy mi van, ha a tiszavirágnak rossz napja van?* (Shorty; or, What If a May Fly Has a Bad Day?)

In books on dramaturgy, tragedy is defined as a form of drama which ends with the fall of the hero. In everyday usage, heroism is equated with a desperate drive, and as long as that exists, so does failure; in this sense we cannot accept George Steiner's theory on the death of classical tragedy without some reservations. In an everyday sense we can continue to talk about failures and tragedies in the modern age, which—at least in Hungarian dramatic literature—have frequently drawn their material from classical traditions.

In *The Hungarian Quarterly* 147 I discussed in some depth Imre Madách's classic, *The Tragedy of Man* (1860), while touching on three productions of the play mounted in commemoration of the 175th anniversary of the author's birth. This verse play tells the greatest "story" of mankind so far, the creation myth, by narrating the fantasy journey of the first couple, Adam and Eve, with stops at some notable historical junctions: at the stages where man's ideas came to fruition. Somewhat in the way of a cynical university professor, the couple's guide, Lucifer, hopes to be able to demonstrate, by the end of the journey, the futility of historical and individual development. Unlike earlier productions which had interpreted it as either a passion play or a historical revue, recent productions have increasingly omitted the transcendent elements, prefering to treat the play as a drama of the crisis of modern intellectuals.

This is true too of the play's latest production by the Géza Gárdonyi Theatre of Eger. In Sándor Beke's direction, a modern-day Adam travels back to Paradise after pondering on the meaning of life. This is undoubtedly a confirmation of the Faustian motif. (In the second half of the 19th century, when the play was written and had its first production, it was fashionable to regard *The Tragedy of Man* as a *Faust* paraphrase.) It is a logical opening: at one point or another we have to ask ourselves questions about the purpose and meaning of life; yet, in order to be able to do that, we already need to possess a certain amount of life experience. As a consequence, the *Tragedy* soon abandons the line of a drama on rivalry, with a bid to challenge the cosmic balance of power (God versus Lucifer); it thus also departs from the direction followed in analogous works by Goethe, Byron and Krasinski.

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The interpretation here moves closer to lyrical works that pose questions of existential philosophy along the lines of *Peer Gynt*. But here a new problem lies in store for us. How should the hero play his naive and innocent younger self? In the Eger version, the main characters duplicate: a second young couple that appear on stage during the performance.

This is not entirely new in the history of the *Tragedy*. There have been directors who have used doubles sleeping through the changes of historical scenes, while their alter egos moved from scene to scene. In Eger, the young couple from the Paradise scene arrive on stage somewhat like a reminiscence, whenever "a belated ray of the Garden of Eden" falls on any of the historical scenes: i.e., every time that Adam and Eve faintly recall the age of innocence (for example, in Rome and London as well as in the Phalanstery). The recollections comprise some dreamlike choreography, along with a number of replicas which were moved here from their original places in the Paradise scene. Naturally, it is the "young couple" who feature in the first Paradise scene, and they are also the ones who start out on their ontogenetic sequence of dreams: by the end of the Egyptian scene, however, they trade places with the "older couple" in a dramatized fade-out.

Another problem that still has to be solved is the emergence of Adam as an intellectual, with his philosophical questions regarding existence. This required a separate scene. A modern couple in their thirties and forties—let's call them Adam and Eve, too—are moving books and bundles of periodicals to a cellar-like place. We do not know for sure what it is exactly, a storeroom or a paper-pulper. Whether they are destroying newspapers or weeding out books, this resigned and silent couple suggest a kind of disillusionment — from the Gutenberg Galaxy, perhaps? Eve curls up on the floor, while Adam is seen leafing through a book, until he, too, dozes off.

This modern-day scene terminates the Biblical frame. Adam and Eve enter their own dream, where they meet the protagonists of the play, including their predecessors from the Paradise scene. This creates the initial tension for the procedure of giving evidence: the sequence of the historical scenes. It is questionable, of course, how the narrative frame of heavenly character can accommodate all this. The rational questions of the modern-day Adam do not blend very well into the religious context. Thus it is only a white silk gown draped on him like a vestment that brings to mind the clerical aspect of the Lord, a tall and powerfully built layman with grizzled hair. With his black boots and an armour-like costume of black cotton, with a conventional cape thrown across his shoulders, eyes lightly made up and greyish-white hair plastered to his skull, Lucifer looks like a circus magician. In their divine and diabolical capacity, they are all abstract figures, crosses between the transcendent and the everyday.

