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*The New  
Hungarian  
Quarterly*

Two Poems — *Attila József*

What is Socialist Democracy made of? — *Miklós Óvári*

The Human Factor — *Péter Rényi*

The Social Responsibility of Hungarian Science — *György Aczél*

The Parameters of Détente — *Elemér Szádeczky-Kardoss*

Global Development, Disarmament, and Economic  
Decolonization — *Mibály Simai*

Fiction and Poetry — *Miklós Mészöly, János Parancs*

# 78

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# *The New Hungarian Quarterly*

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*This issue went to press on April 8, 1980*



## POETRY AND POLITICS

**T**his issue opens with a poem titled "By the Danube." If there is such a thing as a 20th-century Hungarian poet whose name is known even where Hungarian is not spoken, then Attila József is that man. We hope, of course, that it has not escaped the notice of readers that for over twenty years now, in each and every one of seventy-eight issues of NHQ, we have published Hungarian verse, in the first place by poets who are still alive, or who could still be amongst us. Miklós Radnóti, who would be seventy-one this year, is one of the latter, and Attila József another. The whole country is celebrating Attila József's 75th birthday this year. They could truly be still amongst us, one only has to remember that their great contemporaries, friends and fellow poets, whose work is becoming more widely known wherever poetry is read in English thanks to an anthology—*Modern Hungarian Poetry*, published by Columbia University Press—drawn from the pages of NHQ, are very much alive, and active. Gyula Illyés is in his seventy-eighth year, István Vas is turning seventy this year. NHQ proposes to mark the occasion.

April 11th, Attila József's birthday, has been a red-letter day in the calendar of Hungarian letters for twenty years now: April 11th is Poetry Day. Countrywide celebrations evoke his figure as that of one of the greatest Hungarian poets with an international reputation. Later issues will contain writings on Attila József, memoirs as well as critical appreciation, in the present one we pay homage in the most proper way by publishing his own verse.

To offer verse to readers and writers using major and widely-spoken languages in versions that come close to the standard of the Hungarian original is a difficult and daunting task. "The price of verse translation" in this issue gives an account of the process. The author is Miklós Vajda, the Literary Editor of this journal, and the compiler and editor of the above mentioned anthology.



The major message of this number centres on an issue and an event: the future of détente, and the Congress. The official name is 12th Congress of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party, but to the man in the street it is just the Congress. In Hungary today a Congress, in a certain sense, tends to resemble parliamentary elections in western countries, preparations are a real pre-election campaign. The guiding principles of the Congress are discussed and argued over at meetings in numberless small villages—and large towns as well—and not only by members of the Party. Those who attend contribute to the discussion, they interpret, debate, and make suggestions. What this process is about is exemplified by an article based on a television interview with Miklós Óvári, a senior member of the Party leadership. The title itself points to the principal subject of the Congress, and the article goes into details: the notion, practice, further extension, everyday application, theory and implementation of socialist democracy.

Imre Pozsgay, the Minister of Culture, discussed the realisation of socialist democracy on Budapest Radio when interviewed by a staff reporter. The character of, and the need for, administrative measures was described by way of introduction, then the conversation moved to an important condition for the extension of socialist democracy: the charting of the interests at play. In culture the problem shows itself when the publishers and editors of literary journals fail to reflect the interests of discernible economic or social groups or sections of society. Pozsgay's answers show that there is no objection on principle to the specific features of this or that periodical being more pronounced. At a later stage the minister and his interlocutor discussed the way economic difficulties affected intellectual life.

\*

A single article, by Péter Rényi, deals directly with the Congress, and even to achieve that proved difficult technically. This issue actually went to press (i.e. copy was delivered to the printers') on March 3rd. The Congress was held between March 24th and 28th. Without the collaboration of Kossuth Printers we could only have written about the Congress in our Autumn number, and that would not have made much sense to anyone who feels or thinks as a newspaperman. The New Hungarian Quarterly is what its name declares it to be, as such it cannot, and does not want to, compete with dailies or weeklies as a purveyor of scoops or hot news. Nevertheless we presumed that, a few weeks after the event, it was *likely* that there would still be interest in the subject. At the time of writing, having read the reports, comments, interpretations and speculations in the



international press, I know I could safely cross out the qualifying adverb. The printers kindly agreed to accept additional copy long after the rest was set up, and the pages were made up, setting aside a sheet for the Congress material. I cannot here give the gist of Rényi's article, since it is being written after these lines.

\*

As was made clear in country-wide pre-Congress discussions, and at the Congress itself as well, the maintenance of the process of détente is the joint care of the Hungarian political leadership and of public opinion. It is not enough to merely declare its importance, serious analysis is needed, political as well as scholarly analysis, and public opinion has to be kept informed. In the current issue Professor Elemér Szádeczky-Kardoss, the geologist and geochemist, examines the parameters of détente at a time of intellectual cacophony due to the flood of information. Independent critical thinking is needed to do away with this confusion. The trouble is the absence of unified standards of measurement. Lacking them a variety of mutually contradictory opinions can be formed about the same thing, and no universally persuasive common result is achieved as regards such obviously rational desires as disarmament, détente, and the proper limitation of selfishness and lust for power. The article suggests quantitative solutions to be expressed in space-time parameters. It is this that explains the unusual heading.

"Global development, disarmament, and economic decolonisation" by Mihály Simai, an economist, exemplifies an altogether different approach. His starting point is the international strategy defined and developed by a number of UN agencies. Simai argues for the necessity of such a global strategy, which will allow new economic relations to come into existence, that will, in turn, make the process of détente unavoidable. Disarmament and decolonisation mark the connection between the new economic conditions and détente. Some readers might notice an absence of argument or information referring to Hungary, indeed the word Hungary itself does not occur in the article, something that is unusual for our paper, especially in writings of this nature. I think the present international situation is the right time for a journal published for an international public to include a contribution to a discussion of questions of world economic growth by a Hungarian author who feels the world to be his oyster.

Three articles reflect important and timely questions of our own country, Hungary. György Aczél once again charts the course of intellectuals under socialism, a subject on which he has contributed a number of articles to this



journal. On this occasion he concentrates on the social responsibility of Hungarian scientists. Typically, in recent decades, the role of intellectuals has increased in importance. Aczél not only proves this by quoting facts and figures which will also surprise many Hungarian readers, but argues from the reasons for the troubled economic equilibrium, while looking for the scientific conditions which will permit the balance to be restored. He concludes by seeking, and finding, a socialist interpretation of an oft-quoted, one could even say dangerously fashionable expression: self-realisation.

Egon Kemenes discusses the present situation of Hungarian economic management, from the introduction, in 1968, of what has become internationally known as the "new mechanism" to the new system of regulators which came into force on January 1st 1980. He presents the general principles of the new system of regulation, as well as the new principles of price-regulation. The subject is a serious one indeed: the economic situation.

The third article on a Hungarian subject is Gyula Varga's discussion of small-scale farming. To quote: "Small-scale farming is often said to be the root cause of the Hungarian miracle, the mysterious key to the very rapid and steady growth of agriculture." It is the business of the article as a whole to show whether or not this is really the case. His categories are, of course, neither miracles, nor mysterious keys, but economic evaluation and analysis. The same question is discussed from the village angle by a young Welshman, C. M. Hann, a Cambridge social anthropologist, who, incidentally, did a year's stint as language editor of this paper. During his stay at Tázlár, the village which was his field, and which is the subject of his present article, and an earlier one published in NHQ 74 he improved his Hungarian to such a degree that he is now fully qualified to serve as the language editor of a "New English Quarterly" published in Hungarian, if there were such an animal. In his earlier piece he had outlined the development of Tázlár from the Middle Ages up to the Liberation. The present article, which comes very close to what we in this paper, adapting a Hungarianism, call a sociography, discusses the present and future of specialised cooperatives, one of the forms of small-scale production, giving evidence of personal experience, and sound training in the Cambridge school of social anthropology.

Two pieces open a window to the wide world: a Manhattan diary kept by the poet György Somlyó, and a reader's diary on three American novels read in Budapest by the distinguished Hungarian scholar and critic, Péter Nagy.



Whenever I try to survey a new issue by way of introduction I always feel tempted to mention each and every contribution. I shall resist that temptation now, only drawing attention to two writings. One is the text of a television interview given by Béla Köpeczi which outlines his life and scholarly career. The other is Balázs Vargha's piece on something specifically Hungarian: "immortal *ponyva*", *ponyva* = canvas, and *ponyva* are all those books, pamphlets, broadsheets, etc. traditionally sold at country fair booths, that is so to speak under canvas.

Illustrations are responsible for the first impression the paper gives. Our Art Section this time opens and closes with religious art. It opens with an account by Katalin Dávid of an exhibition at the Budapest Museum of Arts and Crafts which she organized where objects loaned by the Roman Catholic, Calvinist, Lutheran and Orthodox churches, and by the Jewish Community, were on display. It closes with a report on surprising and almost esoteric examinations of the frescoes of a small gothic church at Velemér in western Hungary. Sandwiched in between is the most contemporary and most modern Hungarian art which, as many have told me in their letters, or in conversation, often surprises readers, being such a long way from the obsolete conventional idea which is still current in much of the western world concerning the art of a socialist country.

I am sure this is not the only thing that is specifically Hungarian in this issue. Perhaps it can be left to readers to discover for themselves what else there is. Nevertheless I should like to draw attention to Miklós Mészöly's story titled simply "Hungarian story." It is my own and my colleagues opinion that it could not have been written that way in any other country or in any other language.

\*

The sad news of András Pernye's death reached us while correcting final proofs. He has long been a regular contributor, writing first on concerts, later on records, and recently became a member of the editorial board. In the present issue he writes on Vivaldi combining, as usual, sound scholarship and high artistic sensitivity. Another article is due to appear in NHQ 79. An appreciation and memoir will be published in a later issue.

THE EDITOR



# POEMS

by

ATTILA JÓZSEF

BY THE DANUBE

I.

On the bottom step that from the wharf descends  
I sat, and watched a melon-rind float by.  
I hardly heard, wrapped in my destined ends,  
To surface chat the silent depth reply.  
As if it flowed from my own heart in spate.  
Wise was the Danube, turbulent and great.

Like a man's muscles bending at his toil,  
Hammering pitching, leaning on the spade,  
So bulged and then contracted in recoil  
Each wave that rippling in the current played.  
It rocked me like my mother, told me a wealth  
Of tales, and washed out all the city's filth.

And drops of rain began to fall, but then,  
As though their fall had no effect, they stopped.  
Yet still, like one who stayed at the long rain  
Out of a cave, my gaze I never dropped  
Below the horizon. Endlessly to waste,  
Drably like rain fell all bright things, the past.

The Danube just flowed on. And playfully  
The ripples laughed at me as I reclined,  
A child on his prolific mother's knee  
Resting, while other thoughts engaged her mind.  
They trembled in time's flow and in its wake  
As tottering tombstones in a graveyard shake.



2.

I am he who has gazed a hundred thousand years  
 On that which he now sees for the first time.  
 One moment, and fulfilled all time appears  
 In a hundred thousand forbears' eyes and mine.

I see what they could not because they must  
 Drag hoes, kill and embrace, for this enrolled,  
 And they, who have descended into dust  
 See what I do not, if the truth be told.

We know each other as sorrow and delight.  
 I, in the past, they in the present live.  
 They hold the pencil in the poem I write.  
 I feel them and evoke what they now give.

3.

My mother was Cumanian, and half Szekler  
 My father half Rumanian or entire.  
 The nurture from my mother's mouth was nectar  
 And from my father's lips the truth was pure.  
 When I stir, they embrace. Then, soon or late,  
 This makes me sad. This is mortality.  
 Of this I am made. Such words as these: Just wait  
 Until we are no more—they speak to me.

They speak to me, for now I am they, robust  
 Despite whatever weakness made me frail,  
 And I think back that I am more than most:  
 Each ancestor am I, to the first cell.  
 I am the Forbear split and multiplied  
 To make my father and my mother whole;  
 and so I am made one, a single soul.

I am the world; all that is past exists;  
 Where nations hurl themselves against each other,  
 With me in death the conqueror's victory lasts,  
 in me the anguish gnaws of those they smother.



Árpád, Zalán, Werbőczy, Dózsa, Turks,  
 Tartars, Rumanians, Slovaks, storm this heart.  
 If in great depths a quiet future lurks,  
 It owes the past, to-day's Hungarians, part.

I want to work. Enough of conflict goes  
 Into that need which must confess the past.  
 The Danube's tender ripples which compose  
 Past, present, future, hold each other fast.  
 The battle which our ancestors once fought  
 Through recollection is resolved in peace,  
 And settling at long last the price of thought,  
 This is our task, and none too short its lease.

(1936)

*Translated by Vernon Watkins*

## MOTHER

All this last week I have been thinking  
 of my mother, thinking of her taking  
 up in her arms the creaking basket  
 of clothes, without pausing, up to the attic.

Oh I was full of myself in those days—  
 shouting and stamping, crying to her to leave  
 her washing to others, to take me in place  
 of the basket, play with me under the eaves—

But calmly she went on, lifting out the clothes,  
 hanging them to dry, she had no time to scold  
 or even to glance at me, and soon the line  
 was flying in the wind, white and clean.

I cannot shout now—how could she hear?  
 I see her, great, vast, yet somehow she is near.  
 The wet sky shines washed with her blue,  
 her grey hair streams where the clouds scud through.

(1934)

*Translated by Edwin Morgan*



## THE HUMAN FACTOR

by

PÉTER RÉNYI

**T**o put it simply, can a political congress be cheerful, and if so in what manner, if it meets in a far from cheerful world situation and midst cares at home, as the 12th Congress of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party did. That it can be so, is a fact.

Those who had the opportunity to observe the three day long discussion and János Kádár's 90 minute closing address, either in the hall, or on television, will confirm this. Speaking of the latter one can say without a thought of disrespect that one seldom laughs so much and so heartily in these sombre times. Even some of the critical western correspondents mentioned Kádár's humour, though they suggested that this was the sugar-coating of the bitter pill of the expected stagnation of standards of living. But those who imagine an atmosphere in which one can joke about the most serious questions as the instrument or result of some sort of manipulation must have got stuck on the very skin of the surface.

Kádár's humour springs from the depths of his political personality, from an optimist way of looking at things toughened by the most severe of tests, from an experience of life which, in a thousand and one respects taught him the dark side of things as well. His humour is not a gleeful pointing up of contradictions, as an outsider's might be, nor is it a looking to pleasantries as an outlet for problems, the way those responsible often try to pour oil on troubled waters.

His humour can perhaps be best described as being something which harps on problems and makes fun of Hungarian weaknesses not against the cause, but for it. "It sometimes makes me think why the implementation of this or that resolution is a matter of fits and starts?" he asks, to give an example, and then continues: "My only consolation is that according to the Bible Moses received the Ten Commandments many thousands of years ago—that was perhaps the first 'Party resolution'—but the implementation is still only under way. Necessity drives us to work a little faster." Joking about implementation being "under way" for thousands of years and the need to work "a little" faster, is typical of Kádár's ironical style, all the way



from making fun of the bureaucratic idiom, to its playful, but seriously meant interpretation: that, in the given circumstances we will not progress if we stick to the habitual ways.

Or let me quote him, when he "reassured" managers—and that too was received by the Congress midst great hilarity—who thought that the tax on profits was too high, and who figured out how much higher profits would have been if dues had not been raised: "count on it: dues will be no smaller next year. If you carry out this year's plan competently they will remain what they are, if not, they may be severe still." This is not what is called gallows humour in Central Europe, it is not the joking of someone who, seeing no other way out, takes refuge in the absurd, it is the voice of the spokesman of a cause whose supporters trust the future.

Far be it from me to say that the present situation in Hungary is an idyll, I do not want to overestimate what Hungarian society has achieved but I can say perhaps that in a cloudy world, which is clouding over apace, one is not likely to see as much forward looking good humour on the political platforms of many other countries as one was able to witness at this Congress.

What then was the secret of this? The problems were certainly openly and clearly called by their own names, nor did those who addressed the Congress in any way refuse to recognise, deny or minimize expected difficulties. Not even the most critical of western observers can accuse Hungarians of looking at the recent past or the immediate future through rose-tinted spectacles. The Central Committee report stated which of the economic prescriptions of the previous congress were not carried out; the leading body of the Party stated that the unfavourable changes in outside economic conditions highlighted the weak points of the Hungarian economy and the mistakes of leadership. Frequently the economic authorities were unable to adjust to changing circumstances sufficiently quickly and flexibly. The Prime Minister detailed some of the weaknesses of the administration in full session, in the presence of television cameras. The objectives of the next, the 6th, Five Year Plan were established by strictly bearing in mind changed circumstances, and promising no more than the consolidation of what has been achieved, the defence of standards of living, and only modest growth. And it was stressed, what is more, that there would be need of much greater efforts than heretofore, to achieve that much.

To put it briefly, there was no prompted, manipulated optimism about any of this, furthermore the very idea of some sort of fanaticism governing deliberations was out of the question. There was no trace of ideological rigidity, of ascetic obsession, of forced, grandiloquent plans that could not care less about the everyday cares of the masses.



Fifty-seven spoke in the discussion but none of castles in the air, everyone concentrated on real and possible objectives, showing respect and gratitude for the efforts of working people, but not turning the masses into idealized howes. Critically and analytically, evaluating and making suggestions, they spoke of present reality, a reality which the millions witnessing proceedings on their television sets were able to recognise as their own. Bombastic breast-pounding and a flood of moralising curses and invective were both conspicuous by their absence. Nevertheless so many different chords were struck, and there was such a variety of approach that men and women in every part of the country kept up with proceedings, attentively and showing interest throughout.

Let me divert a little and try to give an idea what this wide-spread interest referred to, and how it could be interpreted. It is extremely difficult to explain to anyone living at a distance from socialism exactly what the importance of a Party congress is in the life of a socialist country. This is true not only of the prejudiced, but even of friends and symphatizers.

One can hardly compare the Congress with the congresses of western parties, to start with because they are here held at five year intervals, and just about every problem figures on the agenda. There are more far-reaching differences as well, primarily due to the fact that a one-party system exists in Hungary, as in several other socialist countries. Those unfamiliar with Hungarian conditions may therefore conclude that the Party congress is the private business of the Party—in the case of Hungary that of 800,000 Party members—which could not really concern the non-party masses, the overwhelming majority of the population for the simple reason that they have no say in the shaping of policy.

As against this it must be said that the Party congress as far as the political interest and commitment of the masses was concerned, not to mention the realisation of this political will, did not start when the first session was declared open but months earlier. Preparations are an essential part of the Congress. The most important aspect of this is that the preliminary guiding lines issued by the Central Committee are discussed in every factory and workshop, every producers' cooperative, enterprise and institution, including the Academy of Sciences, throughout the country. In tens of thousands of Party branches several hundred thousand Party members participated in the debate of the directives of the 12th Congress, and non-party members were invited to attend many of these meetings and contribute to the discussion. The leading bodies of mass organizations with millions of members discussed them as well, publishing their views.



It would certainly be misleading to imagine that the intentions, positions and views of non-party people were not manifest in that discussion of government policy which takes place at meetings of the Party membership. It would be a gross error to imagine that hundreds of thousands of Party members, great numbers of ordinary men and women, could be made to accept principles which do not square with the endeavours of those amongst whom they live, whom they meet at work or in clubs, in the family circle or as part of their social life, principles which do not express, or pay no heed to the interests of various sections of society and social groups.

Only those who interpret socialist power as the intolerant dictatorship of a minority obsessed by power which confronts the people could imagine that the Party's policy is an alien will imposed on the country from above or from the outside. But not even those who have not renounced any of their hostile reservations *vis à vis* the socialist system maintain any such thing today, that is if they are familiar to a degree with conditions in Hungary today. In other words, that exchange of opinion which precedes the Congress can best be compared to the political process which precedes elections in bourgeois democracies. In Hungary this means that grass roots criticism and suggestions influence the draft resolutions submitted to Congress. There are two essential differences: there are no irreconcilable class-interests confronting each other under socialism, which means that by its very nature the political struggle is not as acute as it is in western countries between those in power and the opposition; the common interest predominates, something which, overstressed, may lead to a covering up of differences, and hence the endangering of the firmness of the shared platform. At the same time public opinion in Hungary has no fewer active, direct, practical and sensitive ways of manifesting itself in the drafting of policy, than are open to citizens enjoying the suffrage in the west in the unique act of casting a vote at the polls, choosing this or that party.

As regards the latter no one denies its importance in expressing the popular will, but it ought to be mentioned as well that in the West today, as regards the majority of major political parties, the chief criterion tends to be—increasingly so lately—obtaining the maximum number of votes, leaving out of account the traditional basis of the party concerned, or its ideology. This means that the gap between party programmes diminishes and getting the floating vote, in the middle, is what counts.

One may well compare this with the preparation of a congress as another method of familiarizing oneself with public opinion. Both methods have their advantages and disadvantages. I certainly do not imagine the Hungarian way to be perfect. I ought to add, however, that general interest in



congresses has increased in Hungary, on every occasion, in recent decades, and this was the case in 1980 as well.

Let this much be said to shore up my assertion that there was widespread interest in the proceedings of the Congress. What then most excited general curiosity? This is not the place to list all the major subjects in turn, I shall confine myself to mentioning a few typical phenomena.

\*

Economic questions were in the forefront of attention, something that was only to be expected, primarily ensuring and developing the sort of production which, as many put it, stood the test of being judged by the market at home and abroad. It is self-evident that the many objective conditions were mentioned on which the implementation of plans and ideas depended. It was noticeable that, this year more so than ever before, speakers stressed the importance of the human factor, of the readiness to innovate and the opportunities for enterprise. It is worth giving some thought to this, the more so since outside circumstances have never before been as oppressive a weight on the Hungarian economy as right now; in other words there was a splendid opportunity for shifting the bulk of responsibility onto adverse circumstances and objective difficulties. Something has started there which may well have an extraordinary effect on the whole of later progress (some of the speakers explicitly mentioned it), one could say that difficulties are beginning to show their favourable effects; the cleansing and educative powers of necessity are becoming apparent.

Friendly and not-so-friendly reports on proceedings stressed the open and critical character of deliberations. A spade was called a spade, and journalists appreciated this, for good reason. But one could go one further. There are many different ways in which one can criticize and show up mistakes. One is by merely pointing up faults, attacking weaknesses in the implementation of accepted sound resolutions, drawing attention to forced and superficial measures. That happened as well, but things also went much further. Criticism of practice which was good enough by the standard of current norms was also demanded, that is it was said that things had to be thought through again, that more initiative was needed.

Many west of Hungary can only imagine criticism in a socialist society as the exposure of bureaucratic, soulless and negligent management and work. There is no denying, that is needed as well. Another sort of criticism, however, and there is more need of that now, is to subject every sort of routine, sticking to the beaten track, and conservative method to investiga-



tion; including those which work smoothly enough in their own way, even producing results, but not that little extra needed to overcome the far from small difficulties that lie ahead. Those were criticized as well who made no mistakes because they took no risks and never took the initiative.

The Hungarian economy is an odd sort of field in some ways. There is plenty of scope for activity and hard work, nevertheless there is a certain inclination towards awkwardness. New directions are only taken when necessity propels, if there is no other way. One could also say that economic progress is damaged by success, and that finding oneself in a mess has its uses. This was so in the second half of the sixties when the reserves of extensive development were beginning to be exhausted, and new methods and new incentives had to be found. The 1968 reform, whose advantages persist, was the result. And yet the situation which then forced the renewal of economic management was nowhere near as pressing as the present one.

Does this mean that Hungary is moving towards a new reform that is more radical than the earlier one? Anyone observing the Congress from that angle will have heard this or that about carrying on with the reform and the necessity of adjusting it to the new situation, but not in the sense of having to change any of the major elements of the system of management. Instead, or rather as part of it, the spotlight was on the human factor I mentioned above. The stress was not on changed in delegation of authority, the principles of distribution or forms of organization, but on the exploitation of the scope for useful work they contained, primarily on the mobilization of intellectual resources, on better use being made of talents and skills, on a better middle-management and better specialists, on a bolder show of appreciation for outstanding performance and proportionate financial rewards, on a more determined position being taken against levelling and equality-games, etc.

What is done in that respect these days could well be more radical than the introduction of a new version of the "new mechanism, though there would not be much sense in calling it a reform, provided that what the Congress decided or suggested is turned into true coin. Far be it from me to say that we are putting our trust in some sort of miracle which will make it possible, within a short time, for Hungary to cope with the extraordinary burdens which weigh on the country. A good few years will have to pass for that to happen. But one can indeed expect that the political, moral and human capital which the Party accumulated in past decades—the human factor, if you like—will be manifest not only in rising morale, not only in the country's atmosphere or the colours of life (and a growth in material as well as intellectual goods is part of that) but, in my view, and



much more forcefully than heretofore, in work and production as well, in creative activity and in the readiness to accept responsibility and do one's job.

We are faced with an odd sort of paradox. Economic growth will slow down in the years ahead, the indices of national income will hardly rise, and nevertheless we hope, and not without good reason, that this period will speed up the metamorphosis towards a socialist sort of man, and the transition towards socialism. Perhaps it is this that explains the good humour, optimism and confidence of the Congress. It expresses that we have reached the point where it is possible to transform confidence in a policy and joy over what has been achieved into a material and creative force.

No doubt the much more marked presence of the younger generation played a part in this, their more audible voice which was generally critical but which also demanded responsibility. Talk of this Congress being that of a change of generations would not be right, and there is no need of it. The voice of the founding fathers was still loud at it, that is of the generation which had started the building of the new society. But as many mentioned, the new generation was present at the deliberations, as it is present in the country. Everyone was conscious that there were people to whom the management of affairs could be handed, and that they were no worse than the generation before them. Through the younger men and women were not toughened by past hells and did not live through the War, they are better trained and educated, they have all that it takes to do a good job, even given the increased demands made by the future.

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As I indicated at the start, I only mentioned a few aspects of the Congress, largely concentrating on home economics affairs. Naturally much else was discussed, socialist national unity, the policy of alliances with non-party people, and their respective development; many mentioned access to, and participation in culture, education, health; art and literature barely received a mention, and one missed this or that essential ideological subject. Something, however, was given noticeable attention if not on the theoretical plane, then at least on the level of politics and practice, and that was the national and national minorities question, matters of interest to every Hungarian, wherever he might live. The Congress unambiguously and emphatically confirmed the internationalist party line, loyalty to proletarian internationalism, and loyalty to the Soviet Union and the socialist community. It was in that spirit that it discussed the national minorities living on the territory of the Hungarian People's Republic, and a number of members of these minorities in fact addressed it and described how the national



minorities policy of the Hungarian leadership worked out in practice in areas inhabited by people who are not ethnic Hungarians. It really was a memorable moment when the delegates applauded a village council chairman who began his address with words of greeting in Rumanian.

The Central Committee report also dealt with the question. "It is an important part of social unity resting on a socialist basis," János Kádár said, "that members of national minorities in the country take part in the work of construction and political life as citizens with equal rights." He pointed out that they may freely use their native language, and that they are granted the appropriate assistance to help them nurse and develop their national culture. The Party does its best to ensure that the national minorities should continue as active participants of social and political life in Hungary, preserving and enriching their national heritage and culture. "What we wish," he continued, "is that the Germans, Slovaks, Southern Slavs and Rumanians in our country and the Hungarians living in neighbouring socialist countries, should contribute to the deepening of the friendship between our nations, and their internationalist cooperation.

Both delegates and visitors at the Congress, and later the international press showed themselves most attentive when János Kádár mentioned that, for historical reasons, around a third of all ethnic Hungarians lived outside the borders of the country. There were Hungarians in just about every part of the world. "It is good to know when thinking of them", János Kádár said, "that most of them preserve and cherish their native language, culture and heritage in keeping with the options open to them, and that they respect socialist Hungary. We expect them to be honest citizens of the countries they live in while at the same time maintaining their national culture, as well as furthering social progress and friendship amongst the nations."

In his closing address, he added: "In our country, in Hungary, people of differing ethnic origin live, work and prosper as people with full citizen rights, in keeping with the principles of Leninist national minorities policy, and our laws and constitution. We wish that the same be true for Hungarians living beyond the country's frontiers."

All this makes it clear beyond doubt that the Party opposes every kind of chauvinism, considering socialist patriotism and the internationalism of the working class to be an integral and indivisible unity; interpreting the national interests and national unity of the country in this spirit, that is in a socialist manner. What I have said about the atmosphere of the Congress and its unity of outlook, confirms, I think, the judgement that in this respect as well the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party can count on the great majority of the people.



# WHAT IS SOCIALIST DEMOCRACY MADE OF?

by

MIKLÓS ÓVÁRI

**A**round the 12th Congress of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party the development of Hungarian society is determined by three main points of action. First, we have to follow the tried and proven line of the Party. There is no reason to alter this course. Further, the situation implies that we have to continue to strengthen the socialist features of Hungarian society. And finally, the great achievements, the results attained, particularly in the economy, concerning living standards, must be safeguarded, and firm foundations necessary for further development must be laid.

Since the 7th Congress held in 1964 we have generally insisted that the Party line does not change. It has to be said that public opinion in general acknowledges this fact with satisfaction. And let me add that it is neither convenience nor indifference that prompts Hungarian public opinion to insist that it is a good thing if the Party line does not change. The political course, which we have steered for the past more than two decades, was set by the Party as a whole and this in close collaboration with the people. This Party line is backed up by very important, I could say hard-won, historical experience. The most important of these lessons is that we had to break with sectarian and dogmatic policy, which failed to take reality into account and underestimated the importance of the masses, as well as with revisionist arguments appearing in the guise of modernisers of Marxism-Leninism.

It was also recognised that revisionism and dogmatism, complement and strengthen each other. It is therefore necessary to break with pseudo-revolutionary attitudes and opportunism, or simply with impotence and

Based on the transcript of a television interview broadcast on December 11, 1979 which discussed the guiding principles for the 12th Congress of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party held on March 24-28 1980



choosing the soft option; with the disparagement of theory and its severance from practice, with the underestimation of the masses and with that spontaneity which, implicitly or explicitly, rejects the leading role of the Party. When saying that HSWP policy remains unchanged, we know full well that in the meantime, during the past two decades, great changes have taken place in the life of the country. To mention only the most important: we have reorganised agriculture, created socialist farming on a large scale; in 1968 substantial reforms were introduced in the management of the economy, and many other such changes could be mentioned, from all fields. This shows at the same time that the unchanged character of the Party's policy does not imply that ours is the sort of conservative party which sticks to its initial position for decades. I could put it this way: the unchanged element of policy is the very fact that new questions arising in the life of society are regularly taken up and resolved. The unchanged state of Party policy means that socialist aims and principles remain unchanged, that we work on the basis of the ideas of Marxism-Leninism. We keep in view the generally valid laws of the building of socialism, but a factor of this immutability is also that we take fully into consideration the domestic conditions, the concrete particularities of Hungary; that is policy based, in the Leninist spirit, on a concrete analysis of the concrete situation.

Steadfastness applies to methods, as well. In the internal life of the HSWP this means respect for the Leninist norms of party life: we always want to work with the masses in an atmosphere of confidence. This implies the need for persuasion on all important matters, sincerity, a realistic and critical view, and also that the Party looks on its leading role not as domination but as the service of the people.

An important feature of this situation analysis is the strengthening of the socialist features of society. There have been great achievements in the building of socialism of which one cannot speak day after day. And there is no need to do so, they have become organic elements of our lives. All the same, at times such as now, anticipating a Party Congress, there is no harm in recalling them. Achievements of this sort are power firmly in the hands of the people, socialist national unity, the well-tried policy of alliances built on wide foundations, developing socialist democracy, and development along socialist lines in all the sectors of the Hungarian economy, in industry, agriculture, transport and also in the service industry. These are historical achievements, this can be said with every good reason though we do not like to use big words. I might as well say: this is our job, this is the meaning of our life.

At the same time, if we want to draw a realistic picture of Hungarian



society, it must also be said that society is often occupied with difficult and serious problems, and this creates a certain anxiety in the public mind. For example, the Hungarian people are concerned about the arms race, they are anxious that they should be able to defend peace, in their own interests, and that of their children. It is a cause of anxiety that growing requirements and increasingly difficult tasks keep on being mentioned. Shall we have enough strength to meet higher requirements? And there is a certain concern about living standards, not so much because of the present situation, but what has the future in store for us, that is the question; will the economic situation deteriorate? Not only concern but also criticism is voiced. The vast majority of the critical remarks harmonizes with the intentions and ambitions of the HSWP. I take it to be a sign of political maturity that the Hungarian nation is well aware that it alone can create greater democracy, and more freedom. Here, as is usual in economic matters, I should like to stress quality; speaking not so much about more democracy and more freedom, but rather about fuller democracy and fuller freedom.

There is every reason to speak of the political maturity of Hungarians. At the same time we entertain no illusions. True enough, in Hungarian society there are no classes or sections opposed to socialism. But there are, in no large numbers though, elements opposed to socialism who do not agree with the Party on certain questions. There are also those who oppose the policy of the Party as such. A still greater number are indifferent, looking at the exertions of the people from the outside. Some are pleased about the difficulties, what is important to them is not the welfare of the people but the chance this offers for giving reasons for standing apart, for pessimism and cynicism. I mention all this in order to round the picture. The Party will in any event continue with the tried and proven policy of alliances and efforts to develop socialist democracy. The well-known foundation of this policy is the worker-peasant alliance, but it includes all those imbued by love of country, who do an honest day's work, and keep a close eye on the way the needs of the people shape, being ready to do something about it. The policy of alliances is based on the consideration that the building of socialism is the cause of the Hungarian people as a whole. Socialism is there for everybody, so everybody must lend a hand in the building of socialism. At the same time the policy of alliances implies the practice of debate. The very reason for the policy of alliances is that, in Hungarian society, there are still differing interests, which in turn give rise to differing opinions. The policy of alliances and debate do not therefore exclude one another but are interdependent, persuasion being



the instrument of this policy. Only persuasion can mobilise people in the interest of the best and finest aims. The policy of alliances is therefore on the mutual confidence of the Party and the people. It also follows that political work means service, and not the giving of orders.

Another important element of the policy of alliances is the relationship between members of the HSWP and those who are not. It is an old-standing principle of ours, and we shall reaffirm it also at the forthcoming Congress, that any office, except for Party office, can be held also by those who are not Party members, if they are suitable. In culture and science the policy of alliances manifests itself in the Party invariably supporting creative freedom showing tolerance for all endeavours of good will. Cultural policy is built on confidence. We are confident that creative artists and scientists will not abuse this confidence or—to be more realistic—that only few will abuse it, so few that it would not be proper to give up creative freedom, this great motive force of progress, because of them. Prohibition is only used reluctantly and when and how it is brought to bear does not depend on the leadership.

The policy of alliances presupposes frankness, too, because people have to know what they want to support, what the aims of the Party are, and why they should join an alliance.

What I have in mind mentioning frankness is not the prompt, precise, detailed and possibly colourful reporting of all events, although I consider that this also is very important, in the first place we must speak frankly about all political and social questions of importance, we must tell the governed the whole truth. What I mean by the whole truth is not a list of errors but—since both belong to the whole truth—that we should speak plainly both of results and of problems. If we only mention one side, say results, then people will see that words and experience do not tally. Therefore we have to reach a point where everybody will see clearly what we have to tackle and how we intend to tackle it.

To sum up the essence of socialist democracy I would say that what is now needed is not so much the creation of new platforms but, first of all, for us to make good use of existing platforms and to fill them with the appropriate substance.

Several factors ought to be touched on if we want to say what the substantive development of socialist democracy hinges upon. It should be mentioned that democracy in Hungary does not look back to centuries-old traditions. It follows that we now have to learn the practice of socialist democracy. It is not a simple thing to learn, one cannot study it reading books. The Party can do a lot for the development of socialist democracy, al-



though this does not depend on the Party alone. Enterprise managers can do much by asking for workers' opinions on questions which require this. We are building a society based on community and it is built not by one man or by a few people. Such a society will conform to the shape we give it, and socialist democracy as well will take the shape we give it.

Some say that it is easier to make socialist democracy effective in an easy situation than in a more difficult one. I do not share this opinion, and neither does the Party. Socialist democracy does not contradict disciplined and high-quality work, moreover, it insists that without discipline there can be no genuine socialist democracy. Socialist democracy implies voluntarily accepted discipline on the part of the workers. If requirements are higher, if tasks are more difficult, then there is a greater need to explain policy, to make tasks understood, to win over the people, there is greater need for thinking together and for confidence, that is, for all that one could succinctly call socialist democracy.

## FROM OUR NEXT ISSUES

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# THE PARAMETERS OF DÉTENTE

*A Common Quantitative Viewpoint in the Service of Peace*

by

ELEMÉR SZÁDECZKY-KARDOSS

**T**he dialogue between scientists and artists on the tasks of intellectuals in the service of peaceful progress sometimes gives rise to a flow of ideas so ample that it puts a brake on concrete realisation. A good many plans, thoroughly talked over but unrealised and obstructed, accumulate in the course of intellectual pursuits, and once forgotten notions suffer repetition more than once.

This kind of repeated attempt is, in every living system, a fundamental and vital trait, which recurs with special intensity in periods of rapid major change.

Biologically, too, we are now living in a time when nations and societies have come into direct and permanent contact, and when man transforms considerably, and determines practically at will, the biological spectrum of his environment. The closer spatial contact, which started with the discovery of America has, in our age, reached a new level in which the earth has become a habitat, necessarily in need of systematic spring-cleaning, for a human society enormously grown in number and much more busy than other creatures. This direct spatial contact implies, of course, economic and intellectual interdependence.

After the progress made in overcoming the spatial dimensions of the earth, emphasis is increasingly placed on the investigation of the temporal dimension, attention being turned to the future as well. Perhaps the thinking of no other society has been so futurological, so much oriented towards the future and its immediate and extended planning, as ours. The most important compulsive forces of orientation towards the future are, as is widely known, the limitations of raw material supplies, accompanied by a world-wide struggle for the sources of raw materials, the demographic ex-

Text of the keynote address at a Scientific Forum of the Hungarian National Peace Council on January 22, 1980.



plosion, the fast and partly undesired transformation of the environment, and the flow of information.