The presentation is the strong point of the production: the world of images and sound, and the well-coordinated work of the large cast. At the end of the play God includes Lucifer in the eternal "family scene" of mankind. This is taken in good humour by all the characters, while Adam and Eve, after learning of Eve's pregnancy, and after abandoning the universal mission entrusted to them, resume their sleep beside the pile of books.

Madách's *Tragedy* was born in the early 1860s, in the lethargic mood following the crushing of the 1848 Revolution in Hungary. The Hungarian events of 1848, part of the wave of revolution sweeping across Europe, count among the heroic

national traditions. On March 15 there were many commemorations of the 150th anniversary of the outbreak of the Revolution, an anti-Habsburg rebellion sparked off by a number of young intellectuals. The Hungarian theatre took part in the celebrations in a rather subdued manner. However, the National Theatre could not ignore the occasion. They called upon the nation's great tale-teller, himself a former "March Youth", Mór Jókai. Although he did write a number of mediocre plays, Jókai made his reputation as a novelist. One of his best novels, *The Baron's Sons,* tells the story of a family of Hungarian nobles during the Revolution with an epic sweep. The novel is about a widow and her three sons rising in defiance against the pro-Habsburg husband and father. We learn how the Austrian hussar captain becomes a Hungarian captain, and how the youngest son sacrifices his life to save his oldest brother from being court-martialled by the bloodthirsty Austrian General Haynau.

The adaptation for the stage of the novel's complicated story-line required considerable simplification and abridgement. The director Katalin Kővári used minimal stage sets that could be rapidly transformed. (The grey screens and systems of staircases and pulpits of the stage design were reminiscent of Erwin Piscator's political theatre of the 1920s.) Jókai's complex tale was turned into a rather skimpy sketch, the kind that Piscator wrote for his stage version of *War and Peace,* with the only difference that this production lacked the political motives behind Piscator's adaptation of Tolstoy. Nothing more is required than the telling of the story, and this was done rather dryly, so dryly in fact that the director has provided markedly strong effects—the clouds of smoke and the heavy romanticism of Liszt's symphonic poems—added to set the mood. Thirty years ago a production like this, the earlier adaptations of this Jókai novel included, would have been mounted against a colourful realistic backdrop and would have lasted from 7 p.m. to 11 p.m. The National has us outside the building by 9:30 p.m.

Instead of the historical reality of failure, it was the legend of 1848 that Jókai, a true romantic, chose to convey in his novel—heroism, rather than the painful experience of failure. The chroniclers recorded that in 1892 he paid tribute to Mária Leibstück, a legendary heroine of the Revolution, whom he had met at an exhibition held in commemoration of 1848. The old lady had fought as a lieutenant in the Hungarian revolutionary army. Forty-four years later, the writer met her as she sat behind the cashier's desk in her uniform, selling tickets for the exhibition.

The same patriotic young lady was presented in Jenő Huszka's operetta *Lieutenant Mária,* conceived in the spirit of the two Hungarian figures of classic Viennese operetta, Ferenc Lehár and Imre Kálmán. In fact, it follows not only in spirit, but also in musical invention. The composer, Jenő Huszka, was not afraid to borrow from the vocabulary of the Viennese waltz. This is somewhat surprising in a work which honours the Hungarian resolve to rise against Austrian oppression. Perhaps the director's idea when including Johann Strauss' polka "Long Live the Hungarian!" in the performance of the National Theatre of Győr was to reconcile old enemies.

According to the operetta, Mária Leibstück is a young lady educated in Vienna, who enlists in the Hungarian Honvéd in order to avoid a hateful marriage with an Austrian aristocrat; once in the army, she distinguishes herself against the compatriots of her former fiancé. By an operatic stroke of fortune, her commanding officer is a law student whom she saw and fell in

love with during her escape from Vienna. The disguise of her uniform stands in the way of their romance; however, during a clumsily carried out attack, the heroine wins the commander's disdainful admiration. (The two motifs show that the librettist managed to combine *As You Like It* and Heinrich von Kleist's *Prince Homburg.*) At one point, the heroine, now promoted to the rank of lieutenant, is suspected of treason, but by the happy end she has cleared her name. Naturally, her love is also reciprocated and the two can fight for freedom in sweet unison.