I propose to make a number of remarks about one of these questions, the channelling of the information flow, on the basis of new knowledge derived from my speciality, geochemistry. Given the mass of increasingly complex new knowledge the really essential and well established amount of new and old knowledge is often eclipsed compared with propagandistic elements, grown into alarming news, of uncontrollable and partly contradictory data. From the point of view of peaceful development it is particularly important that recent intellectual confusion turned into a hotbed of the manipulative maintenance and, what is more, intensification, of war-like attitudes. This question has great perspectives for scientific peace research and should be examined more methodically.

One of the common reactions to the information flow is disappointed pessimism leading to anti-intellectualism. In the West, as is known, this has had a vast and already commonplace effect on philosophy, literature and other pursuits. Anti-intellectualist social pessimism turns against rational ideologies in the first place, principally against Marxism, often under the guise of a sympathetic understanding that ends up with attitudes of disillusion in Marxism.

Many now add the problems of the so-called information catastrophe to issues of an economic character, which held a leading place among the catastrophe signals of the Club of Rome. In view of the American war hysteria, the concern which Marcuse, Marshall McLuhan, Hacker and others showed because of the preprogramming of decisions thought to be free, and voluntary action manipulatively producible on a mass scale, was not at all unfounded. Steinbuch demands environmental protection against information pollution. He proposes the regulation of the communications system with the grouping of news in categories of necessary, neutral and dangerous.\*

A positive manifestation of the search for a way out is research into methodological problems, which has systems theory as its most effective present form.

But the method in itself does not eliminate the dangers of manipulable knowledge. The decisive task, which is still hard to solve in practice, is to develop independent critical thinking, notably to combine firmly all concrete objective knowledge, providing sound foundations. Efforts were made in every period to combine the problems of scientific knowledge with the teaching of particular schools of philosophy. A synthesis of the huge

\* Steinbuch, K.: *Masslos informiert. Die Enteignung unseres Denkens* (Harbig Verlag, 1978.)



body of mainly scientific and related knowledge is in the limelight today. In the past twenty odd years such efforts, starting from the natural sciences, have been, e.g., non-equilibrium thermodynamics as well as certain aspects of cybernetics, and originally systems theory as well.

But the study of the most promising and most general phenomenon, the Engels forms of motion, has slackened in a singular manner. The condition of the practical efficiency of knowledge is that it should be adjustable to the medium of its use as regards its dimension. For its translation into practice and its further development synthetic knowledge also requires quantitative expression. The investigation of the forms of motion has, in the absence of a quantitative solution therefore, slowed down.

For lack of a broad-based uniform standards the hidden identity of the results attained in two or more different ways disappears as well. Thus directly interrelated notions accumulate in consciousness in the form of phenomena seeming to be independent, they augment intellectual confusion and leave their connections unrevealed. The scientist who measures in ångströms looks on the results of a science measuring in microns as coming from an alien world.

Quantification is therefore the connecting factor, thus a fundamental element of progress with a deeper social meaning. Without uniform standards of measurement we speak mutually incomprehensible languages. All of us desire welfare, the relaxation of tension or *détente*, but negotiations with such issues as their subject nevertheless do not produce agreement. For lack of a common quantitative standard we do not find convincing arguments, e.g., for controlling selfishness and the thirst for power.

In everyday life measurements are made unconsciously to some extent with the help of an innate sense of proportion. Beyond the limits of its operation, however, we are bound to find ourselves in the realms of Lilliput and Brobdingna, in the stamping ground of Dean Swift's irony.

Intellectual confusion is therefore essentially an accumulation of phenomena accepted by the information flow without standardization where selfishness and a thirst for power prevail unchecked. The natural sense of proportion of an individual or a group fails, the phenomena in their consciousness turn into an incoherent mass of data, and the difference between the essential, and what is not, is blurred.

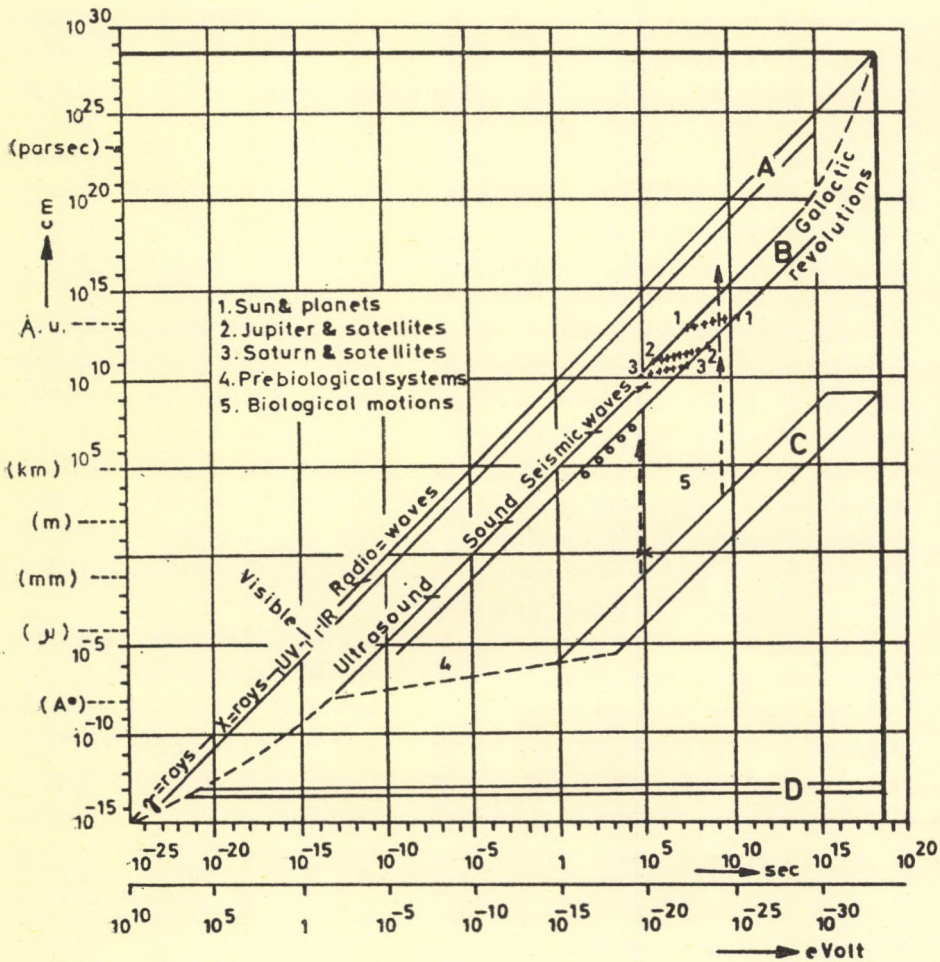
In scientific peace research a realisation appears that efforts aimed at progress, *détente* and disarmament increasingly require quantified, numerically established formulations, that is precise definitions. The international scientific symposium on the parameters of *détente* held in Zurich a few months ago offers a suitable example.



*The Convergence of the Two Cultures*

The standardized measurement of phenomena, their consideration on a common basis in the context of science and art, is also one of the bases for the convergence of the two cultures whose divergence C. P. Snow deplored, and for the general integration of knowledge.

To begin with, this coming closer must be grasped from the side of its origin, that is from the historical aspect. The quantitative linking up and systematisation of the forms of motion and of knowledge in general started to take shape with the discovery of the missing historical links,



*Cyclicity relations*



showing how, precisely on our earth, as part of the inanimate world of the universe as so far known, continuous life came about, and thereby today's high standards of culture and civilisation.\*

This synthesis has proceeded from the realisation that four forms of motion can be clearly distinguished by space and time parameters, or by their quotients of a velocity character. In addition to electromagnetic oscillations, and the cosmic motion systems of mechanical substance and the quantum-mechanical motion systems of elementary particles, it is possible to detect a fourth form of motion, which is equally characterised by its own velocity value—by its own space and time parameters; a form to which belong first of all the special close-to-the-surface phenomena of our earth, including the superior life forms. The four basic forms of motion reflect the types of dispersity, the four basic types of the spatial distribution of matter. Space-time dimensioning thus includes material quality.

The diffusive motion of the complex dispersal systems, whereby there comes about the duplication of life, and eventually of the universe, through selective reflection is of special importance. Systems boasting intellect and consciousness, ultimately human society and culture, gradually took shape at the side of the inanimate world.

The phenomena can be simply and uniformly characterised and defined on the basis of the common parameters of the new synthesis, together with material quality, on a common ground and, on the other hand, they can be brought into a measurable connection with one another.

In accordance with the fundamental law of dialectics, motion takes place in antitheses; in the language of physics this means oscillations, or quasi-cyclical processes, thus periodicity. A common and constant element of phenomena is therefore recurrence of very different dimensions in space and time, iteration and quasi-cyclical motion.

Cyclicity means the conversion of processes into their own antitheses. What is rational in one phase may seem to be irrational in another.

Many philosophers beginning with Vico have dealt with the significance of cyclicity in the most diverse fields of human knowledge, while studying astronomy, geology, history, biology, and prosody. A uniform interpretation, however, has lacked a comprehensive quantitative expression. The new

\* I worked out the practical foundations of the new idea in collaboration with a small team from the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. It is based on the quantitative systematisation of the forms of motion, and is now in a state allowing access to it by a wider public. The foundations of the new concept, in keeping with its geological origins, were published first of all in specialised books and periodicals. Cf. Szádeczky-Kardoss, E.: *Geonomia*, 1974; Public. Sec. of Earth and Mining Sci. Vol. 8, pp. 234-431, Budapest, 1976; Szádeczky-Kardoss, E. et al.: *Cyclicities, Theory and Practice*, in: Acta Geol. Hung. Acad. Sci. Vol. 22, pp. 1-103, Budapest, 1978.



quantitative relationship based on space and time parameters measured according to orders of magnitude, i.e. logarithmically, makes the examination of cyclicity a concretely applicable principle which organizes knowledge into a uniformly arranged form. On the basis of this quantitative frame the essential items of knowledge come into prominence and are interconnected.

The implication of this arrangement, of course, is not a detailed catalogue of phenomena but their framework. Relying on this arrangement, the new bits of knowledge are put in the appropriate place, they can be understood more quickly and more profoundly, enabling the real facts to be clearly distinguished from manipulated processes. In this way they contribute also to dispelling the pessimism of those sceptical of peaceful progress, and thus help to transform the gloomy outlook of the age.

The new conception makes clear that progress, contrary to general opinion, is not only, and not in the first place, an addition but rather increasing accommodation to the necessarily constant changes in the world. Progress means the assurance of keeping up to date. This is indeed a lesson for all those obsessed with selfishness and a thirst for power.

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It is to be particularly stressed that a number of social and art processes also belong to the new conception and thus become quantifiable. Research has already extended to the cycle parameters of social systems.

The question is whether the rational organized world is meant to eradicate the eternal attraction man feels for the mysterious and myth-ridden, the spell of what poetry leaves untold, or, on an even lower level, thrillers and crime stories. What appears in all this is the thrill and the beauty of approaching the unknown, perhaps making it known, precisely what gives birth to reason itself. A broad rational conception, therefore, does not eradicate the pristine desire for knowledge, but brings it closer to the expanding mind.

An essential characteristic of the new conception is also its expressiveness. The essence of the quantitative cycle theory can be concentrated in a fundamental and easily legible diagramme which makes possible also the direct reading of the numerical values of phenomena. Thus the cyclical relation is already suitable for instruction to secondary school pupils. Reports are coming in on concrete ways in which this is being done.

When the idea of education for peace will have become a subject for



closer examination all over Europe, it will perhaps be possible to take into consideration the synthesis of comprehensive and non-manipulable knowledge from this aspect of cyclicity.

But let us not delude ourselves into believing that the results of education for peace or a conceptual system will become fast-acting factors. On the one hand, there is need for a great deal of further profound theoretical investigation. On the other hand it will take decades to translate such ideas and theories into practice. This is why it is necessary to get them off the ground as early as possible. It will equally take a long time to make it understood that weapons are means of absolute superiority only as long as they are in the hand of one of the parties only. Every sale of arms reduces the seller's own superiority and relies on a line of business which increasingly excludes itself. Wars between nations are a long but transitory phenomenon in the history of mankind, a phenomenon which is still very much in the forefront of our consciousness but is linked with only a given period.

Opposed to this is reason which will ultimately gain in strength, even if there are ups and downs in the course of the history of the human race. It requires common effort to achieve social rationality, a broader, deeper and more independent outlook, rational limitations on selfishness and the thirst for power; the promotion of general intellectual progress, revealing the way of its dissemination in the world.



# THE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY OF HUNGARIAN SCIENCE

by

GYÖRGY ACZÉL

The results and progress of science in Hungary, the achievements, discoveries and pioneering methods of Hungarian scientists are noted by their colleagues East and West, outstanding individuals and teams enjoy widespread international renown. And yet Hungarian scientists had to travel a long road since the Liberation. The start was a long way back in a difficult situation. In 1938 only two thousand were engaged in research (including about a thousand university teachers doing part time research), and merely 0.15 per cent of national income was spent on research. (This amounted to about 100 million forints at today's prices.) Even in 1950 the Hungarian Academy of Sciences had only four research institutes with a personnel of 56. In 1978 nearly 85,000 persons worked on R & D programmes at university departments, institutes, enterprises, libraries and museums, and about 4 per cent of national income, 19,000 million forints, are now devoted—directly or indirectly—to such purposes. At present more than 8,000 persons are employed in 39 research institutes of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences.

## *Science and the progress of Hungarian society*

These figures attest to considerable progress which was made possible by social and economic development in Hungary. The changes in the sciences, and such an extension of the scope of research, would have been inconceivable without dynamic socio-economic growth. In 1978 national income was almost five times, industrial production more than eight times, electric power output eight and a half times, and agricultural production twice as high as in 1950. During the same period real wages rose two and a half times, and the index of per capita consumption increased threefold.

Based on a shorthand transcript of an address to the Hungarian Academy of Sciences on December 19, 1979.



Hungarian participation in the international division of labour rose to a similar degree: in 1978 the volume of imports was twenty times, that of exports more than seventeen times as great as in 1950.

The significance of this overall picture is heightened by the circumstance that development was interrupted in 1956. The more than twenty years which elapsed since then, however, was perhaps the most successful and most dynamic period in the history of the Hungarian economy so far. These two decades—and we hope those ahead of us, too—will be remembered as the most fruitful creative period in the history of the Hungarian nation.

The results are the product of common efforts. The work of Hungarian scientists is responsible for an outstanding share of the achievements. Without the intellectual capital they invested, without their constructive and intelligent contribution, there could have been no such rapid growth in industrial production, Hungarian agriculture would not have got where it is and education and higher professional training could not have risen to such unprecedented standards. Considering what still has to be done, it should be added that the tasks of Hungarian scientist today are more involved and complicated than they were in recent decades. Some of the new tasks follow from problems arising in the current stage of the development of society, and others are imposed by the progress of science, by the progressive exhaustion and obsolescence of its hitherto effective institutions, and by the pressing need for a change of attitude on the part of the Hungarian scientific community.

### *The economy*

What is the origin of the current economic problems in Hungary? The rapid progress I have outlined had been based on extensive resources. Starting with the early seventies that type of development had to be changed to intensive development, and quantitative viewpoint, had to be replaced by qualitative ones, and greater rationality in economic activity. The start of the switch-over from the extensive to the intensive stage, however, coincided with major world economic changes, and their impact: raw material supplies have become tight, and energy sources are used up at a higher rate than the exploration of new ones. These impacts the world economy from besides current production and product structure changes in Hungary, have considerably worsened the terms of external trade. The transformation of Hungary's international economic development has been crossed by changes in the world economy. A twofold objective task had to be tackled.



This is why one cannot agree with those who look for the causes of today's problems in some collective original sin, or in inadmissibly high standards of living, i.e. exclusively in subjective factors. This is the first time in Hungarian history that the great masses can afford more than the prime necessities of life, that they do not have to fight for a bare living. It is natural that the people are pleased with this state of affairs, and the expression of this pleasure cannot be called sin, or moral laxity. True, the social aims made possible by welfare would not always be welded to a sufficiently humane, and socialist content, but it would be naive to think that the job ahead could now be done by moralising. What we need is morality not moralising, common sense not ascetic ways, rational thinking instead of nervousness, as well as a sensible exploration of reserves. Instead of jeering or cynically sitting on the fence we need open confrontation with the problems, and a strengthening of the socialist features of Hungarian society. History has objectively put the questions, and our thinking—as well as our practice—must grow up to face them. We have to take note of new requirements arising from changed circumstances. Take the changes in world market prices, for example: we have to start from the fact that the competitiveness (thus the quality, the production costs, etc.) of the goods produced depends to a large extent on how flexibly we can adapt ourselves to new requirements, how mobile we show ourselves faced with the challenge, i.e. how quickly and rationally we can explore and use reserves and—with the help of science—appear on the world market, with new and more competitive products. But competitiveness depends also on how far we are able to channel individual and group interests—those of producers' cooperatives as well as of the research institutes of the Academy—towards the common good. But it depends also on whether or not, in place of the usual pseudo-prestige, a human and socialist kind of prestige can be created—a general and unambiguous respect built on human, socialist values.

The reason why I mentioned outside economic problems is that palpable facts lead to those pressing problems which material welfare may possibly conceal but which, if they remain unsolved, can impede further progress.

### *Balance and imbalance*

In these days there is much talk of disequilibria in the Hungarian economy. This metaphor exists in people's minds as if there were an ideal condition of balance to be attained in which everything is shipshape, while other forces disturb this ideal, sound, state of equilibrium. But social pro-



gress is not metaphorical. As Lenin said, its paths are much more cunning. The ways of progress lead through alternating balances and imbalances, inasmuch as disequilibria come about and are again followed by new conditions of equilibrium. An ideal equilibrium does not exist.

Different kinds of disequilibria have been experienced in Hungarian development. In 1945 there was disequilibrium between the demand for food and the amount produced, there was a food shortage. In 1945 there was still no housing problem in the present sense; people had simpler requirements, they wanted a roof over their heads. Housing problems exist now, that the family pattern in the country has changed, and new ideas have made it intolerable for several generations to live together under the same roof. In other words, the satisfaction of certain needs has created a new sort of imbalance. At that time, in the post-war years, there was disequilibrium between jobseekers and jobs. The floating labour force was far greater than the need for labour. Later, with the progress of socialism, new disequilibria appeared which again were consequences—sometimes stimulators—of further progress. I shall mention only one, the disequilibrium between socialist industry and the small peasant farm. In addition to these objective disturbances created by development there may of course exist imbalances which are due to errors of planning and wrong decisions of economic policy. Examples of the latter abounded in the doctrinaire economic planning of the fifties.

What imbalances are we facing today? Produced and distributed national income are in imbalance, as are budgetary receipts and expenditures, and imports and exports. There is an equilibrium between investment needs and investment resources, or between wages and work done. (A cause of this is, of course, also that real work is not sufficiently remunerated, while unsatisfactory work receives too great a reward.) Serious imbalances present themselves between the size of the labour force and the number of jobs. Hundreds of thousands more than necessary jobs have been created for reasons of enterprise prestige, group interests or overinsurance. This situation hampers sensible work organisation, labour discipline and a rational development of production. (The disturbing effect of this circumstance can be experienced also in the relationship between professional training and the demand for specialists.)

The cunning of equilibrium applies also to today's imbalances. After all, the establishment of equilibrium is an ongoing aim, and earlier conditions of equilibrium have to be upset. The new equilibrium is then realised at a higher level, as can be seen from the example of food production. Imbalance is therefore brought about by development, in the course of which we some-



times intentionally disrupt equilibria that have become obsolete and obstructive and consequently illusory. By making new demands we try to attain a balanced state of the economy on a higher level. In addition what appears to be equilibrium for one section of society often means disequilibrium for society as a whole. In Hungary in the 1930s, for instance, there was one doctor per 1,200 members of the population while the country was full of unemployed medical practitioners. Today, when there is one doctor per fewer than 400 members of the population, there is a considerable shortage of medical personnel. By developing the public health services the demand for medical care was increased and now new conditions are created for the satisfaction of growing demands.

In society one can only speak of dynamic equilibrium: the constant alternation of upsetting and restoring equilibria.

We must deliberately undertake to upset equilibria, because this is the path of development, and at the same time we must know also that the establishment of ideal equilibria is utopic, it cannot be attained because it would be tantamount to arresting development. Our only aim can be always to create an equilibrium which is the fountain, stimulator and starting-point of a new important development.

### *The temptations of scientists*

The solution of today's problems calls for a more active contribution on the part of research scientists and a more effective utilisation of scientific results than before.

The rising cost of energy sources makes it necessary to introduce new scientifically exacting means of producing energy. The explosive increase in the price of raw materials requires rational, and economical methods of use and stresses to the fullest possible and reasonable degree the exploitation of available raw material resources.

Since the oil price explosion the consumption of energy, especially crude oil, has considerably decreased in a number of industrially developed countries, while the value of the gross nation product went up. In Hungary, accompanied by a similar increase in production, energy consumption still rose by 52 per cent. There are also favourable examples, unfortunately few in number: factories where the consumption of energy and materials has dropped to a considerable degree. This is not only an achievement of business organization and thrift: scientists also had a share in such results.

Consequently there is, in all fields of life, vast room—and a great socio-



economic demand—for technological development relying on new research. The introduction of high-standard products, the competitive transformation of production structures, the establishment of commodity types capable of winning new markets cannot be conceived without the contribution of science.

Today, therefore, there is a nation-wide demand for scientific research. The need to solve problems and difficulties has made the technology transfer of new scientific results particularly urgent. This demand was formulated also in the guiding principles of the Party Congress.

It is a serious problem that, while there is a hunger for science, technologies, and new ideas in the entire country, the transfer and practical use of what exists still makes little or no progress. Important inventions—like the Heller-Forgó patent or VEPEX—for a long time tied themselves up in a labyrinth of negligence and red tape or else a lack of common interests stopped introduction. This situation must be altered. Scientists and members of the Academy must show greater impatience also and ask their fellow workers to be less complacent. The country cannot bear such wanton waste of intellectual treasures.

The categories of sin and innocence are foreign to science, I nevertheless mention the original sin of science when I speak of these contradictions, of such a waste of intellectual capital. This original sin is also present in other intellectual fields. In the arts this means that, while millions need and expect works of art with a message, saying something relevant to their lives, a minority of artists cannot satisfy this demand because their work lacks the skill of an intelligent dialogue and intelligibility. Let me stress: I do not ask for a vulgar, discredited kind of lack of ambiguity. Some cannot respond to the hunger for art of the millions because their work is replete with elitism, and often with charlatanry, modishness, and pseudo-art.

I use the idea of the original sin of science in a similar sense. Scientist may also sin if they fail to satisfy the ever growing hunger for science of society. An indispensable condition of the satisfaction of this hunger for knowledge is that scientists should be able to assist with the formulation of needs of society, the economy, industry and agriculture, with an up-to-date and long term satisfaction of their new needs.

I point to this danger because scientists today are absent where their creative and intelligent presence is most needed, that is in industry, in the various posts of practical life. This paradoxical situation has two clearly discernible poles. On the one hand, one can see that scientists sometimes offer their services in vain—there is nobody in industry to recognise their necessity. In many places there simply is no one able to receive the new



knowledge. Looked at from this angle, it may seem that in Hungary today there is overproduction in scientific knowledge fit for immediate application. On the other hand, in research institutes some of the scientists scorn to accept demands and orders of this profane sort coming from production, or they set about fulfilling them as an irksome duty i.e. superficially and with no claim to scientific standards. In reality, therefore, no scientific overproduction exists either in science or with respect to the intelligentsia in general. One might say rather that at present the distribution of specialists is unsound; the experts work in the wrong places, and the sphere of activity of the large number of institutes, their accommodation to social needs, is also far from appropriate. (It is an odd thing, for example, that thousands of persons do research in work and business organisation in independent institutions without enterprise connections, yet specialists from abroad are often commissioned to cope with business organization in certain factories.)

To avoid this, therefore, a thorough change of attitude is needed both in scientific institutions and in the production processes requiring an increasingly effective utilisation of scientific knowledge. Our current attitude shows itself blind to new requirements. Again a sad, if not comic, example: last year 1,243 lawyers were employed by agro-enterprises but only 41 biologists (an indication of the fact that managers of such enterprises had not yet realised that they would be in greater need of biologists) because their earlier attitude still makes them believe that it is more essential skillfully to manoeuvre in the jungle of laws and regulations than to strive for a scientific and qualitative improvement of production.

This change of attitude implies selection on a larger scale in science. It is inadmissible—and obsolete—that a young man or woman graduate should be employed in a research institute and remain there until retirement age, whether he is fit for scientific work or not. The person who, owing to his talents, would be capable of more effective work elsewhere should be placed elsewhere, where he can make better use of his acquired knowledge. This means at the same time that in this country there is not a single superfluous specialist, everybody ought to be employed in the line where his or her labour would be best exploited. The present attitude implies hierarchical prestige-oriented ideas, work in an institute is considered to be a more distinguished and more dignified job even if employment there means free wheeling. In reality there is no such hierarchy, I cannot see any distinction between places, where a person efficiently displays his or her abilities.



*A more economical use of the labour force*

We are wasting our most important national treasure: the labour force on whose rational exploitation future productive efficiency depends, as well as public morale. What this national wealth means has been shown in an approximative calculation by a Hungarian economist. He has compared the value of natural resources, productive equipment, industrial fixed capital and road and railway networks with the expense of raising and training the labour force. The results have shown that about half of Hungary's national wealth is made up of live labour, the labour force of the country's manual and intellectual workers. How efficiently and rationally do we use this national wealth? Unfortunately, experience is not encouraging. I have said before that there is a shortage of medical practitioners in Hungary. But we know also that in developed capitalist countries, e.g. in Britain, West Germany and Sweden, there are far fewer doctors per 10,000 members of the population than in Hungary, yet medical care is on a high level. This is so because we mismanage things. The bureaucratic health apparatus is swollen, doctors are overburdened with paper work of a non-medical sort, i.e. they are withdrawn from an effective practice of their profession.

There are other less important but still typical examples of the waste of skilled labour. Earlier a certain Hungarian periodical was edited by one veteran journalist. After reorganization, the same work is done by thirty four. And let us consider how many similar reorganizations we have already witnessed in scientific institutions and other workshops of the mind where even today intellectual resources are wasted.

A good many scientific institutions perform important work. Some of them can be proud of outstanding, internationally appreciated contributions to knowledge. But experience shows that the performances of a considerable number of them, their scientific efficiency, leaves much to be desired. In Hungarian technical research institutes there are eleven patents a year per 100 scientists—which is by no means an outstanding performance. What then should one say to R & D activity in which 100 scientists come up with no more than one or two patents every year? Inquiries made show a still more saddening picture: in one of the research institutes the number of publications per scientist can be expressed only in terms of ten-year periods: one publication in ten years, and hardly any one of these papers are translated into a foreign language, there being no international interest in the subject and the contribution to knowledge. Even though we stress that we are not in favour of the quantitative viewpoint in science, this



picture is nevertheless staggering, if not grotesque. It is not improved either if, as it happens in the practice of a few centres of research, the number of publications is swollen by travelogues and book reviews, i.e. by the addition of publications of no scientific value in order to put a good face on the freewheeling of intellectual work.

If we meditate these facts, we discover traces of a significant internal contradiction. For the first time in history we have succeeded in suppressing a ruthless selective system which is characteristic of class-structured society and raises the threat of insecurity. Simultaneously with that we have not yet succeeded in forming in its stead a humane selective method conceived in the spirit of the socialist system and indispensable for further progress. This seems to have become one of the socially pressing, still unsolved contradictions of socialism.

If a person becomes superfluous under capitalism he will be mercilessly combed out by the machinery. Since what is decisive there is not the needs of society but of capital, the self-assertion and unfolding of talents are regulated by murderous laws. In capitalism a considerable number of talented scientists, writers and artists are lost. In socialism, on the other hand, where the effective demands of society are already met—but where practical, and humane, methods of selection are not yet in action—the contrary situation has come into being: if someone has once published eight poems, he will, to the end of his life, bear the style and title of poet, whom the nation is obliged to support. . . (But I could cite examples of sham careers in science as well.)

As to the causes of this situation, I should again mention attitudinal barriers, our obsolete and, I might as well say, anti-humane way of looking at things. On the occasion of the anniversary of Zsigmond Móricz we could well see the drawbacks of this attitude and practice. Up to the age of fifty Zsigmond Móricz, but I might mention also some notable contemporaries of his, produced more works than any ten of our fifty-year-old writers today taken together. He worked because capitalist society compelled him to write novels, plays, magazine journalism and to do editing work as well. His example reminds us today that the absence of standards, of reasonable and humane standards, checks performance—both as regards quantity and quality. We are aware of this drawback in all fields of life, from manual labour to intellectual activity.

To alter this situation we have to blend humanity with rationality. There is no wish to make use of any modern Taigethos, for thereby we would repudiate the socialist system, but we have to look for ways of prompting to useful and high-standard work, methods which are more suitable and



more practical than those employed before, from the point of view both of the individual and of society. For that purpose social norms have to be made more stringent in the material, intellectual and moral fields. Appreciation and judgement must be made dependent on performance, be the subject enterprises or institutes, scientists or engineers.

It was not chance that prompted me to say new incentives had to be evolved to create better conditions of performance and better morale not only for society but also for the individual. The introduction of new methods of curbing the wastage of labour does not mean rational economic regulation only: it is one of the conditions of moral regeneration as well, a decisive stimulus to the fuller development of the personality, and the widening of the scope of meaningful life. The superfluous man was a well-known figure in 19th century Russian literature. We have so far created a fairly large number of such unhappy, because superfluous, people: the kind of people who do not feel that their work is needed, that their actions help to promote our common cause. A feeling of being superfluous engenders poor morale, it is a humiliating condition. This is why it is an obligation, not only an economic but a moral and social obligation, for us to reduce the number of unhappy, superfluous people, i.e. to do away with the contradiction between talent and social demand, to put it plainly, with the wastage of the labour force.

#### *On wastage and thrift*

However, Hungarian society is also suffering from other forms of waste. It is wastage when we rashly squander intellectual and material resources, it is wastage to carry out excessive organization, to overdevelop the network of institutions, and also to invest intellectual capital of low efficiency. Again let me give a simple example of obsolete attitudes: we still produce castings the price of which is determined not by quality or utility, but by weight, by the quantity of material included. In this way we stimulate producers to squander material and to waste energy. A senseless attitude is forced on them. There are agricultural productive units where 1.7 kg of fodder is needed to produce one kilogramme of poultry meat while a neighbouring farm uses 3 kg for the same end. It was with good reason that the manager of an outstanding state farm said that the explanation of this difference should be looked for in the minds of people: what the producers know, how much professional skill they have, how proficient they are in farm organization.



I could enumerate examples, even more serious ones, at some length: many others could make a still more damning diagnosis of current waste. But this is not the point. To use a medical metaphor, not only a diagnosis is needed but anamnesis as well, the antecedents of these illnesses, and we are at the same time responsible for therapy. It is not enough to pick on one or another fact, after discovering the causes the consequences have to be examined, every effort must be made to find out how this anomalous situation can be changed and amended.

Today we know why we have grown wasteful: an economy of scarcity is always wasteful. Who asked 30 years ago, when a farm increased crop yields by one quintal per unit of area: how much more does increased production cost you? Nobody did. It would have been pointless to ask since bread was needed whatever the cost. The trouble is that when this reasonable question already ought to be asked, we did not ask decisively enough, but we stuck to a merely quantitative viewpoint: let us produce more, no matter at what price. . .

In the past, and for sound reasons, it was our aim that people should buy vacuum cleaners, refrigerators, and television sets. We promoted this by fixing a lower price for household electric current above a certain level of consumption. The result, however, brought with it a negative consequence the wasting of subsidized energy. What was worse, this practice was ended only as late as six years after the oil price explosion.

It is well and rational to put an end to waste only if standards of living are thereby improved and not vice versa. It is unwise to waste electric power wantonly, and just as unwise to use a 60-watt lightbulb where a 100-watt bulb is needed. In applying the principle of thrift let us not move to the opposite extreme: the standard of genuine thrift is the result, the more humane mode of life, better living conditions and higher morale. What is needed is rational, thoughtful and active work, not just honest work, not just mechanical hard work. Wastage cannot be done away with by blind countermeasures but by taking thought, by the assertion of the right interests, and by sound work of organization.

Therefore economy measures must be dealt with to some extent separately from wastage, since thrift is not simply the opposite of waste. Thrift calls for the introduction of new methods and procedures, it requires of us to seek out the most recently acquired scientific and technological knowledge and to substitute them in the place of the sometimes wasteful, because already obsolete, methods.



### *The network of research institutions*

Let me get back to science and research organization. The wasting of scientific knowledge has already been mentioned, it is needless to multiply examples. These examples are only symptoms the roots of which spread to more profound science organization problems, to the structural inconsistency of the research institute network. I might mention the lack of cooperation among the research centres—it often occurs that one and the same problem of electronics or pharmacology is looked into by different institutes, independently of one another, without any scientific cooperation or rational division of labour; I could refer to the dispersion of research programmes and to the lack of concentration. I might point to institutions which are only nominally research institutes, in reality they pursue routine servicing activities. I think that more serious than these are symptoms like the chronic excess growth of research institutes, the disproportion between the social importance of research programmes and the personnel of the institutes or their provision with accessories. These are symptoms of scientific megalomania.

How the great institutes have come into existence can be explained historically. Towards the end of the 1940s universities became big training factories. This had as a consequence that a considerable number of the ablest teachers were withdrawn and sent to research institutes to do research work unhindered. In some places the universities were practically robbed and as a result some outstanding scientists still do not do any teaching.

Even though research institutes have been called into life for objective reasons (e.g. the overtaking of university teachers or the development needs of proper basis of nationalized industry), today this situation awaits change. A network of research institutes such as is supported in more developed countries of larger dimensions and greater financial resources, where research can and must go on in every direction, and where even the specialized concentration of research pursues different ways, cannot be maintained in Hungary. It is by starting from the Hungarian situation that changes of today's forms of research organization have to be made. Science policy must be formulated by relying on international experience and making use of the lessons drawn from our own. The task of creating conditions of research which guarantee better concentration and efficiency must be faced, and a reappraisal of general over-development must be carried out.

Let there be no mistake: we do not oppose in principle the continuance of every great research institute. When the tasks of science policy are re-



considered today, the guiding line is wise, expedient and humane scientific progress. For this reason, wherever justified by the national economic and scientific importance of the job, it is well to continue with an amply staffed research institute. In the past decade institutes of this kind were established. The leadership takes cognisance of research institutes that operate efficiently both within and outside the scope of the Academy of Sciences. They have proved successful since they have been able to change a given direction of research, setting themselves new objectives, defining urgent programmes that serve specific purposes.

The job ahead is therefore, after sizing up the present situation, to build up the most rational and most expedient model of a network of research institutes. But this must be done in such a way that within a few years reasonable, wise and humane compromises should establish a suitable transition between the most expedient model and the present situation, a transition which takes into account the interests of both the country and of individuals. As a result the research network will be better coordinated with its job. It will, however, take years to approach this desirable situation.

A fact worth considering is that important technical work and social science research has been done in this country, apart from places appointed for the purpose. I hope I shall not be misunderstood when I mention that the great works of György Lukács's old age were produced by a man and not by a research institute. The works of those present here were not produced by huge collectives either. Yet it is understandable that to carry out a great work, a number of men and women are assembled and organized as an institute. But when the work is completed, the institute remains (with an increase of personnel) and the scientists and scholars remain there (with their unexploited talents). To leave a research institute these days is thought of as something to be ashamed of.

The adverse situation cannot therefore be said to be the responsibility of the institutes staff. It is primarily the heads of institutes, and those in charge of them on a higher level still, who must control things, keeping an eye on the work, as well as the activities of particular scientists.

#### *Real mobility*

I have frequently said, viva voce and in print, that mobility is as much needed in science as in society. The mobility necessary in science, however requires a different attitude in society, in higher education and in other fields.



In the next few years some of those working in research institutes must be given incentives prompting them to move to teaching or industry. This helps with the technological transfer of scientific knowledge as well with the formulation of what is required of research. In this country the number of scientifically qualified persons is very low in certain fields. We have to do better than that.

This kind of mobility, however, still comes up against attitudinal problems. If someone with five-years' seniority in a research institute in this country now leaves, he is generally reckoned a failure by his peers. And that though such a courageous and honest man or woman does well to try and do better and more efficient work in a new position by making use of experience gained in a research institute.

A change of attitude is needed as regards judgement of work done in a research institute. Anyone invited to such an institute to take part in a programme should be allowed to move to another position after having completed the job. If, for example, eight people are commissioned to develop a fuel saving process and continue working on it for three years, they should be enabled to return to earlier positions suited to their qualifications and accomplishments. There should be a way of going back to the previous place of work or getting promotion elsewhere on the basis of one's work in a research institute. Otherwise the result will be sclerotic organizations.

Scientific commissions should in general, or at least to a considerable degree, be given for concrete problems and tasks. This is an indispensable condition of increased mobility. A lack of mobility should be a cause for anxiety. One should not only be afraid that there will be no way of studying an important subject, but should also beware of evergreen subjects, those which were already tackled long ago, but for some unaccountable reason someone, who has been on the job for several decades, is allowed to carry on forever. What is spent on scientific subjects could be used to increase considerably the financial resources and effectiveness of one or another underdeveloped discipline. It is in the primary interest of the country to have money available for the investigation of important subjects in the first place, finding the financial means for such purposes. This, however, requires the help of scientists, including members of the Academy. Are the subjects included in the programmes of investigation justified from the point of view of science or the economy? That question must ever be uppermost on one's mind. The aim should be not to let a single man or woman do unnecessary work. In the selection of subjects and in the authorization of their study it is necessary to keep down prestige considerations, and to increase the function of the expected contribution to knowledge.



The high walls separating research institutes and teaching must be pulled down, and joint units of universities and research institutes must be established wherever this is to the advantage of teaching and to research and development. If it is really desired that Hungarian higher education undergo a qualitative change it is necessary to develop cooperation between research and higher education of a sort which exists only in the bud today, though it points the way the future.

Doing away with promotion by seniority in science is part of the modernization of mobility. I do not approve that in this country there are many in their forties who study for the degree of candidate. The word candidate has a meaning. This degree should mean the completion of preparation for scientific work, not the peak of a career in science. It is a good thing for someone to become a candidate at the age of 28—if the degree is genuine, and there is real work backing it.

I should like to emphasize that the problems of which I now speak are a by-product of progress, I could say, we created them together. So there is nothing to fear when at long last we want to size up this obsolescent situation in order to get a clear picture of what has to be done, where we are now, and in which way we have to proceed. Nobody should be afraid of the changes. Everyone ought to be confident that we shall cope collectively, and in a humane manner, in such a way that the solution will coincide with the interests of those who want to work, who want their intellectual talents to unfold, their discipline to flourish.

#### *Genuine scientific discussion*

A lurking malady of Hungarian science is cheap agreement, mutual back-scratching, the avoidance of discussion and theoretical confrontation. Genuine scientific debate is a rare occurrence in this country. It happens, e.g. in medical practice, that three types of therapy, based on mutually contradictory principles, are employed for one and the same pathological condition. Still not a single school is disposed to publish a scholarly paper on the subject, permitting confrontation. There is no wish to offend the neighbouring school, colleagues after all, no wish to disturb an atmosphere of consensus free of argument. The slackening of the spirit of debate, however, will sooner or later bring with it the slowing-down of the pace of scientific progress. A different spirit, a better scientific atmosphere are needed.

The general political conditions for scientific discussion and for con-



structive debate in this country are more favourable today than at any time before. Democratic ways are now generally required in public life. True, the more difficult situation is open to different reflexes. There will be some who say that democratic ways should be curtailed, that less attention should be paid to individual opinion; there will be others who begin to give orders and lord over things. This is a wrong reflex, as was already proven in the early fifties. Wrong methods can follow not only from ill intentions but also from the misconception that considers the people to be under age and immature.

We reject red-tape, in whatever form it may present itself. Results of the past two decades demonstrate the inestimable advantages of the methods evolved on the soil of socialist democracy.

Now, in a tenser international situation, under more difficult economic conditions, there is need for a still broader union of all sound forces. Socialist democracy must be widened and strengthened. On all platforms in the country there should be constructive dialogue of social dimensions which would react upon the shaping of reality.

One cannot agree with those who only emphasise what, incidentally, is true: that Hungary has no bourgeois democratic past, that this is why it is more difficult to establish democratic ways of a higher kind.

Hungary has democratic traditions as well. Democracy was very important in the pre-Liberation trade unions, and the working-class movement as a whole. There were many left-wing intellectuals of a democratic disposition. A democratic cultural, artistic and literary public life opposed to official government and cultural policies took shape, applying an independent system of values and integrating multicoloured ideological and social currents. In the course of the continued growth of socialist democracy we had to utilise and further develop the democratic traditions and the experiences of the past twenty years. The democratic arena must be given a fuller meaning, and additional platforms must be established. No question can be solved correctly without socialist democracy.

We have made great progress in the growth of socialist democracy: this guarantees not only that the authorities will not offend against legality, the institutional system promotes the formulation, discussion and realisation of constructive social aims.

We will not allow ourselves to be driven off course, although there have been—and there may also be in the future—some who will not stop trying. There are those who think that various methods of opposition must be used to test the system, making it resort to stronger measures. There are some who are out to win a false reputation by emphasising their “oppositionism.”



The leadership continues to think criticism, the uncovering of errors, constructive and fruitful debates to be necessary in public life, including scientific life. That accords with science policy, At the same time it is stressed, that tolerance is necessary for good discussions.

At one time tolerance was held to imply a lack of principles, but we need to be tolerant. Honest argument is at the basis of this, but it should not mar normal human good relationships. Debate on theoretical issues presupposes mutual respect.

The connection between science and society in this country presents itself in a new light. What matters is not only that scientific knowledge be applied in practice, in the course of fulfilling the aims, but also that scientists actively join in the definition of the aims. The assistance of scientists is reckoned with in the formulation of the aims of socio-economic development, in the examination and evaluation of different variants designed to attain declared aims, in the exploration of positive and negative consequences, the impact and side-effects of development. No new drug can be introduced without a careful examination of all possible side-effects, however miraculous a cure it might promise. In the same way, when setting an economic objective, it is essential to take into account the conflict-creating side-effects, in addition to the probable favourable effects of implementation.

I should like to say a few words about certain views that are gaining ground here and there. Social science and ideology are said to be incompatible. I am inclined to argue that is an unsound taking over of some of the things Max Weber and others have said. Value free science is impossible, ideology must be part of it. The exploration of reality is itself implies judgement. Neither the dogmatism of the fifties nor conservatism or relativism provide the answer. Marx should not be quoted but constructively applied. Nor should our own earlier resolutions be treated as dogmas—János Kádár himself has recently drawn attention to this danger.

We live in exciting times. I feel this period will turn out to be a positive one: it offers still greater possibilities for exploiting one's talents, prompting people to show what they are capable of.

Not a single issue I have touched on is alien to socialism, I am convinced of that. Restoring equilibrium and doing away with waste are features of socialism. That is why mankind is working for socialism. I ought to add that the tracks have not been laid yet in the field we are about to enter, that is our job as we proceed along it. This is a natural consequence of progress. A schoolboy believes he has mastered algebra having learnt the rules of arithmetic, and only when studying the integral calculus does he



realise suddenly how vast a field is covered by only one small part of mathematics, analytical geometry.

As we move into the eighties, we should like to hope that this decade will produce radical changes. We know this is not simply a step in the calendar. The circumstances under which we have to make progress back the demand for qualitative change in many respects. Will it be difficult? I think it will be excruciatingly difficult and that it will take a long time. Let me remind you that twenty years ago we took a deep breath and started on the organization of producers' cooperatives. At that time I had frequent occasion to visit the universities and the Academy. There were few then who believed that Hungarian peasants were ready to change their mode of life, and living styles. Few believed that they would ever so happily plunge into cooperative association, and produce so many interesting varieties of it. Yet we managed. Even today it is possible to solve difficult problems rationally and wisely. But for this one must interpret history differently. Brecht once said: Woe to those who experience history as guinea pigs experience biology.

All of us, wherever we work, have to experience history on the conscious level. In a debate at the Eötvös College someone told me that, in the life of man, work is one thing and leisure serving self-realisation another. I am very sorry for anyone who has a mere four hours for self-realisation, wedged between work and rest. Work is best for self-realisation, for the development of the personality; socialism makes it possible for the two to come closer together. I think that scholars and scientists, and their staff, are amongst the luckiest people in the world: they are free to do what they like to do, they can realise their desires, aims and ideas in the research process.

Socialism provides scientists with an objective chance allowing the fruits of their knowledge to soar unconfined. The fruits of their research are not appropriated by entrepreneurs and oligopolies but—without precedent in history—they now serve the common good and the whole of society.

Engels once said a remarkable thing. He called the Renaissance a period which needed giants and produced giants. He added that it did so not only in respect of knowledge, but in terms of character, steadfastness, humanism and public spirit. Society is in need of such giants today as well, and I can hope that ten to twenty years hence scientists and politicians will have to face up to problems more tense and more excruciating but much worthier of man.



# GLOBAL DEVELOPMENT, DISARMAMENT AND ECONOMIC DECOLONIZATION

by

MIHÁLY SIMAI

**I**n the UN major preparatory work is under way for the next Special Session of the General Assembly. The aim of this work is to formulate an international strategy for the 1980s and beyond as a continuation of the first and second development decades. This time the discussion around the issues is much broader than it has been in the past. The new dimensions of the dialogue bring new issues and also new doubts.

My intention is to answer some of the questions which have been raised within and beyond the UN and to resolve certain doubts, without creating new ones.

## *Why an international strategy at all?*

If this question had been asked ten years ago, I would have given a qualitatively different answer than today. At that time I would have stressed only one important factor, namely the necessity for a globally coordinated programme in the interests of the developing countries, to speed up their economic growth and the increase of the standard of living of the masses living in poverty.

Today my answer includes much more. It is not only the problems of the developing countries which require a global strategy but the situation and the long-term adverse trends in the world economy.

The world is facing with very serious and complex problems:

- slower growth rates of production in the vast majority of the countries, than in the 1950s and 1960s;
- slower increase or stagnation of incomes and consumption for the greater part of the world population;
- inflation and unemployment;
- slower growth of world trade;



- new forms of protectionism;
- energy crisis;
- increasing costs of raw-material supplies;
- a weak international monetary system which cannot support the restoration of global stability through the necessary process of adjustment;
- a structural crisis, influencing directly about 25 per cent of the world industrial output.

These are only some of the issues with which the majority of countries have to struggle with.

All these mean international economic uncertainty (the scale of which is still increasing) in a world of 160 or more states, of new economic power centres and new conflicts.

Today the international economic uncertainty is a greater problem than it was in the past, it is a much greater potential danger due to the degree of interdependence which has been developed in the post-Second World War decades, which is not only a present fact but a condition of future economic existence in many countries.

An international development strategy therefore is not in the interest of one group of countries only but it is a vital issue of the future in the world economy as a whole.

Without the increasing level and improved efficiency of global cooperation the economic problems of the world will further increase. This may bring about new tensions and political crises on an unprecedented scale.

An international economic strategy in a world of two economic and social systems, with countries on different levels of development and of conflicting interests, cannot be a world plan (even a tentative one). It cannot have the necessary cohesive power and lacks the required set of instruments for its implementation.

In the worst case, an international strategy can serve as a basis for international dialogue, in an optimal situation it can be a programme of action

- for the UN and all the specialized agencies,
- for the different regional groups and organizations,
- and for individual countries.

In those areas where interests coincide or can be coordinated after negotiations aiming to produce compromises an international strategy can be an important instrument in the solution of common problems.



*Strategies and actions*

The global character of an international development strategy for the 1980s and beyond is not a theoretical, methodological, or a dogmatic issue but a very important practical political question.

One has to qualify, of course, what global character means. In my opinion it implies a global umbrella under which all the countries (or all the three group of countries: the developing, the developed market economies, and the socialist countries) can work together. It would condemn any international strategy to inevitable failure if the umbrella would be limited only to one or another group of countries and to their problems.

The global nature of the strategy does not exclude a national and regional diversity of interests, problems, and actions, on the contrary, it presupposes it.

Why is the "global umbrella" necessary?

The clearest answer can be given to those problems, which are global by nature and the solution of which requires global cooperation and action. Environment, the set of issues connected with the sea are the clearest example.

The pollution of the air, of rivers, and the sea affect practically all countries. While it is true that contribution to pollution differs and industrial countries emanate more pollutants than the less developed ones, cooperation especially for the solution of issues such as:

- the anthropogenic influence on the world climate due to changes in the gaseous composition of the atmosphere, the thermal balance of plants and timber-felling,
  - the preservation of the ozone layer in the atmosphere,
  - the expansion of deserts,
  - the exhaustion of the genetic resources of our planet,
  - the degradation of the natural environment in the oceans,
  - the quality of water and the reproduction of water resources in trans-national river systems,
  - the protection of the migratory birds and animals,
- all require global cooperation and global strategies.

The sea presents another globally important area. New technology will enable humanity to make use of the organic and mineral resources of the ocean bottom at a time when shortages due to the limited availability and exhaustion of other sources will be increasingly felt. New sources of protein will be available thanks to techniques developed in relation to the harvesting and processing of fish. There is increasing anxiety that mankind will make unsound use of these immense reserves, the last natural frontier, or



that new pirates and/or major conflicts may emerge if the issues were not controlled and settled by international agreements and cooperation.

A global approach is required also because of the existing degree of interdependence between countries. There is more to it than simple trade growth which is often described today in the jargon of the international life as interdependence.

The essence of interdependence lies in the fact that economic, scientific, and other processes which used to be clearly of a national nature have now become international. A specific metabolism is taking place through various linkages among states, a process which extends to the production and utilization of material goods, acts many-sidedly on economic life and politics, and exerts an especially great influence on the way of thinking of persons who, as decision-takers, play a role in the given area.

Today about 500 million people of more than 30 countries, concentrating more than 40 per cent of world industrial output, have to import more than 50 per cent of the energy and raw materials used. Developed Western industrial countries, developing countries, and socialist countries are among the exporters. All three groups are represented also among the importers.

About 2,800 millions in more than 120 countries draw almost 75 per cent of machinery and equipment needed in the development of modern industries from imports.

More than 25 per cent of jobs in industry depend directly on foreign trade (exports and imports).

There are, of course, many other areas, like international capital flow, the spread of transnational corporations (more than 25 per cent of the world industrial output and more than 40 per cent of world trade is realized in their system), and international intergovernmental institutions which reflect the degree of interdependence. The impact of internal economic disturbances in some part of the world on the rest is also a sign of interdependence.

Not only countries, but many important economic problems and their solutions are also increasingly interdependent.

One important example is the global implications of the arms race and the global nature of interrelations between disarmament and development.

In 1979 the world spent nearly 450 thousand million dollars on military matters. This equals the annual income of the poorer half of the world population. Half of the world's scientists and engineers devote themselves to further perfecting military machinery. The total volume of military research is six times the size of the world's energy research budget. The arms



trade to developing countries increased 10 times (calculated in constant prices) between 1960 and 1978.

The problems of the arms race are however broader than the use of resources. It blocks the massive transfer of resources to peaceful purposes, including aid to developing countries. It also undermines the necessary confidence which is a vital condition for global economic cooperation on a much higher scale.

Without a global agreement on disarmament the vital reserves of mankind which could be used for productive purposes will be wasted, and even if military equipment is not used, future generations will have to pay a high price for it due to the accumulation of unsolved problems. A global development strategy must therefore be a global strategy for disarmament as well.

Another example is the global implications of the employment problem.

Over the next two decades, according to demographic projections, the number of people entering into the working population will increase by about 750–800 million people. More than two-thirds live in the developing countries, where an additional 300–400 million will be unemployed or underemployed. Creation of new jobs for such a large number requires growth, investments, imports, and export facilities on an unprecedented scale. It will become necessary to redistribute certain industries, and negotiate international agreements on trade and capital flow, etc.

An international development strategy must be global because of the institutional framework in which it is formulated. The UN is the only global organization for international security and cooperation. The UN is at present the institutionalized form of global international relations. Member countries experience and evaluate the major global problems first of all in the light of their own troubles. Their attitude will be determined by their interests, which also governs their concrete actions. It is not easy therefore to coordinate often diverging interests, finding a common denominator. This requires compromises on the part of member states. The necessary compromise must be achieved within the framework of the UN in order to help solve those problems where worldwide cooperation is required. The UN is the only institution where a compromise and agreement can be achieved along the lines of which the general principles for action in particular institutions, regions, and countries can be worked out.



*Expectations, needs and realities*

The UN General Assembly's resolutions are not enforceable. Their character lies more in the area of suggestions, they are guidelines for international and national policies. The new strategy cannot be, and will not be, more than what UN resolutions are in general. Implementation will depend on the determination of member governments. This means that the further the strategy departs from the real problem and processes of the world economy, and the real needs and possibilities of member countries, the more the danger increases that its influence on the world will be limited.

The content of the strategy cannot, of course, be separated from the nature of the process and the way it is formulated.

What then do I think of important issues, which must find their place in the new international strategy?

(a) Those policy measures on an international level should be given primary attention which help progress towards a more flexible and efficient world economy, such as can provide adequate support also to development processes. These policy measures must be based on the principles of the Declaration on the New International Economic Order and they should help in the implementation of its Programme of Action. They should, at the same time, increase the economic security of the countries concerned. The policy measures should be aimed at

— an improvement in the system of international trade, using instruments such as long-term agreements among states on raw-material production and supply, and more stable prices (in the spirit of the Integrated Programme of Commodities), as well as agreements for a new industrial division of labour which can solve or at least mitigate the present structural crisis;

— an international consensus on principles regulating capital flow, especially the activities of the transnational corporations, and the international flow of technology. Codes of conduct related to the two mentioned issues which are being discussed within the framework of UNCTAD and are close to the stage of signing, must be tied in this way to international strategy;

— efforts to establish a new international monetary system which can be in harmony with the interests of the major group of countries in the world: the Western industrial countries, the developing, and the socialist countries, and which can help the global adjustment process;

— the establishment of guiding principles for national policies in those



cases where measures taken by countries in certain cases may adversely influence the situation in the world economy (like new protectionism, discriminatory policies, etc.).

(b) A general declaration on certain objectives to be considered on a global, regional, or national level, the solution of which is vital from the point of view of future progress.

Strategic conferences organized by the UN system in the past decade offer a sufficient basis for such a declaration. It would be a grave mistake if the results, that is the proposals made by these strategic conferences, were forgotten. Most of these conferences were forward-looking. They tackled problems and the tasks ahead in long-term perspectives. Some of their ideas however were not very well received in certain circles. Their constructive recommendations must be considered as integral parts of international strategy.

#### *Population*

The World Conference on Population (Bucharest, 1974) adopted a World Population Plan of Action. Paragraph 31 stated: "It is recommended that countries wishing to affect fertility levels give priority to implementing development programmes and educational and health strategies which, while contributing to economic growth and higher standards of living, have a decisive impact on demographic trends, including fertility. These mean that population policy measures and programmes must be integrated into the economic and social goals on a national level." The stabilization of the world population around 10-12 thousand million in the next century depends largely on action which will be taken on national level in the next 20 years. (At the end of the 1970s about 80 per cent of the population of developing countries lived in countries the governments of which have declared a lower rate of population growth as desirable, 17 per cent in countries the governments of which consider the rate of growth to be satisfactory, and only 3 per cent in countries whose governments desire higher rates of growth.)

#### *Employment*

The World Employment Conference (Geneva, 1976) accepted a World Employment Programme of Action which placed at the centre of attention a comprehensive economic and social development strategy, called the basic needs strategy. That strategy was meant to meet two objectives simulta-



neously. The first was the employment objective, the creation of one thousand million jobs, the second the poverty issue. Employment was to provide sufficient income for everybody to secure their basic needs. The conference challenged the distribution of income and wealth in the developing countries and called for major changes. It is extremely important that social implications and needs in the form of recommendations find their place in the strategy.

#### *Food*

The Second World Food Congress (Rome, 1974) recommended concrete measures for the increase of global food supply security, which has become more delicate since, as a result of the increased prices of oil, fertilizers, herbicides, and pesticides. The Programme of Action in food production was further developed according to the changed conditions. It now looks that the developing countries will have to increase agricultural production until the end of the century by an annual 3.5 per cent to be able to cover their food needs from domestic sources. If present trends in agricultural growth continue they will have to import three times more than today by the end of the century to cover their food requirements. (It is highly improbable, that this quantity will be available on the world market.) The required increase in national food production involves a 10 per cent annual increase in the use of fertilizers and an increase in the proportion of high yielding grain from the present 25 per cent to 50 per cent of the cultivated area. Irrigation supplies must also increase. The annual investment costs of such a programme would be 30-40 thousand million dollars. The World Food Congress and then, in 1979, the World Conference on Agrarian Reform and Rural Development, drew the attention to important socio-economic tasks such as the introduction of major changes in land tenure, the development of cooperatives, and the reduction of rural poverty. Other important international conferences, on deserts, on water supplies and resources were also strongly interrelated with the problems of food supplies.

#### *Environment*

The UN Stockholm Conference on Human Environment in 1972 emphasized that new standards in the relationship between society and nature must bring into being a new policy with regard to the environment and natural resources. Among others the passive conservationist forms and



methods of this policy (like the preservation of some of the natural systems and the elimination of some of the anthropogenic damage to nature) applied in the past must be complemented with active instruments and methods. The overall aim must be to limit the probability of immediate or long-term damage to nature as far as possible, aiming at the effective reproduction of natural resources which are of great importance both economically and ecologically.

### *Urbanization*

The UN Conference on Human Settlements (Vancouver, 1976) in its recommendations went much beyond the issues of urbanization. It emphasized that of the 760 million people, who today live in urban centres, more than 250 million live in slums. It underlined also that while 30 years ago in the developing world there was only one city with more than 5 million inhabitants, by 2000 there will be forty. Eighteen of these will have more than 10 million inhabitants. In the next twenty years about 70 million new dwelling units must be created in the developing countries to provide minimal housing for the urban poor. The investment costs of such measures would be 215 thousand million dollars in today's prices, 70 per cent of the urban poor cannot however afford even the cheapest housing. Community investments will not help without jobs for these people. It is, of course, true that 40 per cent of the population of the developing countries suffering from extreme poverty live in remote rural areas. Much therefore remains to be done related to rural housing as well.

### *Industrial development*

The Second General Conference of the UN Industrial Development organization (Lima, 1975), in the form of the Lima Declaration and Plan of Action, envisaged measures which were supposed to help the developing countries to increase their share of world industrial output from 7 to 25 per cent by the year 2000. The share of these countries, however, was no more than 9 per cent in 1979 and it is evident that in the absence of special measures the share of developing countries will not be more than 13 per cent by the year 2000. It is important, however, that industrialization should receive greater support nationally and on an international level. This must include the restructuring and redeployment of world industry. Measures such as international enterprise cooperation, imports of technology



(the selection of the appropriate technology under the given circumstances) must also be part of industrial development strategy. Interrelations between industry and other sectors, with all the international implications which were also part of the Lima Declaration, and were further developed since then, must also be incorporated into International Strategy. The Third General Conference in (Feb. 1980) confirmed and strengthened the main principles and tasks on a national and international scale which are vitally important in the process of industrialization. Eight proposals were particularly strongly supported:

— The System of Consultations between different countries on industrial policies and especially on structural changes, redeployment, etc. should be placed on a permanent footing within the framework of UNIDO.

— Industrial financial information and negotiations networks should be strengthened in order to help UNIDO's investment promotion programme.

— More risk capital should be made available for the promotion of intra Third World investments.

— Barter or buy-back arrangements should be promoted which are related to long-term investment agreements as a means of transferring industrial capacity from industrialized to developing countries.

— Intergovernmental agreements on industrial policies and arrangements should be encouraged.

— It is necessary to mobilize the potential of medium-sized enterprises and other non-transnational corporation sources from the developed industrial countries of the West, granting UNIDO additional resources to extend present activities in this field.

— Industrial research and development should be relocated to a greater extent from developed to developing countries.

— Joint efforts for marketing, exploration, processing, and financing must be made in order to help the industrialization of the developing countries.

— Facilities for preparing industrial projects should be established, especially projects aimed to help the least developed countries.

All these measures would help the restructuring of the industrial sector of the world economy and would foster an appropriate pattern and pace of industrialization in the developing countries.

#### *Collective self-reliance*

The World Conference on Technical Cooperation between the Developing Countries in 1978 (Buenos Aires) drew attention to important re-



serves of economic growth located in increasing cooperation between developing countries. The example of the socialist countries of Eastern Europe proved the necessity of closer cooperation between countries the industrialization process in which, and modernization in general, cannot take place with sufficient speed and structure within the framework of the traditional division of labour still dominating world market patterns. As a result of the colonial division of labour, the proportion of mutual trade in the total foreign trade of the developing countries is still less than 20 per cent.

The strengthening of cooperation between them, especially between public sector enterprises, is an important instrument in the fight for economic decolonization. Cooperation between developing countries, of course, raises several important issues. One of these is related to proposals that the developing countries should extricate themselves from world markets, practising a sort of collective self-reliance. This has been repeatedly urged by certain ultra radical groups of the Third World. It is however unrealistic and unwise. Due to the very high degree of dependence on external sources of goods, services, technology, capital, and experts that are essential for progress, the developing countries would not be able to satisfy their demand from within the group at all. The developing countries, as a group, would not be able to absorb exports of one of their member either. More importantly the differentiation which is already characteristic of the developing countries would increase further. Some countries which are better off today would become even richer and they would fast become middle-level capitalist centres dominating the rest. The economy of several developing countries is dominated by transnational corporations, and through these the transnationals would be able to penetrate into others.

It is not their participation as such but their national economic structure and the present world market mechanisms which should be changed, their mutual cooperation being substantially increased. The example of the Eastern European socialist countries also demonstrates the necessity and the advantages of broader and global cooperation. Terms could be improved by national policies and international action. Compared to their unilateral dependence in the past they are able to participate in global cooperation occupying an improved position.

#### *Science and technology*

Of the major strategic international conferences of the 1970s, the UN Conference on Science and Technology for Development (Vienna, 1979)



was probably the least successful. It concentrated too much on the establishment of international machinery and less on the programmes of action which were discussed and accepted. Several important tasks for national and international action were emphasized, such as the better integration of science and technology into national planning, the improvement of the mechanism and conditions of technology imports, and the choice and the strengthening the role of the UN in science and technology. The UN Conference, which was the second on this subject (the first took place in 1963), was nevertheless more realistic in determining priorities and immediate tasks. The developing countries with 12 per cent of the world's scientists and engineers engaged in research and with 3 per cent of the world's research and development expenditure, 60 per cent of which is concentrated in 6 countries will have to rely on the imports of technology for a long time to come.

The conditions of technology imports are vital for their economic development. The use of indigenous R & D capacities must be also improved and subordinated to national economic and social priorities, such as the development of food resources, improvements in health, the better utilization of natural resources, etc.

UN strategic conferences of the 1970s have been repeatedly criticized by certain experts and politicians for being unrealistic, raising expectations which cannot be matched by concrete action, for too high a degree of generalities which cannot help national (or international) policy making, that is for suggestions and programmes the implementation of which was not feasible. Most of the critical remarks reflected views which did not comprehend the nature of the problems and of the UN or the Specialized Agencies. The issues were of a major, long-term, and global nature. The recommendations served as guidelines only. In the Development Strategy for the 1980s and beyond, these issues cannot be dealt with in detail and concretely either, only in the form of a general declaration. This form would correspond also to ideas of national sovereignty which form the basis for any UN resolution, declaration, or action programme.

An International Development Strategy for the 1980s and beyond should also include concrete tasks for the UN and its specialized agencies. Such a strategy can be a coordinating and integrating instrument able to help concerted action within the UN. It can also contribute to the elimination of parallel endeavours and overlapping on the part of the UN system. Governments are often blamed for the lack of sound coordination. True enough, the representatives of governments and delegates from different departments vote and approve the programmes but it is the duty of the



secretariat to draw the attention of delegates to repetitions (if the proposals come from them). The truth is that very often the secretariat is not aware in one specialized agency what is done in another, or (which is even worse) sometimes they deliberately expand their programme into areas which overlap with the work of other agencies.

Implementation is the cornerstone of any international programme of action or strategy. The UN system has no power to impose any strategy on its members. A strategy can be implemented only when the ideas it is based on are accepted by the great majority of countries and they are ready to be guided by its principles or programmes. The basic question is, of course, not just the acceptance of ideas but what is done by countries and international organizations. The first two Development Decades of the UN serve as sources for a number of conclusions:

(a) Economic development takes place anyway without any strategy or plan, national or international. An International Development Strategy (when translated into national programmes) can only influence the direction or the pattern of economic growth. The degree of the influence will depend on the appropriate government actions leading to qualitative changes as well. One can therefore draw the conclusion that the implementation of growth targets for the 1970s cannot be realistically evaluated without analysing the strategy as a whole.

The second development strategy envisaged a 6 per cent annual growth of GNP in developing countries (3.5 per cent on a per capita basis). The annual growth rates required in particular areas to achieve these GNP targets were as follows

8 per cent annual growth in manufacturing

4 per cent annual growth in agriculture

7 per cent annual growth of exports

and to channel 20 per cent of GNP into national saving in the developing countries, with economic assistance from abroad corresponding to 0.7 per cent of the GNP in the Western countries.

The achieved GNP growth rate was 5.2 per cent (2.8 per cent per capita) but only 4 per cent (1.5 per cent per capita) for the poorest 60 per cent of the developing world. Manufacturing output grew by 6.2 per cent in general and agriculture only by 2.7 per cent (in many countries only by 1.7 per cent).

Since neither the structural nor regional targets of the strategy were achieved, it is not feasible to measure statistically the degree of implementation.

It is also evident that economic exercises (which are very important in



establishing a quantitative framework) cannot be considered as a basis for an international strategy.

(b) The concept of the first two development decades was based on the gap approach. The reduction of the gap in per capita GNP, in consumption and investments, was the main target of these programmes. Since then, it has been understood much better also in the UN that underdevelopment is not simply the result of a time lag but of international dependence, of structural problems and relations which must be changed. There is a connection with social problems. The Declaration on the New International Economic Order and the Programme of Action reflected an understanding of international structural constraints.

(c) The realities of the world economy, and the problems and trends in its development, must be taken into account. No strategy can be implemented which is not based on a realistic evaluation of the main processes and problems of the world economy. Neither the first nor the second development decade was preceded by an important research programme such as the *Future of the World Economy* carried out by a group of experts headed by Vassili Leontieff. It would be a grave mistake if this important report were disregarded by the UN. Important conclusions, especially such as refer to the necessity of major socio-economic measures in order to avoid certain grave dangers in the coming 20 years, are very important in the formulation of the new strategy.

(d) Disregarding the diversity of countries would mean also the neglect of diverging interests and measures for their coordination, and thus produce inevitable failures.

From the point of view of the implementation of the next development strategy it is very important that tasks should be clearly defined and translated into the language of the countries or group of countries. This does not mean targets for individual countries but recommendations for clearly defined action, reforms, and social, or economic measures. It is evident that countries must have the primary responsibility in formulation as well as in implementation. No international resolution can substitute for the political will on a national level.

Countries and governments have different approaches, interests, and options open to them. The suggested measures for the implementation of the strategy must take into account all the related problems. It is evident, for example, that in a capitalist market economy governments cannot undertake obligations in areas where the decisions and activities are in the hand of private firms. They favour general framework agreements with little or no binding power on trade or industrial production. The socialist



countries on the other hand prefer long-term and firm agreements in broad areas of the international division of labour which would offer more security in international economic relations, facilitating planning. This approach corresponds also to the interests of the developing countries (at least of the great majority) and their economic mechanism permits agreements in important areas such as restructuring and redeploying certain industries, thus helping to solve or mitigate structural crises. The socialist countries do not accept internationally agreed figures for the volume of resource transfer, arguing that they are not responsible for the present problems, backwardness, and exploitation of the developing countries. (They could add that Western countries which voted 0.7 per cent GNP as annual development assistance, did not carry out their obligations.)

Their responsibility and participation is emphasized however in the formulation of a democratic framework for the world economy. They are in favour of major changes in the international institutional system as a whole, making it able to take into account the needs of the developing and the socialist countries as well. This means also that certain practices which worked against the interests of the developing countries, for example in the international monetary system, are strongly criticized by the socialist countries. The socialist countries consider concrete steps in disarmament as pre-conditions for major resource transfers to the developing countries. These views are not shared by many Western and developing countries, nor is a clear connection made between disarmament and development strategy.

The strategy and the recommended steps for implementation cannot overlook existing diversities in determining the tasks of particular countries. The same approach must be made in case of regional economic groups or associations which must play a clear role in the implementation of a global international strategy. It is necessary to emphasize for example that

— regional cooperation and action should not block the solution of global problems, on the contrary, they should support global measures with instruments which are available to them.

— Regional groups of the developed Western countries should not hamper cooperation between developing countries. (This problem emerged in connection with the Lomé agreements.)

— Regional integration of the developing countries should help the establishment of joint projects, serving several countries and strengthening their bargaining position in the world economy.

The UN family should play an initiating, mobilizing, and monitoring role in the implementation of the new development strategy. Its role should include measures such as



— initiating negotiations for the conclusion of international agreements in economic cooperation, especially concerning the redeployment of certain industries, in stabilizing raw material prices, reducing protectionist measures, eliminating discrimination, etc.;

— monitoring changes in national policies, their implication for the world economy, and drawing attention to emerging problems;

— monitoring the structural changes in the world economy in the developed Western countries, in the socialist, and developing countries and trying to find ways for their better coordination;

— helping governments to understand better the specific problems of the developing countries, especially the least developed ones, mobilizing international efforts to help these countries;

— encouraging necessary socio-economic reforms, such as land reform, changes in the distribution of income and wealth, eliminating poverty, promoting social mobility, etc. These are of course delicate national issues and the UN can deal with these problems mostly in general terms only;

— helping the growth in efficiency of economic institutions in the developing countries by advising, research, exchange of experience, etc.;

— improving the work of the UN and specialized agencies, coordinating their activities and efforts with new and bold measures, with more joint interagency work.

It is also a vital issue in the implementation of the new development strategy that the enlightened and committed part of public opinion should participate in discussions leading to the formulation of the strategy, as well as in its realization. Scientists, journalists and their professional organizations, and non-governmental organizations should be actively involved in the strategy. In order to achieve these aims, it is necessary to establish much closer relations between the UN and different groups of scholars, journalists, and other important and influential part of the public. These relations must be based upon their more direct role on national as well as the international level. Information flow is also an important condition of such relations.

It is necessary that the new strategy should have sufficient appeal for public opinion in order to get its support, thus helping the coming into being of the political will on a government level in different countries. It is important for public opinion in the Western countries to understand that there is a changing trend in the world economy. New types of economic relations will be established as a result of inevitable economic decolonization. It would be better for all if agreed action took the countries towards a new international division of labour, and not international crises, tension, and conflicts.



# MACRO-GOALS AND MICRO-DECISIONS

by

EGON KEMENES

**F**ollowing lively debates and thorough preparation, new economic levers were introduced on the 1st January 1980, designed to aid Hungarian enterprises to harmonize their micro-decisions with macroeconomic goals.

The new system of economic regulation is the biggest change to be introduced since the economic reform of 1968\*. It has not brought any change in the basic principles of the economic mechanism then introduced, but rather seeks to adapt that mechanism to recent developments in Hungarian economic and social life and in the world economy. It has also restored to prominence certain endeavours of the original reform which had become obscured from about 1973 onwards, for various reasons, partly to do with exogeneous factors. At the time, the reform of 1968 gave Hungarian enterprises a new status and identity by abandoning direct governmental intervention and granting the enterprises themselves decision-taking powers in respect of production and development. The main intention of the system of regulation introduced on the 1st January 1980\*\* is to bring about a closer harmony between autonomous enterprise decisions and the new requirements of the economy as a whole.

## *"Legacy" and "dowry"*

Some of the reasons for modifying the system of regulation date back to before 1968, to the institutional legacy of the system of economic guidance then introduced. The reforms of 1968 did not, of course, begin from scratch; they originated in the soil of a given micro-economic structure,

\* See NHQ 20, 21, 32, 34, 42, 44, 50, 53, 62, 68, 70.

\*\* See NHQ 75.



which was characterized by heavy enterprise concentration. In some branches of industry, total output, or an overwhelming proportion of total output, came from a few large enterprises; the number of small and medium enterprises was minimal. At the beginning of the sixties many industrial enterprises had been merged—through administrative measures—to form huge conglomerates; certain economies were anticipated in respect of vertical labour organization of and the management of stocks, and furthermore concentration facilitated planning and guidance in a system which relied on centralized methods. In consequence, the number of industrial enterprises fell from 1,638 in 1960 to only 812 by 1970, while they grew in size to the point where many of them employed in the order of 20–25 thousand workers. Many of these large enterprises found themselves in a monopolistic or oligopolistic position. Even after 1968 this process of concentration continued, no longer through administrative measures but guided by economic factors; thus the number of industrial enterprises had fallen to 700 by 1978.

The large monopolistic enterprises brought into existence by this process of concentration remained rather insensitive to those attempts of the reform package to stimulate domestic competition and to replace the sellers' market by a fully-fledged buyers' market. When they encountered financial difficulties, they found it all too easy to obtain governmental support, whereas the objective of the reforms had been to limit state support to certain special cases. Firms succeeded in doing this by arguing that they were more than mere economic units: because of the large numbers of workers they employed they could claim also to represent an important section of the working class.

The question may naturally be asked, why in 1968, simultaneously with the introduction of the reform package, was this over-concentrated enterprise structure not transformed, why were artificially created large enterprises not dissolved? The answer is obvious. Firstly, the reforms ushered in such radical changes that the simultaneous transformation of the enterprise structure would have risked disruption of the entire Hungarian economy; there was a limit to what could be accomplished by one round of reforms. Secondly, in 1968 this over-concentrated enterprise structure was still only four or five years old, and at this point in time active re-organization in the opposite direction would have caused more harm than good.

If the reform package inherited a burden in this concentrated micro-structure, it was scarcely any more fortunate in its dowry. The changes which occurred in the world economy within a few years of the Hungarian economic reform were uniformly unfavourable. The sharp fuel price rises,



which began at the end of 1973, increased the Hungarian import bill, whilst the recession which followed in the Western countries in 1974 and 1975 narrowed down export opportunities. Hungary's terms of trade deteriorated. Between 1970 and 1978 the price index of imports rose by 44.5 per cent in trade with the CMEA countries, and by 57.6 per cent in trade with other foreign countries. During the same period the export price index rose by only 15.9 per cent in respect of the CMEA countries, and by 34.9 per cent in the remaining foreign sector. The export surplus of the post-reform years was replaced by a deficit on the balance of trade. The government sought to protect the domestic price level against the impact of energy price rises and accelerated inflation in the West by subsidizing imports. These subsidies demanded an increasingly large share of the state budget, and consequently a deficit appeared here as well. External imbalance was thus followed by the loss of internal equilibrium.

A third group of factors curtailing the development of the reforms were exogenous in character, i.e. extraneous to the economic system proper. Such factors included the implications of the reforms in social and political spheres. The essential point is that the reforms of 1968 had intended to distribute income unambiguously according to performance, both at enterprise level and as regards individual remuneration.