The subplot is made attractive by the three stage appearances of Lajos Kossuth, Regent of Hungary during the Revolution. In all three acts he stands where he should be: at the side of the lovers and by the cause of freedom. On the altar of the latter, he even has the strength to sacrifice his own passion for another Hungarian belle of similar patriotism.

Huszka composed some sweet melodies, carefully counter-balancing the waltzes with a Hungarian *palotás* and a version of the famous Kossuth March. Perhaps this was what the Minister of Culture objected to during the premiere in 1942, when, according to the memoirs of the composer's wife, he frequently shook his head in disapproval. The memoir suggests that the minister was worried about the emphasis on Hungarian patriotism, which was counter to the interests of allied Germany after her recent annexation of Austria. Rumour has it that there was talk of banning the piece the following day. In the end the censors were content with the removal of a few sentences. (Today's production is in no danger of similar censorship.) Directed by the actress Éva Almási, the play has been produced under the aegis of female solidarity. Only another woman is able to understand a patriotic lady, whose love can only have two objects: her country and a handsome hussar captain. The play ends where the couple, now united in their love, set out on their fight for freedom. There is no mention of failure here.

There is some talk of the French Revolution in Mihály Csokonai Vitéz's classic comedy *The Widow Karnyó and the Two Scatterbrains.* The poet, who was a Jacobin sympathizer, submitted to the recently formed first Hungarian theatrical company several of his own works, along with a number of translations from Molière, Goldoni, Metastasio and Schikaneder, none of which were accepted. Csokonai (1773–1805), the greatest poet of the Hungarian Enlightenment, was never to see any of his plays performed by a professional company. *The Widow Karnyó* was no exception: the only production he ever saw of it was that directed and performed by his own students. Thus did the village school of Csurgó, where the poet held a teaching post, take its place in theatrical history.

The Widow Karnyó is a comedy of the Molièrian kind, with tragicomic overtones. The main character is an elderly woman, the wife of a shopkeeper who has not returned from the wars against the French. Her husband missing, presumed dead, she consoles herself with the money-grubbing "scatterbrains" seeking her favour. Her passion for men and her desperate efforts to appear younger in both dress and behaviour, makes her a prime candidate for benefit performances given by great actresses. However, the poetic and surreal awkwardness of the archaic language has stood in the way of performing the play and it is rarely billed. Even when it is, the emphasis is invariably on the comedy of its archaisms. The young Iván Hargitai, who directs this version in the Új Színház, tries a different approach. For him the charac-

ters are real people and not caricatures. The comic story, with its plethora of the nonsensical, is given a workable frame. The shop looks like the corner of a modern wholesale store. Instead of being presented as a comic witch or a man-hunter, Mrs Karnyó is a matron longing for love, stricken by panic at the thought of being out of it. Comical without a doubt, it is also very human. The actress Kati Lázár makes the most bizarre and most outlandish sound familiar or stylized. When the grieved widow Karnyó wants to commit suicide, hallucinating about Heaven under the influence of a drug thought to be poison, the actress gives us a coloratura aria—in middle tonal range. Not all the actors reach this level of perfection. In any case, the closing scene gives us some idea about the relativeness of heroism and sacrifice. When, after many years of absence, the husband suddenly returns from French captivity, we see him in a state of confusion, circling around his deeply sedated wife, who is lying on the catafalque. Then we discover that he is only looking for a bottle of wine he had once stashed away.

One of the most successful stories about failure is *Gentry Fun,* written and adapted for the stage from his own novel by Zsigmond Móricz, an outstanding author of social novels of the first half of the twentieth century. While I would hesitate to call the stage adaptation a failure, it is well-known that Móricz was forced to make several concessions, quite often in accommodation of middle-class taste, by easing up on the harshness of his novels and short stories. Sometimes he turned the original tragic conclusion into a happy ending. In the case of *Gentry Fun,* no such atrocity was committed; the modifications here were confined to the inclusion of a few comic inserts, such as the scene of a lavish breakfast for the poor peasants waiting for their wages.

Móricz was a writer of the Hungarian soil, or to use the words of his friend, the poet Endre Ady, of the "Hungarian fallow": a metaphor in reference to the backwardness of the country's economic and social conditions. The tragic hero of *Gentry Fun* wants to make the Hungarian soil, and the Hungarian economy, prosperous by setting up a model farm on his diminishing estate. However, he is surrounded by primitive people—provincial landowners and army officers throwing away their money and lands, either in wild carousals or in card games, all despising and ridiculing his ideas of reform. He needs money for his plans, but his wife, Eszter Rhédey, the haughty, wealthy and beautiful descendant of an old noble family who understands him neither as a man nor as a reformer, turns down his plea for help. The deeply frustrated Szakhmáry tries to find refuge in the arms of a calculating peasant girl, one of his day-labourers; finally, after a wild night of wining, carousing and Gypsy music, he sets his farmstead on fire and shoots himself.

Gentry Fun established a tradition in Hungarian theatrical history forty years ago when it was produced in the classical style of "high realism" in the National Theatre. Its latest production comes as a surprise from the Merlin Theatre, which is known for its fresh, frolicsome and teasing performances. The director, Tamás Jordán, had to take into account his location, for the theatre is confined in space, providing no room for realism in design—or full-blown emotions. The great carousal in the "Puszta" turns out to be more like a "goulash party" in a roadside inn. The characters are given a contemporary resemblance: Szakhmáry is like a bankrupt small-time entrepreneur, the peasant girl would evidently feel more comfortable in

jeans than in peasant costume. Still, the spirit of the play has not lost its power, as today, too, we are witnessing great ambition and great disillusionment around us. It is only the manner of performance to go with that which has gone out of style in the contemporary theatre.

Péter Kárpáti's play *Honorary Performance,* which is the first production of a recently formed alternative theatre group, is a story of modern failure. Its main character is a scientist slowly going berserk, a certain Endre Hőgyes, who, as head of the Pasteur Institute of Budapest, informs the public of the opening ceremony ("played" by the theatre audience) of the calamities surrounding his new invention, a powerful antiserum for rabies. The play is one enormous, crazy monologue, in which we find out what lies in store for the great Pasteur's follower in Hungary. (Although the setting is the beginning of the century, the theatrical present, of course, directly actualizes the story.) The strange visions of the speaker's deranged mind appear with a grotesque realism in the course of the monologue: the autopsy in the hospital, the influx of rabies sufferers, the scientists holding a conference in a cage reserved for experimental rabbits. The deliberate stylistic hodgepodge comes complete with burlesque and audience participation, all combined, in Balázs Simon's direction, to erect a bizarre monument to Hungarian provincialism. In other words, the central theme here is the same as in Zsigmond Móricz's play, the tragedy of the obsessed do-gooder.

Coming full circle, the formula for stories of failure returns to the mythological interpretation, almost to the point of Madách's *The Tragedy of Man,* in the direction of an extraordinary talent of the youngest generation, Árpád Schilling. Schilling, who is currently studying directing at the Budapest Academy of Theatre and Cinematography had his own alternative theatrical group already before his enrollment, and is still working with them. He rehearsed the play *Shorty; or, What If a May Fly Has a Bad Day?* for nine months with the Krétakör (Chalk Circle) company. (He is also the co-author of the script in the sense that he cast the dramatic material into shape during improvisational sessions at rehearsals.)

Shorty is a young man of twenty-three, who takes us into his confidence. "He is a naive young man, who believes that order rules the world, and that nothing is without a purpose, explanation and consequence," a critic writes about the play. From his soliloquy, and from the events portrayed, we can track the development of his personality, equally influenced by the false ideologies of his family circumstances and the outside world. Shorty's situation parallels both Hamlet's and Christ's—he has to discharge a mission. Yet, he lives in a confused age which fails to guide him when caught between good and evil, between what to follow and what to reject. We can trace his development as a child, his gasping for air in the whirlpool of sexuality and politics, of lifestyle and career. Finally, like Adam in Madách's *Tragedy,* he, too, becomes disillusioned with everything, and decides to blow up the whole world, himself included. But he cannot set the fuse on fire. He is still trying to throw away his life in a heroic manner, when the spotlight slowly loses him at the end of the performance. ❧

András Csejdy

Once Upon a Time...