As far as personal income is concerned, marked differentiation did indeed set in after the reforms, although it cannot be claimed that this invariably reflected differential performance. This new inequality of income distribution was vociferously criticised by some social groups and their representatives, mostly, of course, groups unfavourably affected by the new pattern. This is quite understandable if one remembers the fact that one of the historic motivating forces of socialist ideology was the endeavour to abolish the extreme inequality of income distribution in the capitalist system. However fair and practical it might be to admit some differentiation of incomes within a socialist economy and society, it was nevertheless unusual and even unacceptable to many. Consequently, a few years after the reforms a renewed levelling of individual incomes set in, which dampened the original hopes to improve efficiency, including the productivity of labour.

As far as enterprise revenues and profits were concerned, greater differentiation here was sparked off by the recognition of much growth potential in the micro-economy. Many large enterprises began to expand to the size of major firms on a world scale. This desirable differentiation according to performance occurred in one direction only. The expansion of well-managed and successful enterprises was not accompanied by the contraction or withering away of inefficient enterprises which had become unviable in



changing conditions. In the years immediately after the reform package it is true that some enterprises (including large enterprises) went bankrupt and were eventually absorbed by successfully operating concerns. This process was then interrupted by those social and political forces which claimed that the consequences of inefficient operation should not be borne by the workers, even though this consequence would be, at worst, only a change in the place of employment. As a result, instead of radically reorganizing or liquidating enterprises which were unprofitable, public funds once again were directed their way; at first, support was enjoyed by a small number of large enterprises, but later, with the precedent established, a whole range of enterprises was subsidised by the central budget; in this way such firms could survive and even raise wages; they felt no compulsion to eliminate the deficit at which they were operating.

Today, after the well-known cases of Rolls-Royce in Britain and Chrysler in the United States, this pattern may be more familiar to the Western reader than it was ten years ago. Firms in trouble in the "free market economies" of the West are not always left to pay off the workforce and sell the machines for scrap. This is unthinkable when they control a considerable share of a branch of industry and when their workers form a large proportion of the local population or even a significant group in the national society. In the case of Hungary the trouble was not that a few exceptions were made for large enterprises, but that the practice spread so rapidly that the exception became the rule. Each individual enterprise would turn to the government, and the profits earned by various concerns according to theoretically uniform rules were effectively redistributed by the budget, thus supporting the less profitable at the expense of the more profitable. Thus indirect guidance through levers was in practice again replaced by direct intervention.

*The general principles of the new system of regulation*

A solution to the problems described above was suggested by the way in which they had developed. Since it was the budget which absorbed most of the burden of rising import prices, enterprises had become insensitive to price rises on the world market. They made little effort to restrict imports, yet their profits continued to increase, inflated now by a state subsidy. This had a damaging effect on both the external and the internal balance. Between 1970 and 1978 the taxes paid by enterprises and cooperatives just about doubled, but the subsidies paid out to enterprises and cooperatives grew even faster, two and a half-fold. Payments made by enterprises and



cooperatives represented 85 per cent of total inflows into the state budget in 1970, but only 79 per cent in 1978. At the same time, the subsidies paid out to enterprises and cooperatives accounted for 28 per cent of total expenditure in 1970 and 33 per cent in 1978, rising as high as 35 per cent in 1974. In consequence a structural deficit occurred in the budget, although its average extent (1 per cent of budgetary receipts) remained within tolerable limits.

In the meantime enterprises prospered. In the very worst years for the national economy (between 1974 and 1978) post-tax enterprise profits doubled. The government tried to reverse this trend towards the end of the seventies by raising taxes and reducing subsidies, but it appeared that the enterprises had unlimited resources, were easily able to pay the higher taxes, and simultaneously to go in for more self-financing and increased investment, which the government wanted to restrain. For instance, between 1976 and 1977 enterprise tax burdens increased by 24 per cent, but the developmental funds used to finance their investment projects increased by the same percentage. It turned out that, with better organization, enterprises were able to improve results substantially: from 1976 to 1977 the productivity of labour in industry grew by about 7 per cent, more rapidly than in any previous year. By 1978, despite the intentions of the government, the share of enterprises in total investments increased to 57 per cent, compared with 50 per cent in 1970. In the course of expanding investment, enterprises sought first of all to modernize their stocks of machinery, often by importing equipment from the West. Imports of machinery manufactured in non-socialist countries increased more than fourfold between 1970 and 1978, and their share of all machinery purchases increased from 20 per cent to 32 per cent. In the same period, the value of machinery purchased domestically grew only two and a halffold, whilst that of machinery imports from the socialist countries only doubled.

The expansion of enterprise investments was enhanced by the impact of the export development loan programme initiated by the government. Within the framework of this scheme, approximately 50 thousand million forints (roughly 1200 million dollars) were paid out to enterprises, for the creation and extension of export capacity in the fields to which the government assigned priority. The first step in the realization of this programme was a further upswing in the imports of machinery from Western countries.

The expansion of investments, fed by these contrasting motivations, also imposed a burden on industrial building capacity. This led to delays in the implementation of investment projects.

All this made it abundantly clear that enterprises still had ample resources



at their disposal, which might be siphoned away by increased taxation in order to finance central projects or those preferred by the government. Consequently, one of the important elements of the new system of regulation introduced in 1980 is the raising of corporate taxes. The rate of the general tax on profits was increased from 40 per cent to 45 per cent on 1st January, 1980. The rate of this tax is lower for specified public concerns and utility enterprises (40 per cent), and lower still for enterprises concerned with health-care and culture (30 per cent). On the other hand, the tax paid by foreign trade enterprises is higher: 50 per cent. The municipal rates levied upon enterprises were increased from 6 per cent to 10 per cent.

Enterprise profits have been comparably squeezed by a radical narrowing down of the range of subsidies enjoyed hitherto under one guise or another. The government does not want to impose any artificial levelling in the future. The resources available must be utilized with great circumspection, in a most selective way; they must not be directed to the general support of enterprises with a poor economic record.

In respect of both the increased taxation and the reduction in state supports it is important to emphasize that the new system of regulation has a normative nature (to quote the expression of the official declarations and press commentaries). This means that the new regulations have a universally mandatory nature, to which there are no exceptions (not counting, of course, public utilities whose performance can in no way be measured by their profits). In the new system of regulation it will be more difficult for an enterprise to increase its profits, but if it nevertheless succeeds in doing so, it will be more free in the deployment of those funds than ever before. This system is designed to reward adaptability and to penalize inflexibility. Adaptability in the Hungarian case is bound up with adjustments to the world market. The need to adjust to international requirements has also been recognized by creating new guidelines for enterprise price formation.

#### *The new principles of price regulation*

The new price system derives its *raison d'être* from the fact that Hungary realizes more than half of its national income through exports. This means that the conditions and the results of productive work can only be assessed in terms of the international division of labour. A price authority may fix a price that guarantees profitability, but the gesture is meaningless if the product can only be sold abroad at a loss. In the same way it has no sense for the price authority to freeze the domestic retail price of certain pro-



ducts when import prices are increasing. The situation of the Hungarian economy is influenced fundamentally by the price ratios which exist in international markets.

The transformation of the producers' price system is designed ultimately to ensure that price effects coming from the world market should influence not only the products that are exported or imported, but the entire domestic price system. The general argument in favour of this is that the situation of the Hungarian economy objectively necessitates this high measure of dependence on foreign trade. Favourable or unfavourable changes in foreign trade have a direct impact on Hungarian national income. If the Hungarian economy is to continue to grow, it must succeed in improving its terms of trade and its export capacity. For this very reason, the prices of fuels and raw materials will depend in future on the actual import price, and domestic prices in branches of industry such as engineering, the chemical industry, light industries, all of which supply foreign markets, will in future depend on the export prices which they can fetch abroad. If, for instance, a Hungarian enterprise is able to sell the kitchen range it manufactures for a unit price of DM 200 on the West German market, it will not be permitted to sell it on the Hungarian market at a higher price in forints (converted at the commercial rate).

From January 1980, products amounting to approximately 70 per cent of total output in the "processing" industries will have their prices adjusted to prices on the world market. It is considered that in this way prices will resemble competitive prices, or will at least behave as if they were competitive prices. The range of these products and the *ensemble* of enterprises producing them comprise the competitive sphere in the jargon of the new price system. Since the competitive conditions which would have forced enterprises to reduce their costs did not develop in the domestic economy, the instigators of the new price system have responded with a Copernican turn and subjected domestic prices to the competition prevailing on the international market.

Great expectations are entertained as to how enterprises will adjust to the new system of price formation, i.e. to having to calculate the cost of energy and basic inputs at the purchase prices in force in Western markets, and to fixing the prices of their manufactured goods by the price level achieved in exports. This is a break with the former system of cost prices, in which the enterprises were always able to cover rising costs by raising prices and making use of price supports. In the new competitive price system enterprises can pass on the rising price of inputs and energy only when they are able to make the same increases in the price of their exports. It must be



stressed that this competitive price system has been introduced only in industry, and even there not in all branches.

In agriculture, centrally determined purchasing prices are being raised; this move is demanded by the need to maintain production and the intensive development of this sector. As is well known, the intensive development of agriculture is realized throughout Europe by a protectionist farm policy, with large state subsidies and tariff protection. The prices of the materials and equipment used in agriculture are considerably influenced by rising import prices and by the change in the producers' price system domestically in industry. In addition, in order that the costs of agricultural production should increasingly reflect the actual value of its inputs, the range and value of agricultural subsidies had to be reduced. The value of state support for construction work in agriculture and new planting has been reduced by one third, and the support for machinery purchases cut back even more. Support to aid the purchase of machinery parts and protein fodder has been abolished and the price concessions for insecticides, pesticides and fertilizers have all been reduced. The rise in costs has been offset by an increase of approximately 11 per cent in purchasing prices for final products. For vegetable products the rise is somewhat below this average, and for animal products it is higher.

An integral part of the entire new price mechanism is its devolution of price-fixing to the enterprise (with the exception of the prices fixed by a public authority, e.g. fuels). The system defines only the general rules of price formation, but enterprises run a great risk if they deviate from these rules, since they may be liable to heavy fines.

The retail price increases announced on 23rd July, 1979 constituted an organic part of the new price system introduced half a year later. The retail prices of many foodstuffs, fuels, electric power, building materials, shoes and furniture were all increased. This measure raised the consumer price level by about 9 per cent at one stroke. Following this, producers' prices were adjusted on January 1st 1980. Within the framework of this adjustment, producers were freed from certain fiscal burdens (e.g. a capital tax of 5 per cent was abolished and the rate of the payroll tax paid by enterprises was reduced from 35 per cent to 24 per cent). The aim here was to enable producers' prices to move downwards and to put an end to the situation which had arisen whereby, because of subsidies, the *average* level of producers' prices was higher than that of the retail prices ("negative two-step price system"). On the other hand, energy and raw materials were now to figure at new, higher prices. The changes in producers' prices overall caused a 1 per cent rise in the retail price level.



*Wages system and labour management*

The wages of workers in successful, profitable enterprises hardly rose any faster in the second half of the seventies than wages in those enterprises making little or any profit. The instruments of wages policy did not stimulate rational labour management at this time, and this gave rise to unnecessary labour shortages. Some modifications were made in 1978 and in 1979, which improved the situation but accomplished no essential change.

In recent years it has been increasingly recognized that subsidising a wide range of enterprises and cancelling out the consequences of profitable and less profitable operation cannot be continued. The new wages regulation enables personal remuneration to reflect the economic results (profits) of the enterprise. At the same time, this new system, also introduced on 1st January, 1980, tries to put into practice the principle that every forint paid out in increased wages should be strictly accountable: the enterprise can have more money and raise wages only if it is improving its economic results.

Wages regulation, as it existed until now, tended to induce enterprises to increase their labour force. The new regulations give workers and employees a financial interest in putting an end to over-staffing, because the wages saved through a reduction in the size of the workforce can, within certain limits be used to augment the wages of those who stay. In future enterprises will be able to allocate larger sums to raising wages, because the level above which wages increments are subject to tax has itself been raised. However few enterprises, those operating most successfully, will be able to make use of this provision. The new wages system will discriminate carefully, and only those enterprises able to prove an above-average increase in efficiency (especially if this can be achieved by a reduction in the labour force) will be able to raise wages. Needless to say different regulations will apply in some special branches of industry, e.g. concerning the power workers.

In this way, the new wages system aims at releasing and mobilizing superfluous labour resources; the employment pattern will be more efficient both from the point of view of the macroeconomy and of the individual. Workers released through staff reductions do not have to face unemployment. They may encounter some discomfort in changing their employment, but this is a smaller evil, and really an unavoidable one, since changes in the economic structure inevitably lead to changes in the structure of employment. When storms break out in the world economy and the entire Hungarian economy is forced to make rapid and radical adjustments, then quite



obviously not every individual worker in the economy can expect to spend his whole working career in the same place, quietly and comfortably, with secure prospects of advancement. The mobility of labour was in any case high in the seventies as individuals sought higher rewards: in a climate of labour shortage the openings were always numerous. The new regulation of wages will merely ensure that changes in employment will serve the interests of society as well, and not merely those of the individual.

Within the framework of the new system of regulation only enterprises which achieve a vigorous expansion of competitive exports as a result of technical development, astute marketing and organization, and regular adaptation of the production structure, will be able to maintain fairly dynamic growth. Stagnating or only minimally increasing domestic consumption will strengthen the compulsion to export and will also tend to stimulate continuous improvements in relations with suppliers and sub-contractors and the meticulous fulfilment of contracts; hence production will adjust better to demand, and gradually a buyers' market will come into existence. By making the rules governing utilization of company reserves more flexible, management may outgrow the habit of thinking in terms of the calendar year at hand; company plans will look further ahead, and it will be in their interest to elaborate and carry through longer-range strategies. Above all, stronger incentives and greater opportunities will encourage the adjustment to change, which—irrespective of the social system—must be the main goal of enterprises everywhere today, their only chance to survive and expand.

Enterprises will not in future have equal access to investment resources. For inefficient enterprises conditions will become more difficult; but they will become favourable for well-managed firms exporting efficiently. Enterprises which are more profitable will enjoy new opportunities for dynamic expansion through being awarded a higher credit rating. At the same time, less profitable enterprises will be unequivocally required to cut back and ultimately to eliminate their non-profit-making activities, whilst stepping up output in other lines, more modern and competitive. It is up to these enterprises themselves, relying on their own resources, to overcome their financial difficulties; in general they cannot now expect to receive government supports or concessions.

Hopes for the realization of these positive effects were strengthened by the results of the year 1979, which can be interpreted to a certain extent as a testing ground for major aspects of the new system of regulation. Several preliminary measures were taken to restore external and internal equilibrium at the end of the seventies, and these brought the climate of operation for enterprises nearer to the new system of regulation. Following the increase



in retail prices of July, 1979, the growth of consumer demand fell back; in 1979 consumption went up by 2 per cent, and per capita real income scarcely exceeded the 1978 figure. After the measures taken in mid-1978 and at the beginning of 1979, enterprise investments were likewise checked. In 1979 state subsidies paid out to enterprises under various titles were all reduced, and the scope to raise wages was more closely tied to an improvement in economic performance. All this had its effect in an improvement in the external balance. In 1979 Hungarian exports to nonsocialist countries increased by 14 per cent, whilst imports from this sector were reduced by approximately 5 per cent; hence the trade deficit with these countries narrowed substantially.

As far as the *problems* of the new system of regulation are concerned, there is bound to be a certain transition. There will be many enterprises which in 1980, in the conditions of the new price system, will probably show a loss, or which will be able to show a small profit only after considerable support, price mark-ups, or tax refunds. Such enterprises must elaborate a programme to improve profitability, because concessions granted provisionally in 1980 will gradually be phased out. The new prices and rules will not cause a single enterprise to shut down completely in 1980. This is guaranteed by temporary compromises built into the prices and rules. Some enterprises with a mediocre record may also receive temporary help. The justification wherever this is done must be established according to the yardstick of the world market. It is designed to make catching up possible, it is therefore necessarily provisional, its extent is diminishing and it is very strictly circumscribed. It must also be accepted that enterprises with no future in the long term must either reorganize their entire activity or face being wound up. If some factories or plants are closed, the state organs and especially the local councils will help to assure the optimal regroupment of the labour force.

The real problem does not concern transitional difficulties of this nature; the question is whether the government will stand firm against the complaints and arguments of regional organs, trade associations, large enterprises and trade unions, whether it will in fact apply the strict yardstick consistently and reject pressure to prolong the exceptions once again, i.e. to make compromises which are meant to be provisional into permanent ones, as happened after the 1968 reforms.

Another problem arises from the external market base of the new price system, i.e. that enterprises producing exports cannot sell their products on the domestic market at higher prices than those achieved abroad. There will certainly be no lack of authorities and social organizations to check



whether enterprises do indeed apply this principle in establishing their domestic prices. The problem here concerns the uncertainty of the concept or export price. Whereas the concept of the domestic price is unambiguous, the export price includes elements such as terms of delivery, various rebates, commissions and refunds, not to mention changes in currency rates. For the price controllers unfamiliar with the ins and outs of foreign trade transactions it will not be a simple task to establish the genuine export price.

The same principle of price formation, combined with the policy regulating purchasing power may cause a further problem. With costing based on the external market the government expects the domestic price level to fall, since the enterprises are compelled to sell on the home market as if facing sharp competition similar to that existing on the external market. If domestic prices are in fact reduced, the relationship between supply and demand changes and there will be excess for some products. In the short run this demand cannot be satisfied by increasing the supply, since this would require an undesirable switching away from exports. Hence demands must be reduced through controls on purchasing power. Control is constrained by the fact that in Hungary today broad strata of the population obtain a considerable proportion of their incomes through various social allowances; to reduce these is politically out of the question. The importance of such allowances is increasing. In 1979 average monetary incomes increased by 7.5–8 per cent, but social allowances went up by 18 per cent. The smooth operation of the new price system therefore depends partly on the extent to which the government is able to moderate the growth of wages and salaries, following its successful beginning in 1979, before the introduction of the new system of regulation.

The full unfolding of the effects of the new system of regulation will coincide with the period of the sixth Five-Year Plan, covering the years 1981–1985. Consequently a comprehensive evaluation will only be possible towards the mid-eighties. One point deserves emphasis in conclusion: the new system of regulation is not trying to force enterprises to adjust to difficult world conditions by direct administrative measures (“recentralization”). The new system is a return to the spirit of the 1968 reforms, it reaffirms their basic principles and tries to put them into practice more consistently than has been the case hitherto. It does not seek to solve the problems of the external balance through protectionism but by a more intensive and constructive involvement of Hungarian enterprises in the international division of labour.



## SMALL-SCALE FARMING IN HUNGARY

by

GYULA VARGA

All sorts of opinions have so far been voiced in many places concerning small-scale agricultural production, i.e. farming on household plots by members of producers' cooperatives and on auxiliary farms by persons outside agricultural cooperatives. Hungarian and foreign rural economists alike have been fascinated by the nature of smallholdings in Hungary and with their present and future role in economic life. The views taken of small-scale production are quite extreme. Small-scale farming is often said to be the root cause of "the Hungarian miracle", the "mysterious key" to the very rapid and steady growth of agriculture. Others see here an inconsistency in the socialist reorganisation of agriculture or a blatant refutation of the alleged superiority of large-scale farming.

Hungarian economists today share more or less the same view of small-scale production; of course there are some differences of opinion and, because of the complexity of the problem, these will probably persist in the future. Small-scale farming is uniformly regarded as an economic necessity and not seen to conceal any kind of political opportunism. Small-scale production has played a positive role in the development of Hungarian agriculture, in raising the personal incomes not only of peasants but also of workers owning small farms, and in maintaining high-quality and balanced food supplies nationwide.

Controversies, and serious ones at that, arise only when it comes to the possible and desirable future of such small farms. It is uncertain how long Hungarian agriculture will need them; and it is likewise uncertain how long that section of the population, namely the small-scale producers, will be disposed, by giving up all or part of its leisure time, to work at an incontestably lower technical level and under worse conditions than those employed in large-scale farming. Hungarian rural economists are, however,



agreed that this dilemma cannot and should not be decided or even modified in any way at all by administrative measures.

Since the actual conditions of small-scale farming in Hungary are not well-known abroad, the concept itself merits definition. Smallholdings in Hungary comprise the household plots of cooperative members, the privately managed farms of members of special cooperatives, and the auxiliary farm lands owned by workers of state farms, by non-agricultural workers, and by pensioners. Official statistics also include the insignificant number of individual peasant farms still in existence; their role is in fact quite negligible and far less important than their 2.4 per cent share of the agricultural area might lead one to suppose. The arable land of a small-scale producer is barely more than half a hectare on the average, but owing to the large number of small farms (a total of 1.6 million: practically every other family in Hungary has such a farm!), the total area of such holdings remains significant. It is nearly 1 million ha., including 0.6 million ha. of arable land. The area devoted to intensive branches such as horticulture fruit and wine production is especially large; the 0.3 million ha. of the small-farm sector amount to 60 per cent of the national total. It is due to the particularly intensive cultivation of the area of land of small farms, and to their high standards in livestock breeding, that their production totals about one-third of national farm produce, although they control only 15 per cent of the country's agricultural area.

#### *The volume and structure of small-scale production*

During the past fifteen years (1964–1979) the growth rate of agricultural production in Hungary, measured by international standards, has been very favourable, i.e. well above the global average. This was the result of the dynamic annual increase of 5.3 per cent in the production of large-scale farms combined with the modest but by no means negligible average yearly increase of 1.1 per cent in small-scale agricultural production. These differing rates of growth led to a radical change in the ratio of large-scale production to that of small farms. While small-scale agricultural production in 1961 amounted to 84 per cent of the volume of large-scale production, this proportion had fallen to 61 per cent by 1970 and to only 46 per cent by 1977. The ratio of small-scale production to the production of large units decreased in spite of the fact that the gross value of the production of small holdings increased by nearly one-third in the course of those fifteen years (see Table 1).



Table 1

*Development of small-scale production*  
(At 1976 prices)

Year	Production in million Ft	The ratio of small-scale production	
		to large-scale agricultural production	to the gross yield of agricultural produce
		in per cent	
1970	51,329	65.3	39.5
1971	53,368	61.8	38.2
1972	53,874	60.2	37.2
1973	56,558	59.0	37.1
1974	56,685	56.4	36.1
1975	57,158	53.4	35.1
1976	54,973	53.0	34.6
1977	60,561	53.0	34.7
1978	63,926	55.3	35.6

According to economic policy principles formulated many years ago, but valid today and in the future as well, large-scale farms increased their production without detracting from small-scale production, and in most cases without even substituting for it, but above all in order to benefit the overall productive capacity of the national economy. The priority of large-scale production is evident. This priority, however, implies no exclusivity or permanent growth rate differential. It can hardly be doubted that the growth rate of small-scale production needs to be carefully modified and altered according to the capacity of the national economy at any given time. In the present situation it seems that the optimal solution is to reduce the growth rate of large-scale production to the level compatible with the capacity of the national economy and to achieve a corresponding increase in small-scale production so as to maintain national equilibrium. There are two important aspects to this. It is necessary to make use of the possibilities inherent in the lower capital intensity of small-scale farming; and also to exploit manpower resources which can be freed or recruited for the purposes of small-scale production, but which in most cases are not transferable to large-scale agricultural or industrial production.

Within the growth of small-scale production special attention should be paid to changes in the ratio between two essential components: crop cultivation and livestock breeding. Figures in Table 2 show a clear decline



in the share of the former. On the other hand, the share of livestock breeding was stable between 1970 and 1978, although production value increased by about 20 per cent.

Table 2

*The components of small-scale production*  
(At 1976 prices)

Year	Crop cultivation		Livestock breeding	
	Production value in million Ft	Its per cent share of national production	Production value in million Ft	Its per cent share of national production
1970	22,277	33.0	29,052	46.5
1971	22,479	30.4	30,889	47.0
1972	23,209	29.7	30,665	47.1
1973	24,255	28.8	32,303	47.5
1974	23,551	27.8	33,134	45.8
1975	22,785	25.6	34,373	46.4
1976	20,602	25.0	34,371	45.0
1977	23,299	25.3	37,262	45.1
1978	24,653	26.3	39,273	45.8

The household plots\* have been almost overtaken in importance by the auxiliary farms\*\*, the most dynamic element within the small-scale production sector. Between 1970 and 1977 the production of auxiliary farms went up by nearly two-thirds, and there is every indication that their relative importance will continue to increase, together with the absolute quantity of their production. In consequence of the slow ongoing decline in the number of those working in agricultural producers' cooperatives it was inevitable that the production of household plots would stagnate or fall.

The forecast of an increase in the production of auxiliary farms is also justified from the point of view of manpower. The number of non-agri-

\* The area of household plots is 0.6 ha. per cooperative member. For a family of two members it is 1.2 ha., with three members the family is entitled to 1.8 ha., and so forth. The number of animals that may be kept on household plots is not prescribed. On the other hand, an economic constraint is imposed by the supply of fodder; more important than production on privately owned land is the collective farm from which the members receive, in proportion to work done, either benefits in kind or the possibility to buy fodder at reduced prices. It is worth mentioning that formerly the area allocated to a single family was fixed at a maximum of 0.6 ha., and only 1 cow and 3 brood sows could be kept by each household. These limits were abolished by the early 1970s, and substantial economic incentives were introduced to stimulate an increase in the livestock.

\*\* Auxiliary farms vary greatly in area, ranging from 0.2 ha. to about 1.0 ha.; they are mostly privately owned. The size of the livestock is again unlimited and is determined by the family labour force, the buildings at the farm's disposal, and the fodder available. The fact that small-scale farming as a main occupation cannot guarantee a satisfactory level of subsistence and that the purchase of land by non-agricultural workers is also limited sets a natural ceiling to the activity of the auxiliary farms.



cultural workers engaged to some extent in small-scale farming is on the upswing; more significantly, the average size of these farms has been increasing more rapidly than their number.

*Small-scale production and income*

Manufactured means of production and goods purchased with cash are known to be used most sparingly in small-scale farming. The main factor of production is human labour itself. It follows from this that the return in small-farming, or the proceeds of commodities sold, serve primarily to recompense the work force, i.e. to provide personal incomes. In the case of commodity production this has the form of cash receipts; if production is for self-supply, then personal incomes are derived directly in kind.

Human labour still plays an outstanding role amongst the factors of production, but the role played by manufactured goods and goods purchased for cash is increasing. Small-scale farming, to put it in a nutshell, is also displaying more and more of the marks of commodity production. In consequence, the share of personal income in the value of gross production diminishes, and also the techniques used by small-scale producers undergo a radical change and increasingly resemble the techniques of the large-scale farms; they rely more and more upon the advantages of a complex division of labour. The production of goods of a value of 100 forints in 1970 could be divided conceptually into 37 forints of resource utilisation and 63 forints of income; in 1977 the respective proportions were 45 forints and 55 forints, which clearly illustrates the industrialisation of small-scale farming and the reduced relative importance of personal incomes derived from inputs of labour.

A comparison of the afore-mentioned indices with those of large-scale farms shows that a production value of 100 forints by the latter includes about 30 forints of gross profit. This approximate estimate might suggest that small-scale farming is more efficient in its resource utilisation. One must not forget, however, that small farms substitute an indeterminable quantity of live labour for the use of means of production, and that this is in itself an indication of the much lower productivity of live labour in small-scale farming. A quite different question—and this is the ultimate justification for small-scale farming—is whether it would be correct or feasible to use the live labour input of small farms in any other context, to adapt it to more productive technologies employed in large-scale farming. It is generally recognized that in most cases the labour force which is today engaged on small-holdings cannot economically be employed elsewhere.



Thus its activity here has to be regarded from society's point of view as the only way of utilising this considerable capacity. Thorough investigations have shown that labour productivity in all sectors of small-scale farming is lower than in other sectors of agriculture; thus the gross profit per unit of labour is also much lower in small farms than in large-scale production. The relatively modest sums earned by small-scale producers, however, serve to supplement personal incomes to a larger extent than the profits of large-scale farming; the rough estimate is that gross profit per unit of labour in small-scale farming corresponds to the average personal income of a manual worker. One man-hour's work in large-scale farming produces about four times more in terms of national income. In terms of personal income the difference is only two to one in favour of large-scale farming.

It may still be asked why the cultivators of small farms work for half the hourly wages paid in large-scale farming. A clear answer can be given only by taking several factors into account. First: owing to the high ratio of pensioners, female workers and persons partially incapacitated, the manpower active on small farms is intrinsically less efficient, and therefore cannot expect a comparable return on its labour (or, in other words: it is compelled to accept a lower level of remuneration). Second: the labour input of small-scale farming is non-transferable, and even a low level of recompense may be essential to family or the individual income. Third: the average figures conceal some considerable differences. Experience has shown that those working in commodity-producing small farms expect to attain approximately the same income they would command if they were wage-workers. As against this, the labour of self-supporting producers and of hobby-gardeners often verges on non-profitability, particularly in the case of the latter category.

Self-supporting production is to be found mostly where there are some difficulties in the food-supply, and the population is more or less obliged to satisfy some needs for itself. At present in Hungary such a situation is virtually unheard of. Production as a hobby is growing as the living standards of the population rise and an increasing number of people can afford to be engaged in farming without any momentous economic objective, but primarily for relaxation. The number of hobby-gardeners has been growing for some years past.

A survey of the incomes derived from small-scale farming by families belonging to different classes of society shows that they have an outstanding role among the population living in villages and on detached farms, particularly for peasants and pensioners. This can also be seen in the following figures:



Table 3

*Annual income per head derived from small-scale farming (1977 figures)*

	Amount in Ft	In per cent of total income
<i>Workers</i>	1,689	6.8
of whom those living in villages	2,671	11.3
<i>Peasants</i>	7,034	28.4
of whom those living on detached farms	9,781	37.7
<i>Persons with double income</i>	4,968	18.2
of whom those living on detached farms	6,580	25.1
<i>White-collar workers</i>	1,511	4.7
of whom those living in villages	3,967	13.3
<i>Pensioners</i>	3,322	15.5
of whom those living in villages	5,021	25.9
<i>Total population</i>	2,799	10.8

Ultimately therefore almost one forint in every nine is derived from small-scale farming, and among the peasantry, the ratio is almost one in three.

#### *The future of small-scale production*

On the basis of the various economic and social issues at stake, the following conclusions can be drawn concerning the future of small-scale farming in Hungary:

1. The relative decline of the role of small-scale production and of its share in the global production of agriculture is both natural and self-evident. This, however, does not mean that the volume of small-scale production has necessarily to decrease to a large extent. It is estimated that total production in small-scale farming towards the mid-1980s will probably be the same as it is today.

2. Changes within the total production of small-scale farming appear in consequence of very diverse sectoral growth. In a few sectors (e.g. in the case of vegetables, fruit, rabbit-breeding, etc.) an increase is probable, while in field-crop production and in cattle-breeding, output is expected to decrease. Maintenance of the present level in pig-breeding can be regarded as probable.

3. Such patterns of growth will result in a specialisation of small-scale farming in the direction desirable from the point of view of the national economy. The annual production of small-scale farming will correspond



to the performance of 300 to 320 thousand active workers. The small-holdings function with fixed assets worth 50 thousand million forints; it is impossible to channel these into any other sector. The augmentation of this stock is insignificant; but its exclusive source is the personal income of the population, while most investments in large-scale farms are financed by state grants and favourable credit facilities.

4. The maintenance of small-scale production—and increase in selected sectors—is essential to general supplies of foodstuffs. Despite the decline of subsistence production, small holdings still produce a number of products which altogether supply between one half and two-thirds of family needs. The growth of the ratio of commodity production is a consequence of the specialisation of production and of sectoral expansion entailed by essential technological development. The drawing of small farms into commodity production tends to eliminate spontaneity, and enables planning to extend its influence in this sphere.

5. With the strengthening of commodity production, sensitivity to the profit rate will also sharpen; this is both a condition and a necessity of economic integration, but it will also impose new demands upon the system of economic regulation. In the management of agriculture, therefore, in future more attention will have to be paid to the specific interests of the sphere of small-scale production, and to maintaining a harmony between the productive sphere and pressing social questions.

6. If small-scale producers are to increase their commodity output it will be essential to maintain the profitability patterns hitherto established in the principal sectors. Unless this condition is satisfied no estimates can be regarded as realistic and well-founded. The incentive to small-scale farming implies and presupposes, both economically and politically, a firm commitment in the long run. The process of reproduction, which requires small-scale producers to reinvest a part of their current receipts and personal incomes, can be maintained only if the level of economic incentives is not reduced and if the present political position is upheld. The present and future practice of Hungarian economic policy will assure that such conditions are fulfilled.



JÁNOS PARANCS

POEMS

*Translated by Alan Dixon*

THIRTEEN LINES ON DISAPPOINTMENT

So this as well has been completely shattered.  
Nerve-endings are still kicking but only hurt  
what does not exist. This is the pain  
of absence, of amputated foot or hand,  
of the trunk from which the branches have been lopped,  
of catatonics who can still remember  
ecstatic capers.  
With pain like this I tread again  
the tortuous path to places unknown  
to me as yet, to compulsory torments.  
I do not know what neck-breaking dishonourable road  
it leads me to, and yet I stumble away.  
And no one comments, no one shouts after me.

APOCALYPTIC EVENING

There is no help for anything  
when the earth grows blisters only,  
when blackened trees are lurching and  
new shoots and multicoloured flowers  
abandon shrivelled stalks before their time,  
when bones just turn up out of soil  
and colonies of maggots seethe and squirm,  
when there's a tranquil summer sunset  
which in reality is nothing but  
a flimsy veil across the face of horror.



## DEADLOCK

I know X is the way he is.  
 I know that Y is clever,  
 his knowledge of all things he has  
 to understand is up-to-date.  
 I know what speech is worth;  
 I know how difficult it is to hold  
 my complicated standpoint  
 in the daily muddle.  
 I know that X and Y cannot be saved.  
 I know that little time remains for us  
 and when we understand what it's about  
 there's just no point in choosing any more.  
 And still I never could decide  
 which of the two should be the first  
 for sacrifice, if I had choice,  
 and if I had to choose that one.

## ALL THINGS ARE SO

All things are so precarious, so clumsy,  
 so casual and contaminated  
 like this glass upon my desk.  
 It could have been entirely otherwise;  
 repeatedly this notion rises in me.  
 Some accidental deformation  
 rules every weary step's procrastination,  
 every action. In this windless  
 goosemuck patch where I am living  
 nothing even worth a mention  
 ever happens. I'm just playing.  
 I bustle on this open stage  
 nervous, pestered by vexation  
 knowing I am being foolish  
 for some small meaningless nothing,  
 fragile beauty of a grass-blade.  
 As if it made some kind of sense;  
 as if someone were taking notice.



## HUNGARIAN STORY

(*Short story*)

by

MIKLÓS MÉSZÖLY

J amma dies aged five without ever having been enrolled at school and unable to write down his thoughts in his copy-book. Not even the old folks remember him well. They tend to recall the legend, and everyone knows what happens with legends: any war that happens to break out changes them a bit. As for me, I always used to think that my sister had invented the whole story just to keep me amused. I might say that our family had a curse on it and even in the tales we tell it is as though we were pounding our breasts for some hopeless lost cause; and somehow or other everything always winds up bloody. The fact is that whenever we had to flee or emigrate for some reason, we always carried the Corpus Juris in addition to oatsacks and the diminishing trousseau chests, and even under the gallows we would cite this rather than the Bible. They shot Jamma in front of the church without the slightest regard for the law. Some of the details of my sister's stories absorbed me particularly, and I still remember them vividly. It was said that the little boy usually went over to his outpost at four o'clock in the afternoon. The preceding half an hour will probably remain a secret for ever. In the desolate reaches of Bíró utca he stood between the pylons of the power line and looked up at the black transformer casing which was emitting a soft buzzing noise. This tune seemed to him a like a sort of coded encouragement. After a while he took out a small pair of pen-knife-scissors, cut the nail of his left forefinger to resemble the zigzag of a saw blade and scratched a mark on his leg. It left a clearly visible trace. Limping, as if one of his legs was shorter than the other, he set off towards the narrow street behind the Law Courts. Here the sun shone only briefly and the puddles were slow to dry. The convicts' courtyard was surrounded by a high wall, with barbed wire bending inwards on the top; this did not prevent the characteristic smell from flooding forth. Jamma turned up his



nose and stopped limping. He ran down weed-covered steps to the Dinga Brook and crossed the underpinned iron bridge to reach Fördőház utca. This gave him a comfortable view back over the tiny courtyards and the over-cultivated flower-gardens. In Fördőház utca there were no flowers in sight. He climbed a small hill. On the one side there were crumbling wine cellars with windows like portholes overgrown with wild oats; and on the other side too, the ruins exceeded the number of inhabitable dwellings. There were at least eight such rows of houses. After the Arad executions in 1849 this corner served as a hiding-place, and more than once it was raided by the authorities; but it still offered shelter to a number of grandchildren. These houses had been hastily condemned following one of the wars, but the mayor who passed this sentence died before it could be carried out. Jamma approved of this outcome, and this was where he preferred to spend his afternoons. He climbed with his eyes closed and with his naked soles he searched among the cobblestones for the loamy brown stripe which cut across the road half-way up. On the top, next to a heap of stones, he pulled two pieces of string out of his pocket; at one end there was a steel hook which could be cleverly attached to the other piece. He placed a flat stone into the hook and after a few buzzing rotations he unleashed his projectile. The stone skimmed over the rooftops, smashed into the wall of the convicts' yard and knocked out a piece of mortar the size of a man's fist. The precision of his shot and that dull thud made him bite his lips in happiness. Only afterwards did he go over to the church and climb the hidden spiral stair that led to the tower. According to my sister he knew the pigeons of the bell-tower individually; they would alight on his hand and then fly out through the pentagonal windows. Such are the tales we tell, quite able to outlive reality. When the corpses of Jamma and his mother were illuminated by the rising sun, like the spotlight of some stagy photographer, there were a hundred and eleven pigeons circling above the square, sitting freely on the idle spectators, but carefully avoiding the two bodies in the slush.