Károly Makk: *A játékos* (The Gambler) • Tamás Tóth: *Natasa* (Natasha) • Bence Gyöngyössy: *Romani Kris—Cigánytörvény* (Romani Kris—Gypsy Law) • György Pálos–György Czabán: *Országalma* (Orb)

At European film festival press conferences, in interviews with directors, in studio corridors, in conversations among producers, all that is currently being talked about is the lack of money for making films, and that the only way to prevent a whitewash by American movies is to allocate considerable financial resources, at the national as well as the European level, to cinematic workshops.

Hungary is in a unique position, insofar as the Hungarian commercial television channels launched six months ago are all legally obliged to give six per cent of their profits towards the production of Hungarian films, which means that considerable financial resources will be available in the near future. In the meantime, filmmakers can either consider making low-budget movies or, if they are lucky, can work in foreign productions.

Károly Makk is among the lucky ones.

The rain is pouring down hard and there is mud everywhere. With her hair soaking wet and eyes baggy with fatigue, a beautiful young woman and her baby are shown on their way to a pawnshop; the year is 1870, and the location Baden-Baden. So opens Károly Makk's new film, a British-Dutch-Hungarian co-production, *The Gambler,* based on Dostoevsky's novel. This is the first—partly—Hungarian film for a very long time that has some chance of being successful in Europe. The reasons are to be found in the director's earlier international success and, but even more, in the rebirth of British costume films—and that genre's abiding popularity.

It is always rewarding to adapt a classic to the big screen. Whatever angle the director might be able to find, and no matter how far he wanders off from the known facts and the canonized interpretations, his work is guaranteed to create more of a stir than it would had he tried to take his viewers into an unknown world of his own creation. This especially applies to films about writers and/or great literary works. Scripts based on clichés are usually doomed to failure. Agneska Holland's movie about Rimbaud and Verlaine, *Total Eclipse,* or Richard Attenborough's most recent Hemingway adaptation, *In Love and War* for example, were far from satisfactory. In contrast, an approach which tries to weave the process of creation, the art and circumstances of the birth of a concrete literary work into a portrait of the artist, always provides a stimulating intellectual challenge.

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is a free-lance film critic and writer.

Makk chose the latter course.

Although *The Gambler* is the film version of the novel of the same title, the film is primarily about its author. In 1866, the period in question, Dostoevsky was one of Russia's best-known writers; he was also deeply in debt, lonely and ill, and was in danger of failing to meet his agreement to deliver a hundred-and-sixty-page-long novel in thirty days to his publisher. In breach of this obligation, he would have been obliged to forfeit all rights to his artistic output, past and future, in favour of that literary pawnbroker. Harried by creditors and exploited by his own destitute relatives, the writer asked a stenographer, Anna, to move into his apartment and take down in shorthand, working night and day, the story he dictated set in an imaginary Rulettenburg.

Imagination and reality fade into one another imperceptibly in the film, which has numerous story lines and jumps back and forth in time: characters in the fiction reveal the author's biographical details, while Polina, who is patterned on a disgraced woman, visits the writer in one of the scenes; the most absorbing strand shows the emerging relationship between the author and Anna.

Because this young woman becomes a witness, and after a while the catalyst, of the novel's birth; falling asleep by the inkpot on the table, she dreams herself into the role of the main characters of the story taking place in that Mecca of gambling, irresistibly drawn into the world of the novel; the fact that the impossible was achieved—the novel was completed on time—was largely owing to her resolution, strength and curiosity.

The child carried to the gambling parlour from the pawnshop in the opening scene by that beautiful and poor young woman (who, four years after the completion of the novel, went by the name of Anna Grigorievna Dostoevskaya) was conceived from this unique human relationship, while the roulette-playing father was the aging, limping and overweight writer himself.

Károly Makk, now seventy-three, has directed a pleasant, tightly composed and finely acted movie. Even if it will not improve the foreign standing of Hungarian films, it will provide a clear message to the outside world: Hungarian movie makers can compete with the rest of the field, and can still hold their own on the international market, provided they can work under normal conditions.

"It is better not to think about it. And it is better to be afraid than to receive a fright. This is really more than one can bear." Such comments, or similar comments, are being made in any discussion of law and order within the borders of our huge neighbour, the disintegrated empire of the former Soviet Union. For the past decade or so, we, who for many years threw our lot in with big brother, are not prepared to know about what is going on in that intercontinental danger zone.

We would rather not.