My sister found a vicarious pleasure in fear and freely adapted the stories to ensure that this craving be satisfied. She abandoned this passion of her's only after she lost her virginity when staying on Borjád Isle with our relatives. This was the period when the forests on the island were being replanted, and it was during this very summer that we heard our father's good-natured laughter for the last time. He died later in a mental hospital. One evening a large group gathered in the garden of the Fördős manor, on the bank of the Sió River. The hosts were our uncles—three bachelors who shared the physique of a wild hog and were living off the remnants of the



family fortune. They used to go shooting and fishing, and only when things were going very badly did they turn their hands to the plough. Otherwise everything was hired out on a fifty-fifty basis, even Vilma, their house-keeper. At the time I would have guessed Vilma to be about sixty; today I should say forty. She had black hair like coils of oiled wire; her bras were made of some similar stiff material; their clasps and straps showed through her dress so that we could trace the precise contours of this pink armour. Her breasts were an exciting invitation to anyone, and it is probable that our father did not turn them down. The three brothers regarded Vilma as joint property, and would admit only another kinsman into this community. When Gábor, the youngest Fördös, had laid Vilma on the long oak table and Ernő had placed bundles of straw under her head, our father put on his tropical helmet to indicate the beginning of the rite. Misi, the oldest of the brothers, thrust a folded horseblanket down between Vilma's fleshy thighs and positioned the stewpot; this was how the fish-soup was served to the assembled guests.

We've been related to the Fördös clan since the 1700's when our family emigrated from the Banat, from Cservenka to be exact. We moved to County Tolna to avoid the ravages of cholera. They used to remember in the family an area called the Bossányi fields, situated on the southern slopes of the Mecsek Hills where a collateral line on the female side had settled. We planted vines and chestnuts here, and crossed Chinese guinea-fowl with Hungarian barnyard hens. Another great great uncle of our's experimented with a small-scale horse-butchery, a rather original enterprise in that region. He bought a delapidated manor beside the road towards Szigetvár and refurnished it accordingly. People were somewhat surprised at his chosen line of work, but he did not come off a loser in the end. He made horse-flesh fashionable and there were enough pilgrims and carters on the road to spread the reputation of Ábrahám farm far and wide. He was the only one of our relatives who owed his name to the Old Testament. He busied himself exclusively with foals that had some defect, or as others would have it, with those spirited away from Imperial musters; he and his two journeymen, for whom he built special quarters next to the stables, undertook every task together, from poleaxing to skinning and carving. The poplars, which stood at irregular intervals along the winding cart-track which led to the main road, were reputed to be the rustling gallows. Our uncle would hang the hides on these trees to dry and light bonfires in winter to scare away the wolves which gathered below. There is still no knowing what lay behind the grim reputation of this farm, unless we accept the authenticity of a document written by a Swede travelling to Constanti-



noble who passed by here on his way to Belgrade and actually quotes the name of this farm. He describes one scene to which he was an eye-witness. Three young "human savages," he writes with refined embarrassment in his travelogue, one of whom greeted him in Latin, were amusing themselves inside an animal pen marked out by logs, amidst an indescribable screaming. The game consisted of dangerous thrusts with poles that were far from blunt, on which they had fastened horse-tails of different colours. Then the horses neighing outside were drawn into the game. The men mounted them, then whipped and stroked them crazily. Even one and a half centuries later, we, the Árvay Jurkós, were deceived by the story that wolf's meat properly seasoned with quince cannot be distinguished from that of the foal. My last spot of trouble with a wolf was in nineteen forty-four in the Carpathians. I escaped from the front line and shot a wolf with a pistol at close range; it must have been half-dead already, but still rendered me the valuable service of allowing me to warm by numb fingers between its haunches.

My sister was supposed to have resembled Eszter Dacó, the great-great-grandmother of the Fördös brothers; but that's purely oral tradition, since no picture or painting of that legendary beauty has survived. This resemblance cropped up in the conversation during a two-day extravaganza on Borjád Island. Vilma, who could sing quite delightfully, surprised us in the night by setting fire to a heap of dry maize stalks which had been stored in the rear garden of the manor-house for the previous two years. It was about midnight, or perhaps only eleven. At any rate the brothers were still down at the river Sió, where they used to enjoy a night bathe when the buzzing of the mosquitos was at its height. They jeered at the vain efforts of the insects to force their way through the dense mop of Fördös hair. As soon as they saw the light of the bonfire they scrambled at once to the shore, but they missed the pebbled ramp in their hurry and sank up to their testicles in the soft mud. Stark naked they fought a way through the acacia grove and across the weed-covered melon field, heaping violent abuse on the Virgin Mary and a certain Antal Leppyeny who had taken them to court over a patch of land where an Avar grave was found some twenty years ago. Gábor grabbed a rusty pitchfork and stumbled off with it towards the house. Two huge dogs were howling at the edge of the raspberry-field, but they did not dare to approach the fire. There were not so many people present on this occasion, and most of them were already flaked out. Árpád Bróz fell asleep at sunset and was snoring so loudly that he had to be carried away from the dining-table in a wheel-barrow. Everyone joined in to push him as far as the hedge of the ornamental gardens where the brothers called



a halt with the words: "we don't want the roses to putrify!"; so they rolled him out onto the grass. When they began to play tarot after supper, Vilma put another demijohn into the ice barrel. The sun was just going down above Bogyiszló, the sky was a reddish purple, the lowing of cattle could be heard from Uzd Farm, and the rattling of tanks from the military training range near Paradicsom Puszta. Mrs. Palugyai from Uzd, with her hair loose, had just stepped out of the ivy-covered privy and stopped under the weeping willow where Ádám Béri Balogh once spent a few hours with his wounded horse. She carefully washed her hands in a stone bird-bath, dried them a little and adjusted her panties without lifting her skirt. Fan-shaped wrinkles framed her eyes and a wedge-shaped dent closed the corner of her mouth; her lips were always moist and shining. One could easily imagine that this mouth, which was never entirely closed, desired something even during sleep. She drew out a wicker chair from the shed and sat down beside the rosebushes to face the sunset. She began to read Gulácsy's "Black Bridegrooms" and kept the book open after it grew dark; this was when she mulled over what she had read, marking the lines with her nail, at the edge of the page. As for the privy, it attracted the universal admiration of the guests. In the shadow of the foliage it looked like a shrunken stately home. Its arched entrance was supported by two whitewashed columns, the coat of arms of a gentry family hung over the door, and inside there were three seats separated by shoulder-high partitions. The three brothers could enjoy a pleasant chat in the process. Now they were standing there in the light of the bonfire and the thick film of mud was glistening over the lower parts of their bodies, as though this could be the only clothing appropriate to such a situation. Even in the summer heat Vilma used to wear a long black dress, with a high, closely fitting collar and a green belt. This was her attire now next to the fire, as she sang in her beautiful contralto voice the plaintive song of Ádám Béri Balogh. The brothers looked on admiringly and their eyes fairly shone. "Eszter, Eszter," shouted Misi, "come and join in the singing!" It was no secret that the mysterious Eszter Dacó was being invoked here. Gábor tried to draw my sister towards him and smear some mud on her face, but Eszter slapped him sharply and sang the remaining three verses with Gábor's gaze riveted upon her.

Jamma's story is a good deal older than this, it feels as if it took place only yesterday, or later. Jamma died in such a queer way, as though he had run off with time itself. Old Fürdőház utca was an exceptional context anyway—in the forties it still looked very much as it had at the turn of the century or at the time of the Republic of Councils. There probably wasn't



another place in the country with houses to tenaciously ramshackle. They existed in order to demonstrate the indestructibility of the transitory. In the forties a young couple settled down in a log-cabin in Fürdőház utca and opened a photographic studio. Although the fellow's name was Dacó, there was no firmer evidence for us to consider him a relative of ours. By this time there was scarcely any way of investigating the possibility. All that remained of the Árvay Jurkó clan was a burial-place the size of a garden, with a chestnut tree in the middle, transplanted from the Mecsek Mountains. I spent a whole year on the Russian front, while my sister joined some new shaman movement in Brasil. In her rapturous letters she described the Indians as our comrades in misfortune. The building known as the log-cabin stood empty for many years. It was a round, slightly pinnacled structure built on the flat roof of one of the old houses in the year of the Millennium, and it was here that the town's first steam-baths were established. Later it functioned as a brothel for the initiated; during the First World War soldiers were brought here for disinfection; and Jamma's mother was interrogated here before they tied her to the pillory in front of the Holy Trinity statue in the church square. The Dacó couple arrived in the southern part of Transdanubia from the Nyírség; they exchanged misty mornings for sun-lit hills and ripening figs, and they seemed to be doing so quite deliberately, it was not the hand of chance. In the billiards room of the Craft Union there were those who insinuated that they had good reason to flee the North, otherwise they would have brought more than just a few suit-cases. However, public opinion was soon disarmed by the charm of the woman. She had the auburn hair of a rural Madonna, and the habit of fractionally out-staring every pair of eyes that lit upon her. Her husband was called István (like our first Christian king, the one who blinded his most stubborn relative and then poured lead into his ears to save him from the sound of his own wailing). The woman specialised in children's photos and this is what earned them a living. She could come and go almost everywhere, would knock quietly at the door, and cast her unforgettable glance on the faces of the children, who then wouldn't keep still until she sat them down in front of the tripod. While this was going on the man used to walk the streets and explore the surroundings, photographing unlikely items which led the locals to take him for an idiot or maniac. He himself didn't know what he was looking for and if they asked, he said that he was in search of *motifs*. The cabin walls were covered with his prints, which he was constantly changing, as though he needed to find rational sequence and meaning in them. This work sometimes went on until dawn and usually at the end there was hardly a photo on the wall that wasn't followed by



spasmodic gaps which the prints he had ready just could not fill. His eyes were bloodshot and stubborn when he woke his wife at daybreak. "Look here, Teréz. . . there's always a part of a tombstone missing somewhere. It either disintegrated for good or I cannot find it. It's not so easy to bring a graveyard to life!"—and he laughed wearily. Their vocabulary was like an accomplice whom they didn't bother to question too closely; these words always reached inside to inflame the hottest desire. At such times they made love with the most passionate devotion, eyes open till the last moment, and then reopening afterwards, as soon as the pupil was capable of moving and easing what ecstasy had obliterated. Then the sun would rise, its glistening rays would flood through the window and onto the hanging photographs. One depicted a huge flock of pigeons overshadowing the church square; you couldn't see the pigeons, only their shadows like an engraving on the pavement. On another there were the white bones of a lamb strewn along the muddy bed of a creek (István had made sure that they were really the bones of a lamb). They were covered with strips of red crepe-paper stuck on by the wind and rain; it was probably somewhere in the Dinga Brook; Jamma would have liked to have seen these pictures. The photographer was once called in by the police and detained for a whole day. He had to go over and over his reasons for photographing objects that were of no interest to anybody. "You just put it down on paper, it doesn't matter if you repeat yourself, just try to say the same thing in a different way"—they advised him. There was a civilian present who could not speak Hungarian and when this chap gave a nod István was asked to hand over his service paybook; they took quite a long time examining it. He was released only when he stabbed his jack-knife into his right leg—it was an artificial leg, a deep varnished black in colour.

During these years hardly anybody remembered the *Corpus Juris*. We met its spirit for the last time in the office of our lawyer grandfather, Gergely Árvay Jurkó. The waste-paper basket was stacked high with drafts, outdated invoices and old glue-pots. This room was always several degrees cooler than the other rooms of the house. Leather armchair, walnut smoking table, a tin weighing scale, a brass cigar-cutter, shelves reaching up to the ceiling, bound volumes of legal publications. The desk was like a vast billiards table, crowded with files, a lamp with a green screen placed at the corner. The Persian blinds were half shut, allowing one to peep out at the Dinga Brook, and the honeysuckle growing on the balcony of the tavern known as the "False Witness." The end of the courtyard was dominated by a huge Caucasian pine-tree. If the traveller approached the Lisztes



quarter on the macadam road from Budapest, which followed more or less the same course as the former Roman military road, he was bound to notice this pine-tree and might have thought that it was of some importance. On October 26th 1916, in the second year of the War, the family buried a foal at the foot of this tree, taking care not to damage the roots. The foal had escaped from the municipal slaughter-house, and its pursuers did not dare to shoot it because of the traffic on the streets; they just followed it. Finally, the foal broke through the rear fence of grandpa's garden and trotted through to the upper courtyard. A bullet struck it from the other side of the fence. Grandpa stuck to the letter of the law and refused to hand over the carcass. The management of the slaughter-house contested his right to do so and the body of the foal decayed gradually under the pine-tree while the lawsuit dragged on, and war and peace were dragging on elsewhere. The pine-tree was clearly visible from the bureau, and so was the garret chamber of the poet Jakab Mariosa, rented from Hassan, the ironmonger. Hassan's family had been in the town since the time of the Turkish occupation. They had become Magyarized but remained Moslems, a fact much publicised by the magistracy as eloquent testimony to the freedom of religious practice. A medically attested bed-wetter, hence never drafted into the army, Mariosa was thus left to write in peace on his mattress in the garret, facing our Caucasian pine-tree and Calvary Hill. It was a puzzle how he managed to pay his rent, but the signs indicated that it was probably our grandfather who paid it. Every now and then Mariosa published poems in the local newspaper under the pseudonym of Syrasius Acrotophorius, including one in homage to our foal. It is true this poem did not appear until the Christmas issue, but the ironmonger was quick to grasp the implications. He argued that the poet commands twice his usual fee at Christmas and proceeded to lock the door upon Mariosa and to inform him he would not be released before paying off his six month's arrears. Roman law granted the landlord the right to pawn any items of movable property found in rented accommodation. Hassan was well aware of this, though out of his depth in the jargon. Next morning he was sitting in a leather armchair in the office, with Sunday solemnity. A blackish-brown picture hung on the wall over his head, a picture passed down in the family ever since departure from the Banat. The picture was quite blurred, it was hard to distinguish firmly whether it was a landscape or a portrait, or both at the same time. Some held this picture to be the only authentic portrayal of Eszter Dacó. If it was, Hassan should have felt himself highly honoured. Our great-great-grandmother was for five years the mistress of the Bey of Belgrade, although only in order to secure the release of a Jacobinic agent. But Hassan



was determined to stand his ground. The snow was a dazzling white outside, the bell-ringers of every denomination were working furiously, and the newspapers reported that all was quiet on the Galician front and that the guns were not expected to roar on Christmas-day; everybody felt that this was elevating indeed. A fresh pine twig was charred on the red-hot iron stove in the office. Our pine tree too had played a distinguished role in Mariosa's ode, now its aromatic scent would have evoked sympathy for Mariosa and the foal, but to no avail. The ironmonger began cunningly to complain about the bands of stray dogs which used to hit town somewhere near the Dinga Brook and could be spotted at daybreak from the kitchen of the "False Witness" lurking amidst the frozen mounds of snow. They gathered there for the garbage from the kitchen; the scraps mingled with steaming turds under the rudimentary latrine built over the brook. Our grandfather had his own theory about stray dogs, just like the ironmonger; he probably decided there and then not to fork out this time (although he could certainly have afforded to pay), but to concoct something else. "You see, Mister Hassan," he said sternly, "you can insult stray dogs because of their disgusting habits, you can hate them, you can admire them, you can do quite a lot of things, but let's look at the legal position! A latrine and kitchen garbage: don't we defecate there precisely to enable other creatures to enjoy a share of the goods which we ourselves have already shared? It's clear that even the lawyers would withdraw such a charge and offer no support to the plaintiff. Or here's the other case: did you ever take the trouble to observe one of these poor beasts when eating? One innocent creature feeding off another. The marvellously designed soft, warm harslet, the elastic liver and the mysterious holes of the lungs, the lathe-turned cartilage of the calves—or the staying power of the heart! What a fabulous creation! Or just take the skull as it discloses more and more savoury secrets from one bite to the next! The brain! Or the network of blood vessels. Lift it out with a surgeon's forceps and it looks exactly like the most wonderful butterfly-net. But we should never imagine that after all its tiresome rushing our poor stray friend would ever consume the butterfly as well. No, the butterfly is sacred! Even a stray dog knows that. Our friend will eat his fill, while the butterfly flutters over the bloodstain like a Holy Ghost on holiday, sure to return gently and refill that elastic liver, those lungs and cartilages. . . . You see, Mister Hassan, it was all just a game! Everything was done for the butterfly, to get it released so that everybody should see it. You see, Mister Hassan, that's the way truth comes into being, and a poetical strophe, too. *Denique*, all we can do is to set about eating in our own way as much of Mr. Jakab Mariosa as the rules



of propriety and the law will permit. Provided that the plaintiff agrees, he added in an appeasing tone, confident of the success of this *ad lib.* speech. The ironmonger nodded politely as if he had actually understood, but all he had really grasped was that he was now at liberty to bite into the poet with the approval of the law. "All right," said my grandfather reluctantly. "But it's not our business to go locking up butterflies. If that's what you want you ought to turn to the management of the slaughterhouse." Then, as meticulous as ever, but following an unusual line of action, he opened a file. A suit aimed at forfeiture—this might have been what he had in mind to placate the obstinate merchant. Or isn't the real purpose of this passage of the law to teach us how to prosper without it? When he was expounding such ideas to us—dressed in one of his immortal black suits, like a raven spotted with ashes—in our fancy he soared towards that sanctuary which had been just a garden shed (behind him the bee-hives where the foal came in), and sat there like a king whom nothing and nobody could reach except the funeral ivy which grew on the trellis-work and war unwilling to open a single withering flower. But on this occasion the king miscalculated. In Mariosa's garret chamber there was hardly anything that could be sequestered, let alone something which might have been appreciated by Hassan. Furthermore, matters were complicated by the fact that even arbitrary eviction would not affect his liability for the arrears, not even departure *insalutato hospite*; and so it was simply out of the question. There is nothing in the dossiers to indicate a demonstrable murder, the only recorded fact was that he died through suffocation. Hassan apparently entered the poet's room when the latter was already dead, with his head hanging into the water-pail. It was never resolved whether *ex improviso* Hassan might also have contributed to Mariosa's death. The mere fact that, apart from the poet himself, only he had a key to the garret chamber was insufficient to condemn him. This was our grandfather's last lawsuit. He shut himself up for weeks in his office and even when he came out he wouldn't utter a word. They found him lifeless one morning under the pine-tree, on the snow-covered bench.

After the funeral the portrait supposed to depict Eszter Dacó was taken for safekeeping, *depositum regulare*, to the Borjád manor. We, my sister and I, were the orphans of the family and there was no question of the picture coming to us. Our mother died of puerperal fever when I was born, and our father never recovered from this blow. He used to work at the forestry and from the moment he became a widower he lived only for his work. We could not depend on him at all. When it came to eliminating pests, he



had a nation-wide reputation and he moved to a new territory almost every year. He shot a whole galaxy of animals during his lifetime, a mythological herd, like an enraged Job taking personal vengeance on nature for his fate and sorrow. We grew up, my sister and I, like the eternal visiting relatives: at grandfather's, at the three brothers', in the spare room of the Sárbogárd parsonage. It was forbidden to utter Eszter Dacó's name here, for the Somodis would swear that the beautiful woman had dishonoured that family when she collaborated hand-in-glove with the Serbian separatists under the pseudonym of Antonia Vincs. This mightn't have been so terrible—"against Turk and German anything goes"—but they could never forgive her conversion to the Orthodox faith. The truth about our father began to emerge at dawn in Borjád when he reported that he had seen in the forest of Nagy-ireg in the noonday sunshine a herd the like of which only St. Francis himself could have invented. He said that all the animals he had ever killed had come towards him with skins turned inside out, in a mute procession, absolutely silent, but the dry twigs cracking under their feet, and membranes covered with a network of red and blue veins which clung to them like a rainbow-hued jumper. No animal cast so much as a glance at him. A few days later I took him to Pécs in a hired car to say good-bye for ever. Spring had exploded quite suddenly, the trees had blossomed overnight and the muddy pools had become scattered mirrors in the road. Our driver (who served between the two wars in Tirana, as chauffeur to King Zogu's Hungarian wife) confessed to me on the way that he had been seeing double for some years now, that sometimes the discrepancy was about 8-10 inches, depending on how tired he was. For quite some time he had had problems in determining which vision was the correct one, since his reflexes could not settle on either with certainty. Finally he had got the hang of it. "It doesn't really matter if I confuse them, because the chances of a smash are more or less the same," he said, with a slightly forced giggle, and related incidents when it was precisely a miscalculation that had saved his life. Then our father suddenly lifted his hand, gnarled like a knotty piece of wood. "No! The third image... the one no bullet strikes!" And he squeezed my arm to feel bone, as though he wished to know me as his son once again. "We've ruined it..." he said with pathetic emotion. "A wolf does not devour another wolf, nor a foal another foal... Abraham was trespassing there on the farm." Slowly he released my arm. As he sat there with his shoulders slumped forward you could see the sharp outline of the hair, his clasped hands, and the skin between his fingers was peeling. He was wearing his old grey-felt shooting jacket with its shining leather buttons; the collar left his emaciated neck uncovered. In the garden of the



mental hospital he chose a bench with no back support and we sat there waiting until the head physician was ready to receive us. I suggested we move to a more comfortable bench, but he refused. He said that if the wild hogs came rushing out from the building opposite he would be able to beat a faster retreat from this one. The windows upstairs were wide open, white bed-sheets were hanging out and fluttering in the wind. "Flags!"—he mumbled with a smile and I would see the tears gushing forth. In the meantime he was fiddling with his hospitalization order, tearing jagged scraps from its perforated edge. It was late in the afternoon when we were admitted to the head physician. I cannot remember ever having a more plain-spoken conversation than in those intervening few hours. He told me that right up until she died our mother was jealous of Vilma, who had been with the brothers since girlhood. He said that this maid-servant and family member with the deep, soft voice was indissolubly involved in the labyrinth of kinship, albeit not by blood. One of her ancestors had worked as a butcher's assistant with our ill-famed uncle and her parents still had a piece of that foal-skin waistcoat which the men at Abraham Farm had stitched together with waxen thread. "And what about Jamma?"—I asked on that afternoon of confession. "You've never talked about him. . . . Eszter says it was all hearsay." His gaze suddenly sharpened, became at once cunning and dim, as if somebody had unexpectedly knocked the rifle out of his hand. "Of course it was. . . ." he mumbled. "We always appreciated the bastards, we didn't drag them along with us. The *wolf of time*, he'll know who to pardon. . . ." That's the funny expression he used. I noticed that his confusion at this moment was quite different from the confusion we had been observing in him hitherto. When he began to stare across at the main building again and to ramble on about the wild-hogs, I felt almost relieved.

A few of the details of Jamma's story were published in the local newspaper. They say that it was in one of Jakab Mariosa's Sunday feuilletons that the boy's name appeared for the first time. The narrator of the story gets to know the child in the bed of the Dinga Brook, where he's picking up old rusty nails from the dirt and garbage. Asked what he intends to do with the nails, the boy replies with surprising intelligence that the nails are crooked and he wants to straighten them out. The poet is overcome by the hopeless grandiosity of the enterprise and offers his assistance. They establish a workshop under the iron bridge near Fürdőház utca; the poet gets hold of a couple of small hammers and a little iron anvil, and they spend whole afternoons together hammering away at the nails. The merry clinking reverberates and flashes a myriad spots of light onto the leaves of



the acacia trees bending above them. The nub of the story is reached when Jamma's mother appears one day in the workshop. She is half drunk, a ruined woman. You can see that she must have been very beautiful in earlier years. Abandoned by her husband for another woman, she is now living in temporary lodgings nearby. Here the author indulges himself in a somewhat literary *dénouement*. The young man is a devoted admirer of the art of Van Gogh, an unusually good counterfeit of one of his paintings being on display in the Municipal Museum. In fact he not only admires the pictures but he idealises the painter's own life-style as well. He quotes from Van Gogh's diary where he describes his reasons for marrying a pregnant woman whom he had picked up on the street: "...there is no more ethical, gentle and manly act than to protect the abandoned. This winter I have met a pregnant woman abandoned by the man whose child she carried in her womb. A pregnant woman roaming the streets in winter. There was only one way she could earn her living." The narrator takes a similar decision. He joins the woman, shares everything he has with them, and she recovers and learns how to laugh once again. That was the end of this sentimental novelette. Even if this was some sort of key-story—would anyone have paid any attention to it in those war-time years? The men who might have done were all bleeding elsewhere and not on the mattresses of their bachelor-days (where musky drops of blood could also be found). Most of them did not even reach home from the Urals or Siberia in time to witness the Republic of Councils. The brothers from Borjád returned only years later, when everybody was already trying to forget the yellowing newspaper cuttings, precisely because it was such a fresh shade of yellow. The whites set up a gallows in Church Square and left bodies dangling for more than a week. They tied a young woman to one of these posts to serve as a further warning. The little boy crawled to her at night like a dog, to bring her some bread. The guard spotted him moving in the dark, intended only to fire a warning round, but two bullets were quite enough. The pigeons my sister mentioned were merely startled by the detonation. Fluttering over the main nave, they were rather uncertain about what had happened; in fact, you couldn't have expected more from them.

The photographer's wife became pregnant more than twenty years later in the log-cabin. By that time they had a huge collection of photos of all children in the neighbourhood, as if they wanted to preserve some last fateful moment. Teréz's prints occupied one of the walls, István's stubborn and maniacal motifs the other. Self-tormenting barrenness was confronted by a lunatic fertility which outlived everything. The photos multiplied as the months went by, they penetrated every corner, every shelf, every



bulging box-file. The far end of the room was separated by a curtain. It contained only a home-made bed of planks, a few pieces of furniture discarded by others, and an old cross into which dozens of iron nails had been hammered. This was the man's hobby, he used only the nails which he himself had tripped on or felt under his one good leg. He had been playing this game for eight years without growing tired of it. The cross was about to disintegrate, it looked like an old scarecrow dressed in a crusader's armour. There were no pictures hanging on the walls behind this curtain, but when they stopped working at sunset, the sun itself lit up this chamber. On the afternoon that Teréz became pregnant she kept saying in a tone that was exquisitely soft, as if she were imitating some non-existent bird: "Why are you silent . . . why don't you say it's good . . . say it's good, very good . . . just say it's so good . . ."

In one of Eszter's letters from Brasil I learned that on that bonfire night Gábor had invited her into the wardrobe of the mansion's locker-room to sing for him alone. "You know, it doesn't occur to me any more to ponder whether what we did was right or wrong. I have come so very far from our old units of measurement: one armpit, one high fur hat. Those were the days! They glitter like stars but it couldn't have happened any other way. We should be proud that this star shone so brightly. I was so thoroughly split open that night by my poor wild hog that for two years nothing else came into my head. Still, perhaps this was how to keep our running amok consistent. The family was at a loss for nothing, we kept everything inside the compound. Even a baptism like mine. It might have been you, perhaps it's a pity it wasn't. We retreated like hermits into our dear land and we thought that people would soon get used to our scent—but it must have been damned difficult for others to endure our contagious sorrow! And that desperate laughter! Do you remember how our father laughed? Well, that's how it was. We created a society within a society and we begged, borrowed and stole to have it acknowledged, though we were not at all averse to helping strangers and to kneading the bloody bread without payment. A shaman's laughter, my darling Colt! We are scattered far and wide like broadcast seed. I am learning to be an Indian now! He walks about all day long, sad as a falcon with its legs cut, but he knows where people who know nothing about him are expecting him. We shall look back at ourselves in the same anonymous way, with the same formidable silence." My sister lived another seven years after this childish, self-destructive letter. She died of typhoid in a small Indian village in the Winter of 1956. She had nursed the family with whom she was living until they had recovered from the



disease and then she herself died. She was buried nearby, where there was scarcely enough proper soil among the rocks for a grave to be dug. When I received the news of her death I could not refrain from travelling down to Borjád. Even the ruins of the mansion had disappeared, the whole shore had been declared an inundation area. I spent the night there anyway, in some improvised hut. The moon was shining much as it had over the barbaric rites of that distant evening.

A dim arched corridor with doors opening into the spare-rooms lead out from the smoking-room to the rear wing. Vilma had separate rooms which had been added as an annex and could not be entered from the corridor, only from the kitchen. The brothers thought it was better this way, and probably Vilma thought so too. She could feel she possessed a realm of her own. A few years before when there had been a record crop the brothers had filled one of the guest rooms with nuts. The moth-eaten owl which had been hanging for ages in the corner of the dining-room, with a special Cracovian watch attached to its legs, was consigned to this room later. The watch kept going by its own weight and sank continually lower on its chain. The room with the nuts led to the iron door of the locker-room. This contained five walnut wardrobes, a tarnishing mirror reaching to the ceiling, a few miniature chairs, and a couch covered with green velvet and sawn in half, because otherwise it wouldn't fit in the corner. The oakum and springs were hanging out of the middle. The window with the shutters opened directly onto the banks of the Sió. From this hidden look-out I once had a fine view of an afternoon attraction. Fishing nets were drying on the willow trees, next to them was an old boat used by reed harvesters, propped up by its stern but looking as if it were resting on nothing at all. There was a gaping hole in the bottom, like an abandoned porthole. The company would come down here after lunch to have a bathe, and afterwards laze about in the grass to get dry. After one such dip Misi grabbed Mariska Palugyai behind the boat in such a way that her head was perfectly level with the hole in the deck. She rested her elbows on an iron sheet and turned her face aside. Meanwhile the whole company shouted in chorus, telling her where she had to put her hand and how to hold her chin higher, like the photographer who snapped the gondola passengers in front of the Doge Palace. The others saw the production face-on, I had a side view and indeed, the forced idiocy of the scene became more authentic in this way. I could see the blue-striped bathing costume comically clinging to Misi's haired shanks, but also his Herculean back with the proudly worn traces of gun-stock. Half the country knew of the incident on Furkó-puszta when Misi, to the stupefaction of the Country Committee, had taken the side of the



striking cotters, giving them flour and potatoes and a huge porker with a ribbon in the national colours draped around its neck. "The peasant is our partner, let's offer him the land in partnership"—this was the slogan he had written on the sacks to encapsulate his political program. When the commander of the militia tried to march off the gentleman-rebel, Misi wrested the sword out of the lieutenant's hand. It was then he received his own *national tattoo*. When the delegate of the County Committee arrived later he tried to ease the tension by taking Misi aside: "Now look, what's the sense in pretending to emulate Wesselényi? It's too ridiculous for words!" Misi just spat in front of him and departed with his carts. After this he never voted for anything, never attended a political meeting and would not go near the Casino. But he had done enough to inspire the rhyme which spread from Borjád all over the county: "Oh Hungary, a sport-loving nation, how fine! The militia are out hunting and the people are running for their lives..." This was commonly recited when the song of Ádám Béri Balogh had already made its impact. On this particular afternoon other matters were at stake. A silky red ribbon shone on Mariska's straw-hat, and Misi escorted her around the boat to a round of applause as the guests saw her diminutive walnut arse pulsate erotically in his huge palms. While this was going on Vilma was at the edge of the orchard gathering fallen apples in a basket. I suddenly saw that she was looking straight at me, through the window of the locker-room. I pulled the shutters awkwardly in my embarrassment, leaving just a few slits open. In those days I was often trying to detect some hidden meaning in Vilma's look, even when it was no more than an absent-minded glance in my direction. Her face had some sort of impenetrable, Turkish feature. Sometimes I had the feeling that she was susceptible to any influence, that she could be persuaded to kill, or to set fire to the mansion, or even to sacrifice her own life for it with a gun in her hand. I inched away from the window and opened all the wardrobes as if I too wanted to take possession of something, to assert my rights. I felt a strong odour of old cloth, silk, velvet and leather, mixed with the sharpness of stuffy dust and musty lavender. Our father used to say that history had a smell too. I took off my sandals and walked barefoot on the cool floorboards. The gaps between them were large enough for me to insert my big toe. It I didn't face the mirror squarely my own image was distorted by its flaking silver. Two of the wardrobes were crammed with the heritage of the Bonyhád branch of the family including a military belt which Mór Perczel forgetfully left behind a few weeks before the battle of Ozora. With my knees hunched up, I sat down again on the couch as if I was to conduct an inspection. The clothes were



piled high against each other, short skirts and long dresses, children's junk, long trains rolled around cardboard cylinders, decorative pelisses and frock-coats, a black cape, a dandy's dove-grey, trousers, frilly shirt-fronts, braided waistcoats, short and long fur coats, various cutaways, two coloured dress suits. I cast no more than a sort glance at them and dug my hand in for a momentary touch. When I drew it out the spaces between my fingers were full of hair and scraps of material. Another wardrobe was stuffed with shooting gear for every season: breeches, leggings, boots as hard as stone, a huge heap of fur caps under a dewlap cobweb. The next spilled forth town-hats and top-hats, cavalry swords, and at least twenty lubricated gun-barrels complete with bayonets and only the wooden accessories removed. I remember that these were called *mannlicher*. The wardrobe next to the window was full of ladies' wear, with a broad mourning band pinned diagonally across. Mauve and wine-red velvet dresses, a bright blue tulle, black taffeta with beading, lace underwear, silk-embellished corsets drawn so tightly in at the waist, a semicircular décolleté with a thin velvet braid under the breast to throw those two gorgeous apples into full relief. The brothers enjoyed this sort of phrase when their winter guests assembled in the smoking-room and read extracts about the revelry of "wicked beauties" from the Gvadányi volume that was always near at hand. When Vilma entered the room my arm was thrust deep into the heap of tulles and taffetas. There were shining smears of fruit on her apron and the room was filled at once with the smell of rotting apples. She adjusted her two thick tresses and tied them under her chin; only then did she approach me. I think there was some envious hatred in my love for Vilma, and I was afraid of her at the same time. A timeless witness, it was all the same to her whether she was cleaning up shit or making the bed with fresh sheets, it was the same hand that did the work. She was as close to us as the tree is to the wind. On this occasion she put her hard fingers under my arm and screwed them inwards, only here, until her fist was nestling comfortably in my hairless armpit. "My poor little orphan", she said, pursing her lips, but you couldn't be sure that this was a smile. With the gesture of the owner she closed all the wardrobes. A cloud of dust blew up between us and made her laugh. "Now out you go", she said, "and you come back next year." This brief scene affected me like a premature stigma.

In the guest room of the bombed parsonage in Sárbogárd a few bits and pieces from the old days survived intact, including one of Eszter's diaries, I knew that she kept diary from time to time and that she used to write out the first draft of a letter in that copy-book, preserving that much of her



yesterdays, however irrelevant to her future. I looked at the crumpled identity card photo which I found there. The forehead above those narrow Mongolian eyes was as high as a gothic window. Her face was marked by a fierceness and a melancholy that had been refined over the generations—the face of somebody whose very last movement of the hand would be to close her own eyes. A few scrawled pages of the copybook were dedicated to the inhabitants of the log-cabin. My sister was apparently profoundly touched by the few facts that had come to her notice. Obviously reality was not of supreme importance for her, she didn't believe that life was composed of facts alone. These pages exude a lonely struggle, hardly comprehensible at all to anyone who is not somehow contaminated by us. Eszter includes an account of the events which finally brought about the closure of the photographic workshop. The military police formed their baseless suspicions about a perfectly innocent exhibition and managed thoroughly to intimidate the potential viewers. Teréz gave birth to her son at the beginning of November, my sister writes, but they could not agree upon a name for the boy and kept delaying a decision. There is magic power in a name. By the beginning of December the town was already overflowing with refugees, as if the people were getting ready to celebrate an obscure feast, but hadn't yet obtained the authority to do so. In the shop-window of Börcsök, the cutler, a few shakoed angels made of cotton-wool wished passers-by an early merry Christmas; in an emergency kitchen refugees were fed hot millet soup. Teréz had the idea of dreaming up a surprise for people, since by now they were no longer strangers and many were grateful for their photos. The ground-floor was taken up by an almost empty hall from which a wooden staircase lead up to their flat. Nobody else used it, and the whole of this hall served as a storehouse for the Red Cross. "What do you have in mind?" asked István. The baby weighed incredibly little, an obvious function of war-time rationing, but still it looked like an ivory sculpture, with eyes like transparent drops of honey. After a fortnight the parents could imagine that the child's eyes literally shone and that there was no need for switching on the light, since everything could be found even without it. When the power supply was interrupted for two days they simply didn't notice, though István did once smash his head against the cross. Teréz moistened the wound with spittle and impressed her soothing palm. "The baby wasn't looking, that's why you banged your head." Some time later when he was walking up and down with the baby in his arms touching the tiny nails with his finger-tips, István uttered wild reproaches: "You weren't looking at me, were you...? Why not... come on, tell me..." In the evening Teréz went downstairs for a while. Every now and then the floor would



creak; then came the sound of loud hammering from outside, although there was nothing to be seen apart from the cone of blue light filtering down, all that was permitted during the black-out. For four days now the police had been busy in the house across the street, the residents had been carried off and a warning of the health authorities glued to the door: "Danger — Infectious Disease," The memorial tree of Béri Balogh on the Main Square was destroyed by new planners, deportations became more frequent, and at night the railway station became a prohibited area. Teréz returned smiling from the ground-floor and explained the idea to her husband: they would arrange a little Christmas exhibition downstairs and send out invitations to all their scores of customers. It took them a week to compile the selection and frame the prints. Even new István could not refrain from leaving a few gaps on the wall—not for the sake of having airy spaces but simply because it would have been a lie to pretend that the gaps did not exist. Some photos were indistinct and hazy, not a single sharp outline to be seen, just hovering on the brink of constituting a picture—that was perhaps a view of a sickly body from behind (a child's shoulder?), leaning against a stone banister; and under the banister, packed together in a bundle, the roofs of small houses huddled together. Jamma might have been caught this way at one of his outposts, before anybody had any reason to remember him. Perhaps. István removed this photo several times, but he always put it back again, and eventually it kept its place in the collection. "This one still isn't saying much", he said indistinctly and reluctantly. Teréz was happy enough to display even her less successful prints. "At least they're laughing, no?" Two days before Christmas they sent out the invitations. They thought they would offer the visitors a cup of tea so they bought a hundred paper cups and some saccharine. They had no flowers, but they cut some ivy from the exterior, and decorated the walls with it. They expected the visitors to come early on Christmas Eve, they kept the teapot on the boil and left the door open, but nobody came. The street was even quieter than usual. They tried to conceal their disappointment from each other, they went on rearranging the photos and hanging up new ones. About noon the baby contracted a high fever. No tears, but his gaze narrowed and his eyes lost their sparkle. They could have called the doctor, but (with a provocative conviction of security) they did not. They gave the child an antifebrile tea and a cool compress, but their calmness seemed increasingly to defy the bounds of reason. They themselves seemed to feel absolutely helpless. In the early afternoon two plain-clothes detectives told them that they had sent out invitations without a permit and that every form of public gathering was forbidden. They couldn't help recognizing photos



depicting the children of their friends, perhaps for this reason they were unusually lenient and did not carry off István. It was evident that somebody had reported them, but they still kept on hoping that somebody would show up. Nobody came. Each avoided the other's glance and endeavoured to go to the cradle just as the other walked away for a moment. Then they stood side by side and stared out of the window. It was dark by now and there was an incessant rumbling in the distance. "Is this murder?" asked István with a stony face. "No," said Teréz with a serenity born of exhaustion, "something else is being born right now." The little boy died soon after midnight, the fever was reluctant to leave him. They remained like two sexless puppets. István pulled out some left-over reels of film and they fell snake-like to the floor. They decorated the cradle with the rest of the ivy. (I am sure that the ivy did not creep in by accident: however unconsciously, this motif was the haunting memory of our grandfather.) They carried the cradle downstairs and placed it in the middle of the hall, surrounded by all the photographs. The cross was placed beside it—the only hope they had left to clutch. They left everything just like this, and left town by scrambling onto a freight train at dawn. "Who knows what happened to them after that?" concludes my sister with concise simplicity.