One memorable moment in our recent history was when, in June 1989, in a speech delivered at the reburial of Imre Nagy, the former Prime Minister executed under the Kádár regime, the then still radical young politician Viktor Orbán publicly demanded the removal of all foreign, i.e. Soviet, troops from Hungarian territory. The speech was received with great surprise and instinctive alarm by everyone above forty. Much has happened since then, our two governments have preserved friendly relations, and our politicians are in a mad rush to join NATO, since you never know. The link, it appears, has gone once and for all with the removal of the constraint.

And that is bad.

It is bad, when the only news coming from the CIS member states is carried in crime reports in the tabloids; it is bad, when, instead of learning about the developments of a historical self-examination, we find that compromised politicians are given prominent positions; and it is bad, when even the traces of Russian culture are rapidly disappearing from our horizon. We keep our distance; we turn our back on them; and in our boorish indifference we fail to realize that in this exciting, transient, wonderful, dangerous and complex world, in this huge rich country very close to our borders, people very similar to us struggle with problems very similar to ours.

In contrast with this stupid and arrogant cultural indifference, the Hungarian cinema is the only area in which our links with Russian culture have not been radically terminated. On the contrary, for the first time after many, many years, our film makers are now in the position to deal with Russian reality in its full complexity, without political overtones and expectations. Péter Gothár's *Vaska Easoff* and Ibolya Fekete's *Bolshe Vita* were two important stations in this interpretive process, both enjoying wide recognition abroad.

Tamás Tóth's *Natasha* can be the next such station. This thirty-two-year-old director has already shown some interest in the Russian theme in his earlier films: his *Stalker*-like industrial feature film, *Children of the Iron God,* and his disturbing documentary, *The Fall of the KGB,* were received with praise.

Natasha is a mythical and mystical love story with elements of a fable, set in today's Moscow, more specifically, in the gigantic towers of that phalanstery, familiar from postcards as a symbol of Moscow and Communist power: the Lomonosov University.

The choice of location is telling. This gigantic Socreal building, intended as a symbol of socialist knowledge and internationalism, announcing to the world the superiority of the Soviet hemisphere, was built in the 1950s—in American style. As we all know now, the world existing in the imagination of the people conceiving the building has collapsed, and the institution, now used as an international youth hostel, serves as a grotesque memento. It is in this sparse mausoleum that Tóth has placed his story of a Hungarian boy meeting a strange Oriental girl.

In the director's vision, this Stalinist-Baroque magic castle makes a bizarre medium: dislodged from time and space, the various races and ethnic groups from all parts of the world live their lives in a Babelian confusion, linguistic and otherwise. A wild variety of costumes, styles and rites co-exist in peaceful, or not so peaceful, harmony: Tartar hordes run riot in the corridors, sexy *dezhurnayas* pry into the affairs of the private sphere, and African princes and European whores provide the background to an incredible, and hardly interpretable, story.

After a shoot-out in a market-place, far too realistic for my liking, Ferenc, the Hungarian boy, gets acquainted with Sergei, a powerfully-built, bald young Siberian, and his younger sister, Natasha, who instantly mends his injuries by using stones and fumes. His new acquaintances also include their grandmother (a medicine woman who communicates with the spirits through her shaman drums), her lover, a thoroughly wise Decembrist, and a domesticated wildcat.

It is in such magical-realistic surroundings, and with such characters, that various miracles and amazing coincidences take place. In this Fellinian stage-designed reality, any normal, traditional human

emotion seems impossible. The lovers never consummate their love, the Siberian trouble-maker is shot dead, and Ferenc returns to Budapest utterly confused and lonely.

Despite its shortcomings, Tamás Tóth's creation is likely to open new vistas in the Hungarian cinema: the visual world of *Natasha* is startlingly powerful and unusual, the musical structure suitably agitated, and the Russian cast refreshingly artless. Had the director been able to avoid the cultural-anthropological approach; had the exotic episodes been less feigned; and —most horrendous of all—had the viewers been spared of the sight of Lomonosov's wildcat, a recurring motif and the epitome of a symbol, walking across Budapest's Chain Bridge, then *Natasha* could have shown the way how to combine, tastefully and successfully, the popular and the artistic, and how to attract large audiences to art movies.

The films on show this year, full-length, short and experimental, show that filmmakers have accepted the fact that they do not know what to do with everyday life; the works, the trends and the approaches suggest that the profession has turned its back on any artistic treatment of everyday experience, leaving the problems and issues concerning individuals and social groups, society as a whole or in part, unreflected. The impression we get is that scriptwriters and directors have got cold feet; it is as if they do not believe that it is possible to speak authentically; it is as if they, through their stories, have given up trying to say anything authentic or interesting about where we live.

Instead of this—and sadly not in conjunction with this—an approach which dresses up reality in the fabulous and the balladic, which weaves the story line through an archaic medium, is becoming more and more typical. While this is generally true for the entire field, including *Natasha* and *The Gambler,* it is nowhere as evident as in *Romani Kris—Gypsy Law.*

For this, his first film, director Bence Gyöngyössy managed to get Djoko Rossich, a Serbian actor evoking memories of the great days in Hungarian movie making, in the role of Lóvér, the Gypsy King Lear. In search of his youngest daughter, whom he has unfairly treated, the great story-teller meanders through the contemporary Hungarian landscape, entertaining with his endless stories Tamáska, the deaf-and-dumb village fool from his former home, now razed by bulldozers. Although an honest and upright man, Lóvér has a terrible crime on his conscience: he has killed a man, the administrator who bought up the Gypsies' houses for peanuts and then ordered them out. The King Lear theme is closely followed: he has shared the money received from the State between two of his daughters, who, although they love and respect the old man, cannot endure living under the same roof with him. The derelict man and his deaf-and-dumb companion can no longer stand life in his daughters' houses and pin their last hopes on the youngest daughter, the horse-lover Sarolta, unfairly left without a share of the money. In a twist befitting a folk-tale, the vagabond Gypsy stumbles on his daughter, where else, on a stud farm.

Beautifully photographed, *Romano Kris* is a naively frank and touchingly authentic film, which combines the folkloristic, Romantic and markedly passionate motifs and topics of Gypsy culture with raw and adequate facts. Because there are, indeed, Gypsies who become derelicts, when their wattle and daub huts are razed to the ground; there are, indeed, Roma minorities organized according to an archaic hierarchy; and there are, indeed, incidents

reported in the newspapers when Gypsy laws and justice are in conflict with the current legal system.

As six to eight per cent of the population are Gypsies, the problems of the Roma minority affect all Hungarians. It is in this milieu that this magical fable of a movie was born, and even if it seems too sentimental, too rounded, and sometimes too idealized, it has an excellent chance of being well received by Western audiences.

In *Orb* a two-man provincial television team sets out to follow up on a story, which involves some mysterious incidents taking place in the remote past in Csenyéte, a backwater village. This Gypsy settlement is beyond the seven seas but still on this side of the glass mountains. The television people are trying to find out the truth about Csulánó, an infamous thief. They make inquiries and try to trace his relatives. As they ask their questions, more and more of the local people start to recall his deeds, while a helpful man from Motyog is even willing to take the team to Csulánó's hideout. And just as in a medieval farce, the episodes of Csulánó's life begin to come to life: we learn how a lieutenant married his daughter and how he disappeared immediately after that; how he was put in prison and how he managed to escape; and even King Matthias, the folk tales' legendary champion of justice, puts in an appearance in this mad, Eastern-European absurd farce, composed in a true Hrabalian style.

Orb, produced and directed by György Pálos and György Czabán, is one of the most fascinating feature films made by a Hungarian independent producer in the past ten years, and also the first low-budget work to which, believe it or not, the entire profession gave its blessing. This is a very lovable and funny work, which is defined as "a colourful family entertainment with lots of music, suitable for kids and adults alike."

The kind of fable we enjoy.

As to the Walt Disney productions, the cineplexes can have them. ❧

Erratum: The heading of the leading article of *HQ* 149 states that Ferenc Pulszky died in 1889. In fact he died just one day before the planned celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of his membership of the Academy in 1897. The error is very much regretted.

Sir,—The intellectual disingeniousness, if not downright haughty revenge,* of Zsuzsa Beney (book review, "Enter Attila József..." (HQ 149, Spring 1998) is simply shocking to those who know both the author (Thomas Kabdebo) and the reviewer. In a longish "essay" purporting to lament the volume's "pedestrian," "crude," and "oversimplified" rendition of Attila József's oeuvre, going as far as dubbing Kabdebo's interpretation "Marxist" (which "he had probably acquired as a university student in Communist Hungary")—Beney, the distinguished physician, poet, writer, critic, leading disciple of the legendary "Fülep Group," commences with an unexpectedly harsh Kabdebo bashing, listing first the book's "minor" mistakes, then, getting even more agitated, the "much more serious shortcomings." First she denounces Kabdebo for being too biographical and sociological (and not "poetical/analytical" enough) and then goes on to censure his book as a "vulgar" text that "leaves the reader in the dark about the social and socio-cultural fabric of the 1920s and 1930s..." Well, which of the two is the mortal sin?