That's the story, like a tear-jerking mass celebrated in our old churches, tremulous and spun out over the centuries with the congregation forever asking: how much longer?

For some time I have been dreaming about that little Indian village where Eszter is resting. Sometimes it feels almost like home to me, but I doubt I shall ever have the strength to articulate this.

*Translated by Mátyás Eszterbázy*



# THE PRICE OF VERSE TRANSLATION

by

MIKLÓS VAJDA

Poetry, like music, appears to be totally at the mercy of its interpreters. The path of a piece of music from the score—where it has only a notional existence, deprived of sound—to its audience resembles that of a poem crossing the multiple barriers of language, culture, tradition, time, and poetic individuality, inasmuch as both require human mediation. Mediation means, by necessity, interpretation, with all its inevitable subjective implications, and so neither a piece of music nor a translated poem ever reaches its audience in exactly the form in which it was conceived by its creator. The parallel—a weak one—ends here. Music is written to be performed—interpretational re-creation being one of the conditions of its existence as art and, therefore, a built-in risk. Poetry, on the other hand, is not written for the purpose of translation. Translation is a major interpretative encroachment on a poem's content, lingual, aesthetic, and auditive integrity, a necessary evil resulting from mankind's linguistic diversity—with the built-in impossibility of total perfection. Music is, however, well protected from incompetent public interpretation by internationally accepted standards which operate on a competitive basis, while no such protective universal standards exists for the appreciation and publication of translated poetry. Poetry is, therefore, much more vulnerable and will always suffer. It will suffer even more in the case of poetry from minor languages, like Hungarian, being translated into major ones, because such work has no significant traditions.

Poetry made its first attempts to conquer linguistic boundaries in antiquity. Parts and fragments from poems had always travelled within the language, to surface in other poems in a different form, performing different functions there. At a certain point in time, and for reasons too complex to discuss here, somewhere and somehow inter-lingual travel also became possible. What we call verse translation today must have had its origins



in the process through which a particular poem had an impact on poetry itself, in the form of textual fragments, quotations, plagiarisms, imitations, adaptations, parodies, and the like, which were able to penetrate another language and there influence or condition the creation of another, a new poem. Where and when, by whom the first deliberate attempt at inter-lingual transfer of meaning and poetic form was made, involving a desire to give a foreign poem some semblance of a life of its own in the other language, is unknown. What we do know, however, is that this pathbreaking professional translator must have faced the same kinds of problems that his latter-day colleagues face today.

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Translation, as George Steiner convincingly demonstrates in *After Babel*, is inter-lingual interpretation, an act of transfer of meaning which, in the case of poetry, is done in a framework of rules vaguely defined by tradition in each literature, as well as by the self-imposed standards of the translator. While poetic translation is, by definition, re-creative and derivative when compared to original writing, its product is nevertheless an aesthetic creation which can claim to be considered along with, or close to, original poetry itself. Translation, it seems, requires slightly different intellectual and cultural skills from those demanded by writing itself, for in addition to all, or most, of the gifts of an accomplished poet, a more conscious and academic awareness of language as a tool is also necessary. While translating, a poet has to watch—among other things—his own language function in the mirror of an original, and he has to compare the two constantly, which a poet writing an original work never does.

Whatever linguistic and professional skill and awareness a poet brings to bear on his work, translation will always necessarily make him face new and quite different problems. His motivation will be different, his aim will be different and, therefore, the mental process involved will also be different. When writing his own work, the poem is not the aim of the poet's efforts, it is their result. While writing his own poem he has no conception of the poem in its ultimate form because that will only emerge through his efforts, at the very end. When writing, the poet practices a particular kind of artistic self-expression and is concerned with the formulation and articulation of his material, his message, and not with the creation of aesthetic value. The translator, on the other hand, faces a finished text, a completed poem that is not merely not his own but happens also to be



written in another language. The mental process which led to its creation cannot be relived or reproduced by him. The poem will thus be the aim of the translator's effort, rather than its result, because the result, the poem that emerges between his hands, is not one and the same thing as the original poem, but merely a translation.

When a translator has to work from a rough, literal version—which often happens with minor languages, like Hungarian, when a foreign poet is keen to translate but ignorant of the language—his situation appears to be simpler on the surface. His ignorance will in a sense spare him the strenuous task of having constantly to compare his version in progress to the original. But all the indispensable information at his disposal regarding the poem, its contents and formal qualities, as well as his own experience and his impressions of the poem itself, are second-hand, derivative. He is unable even to make a proper judgement of his own final version, because he is unable to compare it to the original. If he is a conscientious craftsman, he will therefore try everything he can to reach out for shades of meaning probably lost in the rough translation; he will use dictionaries, even grammars, ask native speakers to read the original to him, or use tapes, consult translations of the same poem in other languages, if translations in other languages which he knows already exist.

This shows that verse translation, in contrast to writing, is a craft that presupposes an apparatus of all sorts of professional knowledge and skills that a poet does not necessarily need—including fairly clear notions of what verse translation itself is all about and how it is done, what its accepted norms and criteria are. It requires a different awareness of language, and also mental, mainly verbal, resources that can be triggered into action by stimuli that are not strictly speaking creative but reproductive, and yet can still be made to function on an artistic level.

It is at this point that theory enters the picture; not as a practical guide, which it cannot be, but as an exploration and explanation of the complex mental processes involved, as an investigation of the inevitable changes that occur during the specific kind of transfer of meaning that we call verse translation. What happens is that a self-contained semantic, linguistic, logical, aesthetic, and prosodic structure—a poem—is being replanted, through individual poetic means, from one language and culture to another, undergoing certain unavoidable and vaguely predictable changes that, when examined on a theoretical level, can offer certain insights to the practising translator.



As is all too well known, a poem will necessarily suffer certain losses in the process of translation, even very good translation, and even when, as sometimes happens, the translation is actually a finer poem than its original. It will, first of all, lose its language entirely in the process, and it also will lose its exclusive originality. To believe in the possibility and viability of verse translation means, therefore, to acknowledge the paradox that a poem can lose its language and form, and then have the core of its non-lingual poetic substance, with most of its lost linguistic, cultural, prosodic, and other qualities coded into it, grafted onto another language, like some vital internal organ, with a certain hope for survival. During the process, up to the point when the translator is ready with his own final version, the original has a notional existence in his mind in a non-verbal, essential, reduced state that is open to, and at the mercy of, all the linguistic and poetic possibilities on which he is able to draw.

In a poem that has been translated into another language, there is no way to distinguish between the work of the poet and that of the translator; no analysis can possibly separate the two—they are fused into something new, another poem, which is, however, no longer the exclusive brainchild of its creator, but neither is it a product the translator may call entirely his own. Thus it will begin an ephemeral, new life in another language and another culture, as a proxy of its original. Besides the inevitable loss of its language, this assault upon the originality of the work and the vulnerability which results make up the price which has to be paid if any poem is to be given a lease of life outside its own language.

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A poem, any poem, is itself the result of a series of compromises. Language, after all, is nothing more than a system of signs that a certain community shares—though by far the richest and most sensitive among all such systems that mankind has devised. Every poet inherits it, it is complete and at his disposal, with rules and a life of its own. Whatever a poet may do to the language, enrich, personalize, stretch, even rape it, as some of the greatest do, it will always remain subject only to its own inherent laws, a common property, a system of signs; in other words, as far as the poet's inner world, his feelings and thoughts are concerned, language is just a keyboard, a go-between, with only limited ability to communicate between the virtual infinity of the inner and external worlds. Anyone who has tried his hand at some form of verbal self-expression on



a higher level knows the limits of language—his language, of course, for we have command only over our own linguistic abilities and not over language as such. It seems that somehow the deepest, most subjective and most banal stratum of our shared human experience is that which is most resistant to exact verbal definition; the dozens of primary physical sensations we experience in our bodies at any given moment, the innumerable stimuli, pains, pleasures, desires, pangs, moods, impressions, emotions, associations, and so forth, which cannot be named or distinguished easily from each other. We can only approximate them in a very general way or express them concisely and figuratively, and even that is done at a considerable loss. The more societal and more abstract phenomena in our world, at which we can look in a more objective manner, as well as nature itself and the world around us, can be conceptually more easily grasped and are therefore more easily conveyed by language.

Poetry, of course, thrives at the border regions of language, being able, through its suggestive and representational powers, to penetrate the realm of the ineffable—that is, using words, it is able to transmit meanings that lie beyond the reach of words, of language.

Every poem worth its name carries in it a whole range of unspoken meaning—unspoken, in part for æsthetic or technical reasons, e.g., to do with conciseness, form, prosody, etc., and also for the less obvious reasons of poetic alchemy, the art of verbal representation and evocation. It is here that the translator's sensitivity and intuition are ultimately tested. For what happens—to name just one of the many problems one finds here—to the peculiar quality we call, by association, the "Englishness" of an English poem or the "Hungarianness" of a Hungarian poem, in translation? Quite apart from what a poem actually happens to be about, it will in many cases also have a certain indigenous English or Hungarian quality to it, conditioned more by cultural and socio-historical than personal and linguistic factors, and present not only in language and style; it might be ethnic outlook, temperament, tradition, convention, adherence to certain unwritten rules prevailing in a culture, serving some sort of determining function in verbal expression. (Take the English tendency toward understatement, for example, or the very opposite inclination in Hungarians.) It seems that these "national" qualities resist translation, in the first place because they can only be recognized by the most knowledgeable and experienced translator and, secondly, because translation entails the elimination of most such qualities. When, for example, an English poem is being translated into Hungarian, its "Englishness," whatever that may be, is at least partly lost in that process. The poem will not acquire a "Hungarianness" instead,



for that would not be analogous. If it does so nevertheless, that "Hungarian-ness" will largely be due to the change in language and not to anything inherent in the poem. It was, after all, not written in Hungarian—it was written in English and merely translated into Hungarian. So the poem is, strictly speaking, not an English poem any more, nor is it a Hungarian poem—it is an international hybrid: a translation.

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Let us now look into what really happens when a translator has to rely on a rough translation—a method that is frowned upon by many but which is, however, widely used and at present the only way in which poetry from minor languages, like Hungarian, can become known in English.

A good rough translation is a close, literal, prose version of a poem in another language—another, additional necessary evil in a complex transaction that is itself a necessary evil, arising out of our linguistic diversity, and demanding a whole series of compromises. No doubt, the unavoidable loss of the poem's integrity is exaggerated even further by this process. The translator's subjective-interpretative activity has to be based on the subjective-interpretative activity of another person.

Translators using a rough version have to work at the duplication of a poem the very existence of which as a poem is but indirectly known to them. The model itself is invisible or, as it were, it shows them its underside only, where artistic merit is not easily recognizable. There is something there, a text, but one that is devoid of poetic quality. Only those who have seen a rough translation of a poem know what it is like. It makes horrible reading, bordering on the ridiculous, because it has to avoid being poetically suggestive in any way whilst, simultaneously, it must be very suggestive linguistically. It has to follow the word-order, the sentence-structure and the logic of the original as closely as possible, providing synonyms and mirror translations of idioms, phrases and other semantic structures in brackets; it should always be accompanied by a detailed explanation of prosody, style, period, and poetic pitch, as well as all sorts of relevant background information pertaining to the poem and its author, his cultural context, and so forth. A rough translation is a kind of technical aid, a tool which, in fact, paradoxically, becomes the rough material itself, to be absorbed and made invisible in the final product. Its existence makes the already extremely complex relationship between the original poem and its translation even more intricate. Here is another of the paradoxes involved



in rough translation: a translator must first translate the entire poem before he can see for himself and be satisfied that it indeed is a poem, a good poem, worth his effort. At the start he cannot be sure, it's all blind trust on his part; the act of translation overlaps the act of perception. It requires a great deal of insight and intuition as well as professional skill and goodwill to find and rehabilitate the poetic qualities of a poem from a rough translation.

A rough, literal version, phenomenologically, and in the strict sense, is not merely a prose version or an analytical, annotated guide in another language. It does not resemble a piano transcript of an orchestral score or a sketch made of a painting or a sculpture. It is not an inter-art but an inter-lingual phenomenon, an attempt at total linguistic mirroring (impossible to achieve, of course) of a poem in another language, a transfer of a text from the poetic sphere of one language to the technical-linguistic-didactic sphere of another. A rough version must contain very clear information about the poetic devices by which the original poem creates its effects, but it must not make any attempt at their duplication or re-creation above the technical-linguistic level—such attempts would seriously limit and influence the translator's freedom of movement. The rough translation is there as a substitute for the translator's knowledge of the language of the original and, theoretically, it represents the poem in the perceived, analysed and processed condition in which it exists in the translator's mind before acquiring its final form, still open to his own skill and resources. In the case of direct translation, such a version, though it might notionally exist, would never be committed to paper because the translation process is partly automatic, occurring in the translator's mind and not, as is the case with a rough translation, in the mind of another person, who has to prepare it for him if translation is to be possible at all.

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What, then, is the final result of the process of verse translation, the translated text itself, as it exists now on paper in its final form, appearing under both the poet's and the translator's name, regardless of whether it has been achieved through direct contact or via an intermediary, and achieved with the ideal of utmost faithfulness to content and form in mind? What is it indeed? An "equivalent" in another language? A "likeness"? A kind of mirror-image? A reconstruction? An ersatz? A piece of trans-lingual epigonism, perhaps? Or an adaptation, appropriation, a particular sort of



linguistic transfer of meaning done within the framework of certain conventions? Or is it a mere conjuring trick nobody can check, or a futile attempt at rescuing a piece of condensed human experience hopelessly locked in idiosyncratic linguistic and cultural particularity? Another brick in the wall of the Tower of Babel?

It is all of these things, and it is none of them. But then, is it a poem at all, deprived as it is of its pristine form and even of its language, which is, after all, also the vehicle of the form of a poem? In a translation, both language and form come from an alien source: the translator.

A poem is a work of art that is final, unique, and absolute. It cannot be imagined in any other form than the one in which it exists; the slightest change would shatter its integrity and transform it into another poem. A translation, on the other hand, is relative, being just one foreign-language version among innumerable other possible foreign-language versions of the same poem. A poem, regardless of its value, stands autonomously in time, and time will not change it; only its appreciation is likely to change in the course of time. As any number of translations can be made of the same poem, even simultaneously, and in any number of languages, a translation will always be exposed to the ravages of time, which will gnaw away its edges and, after a while, will make it look out-of-date, and create the need for another, more up-to-date translation into the same language. A poem is just a poem; a translated poem is both a poem and a translation, but the latter somewhat reduces its validity as a poem; the translation exists at the expense of the poem.

At least as long as the original remains inaccessible to the reader, and as long as no alternative or competing translation of the same poem exists, a translation substitutes for the original, serves as an exclusive and effective surrogate, and becomes accepted, for all practical purposes, as identical to it. But, of course, that is just an illusion. Theoretically, a translated poem is a piece of subjective poetic information about a poetic statement in another language, achieved in accordance with certain changing conventions by way of an approximate reconstruction of linguistically realized contents and form (but not of the subjective motivation behind them) and on a certain level of artistic identification.

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I am aware that I have been stressing the problems, the complexities, the pitfalls, and the losses involved in verse translation. Perhaps I have



created the illusion that I am opposed to it, on the grounds of a number of obscure theoretical considerations. That is not so; I have a passionate belief in translation, have been witness to, even part of, the birth of a great number of excellent translations both into and from Hungarian, into and from English. (My anthology, *Modern Hungarian Poetry*, published by Columbia University Press in New York in 1977, contains, I believe, a sufficient number of convincing examples of this: brilliant translations from the Hungarian, made by British and American poets ignorant of that language, via rough literal versions prepared for them by myself and others.) Aware as I am of the obvious limits of verse translation, those imposed by external necessities, I still think that it is an act of interlingual communication of the utmost importance, one that is absolutely indispensable in our culture, and one which can indeed be executed at a level where it will, whatever the price, enrich and benefit both the donor and the recipient culture.

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# LOST IN MANHATTAN

by

GYÖRGY SOMLYÓ

October 1979

*Travelling is bad*

Should I mention that I don't like to travel, that usually weeks before the start I am seized by a far from imaginary and much too real feeling of *partir c'est mourir un peu*? And what if it means real death? As if death were worse, or more definitive, or more fateful *en route*. Perhaps it is. I cannot forget flying (or rather being tossed about) towards the end of the fifties, on the third day, in an obsolete Dakota seating sixteen passengers over the immense folds of China's Central Mountain Range. If we were to crash no one ever would find any part of us. And if they did find our remains elsewhere? Does it make any difference? It seems it does not. I am only afraid of death catching me when alone, reduced to myself, or to that contingent self who is just travelling. A long way, but from what? This is difficult to size up precisely. From my own self perhaps, a long way from where I ought to be. Where ought we to be? Where are we really there? Are we supposed to be there at our death? And our life—where is it truly? Is it not in all places where we could be? Is every staying behind not a kind of self-mutilation? Does it not imply unpardonable comfort; guilty mental and emotional laziness?

But, I travel nevertheless. When I am sent, when I am invited, when I am urged, and sometimes on my own initiative. Always with the same anxiety. I hate preparations. Travel is embodied danger elevated to the rank of a symbol. For the fiftieth time I write down the same place and date of birth in the same space on the same blanks. Is there any more superfluous writing job than this among the many superfluous writing jobs? Not to mention repeatedly penning in vain my mother's and father's beautiful names. Shall I put in writing such pointless information about myself when others anyway fill in the same facts about me?

What do I prepare for myself with these hated preparations? Why do I take upon myself what is predictable, not to mention the unpredictable? The specific foreign exchange poverty of our parts of the world which, unlike other occasional manifestations of poverty, is never honourable since it always forces me into shameful situations? The tortures of packing and unpacking, carrying my luggage, of the complications or manipulations of transport? The disquiet of being compelled to abandon my work, a feeling which seizes me well before my journey and which persists even after the journey is over, with the added pressure of the new jobs imposed on me by the trip? (Like this piece, for instance.)

*Travelling is necessary*

Travelling is necessary. Living, living well (do I live well when I do not travel?), feeling secure (where can we feel secure?) is not necessary. But *navigare necesse est*—both metaphorically and literally.



*Travelling is good*

Flying, that is the aeroplane, was the big metaphor of the early part of this century, the soul's wings fitted on the body, the big myth of the future. We sell the future cheaply these days, and so does literature. Our days pass in a new feeling of "the declining future," as Octavio Paz put in in several of his essays. People early this century felt an incurable nostalgia for the *fin de siècle*; we, getting close to the end of the century, are filled with their *fin de siècle* nostalgia for the end of the century. On the Air France Boeing-747 with a seating capacity of around 350, flying above the ocean from Paris to Montreal, near the stratosphere, at a speed of 900 kilometres an hour, the menu is illustrated by a poster displaying the Farman F-170 which, in 1926, flew its 8 (!) passengers at a speed of 190 kilometres (!) an hour between Paris and Brussels. Was this done to offer an example of dizzy progress? Or was it rather to offer the sensational feeling those passengers enjoyed, and which, in consequence of sensational development, we no longer experience? We boringly munch a somewhat remote copy of the printed menu, in which smoked salmon, tournedos sauté Bercy, and Colombian coffee all taste of plane food, just like on any flight anywhere, in spite of the resounding names. And the air above the ocean is also the same as anywhere else. But the small ship which appears for a minute through the telescope of broken clouds below us, alone in the middle (for everywhere here it is the middle) of the blue (really blue) water—what poetry that is!

*"And what about poetry?"*

A sudden idea prompts me to take out my small brown notebook and I begin to scribble ideas for my Montreal lecture. *Et la poésie?* What of it? The sky above me is a bright blue, precisely like the sea, "flight blue," as I once called it, now one can just see down as far as the earth or, more precisely, the water. The real truth is that "whoever takes a plane to fly over it can see the landscape as a map," every landscape is a map, Radnóti the poet wrote about Hungary. However, since we fly over it more and more often, this map-landscape is just as real as the other, the real one, as is the structure of matter which we can know only in the metaphorical transposition of instruments. This formerly unimaginable magnification and reduction of things, this two-way abstraction, is just a new concretization of reality; of what else? of what there is. What we just begin to grasp in its own magnitude and smallness.

The movie screen is put in place. More precisely, there are two in the huge divided passengers' cabin. You may see the most idiotic story in the world, see it double if you wish: the film is screened simultaneously in double timing, starting earlier on one screen than on the other; as though one lived the double time of the air trip and of the story: the future in the present, the present in the future. This seems amusing for a moment. But then all is swept away by the far from comic ridiculousness of the movie. True, but what else could be shown to passengers so different in age, education, culture, etc., to men, women, children, and old folks? Thrillers? Art films? Box office successes? Pornography? Horror pictures? Farces? None of them is equally suitable for all those people. Any one of these might offend the tastes of some. After all: trash is surely the smallest common denominator of culture.

How shall I talk to them about Hungarian poetry? About this beautiful princess locked up in the crystal palace of her own idiom, about this notable unknown?

In the meantime we fly across the ocean, inconspicuously; I just now remember the amaze-



ment which in my childhood overcame me at the sepia pictures in the Sunday supplement of the daily *Pesti Napló*. Lindbergh extracting himself out of the armchair-sized cockpit of the *Spirit of St. Louis* after 33 hours of flight. The first time in the world. And the world-shattering pictures of the kidnapping of the Lindbergh baby. Equally the first in the world. We too can easily become the victims of terrorism—this has become an event just as common and quite inconspicuous as trans-oceanic flights; but just because we flew across the ocean. . . ?

We have flown across the ocean. We have crossed the seas seeing nothing or hardly anything of the sea and have not been aware of flying. The real experience of crossing the ocean is unrelated or hardly related to two things: the sea and the crossing. It is here that Eliot's objective correlative becomes palpable in poetry. Instead of sea and crossing, therefore, one has to meet, experience, and think over other correlative objects, other objective correlatives. Instead of a certain kind of vision another kind of vision. That is, abstraction instead of reality? No. Only one kind of reality instead of another; one kind of abstraction instead of another. Abstraction? Rather the concretization of something that has so far meant abstraction for us.

We have discovered—we could not help it—a new view of the world, another world of ourselves. Why shouldn't we represent this new view in poetry (and in everything else), even though it is impossible to do so in terms of classical shapes? Romanticism only discovered such a view of the world as could also be seen (but not represented, so it seems): nature; yet, entirely new means and methods were needed to let it be seen.

The flight captain announces that we are over the Gulf of St. Lawrence and in an hour and twenty minutes we shall touch down at Mirabelle Airport in Montreal. Here below us is a cloudless—I very nearly said: sky (it is difficult to overcome the inertia of words); but no: the sea below us is cloudless, although this sea as something to look at differs in nothing from the sky.

Through the porthole the map changes from a drawing and representation into reality before us. Side by side, in my lap, I hold the notebook in which I write and a world map I have found on my seat in the plane. "The landscape is a map." The "sensation" is that map and landscape coincide. That the map is not only a speculatively achieved abstraction of the landscape but also one picture taking shape in our eyes. What reckoning has put into shape throughout centuries is now being made visible by the distance. The picture that has come into being in a purely intellectual way suddenly changes into a picture "made according to nature."

Longue Chaîne grows out of Newfoundland as a long wing on the map, and the giant whale-body of Anticosti Island also swims there in the St. Lawrence estuary, and even the ships drawn on the old maps float there like flying-fish. My watch says—still? already?—a quarter to six; local time is therefore a quarter to one: interchangeable abstractions. Which of them is real, more real, the still rising sun I see or the setting sun my nerves are longing for at the suggestion of the time that has passed in me? Meanwhile the clouds below us again merge into an infinite expanse of level snow-field. I am flying over the snow-field above the snow-fields (or rather only imaginary snow-fields) of Canada. The sun is still rising. But we are already slowly losing height. Penetrating the clouds. Like a sun thrown out of orbit.



*Peeping in*

After a three-day non-stop conference, which was broken only for short intermission by the forest symphony of the Canadian autumn with the red-yellow-green triad of maple, birch, and pine around the Mont Gabriel Hotel where we lived, took our meals, and discussed as at a religious exercise of some sort, we are so to speak pleased by our next trip, this fleeting flight of barely an hour. Passport control and customs examination on the part of the United States also take place here at Dorval Airport; for once we shall arrive with the illusion of a free change of place, something one has for so long hoped for and is less and less able to do. The woman passport officer peruses my passport at some length and then apologizes with a smile: such a document has never before been in her hand. At least I also meant something new to her.

I almost feel I am an adult (high time, you may think) when I set foot on the tarmac of La Guardia Airport. Nobody is waiting for me. My luggage very soon emerges from the labyrinth, and in an instant a canary-coloured taxi-cab is there. Before I am aware of it, I am on my way towards Manhattan, along Grand Central Parkway, in the direction of Triborough Bridge.

I notice with some satisfaction that the very first experience contradicts all earlier information: the passenger in the cab is not separated from the driver by a hermetic wall, nor does a bloodhound sit at the side of the young Black driver; for the time being everything is as it is in Europe. The only alarming thing is the inverse ratio between the speed of the cab and that of the fare-indicator: while the latter seems to push up the growing cents at a speed of at least a hundred miles an hour, the speedometer shows only twenty. The digits killed in action turn off without stopping like figures hit by a master marksman at the range.

I get off between 82nd and 83rd Streets at Second Avenue. Low, small houses made of grey and red bricks, tiny shops with battered fronts, double-parking minitrucks being unloaded, a greengrocer's shop with the profusion of odours reaching as far as the next corner. As if it were the outer quarter of a French provincial town. I have arrived in New York.

All I have in this town is board and lodging with a friend, as well as my legs and five short days. And my somewhat sobered-up foolishness. And a few long-distance appointments; as if we had made the date in front of the Emke Café in Budapest. And some good advice I received.

I take the first piece of advice forthwith the next morning. I received it from Salah Stétié in Montreal when we parted. He is a Lebanese poet, and ambassador to Unesco. Unlike me, he usually stays at the Plaza Hotel and starts his Manhattan walk there, as he advised me to do. "New York's profound early morning melancholy."

I start early one morning from the corner of 82nd Street towards remote Downtown, on the deserted—incredible as it is—the stunningly deserted avenue, amidst waist-high black plastic garbage bags. First I am surprised at the street signs (I wonder whether Fifth Avenue is indicated in the same manner: later I could make sure it was); as if those small tin flags pointing in four directions had been set only temporarily on the corner posts: *E. 82nd St.* and so forth. And the rusty iron zigzag lines of fire-escapes on the naked façades. Open, undisguised architecture unashamed of the function? I think of my talk in Montreal with Jacques Folch-Ribas. Jacques is Catalanian, a Spanish Civil War exile; his first occupation had been that of architect, teaching his subject at a university, but he was also a member of the editorial board of two periodicals, in addition to being a novelist, art critic, radio commentator, and who knows what else. He explained the architectural significance of the Beaubourg of Paris in this way. Is it beautiful, or not? is a meaningless question. Here it



happens for the first time that the users of a building are confronted with their own (concealed, spontaneous) demands. The indispensable functional structures of all buildings are not concealed. They say: look, this is what you need, you wanted it: water-supply, heating, cooling, ventilation, garbage disposal, lighting, staircase, lift. As if living creatures wore their cerebral convolutions, their bowels, their vascular systems on the outside. Winding pipes, scaffolds, flues resembling giant trombones, transformer substations, boiler houses, all on the outside; and so, freely hovering with us, the wall becomes transparent. "You wanted to set fire, now you have the fire-escape on the wall here!" This seems to be the message of the row of stairways like firemen's ladders marring the façades of houses on the streets of Manhattan. However: these have no philosophy, no aesthetic and intellectual function, they have only, and exclusively, practical functions. They are the icons of necessary ugliness devoid of any meaning. I already observed some time ago that what one sees in towns are not houses but streets. The eye is a horizontal device. Houses must be looked at. Thus, even in your native town twenty or thirty years after, you occasionally take notice of a house, as if you saw it for the first time; really you do see it for the first time. In New York one sees the buildings. They are so low that they fall within the field of vision; and they are so tall that one has to look up to them. They are so surprisingly ugly; because they are so matchlessly beautiful.

I have not seen the burnt-out and desolate parts of the Bronx, of Pompeian ghostliness they say, nor Queens, nor the blocks of tenement houses in Brooklyn. Time enough for Manhattan only. But I should not have supposed that the streets of midtown New York largely consist of such houses and present such general streetscape. And indeed, something like the suffocating melancholy hinted at by Stétié squeezes the traveller's curious heart.

*The discovery—of course—of America*

Downtown New York and the Ocean must still be a long way off, but close to water I cannot bear being kept from it for long. The riverbank which, as I see from the map, must be quite near on the left is the tempter. But how can I get there? All of a sudden I see a red machine swinging overhead, something like the red helicopter in Jancsó's film *Electra*. The elevated railroad running over Queensboro Bridge. Below it traffic flows up and down in two streams, to join by a round arch each the southern end of Central Park at 59th Street.

I try to turn to the left where I guess the East River to be. Distressing over crowdedness, warehouses, trucks in every passage. I move on, finally I come to a side-street in which, by contrast, not a soul is seen, all is silence and an elegant emptiness. I already feel that the uneasiness that haunts me everywhere in New York is due at the same time to overcrowded traffic and to the total emptiness which so suddenly succeeds it. As if the small palaces here had been abandoned: no car turns the corner, nor are any parked, not a single stroller; and the end of the street leads to a sort of nothing bounded by iron railings. But as I come nearer, that nothing flashes—there is water beyond the iron ornaments; and a flight of steps leading down, then another, leading to a terrace protruding high above the water level. And here the world opens up at once: above and below two small trees and two Art Nouveau benches there is the sea and the sky, with the cool glitter reflected at the same time by the motionless clouds hanging like light metal-plates and by the slowly undulating mirror of the river. I am altogether alone—in a small nameless square of the big city, a square which seems to be cut off from everything and communicating with the city only by means of a



narrow flight of stairs but which extends straight to the sea. I look up and catch sight of the small tin-plate on a post of the upper terrace: upwards Sutton Square, downwards River-view Terrace. I am almost disappointed seeing that the square has a name, so I cannot name it myself. Luckily it can be found neither on the map nor in the guidebook. Perhaps it is still me who has discovered it. If not America itself, at least this tiny terraced garden of America which seems to have nothing to do with the sky-high monumentality of the city, nor with its very earthbound mediocrity. As if one could not even come here, as if one could only get here by chance, to this "river-gazing parapet," where I lean out over the river, the sea, and myself. In America—or not in America, it makes no difference: anywhere on this earth—at a moment of life when one takes a deeper breath than is possible on this earth.

*The discovery of Europe*

How many out-of-the-way places like this can there be in this gigantic island city, in what Walt Whitman with poetic precision describes as "A rocky founded island-shore where ever gaily dash the coming, going, hurrying sea waves!" how many such illegal, unplanned, irregular, discoverable moments!

My friend Lajos Szalay, the graphic artist, authorized me to boast that it was me who discovered for him, an artist living in New York for these twenty years past, the most beautiful museum of New York, which is perhaps the most beautiful in the world. It is as if it were not a museum. There ceases in it the dispiriting whimsicality hostile to art of all museums. The private collection of the Fricks, a family of steel magnates, has not been crammed into the already packed stocks of other collections. It has remained in its own unique cosy integrity with the objects of art not exhibited with the befitting expediency or anarchy of a museum but arranged according to the needs of a human home. The paintings together with furniture, carpets, books, stoves, chandeliers, and vases exist in natural symbiosis with the human environment; the ecological balance of the medium uniting man with his culture is not upset as in museums where neither pictures nor visitors can breathe any more. I think the urgently needed environmental protection of the fine arts ought to start out somehow in this direction. If, in spite of the greatest good will and the most threatening realizations, this direction were not—as it unfortunately is also in the case of broader environmental protection—blocked again and again just by other similarly urgent requirements of modern life.

Because, after all, museums provide the momentarily only conceivable possibility for disseminating as widely as possible the treasures of art. Who with a good heart and common sense could wish that such private collections were established once more in the world? As regards the collection of works of art to be seen here, not only their current world-market price but also their supposable value at the time of their acquisition can hardly be expressed even in millions of dollars.

It is, of course, ridiculous that pictures have a price. Moreover, this price is not really what their painter would be paid for them. Here is this Vermeer which, more than two hundred years after its making, became known as *The Soldier and the Laughing Girl*. When it was made, the space of the Fifth Avenue mansion was pasture. And the price of the painting, as witnessed by the only known posthumous auctioneer's report, was 44 Dutch guilders in 1696. The French private collector who later bought it in London—as a work by Pieter de Hooch; that is, he did not know the real name of the painter—paid 246 for it. At that time even the painter's eight children he had left nothing to, were no longer alive. How



much did Frick, the steel magnate, pay towards the end of the last century, or early in the present one? Is it not ridiculous that paintings have prices? The 44 Dutch guilders of those times just as today's, say, half a million dollars? Both the high and the low.

A little more serious question is how the direct objective reality and the indirect spiritual reality, the ideology, of the soon declining great age of the colonial Dutch republic of burghers was intertwined with the wonderful pictorial sensibility which cannot ultimately be explained by all this, with the objective and spiritual way of seeing things, whereby the wide world suddenly bursting into the small is condensed into such simple and complicated space in an area of barely one half square metre as in this picture. An open window and an unfolded map: this pushing of the walls of Vermeer's amazingly rich little world to make it a real wide world is European man's first looking out beyond himself, the consciousness of his smallness projected into the world, and at the same time the safeguarding of the unique inner wealth of this smallness in the virtually unrepeatable intimacy of painting, and in the suffocating tension of the mysteriously mute drama of the two seated figures closing the triangle of the window and the map, in the tension of the silent conflict of remoteness and nearness, of presence here and presence there.

#### *The buildings*

I now stand, with my European feet, on this American map. Or rather in this American air. In the air conquered by American architecture. On this peak of bigness and bragging built highest in the world. Seen from the circular look-out on the 107th floor of the World Trade Center, the city again looks as if it were a drawing: including the stiffened ripples of the waves in the bay around the Statue of Liberty which barely rises from the picture. The modern monumentality of the city's new towers has clearly suppressed the old-fashioned monumentality of romantic-neoclassicist sweep. All facile judgement and cheap symbolism aside: Manhattan is no longer the city of the Statue of Liberty, but one of the Buildings and Centers which bear the names of international concerns and far surpass the Statue in height; which rise from the mass of low buildings, almost a prehistoric enigma like the stone giants of Easter Island, or as the prehuman wilderness of Milán Füst's moonless night: "Tree-stumps stood in it like wild boars."

What is the conception, the purpose, of this height record being broken time and again, of these buildings contesting like competitive sports which, with the passage of time, can only be attained by doping and superhuman efforts? (In parentheses: doping control in world-wide competitions is the same kind of hypocrisy as the pretence of maintaining an amateur status. It has become increasingly obvious that the strenuous training required by recent developments in the major sports, mainly in those where performance can be clocked or taped, cannot be further intensified without either professionalism or the use of drugs; it takes a mutation attainable only with the help of heaps of cash and extraneous substances to add a third leg to the existing two.) The genuine explanation has to be sought beyond the initial and very rational one (which is, of course, only partly satisfactory) of doped land prices and land speculation, one of this sort can be found only in an analogy with modern international sport and the afore-mentioned Easter Island colossi or medieva, cathedrals. The continued advance of *non plus ultra* seems to be part of the nature of man or even of life which made man as well; when history so decides, it is expressed in cultic terms (suggesting that it is rooted in the cult), and when it does not, progress seems to play up its rational, economic, or artistic causes (or even the latent renaissance of the cult), al-



though, in both its cultic and non-cultic forms, it is only a variable of some more constant human invariable. Wherever you may look, in time and in space, everywhere in the world, up to the small towers of the Art Nouveau houses, the plus over the "function," the ornaments and the "beauty" have always been glorified in the parts protruding from the buildings. The tower, the column, has now been "functionalized," it has become the building itself. The Eiffel Tower charted the course of the last century: even without a function it was the highest structure in the world; it still had the function of being "the tallest building in the world." An index of the intellectual missile which, behold! flies man into the air to live and work, to newer and newer summits of construction. Yesterday it was the Empire State Building, today it is the World Trade Center. And tomorrow? We shall see if it will be possible to jump 3 metres high and to run the 100 metres under 9 seconds. And if not? Which way will we go on?

*The king of Central Park*

The date I had made from a distance of thousands of kilometres proved, even at a still greater distance, just as accurate as if I had made it with Michel Deguy and Jacques Garelli in the coffee bar at the next corner. On the morning of Columbus Day we stroll together in the vortex of the festive open sale of articles of applied art on Bolivar Plaza, on paths made slippery by roller-skaters in Central Park, around Bethesda Fountain. Then at once I see there a pair of big violet-coloured eyes, looking straight at us; the creature is immersed in himself, in the past of a hundred million years of the creation of his terrible self, a past which he carries in his rare movements and fascinating immobility. He is sitting on his throne, a huge truck tyre, like a real king born to the purple. Then he gets up, picking up the tyre in one hand, with the same movement with which we hurl a chair into the far corner of the room, and again sits down on it at the other end of the cage. He has moved his residence to another place of his realm; as kings indicate by rising that an audience is over. What would the king of Central Park say if he had been taught to speak by signs, as was his brother whom I read about in one of last year's *National Geographic*? What would he say if he were asked about his opinion of himself? Repeat like the learned Koko: "Fine animal Gorilla"? And what would he say about us if he really learnt to speak?

*Here and there*

We always have to be here. There, we always have only been. (Or we shall be, but always with a question mark.) I was there—that is, it is somebody else that was there. I go on having the feeling that what I write here is being written by somebody other than the one who was there; even if in the meantime he uses the fiction of the deceptive present tense in writing; even if he really copies out of his notebook what he wrote there. The act of writing here also exemplifies the impossibility of being there; or rather the only kind of possibility of it. So let us nevertheless make use of this possibility.

The utterly decayed meandering stairs of the Bus Terminal, from the foot of which our bus takes us in a moment, through Lincoln Tunnel, right onto the flood-lit lanes of the New Jersey turnpike, not to stop before reaching the opposite shore. The only suspended arch of Verrazano Bridge closes down the bay and opens up the sea, like the drawbridge of a medieval castle.

The bearded old Negro saxophonist plays there at night, on 52nd Street at Park Avenue



where not long ago Cool's princes blew and beat their instruments in the depths of small and big jazz clubs—as maybe he also did himself. Now he is the street soloist of the band of *gingko* trees planted in front of the Seagram Building.

*A change of rhythm*

Your friend hustles you into a minibus (his tool helping him to distribute Hungarian books and records all over America), you start in one of the Eighties and, at the next traffic light, you slowly inch forward to join the flow of cars forming eight lanes on the six-lane motorway. The cars slowly crawl, almost bumping into one another; the passers-by proceed, instinctively keeping away from one another, but all the more hastily. The traffic rattles and knocks like the flourish of a big band, with the abrupt syncopation of slow and fast, dashes and stops. Then one more street to the left, another avenue to the right—what a change! You feel it first in your ears, then in your entire body. The car suddenly gathers speed in the dispersing traffic, the footpaths become crowded and the surging crowd has to slacken speed. So far everything has been racing along, even the cars compelled to slow down showed, in their panther-like movement, fumingly arrested speed. Here the cars are moving fast, in a hurry, it still seems as if speed were confined to them, amidst the crowd of people standing, loafing, idling, and loitering about on both sides of the street. This was the fantastic Harlem which Duke Ellington and his kind just had to get to. To think of the longing we felt reading of Simone de Beauvoir's magic nights in Harlem after the war. Let me add that even the Hungarian 1979 guidebook invites us to "a stroll in Harlem" and shows us pictures (probably taken twenty or thirty years earlier) of "sightseers" in the Harlem night! The stranger (even a white New Yorker) today only ventures by car into Lenox Avenue (let alone the side-streets beyond 100th–110th Streets), where we are now speeding. When we have to stop at a red light, the driver already restlessly glances right and left, and the foreign passenger looks around in embarrassment as if he were not authorized to see the dismal (and gloomy) sight that unfolds itself before his eyes. As we turn into Adam Clayton P. Boulevard named after a Congressman for Harlem, "the emancipator of 125th Street," and I catch sight of the first white passer-by, who is distinguished from the gaudily dressed loungers not only by his contrasting pale face and grey suit, but also by his different manner of walking, his uneasy and rapid New York gait, I am suddenly hit by all the absurdity of this "forbidden city," of this topsy-turvy ghetto, from which there may still be a way out, but which it is increasingly impossible to enter. As we drive past Columbia University along upper Broadway, towards downtown New York, the rhythm of traffic again picks up speed, the New York big band trumpets again, with the big black musical accompaniment swelling to full tension, in the dazzling rhythm of Times Square preparing for its night performance with the hundred-stroke lights and four-stroke petrol engines and the street dancers quickening their pace.

*Postscript: Manabatta*

Whitman still called it that, by the name of the Indian tribe, of which the name is all that has survived, since they sold their island, in exchange for knick-knacks worth 24 (twenty-four) dollars at today's prices, to Peter Minuit, the first governor appointed by the Dutch West India Company. What has become of the Manahattas inhabiting Manhattan,



together with their twenty-four dollars? The origin of all peoples and nations goes back to the darkness of savagery. Each and every one of them suffers from its cruel conception in the form of a trauma of some sort. But America—or let us now stick to Manhattan only—has built a double trauma into its unparalleled affluence: that of the Indians who were expelled and that of the Negroes who were dragged into America. Few neuroses are more difficult to cure and sublimate than this social neurosis caused by these, especially the latter trauma, are known to history afflicted with so many neuroses of local and global dimensions.

*Conclusion—for Pierre and Angella Oster-Soussouev*

I am in the habit of losing something on every one of my trips, perhaps as an unconscious sacrifice to the jealous gods, in return for all that I have found, in the manner of the ancients who sacrificed for the sake of an auspicious journey. Could be because, as the Freudians have it, I should like to go back. In Montreal it was in the moments before leaving that, when packing, I became aware of having left my pyjamas and dressing-gown in my hotel room at Mont Gabriel. Dear Pierre and Angella, with whom I fled the conference room and went to the forest promenade on a couple of occasions, and who then were to stay in Montreal for a few more days, immediately undertook, despite my protests, to take steps to recover my belongings. And indeed, thanks to them, the parcel, flew first to Paris, then to my home, just as I am writing these last lines. Gave me quite a shock. Like that famous ring thrown into the sea and returned to the king out of the inwards of a fish.

In New York I did not lose a thing. Perhaps I do not wish to return there? Yet, how many things I did leave there: all that I did not manage to see.



# INTERVIEWS

## KEY ISSUES IN CULTURE

*A radio interview with Imre Pozsgay*

*Imre Pozsgay, the Minister of Culture, was interviewed by Hungarian Radio on October 14th, 1979 in the framework of a series of discussions on cultural policy. At the time of a previous interview—some years ago, shortly after his appointment—the controversy centred on theatres had reached an acute stage. Many tried to reduce the argument to personal issues, a conflict of generations or between metropolitan and provincial theatres. For months on end the press attacked the way in which films were selected for Hungarian showing, as well as the manner in which they were distributed. The way canvasses were selected for showing at art exhibitions, and the policy governing the latter, were subjected to criticism, and much was said about the sad state of industrial design. Debates on innovating theatrical productions and films, works of art literature, and music were permanent feature. At the time of the earlier interview all this was discussed, as it were, 'in the future.' The debates continued and novel features were still in the bud. Since then it has become clear that most meant a sound step forward in the progress of the arts in Hungary. In the awareness of this fact the interviewer started the present interview with a personal question. Had Imre Pozsgay experienced the past two and a half years as tougher or easier than he had imagined on his appointment?*

**A:** Much tougher. I knew on appointment—after all I had some knowledge of these matters already—that I had undertaken a difficult task. Nevertheless, at the start,

certain problems had appeared clearer and more amenable to action than they turned out to be. Contradictions and tensions had deeper roots than was presumed then, when I started. Speaking personally I must therefore say that things turned out tougher, but I have no cause for regrets. In spite of the difficulties there was progress. I should like to say in the first place that the steps forward taken by the theatre are extraordinarily important. I would not for the world rank either persons or particular fields, in culture they are not hierarchically related. Bearing in mind the nature and scale of troubles, I felt that something had to be done in the theatre in the first place. I think the right choices were made, and a number of important measures changed the earlier situation.

**Q:** *In my view as well these debates have abated, on the one hand because of the measures taken, on the other because of the events, the changes in the economic and social situation. How big, in your view, was the role of the administrative measures, in what proportion were they responsible?*

**A:** I am sure you are not using administrative with some of the unpleasant overtones that are present in the Hungarian use of the term. Taking the term literally I think we agree. That is, in this most important question, helping talents to surface, the state



authorities, using available administrative instruments, assisted those talented and able people to come to the fore who had not found a platform earlier, at least not one worthy of the attention of the whole country.

*Q: Some of these measures have truly produced results. We hope the National Theatre has overcome its brief crisis, and is finding its feet. The repertoire of a number of theatres is being renewed, and new stages are becoming available. In other cases, that of the Népszínház theatre, for instance, events are still dragging their feet. But if the state authorities take measures that intrude into the arts, the field of spontaneous initiative is always somewhat restricted. The cultural authorities have asserted on a number of occasions that the Hungarian theatre lacks real personalities. In your view, what are the chances that someone, following spontaneous initiative, should emerge as a personality able to organize a real theatrical venture?*

*A: In my opinion the opportunities open are great indeed. There is a dearth of such personalities. You might well say, perhaps they are there somewhere, but they simply don't get a chance. The theatre is after all a complex and expensive institution, you can only move according to carefully hedged institutional rules. And yet I say there are not enough. This is particularly true of the younger generation, there are not as many outstanding people as are needed. I am not underestimating those that have proved themselves to be talented, on the contrary. Spontaneity and interference using administrative instruments alternate, step by step. Thus a wide and spontaneous theatrical debate—throwing light on experience—preceded administrative measures. One might say each acted in its own time. The state authorities drew their conclusions from the debate and took the appropriate measures. This did not close off the options of spontaneous initiative and manifestation, but started something, returning the field to spontaneous initiative, provided that his*

*initiative manifests itself on a high artistic standard, with something to say, and intelligently.*

*Q: It has often been said on official platforms, and you expressed yourself similarly in a recent article, that finding out what interests are involved, and how they are related, is one of the conditions for an extension of socialist democracy. Cultural life obviously has a serious role in this, since many of the social contradictions are attached to it. Looking at literary periodicals and publishing houses one does not get the impression that they are organized in terms of sectional or group interests recognised in economic and social life.*

*A: It is not manifest since these literary workshops, periodicals for instance, do not participate in this process as separate ventures with their own line. Almost everyone looks on a faithful rendering of Hungarian social reality, a critical rendering as well, as its own special mission and duty. In this sense and in this spirit I feel that every literary periodical feels called upon to seize the whole of present Hungarian reality. This sometimes confuses us, that is us, the readers. I should like to say something here as a reader, in the first place. There is no need to place the problems of the age, of society today, in abstract and universal terms every time. One could take a stand more concretely, acting for a particular sector of production or social group, displaying its inner problems. Forgive me, but I can also imagine literary periodicals that stick more closely to aesthetic questions, and others which perhaps concern themselves more with political aspects, of course on the basis of a shared Marxist ideological and political direction of these workshops.*

*Q: Speaking as a minister, and not as a reader, do you feel that, on principle, these periodicals have the possibility to choose amongst the ways you just mentioned?*

*A: Yes on principle the option is open to them. And I think that institutional*



attempts will be made to ensure stronger features to the periodicals, naturally not by taking administrative measures, but by looking on particular periodicals as workshops, and strengthening these workshops.

*Q: To what extent does this fit the fact that in Hungary generally those in charge of publishing houses, periodicals, theatres, and other cultural institutions, are appointed. That is they do not emerge spontaneously from an artistic group which came into being on the basis of a specific interest, but they are institutionally appointed and then go on to recruit their staff in keeping with the given possibilities.*

A: Well, after all a state authority is responsible for each of these periodicals even if they bear the name of some organization or movement on their title page. But please don't imagine that an appointment is simply the manifestation of an abstract state will. Certain interests, certain group efforts are always there at the back, inasmuch as the state recognises these, and those are then appointed who embody these interests.

*Q: I believe the situation is somewhat different as regards works of art. There the state monopoly of the Képcsarnok Enterprise and the Arts & Crafts Enterprise, which maintain shops and galleries, where fine art and craft objects respectively are sold, further hinders the organization of workshops. If groups of artists could exhibit in, and sell through, galleries organized on say a cooperative basis, it would become clearer what there is a public demand for. Everyone could then draw conclusions of use to their own work. Couldn't that be arranged?*

A: It could, in my opinion. I was sure you would mention this, and perhaps remind me that we talked about this business two and a half years ago as well. I must admit the transformation of the organizational aspects of fine arts is a slow job. Many kinds of interests, many reasons, many established customs, stand in the way. One thing is

certain, the Ministry of Culture, that is its responsible officials, who are now in possession of a clear and determined statement of position, are planning institutional changes. Once again, making use of the instruments of state administration, they are preparing the options for some sort of more free manifestation. For instance that there will be no need for the state to hallmark every art or craft object. It will not then have to feel pangs of conscience concerning the good or bad conditions under with artists belonging to various schools can effect their own breakthrough. I do not know how warmly the firms you mentioned will welcome what I am saying, but I am convinced it is in their interests as well for a less uniform organizational system to govern the arts and the crafts, one that gave greater opportunities for choice and for making a decision. I could well imagine that some might want to maintain their own studios as a sort of gallery as well, where they could present their work, and I can also imagine a situation where, at the side of the major state-run exhibition organization there would be possibilities for small groups or private persons, who bear their own costs, to run their own exhibitions, as long as they pay attention to aesthetic and political norms. I hold similar views on the sale of pictures. Crafts in the wider sense, including industrial design which directly intrudes into the shaping of the environment in which we live, and of the tools we use, fit into a somewhat more complicated system. Whole industries and large commercial enterprises there intrude themselves between the artist and the consumer. Wishing to improve conditions there it is not sufficient to arrange the relationship between artists and their public in an institutional way, but the relationship of the crafts and design as a whole to the economy as well. That is a difficult job.

*Q: These two examples might create the impression that what we are talking about are the anxieties of two particular arts. Actually exam-*



ples from other fields could have been given as well, what is involved after all is the further democratization of artist's life as such. The experience of the past twenty to thirty years proves that real results were obtained in the economy, in social life, and in culture, in those areas where the Party and state authorities tackled conflicts with the intention of getting at the bottom of things, taking decisions on the basis of a thorough analysis of the situation. In the present admittedly tense economic situation a pretty large section of the intellectuals fears, however, that, coming up against difficulties, politics will once again seize up. Is that how you see things?

A: That possibility is certainly there in the present situation, but I take our policy to be wiser than that, and unlikely to react in such a way to these facts. Let me insist to start with that, in spite of certain economic difficulties, there is no reason for sackcloth and ashes concerning cultural ventures. The proclamation of the access to and participation in culture programme (*köznevelődés*) was most timely. That was a highly necessary initiative. This country has long ago reached the stage where a cultural policy that treats people as creative participants, and not merely members of the public, takes its start. The growth of the transmission system, the establishment of institutions, investments, renewings and refurbishings in culture are naturally still part of this process. We have had troubles enough in this respect. That is why I say now both to my staff who are in this with me, and to all those throughout Hungary who are working on access to and participation in culture of the broadest masses, that they did not commit themselves to a vain cause that was doomed from the start, that they are engaged on most important work. This is true though the conditions of implementation have, for well known reasons, become more difficult. Another thing I want to say in this connection is that precisely because I accept that our policy presumes a close interaction between economics and culture, progress in

the latter, specifically in the aspects of wide access to and participation in it, will have a beneficial effect on economic matters. A sound economic policy does not look on culture as a way of decorating the façade, but reckons with it as a powerful inner driving force, whose progress must be ensured in spite of tensions and difficulties. That is how I see the preparations for the sixth five year plan. I am convinced that there are certain possibilities for the material development of culture, though perhaps they are not as good as desirable, and not really in keeping with our longings. I must stress though that the needs are far greater than what the options open to us permit.

*Q: Won't there perhaps be more pressure as regards ideological matters? I think a fair proportion of intellectuals fears something of that sort.*

A: Indeed, this is one of the essential aspects of the question. I almost managed to dodge it. To tell the truth however I have no wish to side-step this issue, after all what does cultural life mean in the political context, and often enough in that of public opinion as well? The appearance of works, theatrical performances, films, literature, where the troubles that befall man are discussed, individual ills as well as social ills, the agonies of history as well as the insecurities of the future. Wrongly approached, such works appear as the causes and stirrers up of trouble, though they really reflect and express what ails society. I have no wish to oversimplify things but I want to say nevertheless that such views in some sense express general feeling and experience, they are not always merely monstrosities conceived by a mistaken way of looking at things—though these exist as well, let me hasten to add. One must oppose these, argue with them, fight the good fight on the level of ideas and of the spirit, that, in the first place, is the norm which guides me on such matters. But one should not always identify trouble



with the trouble-spotters, and I am inclined to argue that it does not help matters to break the looking glass if that shows us to be misshapen.

*Q: I think what you mentioned now is what gives rise to doubts in many. What often happens in acute situations is that those who criticize, perhaps with the intention to improve things, are then identified with what are called oppositional forces. Have those responsible for cultural policy prepared themselves to cope with this in the coming period of time?*

A: We are prepared, on the level of ideas. I am not certain that the preparation is up to the standard required by the situation as regards principles and theory. To put it more clearly, as I look back on the debates of the seventies, I think that one of our major troubles was that opponents, you called them oppositional forces, people hostile to us, and others too—there are a great many who approach our world in bad faith—proved more alert in discovering and pointing to the contradictions and tensions, than we did, that is those of us who try to face up to the same contradictions and tensions but in a committed way, identifying with the system. Let me make myself perfectly clear, I am not denying that our opponents also pointed to real and genuine problems, all that happened was that we, and that is my genuine conviction, who could have answered questions that arose in connection with these problems in a committed way that accorded with the interests of the people, were a little late with our answer. We hesitated, we had not really done our homework on the level of ideas and theories, and as a result our answers were not as credible as they should have been.

*Q: Clearly something was done to find out the reasons.*

A: Indeed. But it would be too simple to write it all off by saying that theoretical ways found themselves at a disadvantage,

that pragmatist practice forced theory to the ground, and meanwhile a social group, or rather a few turned up in the country who meanwhile expressed their theoretical sensitivity, and at the same time their oppositional critical sensitivity. Things are not as simple as that. What I think really happened was that those of us ready to accept responsibility for the functioning of this system and the realisation of our objectives had our time taken up with practical action, at the same time we were afraid to face up to what the experience of the 'fifties taught us, the fact that then theory got itself into a mess. Because of the sectarian and dogmatic use made of theory and the rightist deviations this elicited precisely amongst Communists, the importance of theory was devalued precisely amongst those most committed to the system, and this social effect also made itself felt amongst those doing theoretical work.

*Q: Following the 1974 resolution of the Central Committee of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party concerning access to, and participation in culture, and the ensuing legislation it was to be feared that the campaign would swallow the cause itself. Now, in view of the economic difficulties, the situation has just about reversed, and it is almost to be feared that there is a wish to return culture into the glass-case, placing it amongst the knick-knacks. This is particularly upsetting since there are signs that the old contradiction between elite and mass culture is raising its ugly head again. Between the Liberation and the sixties the foundations of education and culture reached far larger masses in this country than at any earlier time in its history. Around then the process slowed down, indeed it got bogged down as regards pretty wide sections of the population. What is your view of this?*

A: This opposition is certainly well-established in Hungarian history, though I do not think our case is in any way exceptional. For some centuries in Europe a most valuable elite culture took shape,



which was of primary importance to those who created it. Outstanding works show that this is true of Hungary as well. Sticking to the 20th century only it is sufficient to mention Bartók, Ady and Attila József to show what peaks high culture could reach while surrounded by the huge seas of backwardness. One could also speak of an abyss between the two. Much was done to bridge it in the past thirty years, especially in the most recent fifteen to twenty. Nevertheless I feel that the gap is widening once again. It is an irrevocable achievement of the recent history of this country that the educational standards of the people, as you put it yourself, reached unprecedented heights. The tempo, however, will not do, since what is demanded of high culture, and the resulting performance, once again soars high, while the gap between high culture and mass culture is once again widening.

*Q: Many sociologists are particularly concerned that Hungarian economic life perhaps does not favour mass culture, precisely because those sections of the population which are the most backward culturally are forced to participate in what has been called the second economy—connected with agriculture in rural, and service industries in urban areas—spending much of their leisure working rather than engaged in cultural activities.*

A: I am familiar with this argument and this conflict. I am not a pharisee, I do not deny the reality of this conflict. This social fact could, however, be placed in another context as well. The way I see things those who spend much of their leisure working household plots, or increasing production in other ways, are not really faced with the alternative of either devoting their spare time to production or culture. Their alternative is concrete productive activity on the one hand, and a useless filling in of time on the other.

*Q: Well, it is difficult to define what we should call useless filling in of time.*

A: It is difficult to define but precisely after weighing up our present levels of development and economic conditions, my view is that these people are doing work that is economically immensely useful for the whole of the community. It is not of the essence that it pays them to do so. If this option is closed to them, they are likely to turn to pseudo-activities, perhaps spending their time drinking since, I want to stress this, there is nothing else on offer at the moment. Goodness knows what else they might do, things that even if they do not do harm are certainly not useful.

*Q: Far be it from me to even suggest that something be withdrawn from these people, the more so since they spend a fair bit of what their prosperity brings them on improving their habitat, and that too is an important part of culture though it does not always imply education.*

A: Looking at access to and participation in culture from this angle I see the greatest conflict and the source of the greatest ill, in the fact that we have not really been able to put the related programme on a mass basis. This must not be confused with the mobilization of millions following the resolutions and the legislation. The quality and import of culture were not essentially changed while, and I want to stress this, human knowledge and available cultural goods made considerable progress. Getting back to what I said before, in my view the programme remains valid for many years to come for that very reason. You are right, there is a danger that we might forget this. We might forget since our attention is taken up by other troubles, because we were perhaps over-afraid a couple of years ago, two and a half years ago, at our last conversation, that there was too much talk about the programme of access to and participation in culture. The danger today is no longer that, what threatens us is that some might shy back from this cause, and that would be highly undesirable.

ANDRÁS KEPES



## KOLOZSVÁR, PARIS, BUDAPEST

*Béla Köpeczi talks about his life and career*

*Béla Köpeczi, historian and literary historian, Deputy Secretary-General of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, is professor of French at the Eötvös Loránd University of Budapest, and editor-in-chief of Helikon, a literary journal. He also holds of a number of public posts, and last but not least he is a member of the NHQ Editorial Board. In 1979 Hungarian Television prepared a film profile of Béla Köpeczi, an interview by the literary historian György Bodnár. What follows here is a somewhat abridged text of the film broadcast on October 24, 1979.*

**GYÖRGY BODNÁR:** What is your opinion of the role of biography in literary history and in the history of science?

**BÉLA KÖPECZI:** I think that biography is of importance even though I know full well that historians, literary historians and art historians are at present trying to keep away from the genre as far as possible, believing it to be far too subjective an approach.

When all is said and done we cannot adopt a scientific approach without considering the subjective facts as well; and it is up to biography to give, as it were, an explanation of how a work is born, even if this is not the only explanatory factor involved.

**Q:** The reason why I begin with this seemingly abstract professional question is that here and now, I think, some reference to biographical details is inevitable.

Your life-work is so diverse, you work in so many genres, that to find the origins and the evolution of the outlook behind it all, of the general human message, it becomes necessary somehow to roll back the film of your life and career. Another reason for doing so is your Transylvanian birth.

We know from the history of literature and history itself how determinant Transylvanian birth is, no less so than the culture and the social and national community in which countless generations were reared; and if this is true historically, then it is equally true in real life as well.

**A:** Transylvania was a very important factor for me, not only at the beginning but throughout my career. In that multinational country one naturally had a heightened sense of community affiliation; but another advantage, of great importance to my career, was the opportunity to become acquainted with several languages and cultures. And in fact I was to some extent capable of assessing my own Hungarian identity from the outside, because I couldn't help comparing it with other national identities. Thus language, literature and art all had to be compared, and if we add the nationalistic atmosphere in which we lived there, then over and above the comparisons, the contrasts were strikingly manifest. But I might add one more word of explanation. Transylvania is a historically determined country. I mean to say that not only its recent history but also the remote past continues to have a very great effect upon people. For instance, relatively few historic monuments, tangible witnesses to the past, have survived in the present territory of Hungary. Like Northern Hungary, Transylvania was not systematically devastated by Turkish occupation and so it preserved more of the relics of its distant past. If I recall walking the streets of Kolozsvár in the company of my teacher, Professor Lajos Kelemen, listening to him expounding on the monuments, then I have to say that this historicity both endorsed and nourished in us the idea of continuity and at the same time stimulated a certain kind of stoicism; we were drawn



to conclude that, in spite of all historical tribulations, we had to try and survive, and the quality of the survival was the all important question. This history itself was a superior grade of history, in the sense that it was a history capable of evoking and handing down values.

*Q:* The quality of being Transylvanian influenced your choice of profession, your attraction to the Romance languages, your interest in history and also your general outlook. One might risk calling this last an open outlook, one bound up with the social and historical frontier position entailed by Transylvanian identity.

I think you were lucky enough to receive an open outlook in your childhood, and that this open outlook was further nurtured by your choice of profession. You were privileged also to have been admitted to the Eötvös College, the Hungarian counterpart to France's École Normale Supérieure. That famous College, founded by Loránd Eötvös in honour of his father in 1896, was renowned for safeguarding and cherishing intellectual freedom. I wonder how this intellectual freedom persisted during the war years, when you were living and working within the walls of the Eötvös College.

*A:* I should begin by explaining that my road to the Eötvös College was an adventurous one. In 1940, of course, Northern Transylvania was again part of Hungary, and the Calvinist College of Kolozsvár was requested to nominate somebody for admission to the Eötvös College. The choice fell on me, and thus I was able to leave for Budapest at the expense of the Calvinist College of Kolozsvár, but only after "ratification" by the Eötvös College. That is to say, admission was subject to an examination conducted by professors and former students of the College. It was designed not primarily to test how much the candidate knew but rather the quality of this knowledge, and whether it was a sufficient basis on which to train an outstanding teacher, this being,

after all, the ideal of the Eötvös College. This is how I arrived at the College in October 1940, and I must tell you that it opened up a new world before me. The values to which you alluded had survived in this world, amongst them a strong critical spirit, an emphasis upon quality and, no less important, a certain urbane, humane ethos. I personally consider this to have been the lasting achievement of the progressive traditions of the Eötvös College. Let me add that there, in that library, practically everything worth knowing from written sources was accessible. All this was the background, the realm of possibility, the instruments on which you could call to display and to develop the qualities you felt in yourself; in harmony with the qualities of excellence deeply rooted in the institution.

*Q:* How did you, in the College, react to the German occupation and the Arrow-cross take-over?

*A:* For my part, in June 1944, I landed a job as a French translator with the Hungarian News Agency and, as such, had access to first-hand information on the political situation and, of course, events on the battlefields. From that time on I was the principal newsboy at the Eötvös College. On October 15, 1944, I was in the Bródy Sándor utca building of the Hungarian News Agency and the Radio. As an absolute novice, I was assigned the double task of making a round of calls to read Horthy's armistice proclamation to the organs of the press, and of translating the text into French. I was only half-way through the translation, when SS men appeared and stormed the building; we were driven at gun-point down to the cellar, and the negotiations started with the executive of the Agency to get us back to work. They allowed us home in the evening, on condition that we should report for duty the next morning.

At the Eötvös College they waited for me with incredible excitement and pumped me to find out what really had happened, or rather how the events should be inter-



preted. Previously they had entertained high hopes that Hungary would manage to get out of Hitler's war, to turn against Nazi Germany, and somehow find a democratic road; I don't mean a socialist road, I mean simply the road of democratic development in Hungary.

Q: You later found your way to a sister institution of the Eötvös College, the *École Normale Supérieure* in Paris.

A: French literature opened up a new world in the sense that it liberated me from the narrower preoccupations of Central and Eastern Europe. I had the luck to be the only student of French in my year, so I had to prepare carefully for every class. The college library gave me a thorough grounding, and I was able to read all the scheduled works. I can say that it was in effect through French literature that I was led to exchange parochialism for a wider world outlook.

After October 15, 1944, the day of Horthy's abortive attempt to withdraw from the war, I was called up because I refused to cooperate with the fascists at the Hungarian News Agency. Later I became a prisoner of war. After coming home, and having passed a teacher's qualifying examination and taken my doctor's degree, I obtained a French government scholarship. And indeed, under an agreement between the Eötvös College and the *École Normale Supérieure*, I spent a year in Paris as an internal student of the *École* and another year as an extern. The *École Normale* also trains teachers, but a considerable number of its graduates make their careers in public life, cultural affairs and the diplomatic service. For a year I shared rooms with Jean Perrot, who is now a professor at one of the Paris universities and head of the Finno-Ugric Centre there. This experience gave me a much better insight into the country. France not only has a literature, and marvellous artistic and cultural traditions: it has, of course, an everyday life as well. I became acquainted with it not only at the *École*, but at the home of my friend

Perrot at Malesherbes, south of Paris, where I could observe life first-hand in a family environment.

That was also a period in which my philosophical and ideological consciousness developed immensely. I attended lectures and seminars not only at the Sorbonne and the *École Normale*, but also at the *École des Sciences Politiques*, where I ran into all the diverse intellectual and political trends of the day. For example, it was at this institution that I first became involved systematically in Marxist studies. It was there too, in and around Saint-Germain-des-Près, that I familiarised myself with existentialism, and got to know its major representatives, Jean-Paul Sartre and others; and for this very reason my acquaintance with existentialism was not simply a bookish experience but a very personal affair.

Q: I think that Paris was also for you, to borrow an expression from Hemingway, an "moveable feast"; you keep on going back, and sometimes it is scholarly research which forces you to return. As far as I know, that was where your Rákóczi research project started. What was your motivation here, and how did you come to be occupied with the Rákóczi theme for nearly thirty years?

A: The initial impetus was actually given by the fact that both my undergraduate thesis and my doctoral dissertation dealt with Miklós Bethlen's memoirs of France. This period, the latter half of the 17th century, interested me very much, primarily as regards Transylvania, I was also engaged in studying the intellectual trends of the period, especially Cartesianism and its influence upon intellectual life in Hungary. Conducting researches in this field, I had the extraordinary luck to discover that deposited in the Archives of the French Foreign Ministry, and in the *Bibliothèque Nationale*, were countless sources upon which nobody had previously drawn, although it was known in the early 19th century that all the diplomatic papers concerning Prince Ferenc Rákóczi's war of independence had



been preserved in the ministerial archives. They consisted of the reports which French agents sent from Hungary to the court of Louis XIV. Quite a few historians had chronicled Rákóczi's war of independence without consulting these French diplomatic sources, and this was all the more exciting since Rákóczi had launched his war of independence in 1703 by building on the conflict between France and the Habsburgs, on Bourbon-Habsburg differences. At that time, however, I was still trying to reconstruct an image of the Hungarian nation from the foreign literature of the period, and so I endeavoured to make a thorough study of the entire press, including the pamphlet and political literature, historical and geographical publications, essentially from 1664 up to 1711.

I was certainly strongly influenced by the desire to convey some authentic image of the Hungarian people. It was the debate on "our place in the world" that prompted me to take up the subject.

Q: What you are saying makes it clear that, even in such a diverse life-work as your own, some sort of schedule necessarily asserts itself sooner or later. I mean to say that one theme follows on from another, and I should like to ask you about two of the paths you have trodden. One is the research on Rákóczi and Thököly, which has developed into a general study of the 17th and 18th centuries, epitomized in the achievements of a series of symposia known as the Mátrafüred Conferences.

A: The Mátrafüred conferences are a good illustration of our intention to escape from a provincial Hungarian outlook. The purpose was, first of all, to set the Hungarian people in the framework of the Central and Eastern European Enlightenment and, where appropriate, to place them in an all-embracing European context. Consequently research into the Hungarian Enlightenment became an international pursuit and, in line with our intentions, an interdisciplinary one. Thus we did not restrict the meetings to

literary historians, but opened them to historians, art historians and musicologists as well.

Q: It seems to me that you consider the Enlightenment primarily as a phenomenon in the history of ideas, and the cementing medium of the interdisciplinary complexity to which you have referred is the history of ideas. This is what I had in mind as your second major scholarly orientation, particularly your essays "Idea, History, Literature" and "The Ideology of the New Left". Why is it important in our times to study the history of ideas?

A: What interested me fundamentally was the significance of intellectual trends, of ideas themselves, in the general processes of history.

Instead of regurgitating the old—very primitive—ideological message, it is my goal to renew and enrich analysis by employing new methods of research in the history of ideas. This is why I studied the question of existentialism in literature and art, and the connections between literature and art and Neopositivism, or Marxism for that matter. The New Left is a more complex phenomenon in the sense that here it was necessary to deal with trends in the realm of ideas in a context broader than that of this realm alone. The reason why I held it necessary in the first place to analyse the ideology of the New Left was that I believed we were confronted with a new set of problems for the intelligentsia.

In the capitalist world the intelligentsia has become very important numerically; this intelligentsia is today no longer so absolutely subservient to the ruling class as in previous periods; it is seeking a sort of more or less independent status. Of course, subjective intention is one thing, and what this intelligentsia is objectively able to achieve is another thing.

In any case this intelligentsia appeared in 1968 as a more or less self-contained political principle, and this was its tragedy. It was unable to make any contact with the



working class or in general with the strata capable of preparing and executing social change either in France or elsewhere.

Anyway, in my opinion this new role of the intelligentsia, deserves attention even in its failure, and this is why I became engaged in its analysis.

*Q:* For two decades at least now you have been professor of French language and literature at the Loránd Eötvös University. Why, besides your many other occupations, do you stick to this post so firmly?

*A:* Because it is of help in two respects. One is that it allows me to keep in lively touch with youth. The other is that teaching is rewarding in itself and one is pleased that what one discovers can be passed on not only in writing but by word of mouth and the effects of particular discoveries on students can be evaluated.

*Q:* This conversation is taking place in the office of the Deputy Secretary-General of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, one of your many offices. This is where another story has to be taken up, that of the public servant and administrator. But this story did not start in this room. Let us try to recall the beginnings.

*A:* I came home from Paris in the autumn of 1949, at the time of the Rajk trial, after obtaining my doctor's degree at the Sorbonne, and for a while I was in the employ of the Hungarian News Agency.

Those were tragic times, but I was looking at events in Hungary with a foreigner's eyes. The factor basically underlying this was the fact that in Paris it was possible to have a clearer view of the developments of that great international scramble which at bottom was the conflict between capitalism and socialism. I made my choice, and I made it consciously, and this conscious choice led me—being rather unfamiliar with the circumstances at home, since I had been away for nearly three years—to apply what I perceived to be a general truth to my everyday life and to contemporary affairs in Hungary. Soon after returning,

however, I had to face the fact that my stay in Paris impressed nobody: I was unable to find a job, either at the University or in scholarship, and eventually I became a publisher's reader.

*Q:* Your job as a reader was followed by quite an important position in book publishing, and in 1953 you became Vice-president of the Publishers' Board. This involved you deeply in cultural policy and drew you closer to politics proper.

How do you, as a participant, judge the post-1956 period? I am curious about the debate now going on in Hungary: the relationships between continuity and breaks in history and in particular in this most problematic period.

*A:* Here one has to invoke a concept of the long term, for the question of continuity versus discontinuity can be approached only over a longer period. If I take quite a short term and begin personally, I can say that in 1953 I was appointed vice-president of the Publishers' Council, which was a kind of prototype of today's Publishers' Board, and that two years later I was appointed head of this authority. That was the period when it became possible and also necessary to break with dogmatism, and this introduced an element of discontinuity. But it was necessary to break in such a way as not to jeopardize all the achievements of socialism in Hungary after 1945. Because, in spite of all the errors, distortions and outright sins of dogmatism, Hungary had gone through changes which amounted, for my generation, to something like existential changes.

We had previously known only the reality of a capitalist society fraught with the vestiges of feudalism, in everyday life, in human relations, in the social hierarchy, and so forth. The change against all that was doubtless a favourable change, eagerly expected by all democratically-minded people. Under such circumstances, the real problem in the short period between 1953 and 1956 was to decide how to achieve a



break without putting all beneficial changes at risk. My own position was by no means easy, for publishing rapidly became a point of contention. It is common knowledge that political problems presented themselves in literary life, and that issues vital to our economic, social and political system were commonly raised in literary disguise. Under such circumstances, therefore, every literary quarrel betrayed a political conflict, and literary policy was the responsibility not of the various professional organs but of political leaders at the highest level. In those turbulent years, full of contradictory recessions, we at the Publishers' Board tried to correct all that had been wrong in literary policy during the previous period. We therefore launched a more open publishing policy.

If I ask myself how far I was ever committed to dogmatism, I can say that what ultimately mattered to me in the pre-1953 period was first of all the sheer force of the changes taking place. Thus I lived through this period, with all its compulsions and distortions and all its sins, in anticipation of some great possibility. The self-criticism of 1953 naturally brought to the surface all the contradictions which, until then, I myself had tended to suppress in order not to jeopardise the greater good. At the same time this self-criticism let loose in me a lot of thoughts which had begun to take shape in Paris. Therefore the stand I took between 1953 and 1956 was that of someone seeking to force an opening, a new departure.

The opening was decisively directed in the first instance towards the past and Hungary's image abroad. No conflicts of any kind arose here, but they did arise in domestic literary policy as soon as someone suggested turning to those writers who had published nothing in the years from 1948 to 1953. The question was how and on what conditions to allow someone like, let us say Lajos Kassák or László Németh to publish once again. Again it was continuity versus discontinuity, and I believe I tried soberly

to resolve the issue for myself this time. I would do nothing to endanger socialism or the national interest, permit publication of everything that implied enrichment and value, but set the appropriate political frontiers in matters of politics. This, of course, gave rise to conflicts, some of which obviously hung upon my own judgements; for it is impossible to judge by cultural criteria alone what is harmful and what is not at a given point of time: the whole environment must also be taken into consideration.