Similarly, on the one hand, the review berates Kabdebo's "sketchy portrayal of József's family and era", on the other, chides the overabundance of "biographical overview." Once Beney admits, "Kabdebo tries to be objective... (and) is authentic" then she reprehends him for "not drawing a coherent picture of the artist and his art." Well, which side of this paradox then prevents Kabdebo from generating a reliable (?) image of József in the non-Hungarian reader?

All these critical gaffes are doubly regrettable; they are demonstrably petty in view of the volume's overall value, and its uniqueness in the genre, particularly in English. Furthermore, it is especially painful since we, Hungarians, have long been yearning to break out of our curse, linguistic isolation, while singing jeremiads for inadequate translations. Thus we can ill afford such murky "appreciation".

Be it as it may, it's rather unlikely that Beney would succeed in convincing readers—let alone those who know nothing about József's poems in translation—to forgo their initial reservations and surrender themselves to the uneven, vitriolic ministrations of comments by a Hungarian literary comrade-in-arms.

Incidentally, my American colleagues (hitherto unfamiliar with the work of this Hungarian genius), who recently read Kabdebo's tome: *Attila József. Can You Take On This Awful Life?* (Budapest, Argumentum—Dublin, Cardinal Press, 1997) and nothing else on the subject, unanimously opined that "it [i.e. the output] belongs within the canon of Western literature", contrary critiques notwithstanding.

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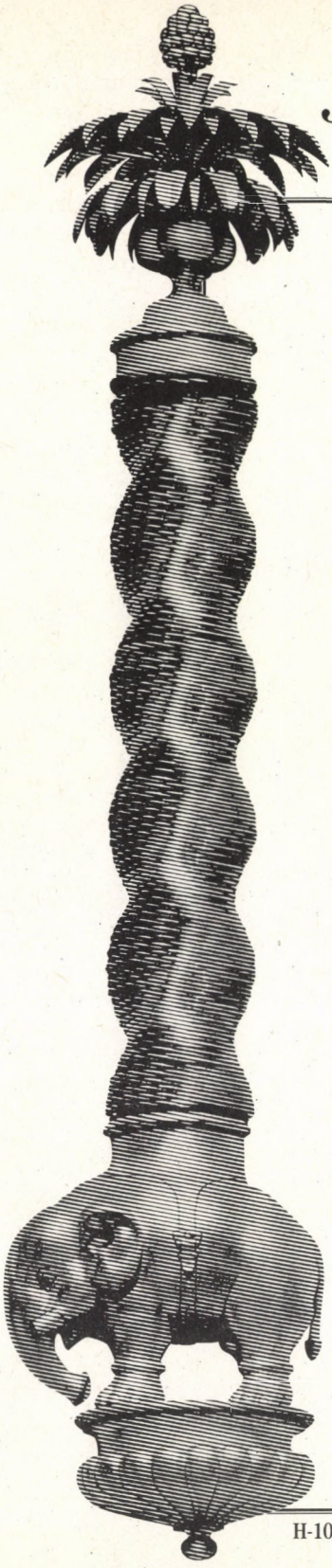
* Kabdebo criticized Beney in his book for being a Marxist critic, who deliberately misunderstood József's religious poems.



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It was from Neuilly that Maillol enticed me to his native parts in Banyuls, whose environs had not till then been exploited by artists, even though it is one of the most picturesque regions I have ever seen. Here, I soon saw everything in colour, though not yet as "sunny". This is where I painted those works of mine whose religiously simple yet colourful motifs served as a transition from the "black" series to the "sunny" or —if you will—stridently coloured series. It was the intensive blue of the ocean which provided the impetus. This was the turning-point. My present ideas and searches in painting date from this period. My studies and paintings done at that time convinced me, above all, that paintings should be executed at once; what's more, that the power of the colours must be intensified in the simplest way possible.

From *József Rippl-Rónai: Memoirs, pp. 15–28.*

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