Briefly, all the plans which we had devised after 1953 were effectively implemented after 1956, and I think this was a marvellous age of expansion for publishing in Hungary. Of course, the reason why it shone so brightly, and here I suppose I was lucky, was the scale of debts accumulated from the previous period.

*Q:* All your achievements and plans, all the ramifications of your life-work, can after all be accommodated by a single framework. It is the basic framework of intellectual existence. So I feel you might summarise all you have said so far by answering the question: what is your opinion of the situation of the intelligentsia, of its possibilities and its future here in East Central Europe?

*A:* One might begin with Gramsci's concern for the organic intellectual, one who is both a scholar and a politician at the same time. I think society has a great need of the knowledge of the expert; but there is no need for intellectuals to be one-sided specialists. They should concern themselves with politics and public life, the very word 'politics' implies concern for the polis, the city-state, the whole society. Consequently, we need to reflect on social affairs, and it is up to socialism in this stable period of social progress, to make it possible for an intelligentsia of this type to evolve. For myself, I have always striven to try and realise this ideal of the intellectual, not merely in my own specialised branch of science and in other branches of learning,



not merely in social and public activity, but through the constant interaction of the two.

Perhaps I should add one more point. The intelligentsia of Central and Eastern Europe has a long tradition of seeking to serve just public causes, seeking to be useful and to do something for the common

good. I feel that this ethos of the organic intellectual is deeply rooted in the Hungarian tradition. It has a rich past, and I do not think this is a tradition which ought to be broken.

GYÖRGY BODNÁR

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# SURVEYS

C. M. HANN

## TÁZLÁR: THE FRONTIER COMMUNITY SINCE 1945

In the first part of this article I gave a short outline of the history of the Hungarian Great Plain community of Tázlár from the time of the first Cumanian settlements there in the Middle Ages. The devastation wrought by the Turks resulted in centuries of non-inhabitation, and gradual resettlement began only in the latter part of the nineteenth century. I stressed the importance of *tanya* or scattered-farm settlement in the heavy waves of immigration which brought the phase of the "frontier community" to a rapid close. By the outbreak of the Second World War Tázlár had been largely assimilated into the national society: the divisions of peasant society here reflected the class structure of the nation, and the economic and political problems of the country had direct repercussions upon the local community. In spite of this integration, the notion of a community in Tázlár remained elusive because of the persistence of what was by now commonly described in the sociographic literature as the "*tanya* problem." In the analysis of Tázlár since 1945 I shall concentrate upon the two inter-related themes of community and integration. Considerable progress has been made in the development of a planned nuclear centre in the lower of the two hamlets (Lower Tázlár), in increasing cohesion and raising

This is the second part of a paper, the first part of which (A frontier community on the Great Plain) appeared in NHQ 74.

the material and cultural standards of all citizens. At the same time *tanya* residence has remained attractive to many, and this is in part because Tázlár has once again diverged from the main stream of national development, and notably from the typical cooperative pattern of agriculture. Currently, the forces of integration are once again in command and Tázlár is converging to meet the national norm. But for a substantial period in the 1960s and 1970s the community was one of the scenes for a novel Hungarian experiment with gradualist, transitional institutions in agriculture. This experiment is characterised by the "specialist cooperative" (*szakszövetkezet*).

### *The emergence of the specialist cooperatives*

The post-war period opened with the Land Reform of 1945. This had only a small impact upon Tázlár because of the relative unimportance of large estates by this time. Nevertheless it gave many individuals the opportunity to build new *tanyas* and commence independent farming operations for the first time, thus further strengthening *tanya*-based smallholding. The population of Tázlár reached a peak of 3,408 persons in 1949, and of these 2,650 were to be found outside the two hamlet centres. In the same year at the national level the *Tanya* Council was formulating plans for the resolution of



the "tanya problem." These included the proclamation of numerous new communities in areas of scattered settlement, and the affiliation of other *tanya* zones to nearby towns. A ban was imposed on further *tanya* construction. These new policies gave rise to no radical changes in Tázlár in the 1950s. At first all individual farmers suffered, and output declined sharply as a result of the mistaken policies of the years of the "personality cult." There was also a great contraction in the landholdings of a large section of the peasantry, although apparently excessive holdings could in many cases be justified by the poor ecology of this region. Many farmers sought work in industry, while others applied for membership of the new cooperative groups which functioned in Tázlár from 1949 onwards. The latter, however, though benefiting from land transfers away from the richer sections of the independent peasantry, were never properly in a position to lay the foundations of an efficient large-scale agriculture. Their membership consisted primarily of those who had been unable to make a success of independent farming after 1945, those lacking in essential know-how; these cooperatives obtained very little aid from the State at this time. The cooperative movement was thus highly unstable in its early years, and several groups dissolved in 1956. They were inevitably viewed with some suspicion by the majority of farmers who were fearful of having their own lands appropriated. However in the closing years of the 1950s, following the government's abolition of compulsory deliveries and the general raising of agricultural prices, smallholders in Tázlár and throughout the nation once again became relatively prosperous. The great majority of the land surface was still privately owned. The curious fact about Tázlár is that even after almost all farmers had signed to join one of the three new production cooperative groups formed in the closing weeks of 1960, the smallholders retained their dominance, in contrast to the new pattern of farming

—the production cooperative—in the nation as a whole.

The institution which gave rise to this situation is known as the "specialist cooperative." It differs from the "production cooperatives" (*termelőszövetkezet*), which constitute the bulk of the cooperative movement, in a number of ways. The latter from the outset assumed full responsibility for the cultivation of all land in cooperative ownership (apart from the household plots\*), and besides their agricultural activity many founded large-scale commercial enterprises which later branched out into various supplementary activities, some without even tenuous connections with agriculture. The individual member was obliged to work a specified number of days in the collective sector, and in return (especially in more successful cooperatives) he would derive the overwhelming part of his personal income from the cooperative. The specialist cooperatives have, in comparison with the production cooperatives, had great difficulty in developing their collective sectors, although a minority have been unusually successful and many of the remainder have performed creditably, given adverse conditions and minimal state assistance.

The individual, on joining a specialist cooperative, takes all his land with him into the cooperative, with the exception of a notional household plot and special cultures such as vines. The household plot here is a notional entity only, because the farmer retains the use-rights over all his plots until such time as the group is ready to transfer them to some form of collective exploitation. He is not obliged to work in the "collective sector" (*közös*), but may continue with his family to devote himself to his traditional fields, both vineyards and arable holdings. For certain purposes, such as social security entitlements, this independent activity may, like work on the household plot in the context of the production co-

\* See Gyula Varga: Small-scale farming in Hungary, in this issue, p. 77.



operative, be counted nowadays as work in the collective sector. The farmer is expected to dispose of a large proportion of his output through the group, but since the latter, as the agent of the State, has usually been able to offer very favourable prices, this is no hardship for the member and merely simplifies his marketing. He also has the right, as does every member of a cooperative, to participate in its organization. The specialist cooperative, is a democratic, self-governing body controlled ultimately by the general assembly of the entire membership. Finally, the member has the opportunity to purchase many services from the group, including supplies of fertilizers and feeds and the mechanical execution of a wide range of tasks (sowing, harvesting, etc.) on his individual plots.

The establishment of specialist cooperatives in communities such as Tázlár had several justifications. In the first place, scattered settlement posed a formidable natural obstacle to field consolidation. Secondly, the economic importance of smallholders' fragmented fruit and viticulture in areas such as the Danube-Tisza interfluvium also weighed heavily against premature collectivization. However it was always stressed that the specialist cooperative was a lower form of collective and that the natural tendency of development would gradually strengthen its collective sector.

#### *The situation in Tázlár*

In retrospect it is easy to understand the reasons for the failure to implement this scheme in Tázlár. From one point of view it is a tribute to the realization of cooperative democracy that the elected leadership of local farmers made no attempt to strengthen the collective sector through the appropriation of the lands of their fellow-members. The collective land area did expand gradually, but this was due to the voluntary ceding of plots by some emigrants, or by

farmers who found that, with the help of the group in supplying goods and machinery services, they no longer needed more than a few hectares of land. Many members prospered in the new situation, particularly in the years after 1968 when the farmers of specialist cooperatives, most of whom were still working full-time on their own farms, were optimally placed to exploit the opportunities created by government policies designed to stimulate small-plot farming in general. In the meantime the collective sector continued its piecemeal assimilation of the inferior lands the independent farmers did not need, and suffered from underinvestment and general neglect. Tázlár soon came to typify an extreme case of the "rich peasant and poor cooperative" dichotomy (noted by István Lázár in NHQ 63), and whereas the "poverty" of some cooperatives stemmed solely from the lack of central funds and disguised a quite satisfactory return on capital, the specialist cooperatives of Tázlár suffered from both the absence of outside financing and from local mismanagement. It was difficult to find employees of the right calibre to work in the cooperatives, and the leaders themselves were often most concerned with their own personal farms. Several large-scale fruit and vine investments failed completely in the 1960s due to the lack of professional advice. The cooperatives confined their own production to field-crops, and their other activities to supporting the profitable animal and wine production of their members.

The conditions of the specialist cooperative contributed towards the resolving of the *tanya* problem, and simultaneously made a final solution very difficult to achieve in the short term. On the positive side, it was thanks to the large sums now obtainable in independent farming that many *tanya* families were able to afford the construction of new houses in the village. More than 100 families have made this move over the last fifteen years, building entirely new streets and transforming the character of



Lower Tázlár. A hamlet centred around the tavern and a few shops gave way to a modern community of almost 1,000 persons with numerous central institutions and services. Noteworthy in this process of modernization was the role of the State and of the local council in the accomplishment of extensive building programmes (schools, surgery, culture-house, pavements, post-office, shops, etc.), and major ventures such as the piped water network. The private housebuilding boom as yet shows no sign of abatement and the local council has ambitious plans for the future, including park landscaping and the further development of cultural facilities. The solutions to the social problems of *tanya* settlement are being achieved not, as was once envisaged, through administrative measures and decrees, but pragmatically in the course of the general rise in living standards, and under the influence of wise community planning. This conscious policy to promote the central functions of the lower centre has inevitably been accompanied by discrimination against Tázlár's upper hamlet, and has caused some resentment amongst its inhabitants.

*The specialist cooperatives today*

In recent years, beginning in 1975 with the arrival of a team of young, qualified professionals to head the management of the specialist cooperative, modernization of the agricultural structure of the community has also proceeded apace, though less smoothly than the growth of the village centre. In one sense, the underlying trend ever since 1945 has been towards the greater integration of smallholders. In place of semi-autonomous production utilizing relatively large areas, they have been induced to substitute co-operation with the collective sector and more intensive methods. Moreover, in Tázlár as everywhere in Hungary, many families now have one or more of their members in regular employment off the farm, either in one of the local cooperatives or State farms, or as

a commuter to more distant urban factories. The very effectiveness of recent government policies in stimulating output through price incentives is further indication of the integration of small-farming: the farmers of the specialist cooperative are not an isolated reservation of "private interests" but a group susceptible and responsive to general agricultural policies. Within the total number of small-farms (including the household plots and the auxiliary plots of industrial workers, etc.) they occupy a distinctive position, but, as Minister of Agriculture Pál Romány wrote in his article in NHQ 71, all small-farming takes place in the general framework of "an agriculture in socialist ownership." The fact remains nonetheless that at the time of the socialist reorganization of agriculture it was not foreseen that the distinctive institutions of the specialist cooperative would continue for two decades to guarantee small producers, many of whom would remain full-time farmers, the use of landholdings considerably in excess of the norm for the household plots of the production cooperatives, as well as the freedom to work individually, free of obligations towards the collective sector. Since 1975 the specialist cooperative leadership in Tázlár, frequently in conflict with the wishes of its members and in closer association with higher State administrative organs, has been attempting to bring about greater conformity to the national pattern. At long last, promising new investments have been undertaken in the collective sector; *tanyas* have been acquired by compulsory purchase orders and demolished to make way for large-scale vineyards. The leadership has also bravely tackled the land question and pushed through schemes designed to enable the most rational expansion of the common acreage. Attachments to traditional family plots explain the dismay with which the whole community received these policies. However, there can be no doubt that the losses in small-farm production consequent upon collectivization today are infinitely



less serious than they would have been twenty years ago. The majority of farmers no longer need large resources in land and are able to attain the output levels they desire by virtue of their membership of the specialist cooperative. At first it was objectively beyond the capacity of the collective sector to assure the conditions for the technical integration of small-farms, and the appropriation of land would have had a direct effect upon the productive potential of the farm. In the decades which have elapsed since the socialist reorganization of agriculture, the existence of the specialist cooperatives was one of a number of factors which facilitated the long-term strengthening of the collective sector without entailing shortfalls in production.

Just as the specialist cooperatives form a much more heterogeneous category than the production cooperatives, the membership *within* Tázlár is also highly differentiated. Apart from those who are more or less integrated already, there are some who still aspire only to the traditional levels of farm output, who believe that the present size of their landholdings is essential to their enterprise, and who even justify continued *tanya* residence by the need to be as close as possible to these plots.

It is impossible to know how specialist cooperatives will develop in the near future; it is unlikely that present trends will lead to convergence with the production cooperative. The experiment may already be hailed as a success in terms of easing the national economic transition to a socialist agriculture. A common fallacy which underlies many Western analyses of rural societies following collectivization is the assumption that similar institutions and central planning lead necessarily to a dull uniformity of social structure throughout the countryside. The truth, as Antal Gyenes noted in 1976 in an article published in *Sociologia Ruralis*, is that Hungary's agrarian society remains in constant flux and is "presently extraordinarily varied and, in many respects,

surprising." However, while heterogeneity may in itself be highly desirable, one naturally should not expect to discover under socialism social distinctions reminiscent of capitalist rural society. With these points in mind, let us pay a short visit to the specialist cooperative community of Tázlár and meet a few of the citizens still resident of *tanyas*.<sup>1</sup>

#### *Tázlár families today*

We set out on the road from Soltvadkert, Tázlár's nearest neighbour at ten kilometres, and always a large and more prosperous community, in which the specialist cooperatives were able to develop strong collective sectors at an early stage. After proceeding five kilometres in a south-easterly direction we reach a large wooden cross by the side of the road. This marks the Tázlár boundary, but there is no conspicuous change in the random distribution of the *tanyas* and their access tracks, nor in the mixed landscape of large fields, small vineyards and seemingly infertile rough grazing land. Two kilometres past this cross the road bends slightly to pass through the upper hamlet. Another subtle bend, and after a further three kilometres one is in the main village. Tázlár extends for a further perfectly flat five kilometres beyond this centre, before merging imperceptibly into the less developed *tanya* world of Bodoglár, in the direction of Szeged. We are not travelling so far. Our focus will be on about one square mile, north of the main road and adjacent to the Soltvadkert boundary. The land here is of relative good quality and of average *tanya* density. It was settled in the main by farmers from Soltvadkert, who bought parcels of around twenty *bold* (11.5 hectares) at the turn of the century; but the larger properties of one or two rich peasant farmers (*paraszt nagygazda*) were also preserved intact until the 1940s.

<sup>1</sup> This visit was actually paid in summer 1978, but the profile of this *tanya* world has not changed substantially since — CMH.



Some inhabitants have retained closer ties with the older centre of Soltvadkert than with either of the Tázlár hamlets. The principal *tanya* access tracks fall perpendicularly to the main road. After about a mile these tracks peter out in a zone of sand dunes where *tanya* penetration ceases. Electricity has been available along these access tracks for several years, but supplies are not extended to every *tanya* household.

From the road, one receives an impression here of generally large fields, implying collective cultivation. In fact—as has been mentioned previously—a policy of active appropriations has been readopted only in the last few years, after a lull of more than two decades since the very large private farms were broken up. The aging population raised no effective protest. The specialist cooperative owns the buildings of the largest of the former private farms, but in spite of many predictions that large-scale agriculture would find some practical use for such buildings in the new pattern of farming (as storehouses, etc.) the cooperative has not utilized them and they have fallen into decay. When another large *tanya* came onto the market a few years ago it was bought by a neighbouring smallholder, but later it was remembered that, in now possessing two *tanyas*, he was in violation of the law. The property then reverted to the cooperative, and it now serves as low-rent accommodation for an employee of the collective sector, a tractor-driver who is unlikely to stay there for very long. Other *tanyas* have been abandoned as places of residence, though their owners have retained proprietorship and return to cultivate the gardens or associated vineyards in summer months. One individual used to return regularly from his new home beyond the Tisza. Imre Bugyi is one of those who commutes out from Soltvadkert at peak periods, and hence uses the *tanya* in the manner characteristic of the Great Plain in the past, as an aid to farming in the summer season rather than as a permanent residence. He is a former chairman of the specialist

cooperative in Tázlár, and, although replaced by the new young leadership in 1975, he remains more popular than they in the eyes of many farmers, and retains the respect and affection of his neighbours here.

Another prosperous farmer long resident in Soltvadkert disobeyed the law and constructed an imposing new *tanya* with modern cellars and garage, next to his exemplary orchards in this same corner of Tázlár. This extravagance cost Sándor Ördögh a substantial fine (for building without permission), but he was rumoured to be well-satisfied with the result. Often, however, the decision to leave the *tanya* marks a scaling down of agricultural activity on the part of the farmer, and sometimes his complete retirement. In such cases the buildings and the vines degenerate extremely quickly, and the buildings are frequently destroyed by their owners, care being taken to salvage valuable materials, such as roofing tiles.

The cooperative has no interest in acquiring more old *tanyas* except where they fall in areas scheduled for large-scale re-development. Those who still intend to leave have a good chance of finding a buyer for their property only when it has electricity and is situated near the main road. Ferenc Berta works in the technical centre of the cooperative in the village. He is only thirty, but has managed to build a house in the centre, where his wife and children already live. The stables at the *tanya* and the importance of the income he derives from milk have induced Ferenc Berta to stay on for a few more months. Mrs. Pál Péter is a widow of fifty-seven who, with one of her sons, still remains active on the land, and with the aid of the contributions of another son, a wage-worker in Soltvadkert, has laid the foundations of a large new house in the upper hamlet; she will move there permanently in the near future, at which point their farming activity will probably cease altogether.

Amongst those most likely to live out their lives on the *tanyas* of their forebears,



we may note first of all a number of descendants of the former prosperous middle-peasantry who have successfully adapted to new conditions. They belong to a stratum which includes most of the large-scale individual producers in Tázlár, today, and it is above all the value of their production which has been retained for society by the institution of the specialist cooperative. For example, there is Imre Ördögh, who lived through many difficult years with the stigma of being labelled a *kulák*, and who even today is far from reconciled with the land policies and the general performance of the cooperative. Yet from his four hectares of land and three-quarters of a hectare of vines, he sells to the State, through the cooperative, produce worth over 60,000 forints annually. He also pays out to the cooperative some 5,000 forints each year for machine services. At the same time, his wife and sole companion on the *tanya* is regularly selling large quantities of fresh garden produce on the open market in Soltvadkert. Imre Ördögh is sixty-five years old now, and illness makes work in the vineyards very difficult for him. He resolves this difficulty as his parents might have done in the past, and as his rich neighbours do today, by seeking to hire labour on a daily basis. That, perhaps, should be the substance of his complaint today: not the institution of the specialist cooperative, which allows him so much latitude and independence, but the general economic climate which is both driving up the price of hired labour and squeezing its supply.

Let us take some other examples of producers who have flourished in recent conditions. László Szabó (born 1926) is a specialist wine producer and one of the largest in the community. He is not a very popular man, and has the greatest difficulty in recruiting day-labourers; nor is he well liked by the local tax inspectors, who suspect him of entering false declarations of his grape harvest in order to increase his profits through private selling. Despite his large income, the living conditions on his *tanya*

have not greatly changed in recent decades. Not far away, Sándor Nemcsók now farms only a small area of poor-quality land on the edge of the sand-dune zone, but his years of experience enable him to produce remarkable results from such meagre resources. In addition to apricots and melons, plus some milk and pork, he too specializes in wine, with perhaps a lucrative sideline in spirit production. Sándor Nemcsók is now fifty-seven, he feels that the individual farmer has been somewhat squeezed in recent years, but his own industry and resourcefulness have not been found wanting, and it is the whole society which is benefiting from these qualities.

A couple of individuals of a younger generation are full-time small cultivators on a slightly more modest scale. Mihály Péntes did not inherit a large land area or good-quality vineyards. He produces less than half the value of Imre Ördögh's farm output, although he is twenty years younger and, until his eldest child recently started work on a State farm, had two children to support at home. From savings in recent years Mihály Péntes has purchased expensive vine-spraying equipment, and with this he can now earn substantial sums through spraying in the vineyards of his older neighbours, in addition to saving effort in his own. Gábor László, born 1938, is one of his nearest neighbours, and likewise the head of a household where neither adult has any off-farm activity, but which, in comparison with the older producers we have already met, is not making the most of the opportunities afforded by the specialist cooperative. He purchases fewer services from the cooperative than the larger producers, and at peak periods his wife occasionally assists on the adjacent farm of Sándor Nemcsók. They have two adopted children—one of them a Gypsy girl—and Gábor László is the representative of this *tanya* cluster on the Tázlár local council.

Other households in this cluster diverge from the norm of largely self-provisioning,



full-time farm enterprises. They are not exclusively concerned with small-plot farming and procure their livelihood in part by some other means. There is much variety amongst these households. László Mednyánszki (born 1950) commutes to work on the railways in Budapest, and during his absences his wife is left alone on their small *tanya* with their young children. In summer they are usually joined by members of her family from another community, attracted by the high wages paid in the season for agricultural labouring. Sometimes the whole family contracts with one of the neighbouring farmers, and the children too are taken along for the day. This family, and another very similar in character, does a little gardening for subsistence requirements but produces virtually no agricultural commodities for sale through the cooperative. Another family which occasionally sets out as a unit of hired labour is that of Elek Csontos, born in 1914 and now a pensioner of the State farm which controls large vineyards on the borders of Tázlár. The eldest of his six children are already full-time workers for the State farm, and since Elek himself is now fond of putting in more work on his own plots, both to satisfy family consumption needs and to market through the cooperative, the time this family has free to work for others is now very restricted.

This does not exhaust the social types we can identify within this one small corner of Tázlár. There are other families which manage to combine various types of wage-labour with significant small-farm commodity production. These are the so-called worker-peasants, to be found throughout the Hungarian countryside, but in Tázlár rather more conspicuous in the new village centre. There are also several pensioner households, some of them living comfortably off the results of their own past labour or with the aid of their children resident in the village or in remote towns, but others struggling to maintain themselves on the small allowance they receive from the co-

operative. The problems of old persons are greatly intensified by difficult communications, which impede them from maintaining regular contacts with relatives elsewhere.

#### *Some conclusions*

What lessons can be drawn from this short visit to a few of the inhabitants of one corner of Tázlár's still sprawling *tanya* world? First and foremost there is the implication that the positive economic results of the experiment with specialist cooperatives should be balanced against some negative socio-cultural manifestations. Tázlár has once again become atypical. Only in communities with this type of cooperative is there such extensive hiring of labour in Hungary today. Only in such communities did government policies designed to increase small-farm output run the risk of intensifying remnants of the traditional stratification pattern.

As we saw in the first part of this article, Tázlár had conformed to the traditional pattern much later than most Hungarian communities. Now she was clinging to it all the more stubbornly, and isolating herself from the general trend of national development. It was only with considerable difficulties, during which the self-managing character of the cooperative was seriously weakened, that towards the end of the 1970s the community began to move in the direction of a properly integrated agriculture based upon a strong collective sector. It remains uncertain whether the delay in reaching this equilibrium will have lasting effects upon the social structure of the community. In visiting one cluster of *tanyas* we should not forget that, although representatives of all of these household types and interest groups may also be found in the main village, here the polarities are altogether less sharp. In fact, in the new streets one is struck rather by the general similarities of house sizes and designs,



similarities which extend to the interiors. The very existence of this new community must be set down in part to the credit of the specialist cooperative.

In recent years, the authorities have been able to exert ever greater influence over events in the community, and have set about eliminating the unusual features of the specialist cooperative, while maintaining the will to produce of the majority of medium smallholders through sensible pricing policies. The long-term success of this agricultural policy is best indicated by the be-

haviour of the majority of young persons. The obtaining of skilled qualifications is their general aspiration today, whether they then choose to leave Tázlár or to stay in the village and perhaps work in the cooperative's centre. Amongst the children of the well-to-do smallholders there is little willingness to remain either as full-time farmers or as *tanya* residents, and hence the social disparities so characteristic of this world in the late 1970s will sooner or later be eliminated.

## FROM OUR NEXT ISSUES

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## A NEW TOOL IS BORN

In the village of Kakasd in Tolna County (*kakas* is a word of Slav origin), on the *bobstel* (German, meaning a high place) stands a *prepelák* (Rumanian word) or, as the Székelys from Andrásfalva in the Bukovina\* call it, a *csélbe*. This is an implement used for drying hay. A roughly 3-metre-high pine tree is cut down, its bark is stripped, and the branches are shortened: this *csélbe* is then dug into the earth. Grass and lucerne are placed on its branches where they turn into hay. Then the hay is taken to the barn on a special hay-carting wagon, the *rëkk*.

*Rëkk* is a word of English origin derived probably from rack: later it became the name of the implement. This is made likely by the fact that the idea of the *rëkk* reached Andrásfalva in the Bukovina through "Americans," that is returning emigrants. From there it moved, with the men who made it, to the Bácska and finally to Hungary, in particular to Kakasd where they and it found a new home: the only place where the *rëkk* exists to this day.

I mentioned five foreign words which have more or less become "Magyarized"; in any case, they indicate Hungarian material and spiritual property. Two are connected with Hungarian ethnography which proves that there are countless things in our popular culture which come from other cultures and reflect the impact of other nations, from the oldest layers of the language to the different branches of folk art to economic and object ethnography.

There is another variant of the phenomenon of take-over, transformation, and integration: this is when folk art takes something from high art. There are examples such as the words and tune of some folk

songs. It should be mentioned, however, that the impact is reciprocal in poetry, music, etc. and also in economic ethnography. Modern weaving looms still follow the basic principle of the primitive popular hand-loom. The early specimens of the most popular contemporary vehicle, the motor car, looked like coaches.

There are also multiple transplants and feedbacks. Let me mention the loom once again. The more up-to-date and productive fast-shuttle weaver's loom which developed from the popular loom has returned to the people and to folk art albeit in its decadent stage when it became cottage art.

The case of the *rëkk* shows similar characteristics. It stems from a foreign people (uniquely from the North American continent). The model of the first *rëkk* made in the Bukovina was certainly an implement used in America.

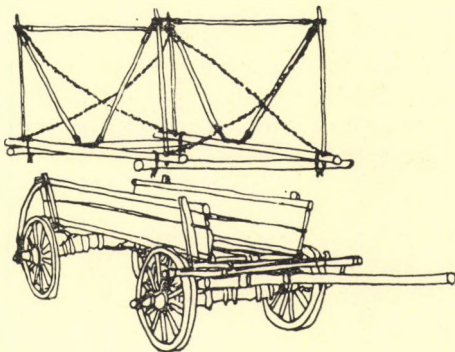
—There were never more than fifteen at any time;

—the *rëkk* never spread beyond Andrásfalva, or rather beyond villages to which people from Andrásfalva moved;

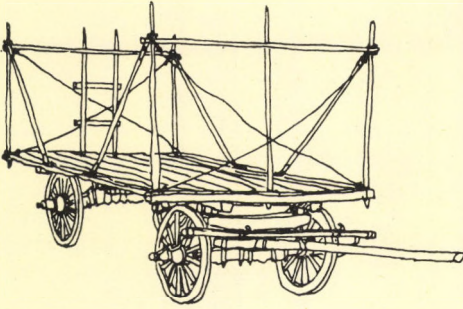
—its present forms have been evolved in the last half-century when traditional popular culture ceased to develop, and when, with successive decay, its existing values started to lose their function;

—the tool developed in the old home in the Bukovina, and it was taken several hundred kilometres to a very different world;

\* The Székelys from Transylvania were settled in the Bukovina (Northern Moldavia) after it became one of the Habsburg crownlands in the 18th century. They were resettled as part of population transfers early in, and shortly after, the Second World War.







—it developed despite modern mass-produced machines which gained ground in agriculture, and despite large-scale farming which accelerated the end of traditional peasant farming;

—the stages of evolution can be linked to dates and names;

—the most practical form in contemporary use could be mass-produced if the demand arose;

—despite all the foregoing the *rëkk* is typically ethnographic. It was made by craftsmen, or the users themselves, to satisfy the needs of peasant farming. It is thus the product of the collective spirit of a defined popular culture satisfying its requirements and tastes.

\*

Ágoston Molnár, from Kakasd, born in Andrásfalva in 1910, said of the *rëkk*:

“András Molnár was my uncle, János Dávid was only a relative—later he became the village headman—when they came back from America they brought the *rëkk* to Bukovina. They did not actually bring it, they brought it in their heads, in their imagination. At that time many went, there was good money in America navvying. As far as I know they returned in 1918 and started farming as best they could with their money.”

Lajos Farkas, born in 1908 in Andrásfalva, remembers the story of the *rëkk* differently. “Those ‘Americans’ came back

later than '18, it was in '20 or '22. They came back after things had settled. They had gone away because things had been bad in Europe. There was fighting and fighting all over the place. They had run away from fighting, they did not want to be soldiers. When the storm was over they returned and brought back many things. They brought the *forgósbakó* (sledge), the *marker* (ruler for sowing corn), and until their return nobody knew of the *fürgentyűs* wagon or the *rëkk*. The latter was drawn by Anti Buta (Stupid). His name was Stupid but he was not stupid at all. He had observed everything accurately and he drew them beautifully, like a draughtsman. When Buta, Dávid, and Molnár came home these things were introduced. They had many dollars, they went to the Bánát and bought things there, implements such as a rotary hoe and tractors. They obtained or made things which had not existed earlier and they told people that new things were better than the old and taught them how to use them. Until then people used to broadcast maize as well as wheat, without thinking. After it shot up they hoed the lines and thinned out the stems. Now these people made peasant work easier and simpler. This was also the purpose of the *rëkk*. It made hay transportation faster and easier. One man was able to load it alone.”

The sides, *fürgentyű*, and floor boards were taken off the wagon. The *rëkk* was put on the rear and front-wheel pair connected with the stretcher (*nyújtó*). The *rëkk* consisted of an oblong-shaped loft (a board platform like a lorry). A heightening device (*tabarcs*) prevented its touching the wheels. A slit was cut in the loft for the larger rear wheels and surrounded with planks so that the hay did not get in the way. The loft—the boards—are held lengthwise by two beams, each appr. 4 metres long. The 2-metre-long transversal beams are placed on these; there are five of them. In front three to four horns are placed upwards (these are 1.5–2-metre-long pales), two in the rear. The outermost have one support each leaning against the longer side



of the oblong loft, so there are altogether four. Crosswise a connecting pale—a *laboda*—holds the upper parts of the horns. (See illustration no. 1.) A forage ladder is mounted on the loft in front, where the driver sits. They do not sit on top, the horses are driven from below.

Why is it better to load hay onto this than onto a ladder wagon?

"It is difficult to load the ladder wagon. One man can't do it. He has to balance towards the pole, and crumple gussets on the corners which give shape to the load. No need to do this on the *rëkk*. The horns, connecting pales, and supports hold the hay in place and one man can do the loading. I used to pitch the two sides first, then the centre. I trod it down thoroughly, then I turned it twice in the same way, doing so three times altogether. You can do it alone but it's better if you have some help."

\*

I don't wish to describe the cart-ladder variant in detail. Although important for the development of the *rëkk*, it is popular and well-known. Another less known but important version which resembles the cart ladder is what the Székelys call the *reszkoj*. The main difference is that the transversal beams are replaced by a 5-6 centimetres thick and appr. 25 centimetres wide hardwood board. Four holes are drilled into it. The board is pulled onto the specially shaped ends of the wagon sides through the two inner holes—secured with pins—the cart ladders stick out through the outer holes. ("Put up the front *reszkoj*, put up the rear, insert the cart ladder from right and left.")

\*

"The *rëkk* here is not like the *rëkk* at home and even that is not like the American. Anti Buta and the others said that the American *rëkk* had rubber wheels and was pulled by a

tractor. It was unnecessary to unload it, it had a tilting platform and dumped off the hay. This could not be made in the Bukovina, there was no material for it. So they did what they could. Not everybody had two wagons so they made a *rëkk* which could be mounted on one."

The first drawing shows the ancestor, the primitive *rëkk*. The entire upper part can be taken down from the wheels, the sides put back on the bottom part and the whole thing can be used again as a wagon. The portrayed *rëkk* was made in Kakasd; Lajos Farkas, who made it, said it was made in 1946 following a Bukovina model which he remembered, and remembers to this day. Lajos Farkas farms his own small-holding in Kakasd and is a jack-of-all-trades. He made all the wooden parts of his farm implements himself, in his own workshop "exactly as back in Bukovina." There is a slight modification on this specimen too, on the rear, where, on the central horns, he has placed a small ladder to make climbing onto the hay and treading on it easier.

So the *rëkk* has undergone its first European transformation. Since the original, the American copy, is unknown, one can presume the extent of this change only on the basis of what has been related by informants. I surmise that the overseas *rëkk* was the predecessor of a modern contemporary agricultural machine, the Hamster picker and dumper. So the ancestor of a modern farming implement was the model of the new peasant tool in the Bukovina.

"Not everybody had one," said Ágoston Molnár. I think five men owned a *rëkk*: Sándor Ömböli, János Dávid, András Molnár, the Zsók and the Buta family. When we moved to the Bácska Zsók took his, but nobody brought it to our new home in Hungary. If I am not mistaken the first who had a *rëkk* here was Jóska Sebestyén, Jóska Kák, as we nicknamed him."

This was the particular *rëkk* made by Lajos Farkas after the model in Andrásfalva. He made it in Kakasd; the ironwork was



also made in Kakasd by János Katona, a blacksmith from Andrásfalva.

Many hundred kilometres from the Bukovina, at a great distance from its original home, the *rëkk* began its new life.

Bukovinian Hungarian folk culture tried to implant itself, with the *rëkk*, in a new world, where the new settlers met with the tradition-preserving force of the few Swabians left behind, and the abandoned dwellings, farm buildings, and implements of those who left the tokens of German folk culture and the products of modern husbandry.

It would have been impossible to recreate Andrásfalva, Józseffalva, the whole of the Bukovina territory, here in Kakasd or in other villages where the Székely resettled; the objective conditions here were more advanced, and the natural conditions differed. Their reception in Hungary had much to do with it as well. Nobody could say that the Székelys from Bukovina who were resettled via Bácska were received with enthusiasm and sympathy. The feeling of insecurity and inferiority which has been alive since Mádéfalva\* and which, to a lesser degree, exists also today, has struggled with the most important law of nature, the instinct of survival which suggested that traditions should be given up for the sake of integration. Almost nothing in and around the house suggests Székely culture. The garments and objects which they brought with them or had made here were not put to use. They stored most of them away in attics and closets. Only the spiritual domains of Székely folk culture survived. Sporadic phenomena which recreated one or the other farming implement in the alien world of the new home erupted from these hidden, often hurt and humiliated layers, the *csélbe*, *marker*, *forgós bakó*, *fürgentyűs wagon*

\* A grave and bloody defeat on January 7, 1764, suffered (and long remembered by the name of "Peril of Mádéfalva" and *Siculicidium*) when the Székelys resisted reorganization as Frontier Guard Regiments. (*The Ed.*)

(the latter is still in use, it has even come in useful in the cooperative), and the *rëkk*. Two *rëkks* are still used in the cooperative for feeding. But they have undergone further modifications. The cart-ladder variant has been combined with the *rëkk* so that there is no loft and the horns are placed on the cart-ladder side. (Picture no. 2.) This implement—still called *rëkk*, sometimes *labodás rëkk*—can be put onto the sides without taking the wagon apart. And it can also be put on stake brace and wicker framework carriages. Mounting it is fast and simple enough. He throws it down in a jiffy and puts it back, if necessary."

"I don't know who made the first one. We invented it ourselves maybe before 1960 when the cooperative did not yet exist. I don't know but it must have been around 1960."

These years, between 1959 and 1962, can be accepted, this is what most people remember. So the American *rëkk* was transformed around 1920 on another continent into the Bukovina *rëkk* and another 40 years later it became the *rëkk* of Kakasd. This happened in the years when with the development of cooperative farming the implements of small-holders started to decay and die out. In fact the transformation and evolution lasted longer because Pius Katona combined the *reszkoj* variant of the cart-ladder device with the *rëkk*. He replaced the transversal beam with the *reszkoj* which had four holes in it. "I remember exactly that I made it in 1968. The wife always egged me on to make a *rëkk*. It would make our work much easier, she said. So I made one like that of Andris Daradics but I put a *reszkoj* on mine."

Vince Sebestyén thinks his *rëkk* was made the same year. He has also added some innovations. The horns are fixed onto the cart-ladders with hinged iron straps. When the wagon is running empty they can be bent down on the inside, they don't get stuck in the branches of trees. Vince Sebestyén claims to be the inventor.



"When I don't use it I don't have to take it apart. I just fold the horns and hang the whole device on the wall in the barn; it doesn't take up much room."

This type—only one of its kind exists—is very easy to handle. It is so practical it could be mass-produced. Perhaps it is not too obsolete, being still very useful for the transportation of hay, straw, and other roughage. This would complete the life cycle of this implement which wandered over long distances was, passed on by creative human hands and whose shape is so different from the ancestor which inspired Stupid Anton. It is no exaggeration to say that a new tool has been born.

\*

Yes, a new tool has been born before our very eyes. If in another hundred years somebody inquired into the story of the *rëkk* he would go through the same experience as we did. We do not know all the reasons for its transformations and modifications and we do not know the names of the authors of those changes. The tool stands before us as the product of a community: it is timeless,

its creators are nameless, they represent the work and spirit of the community.

The spiritual culture of the people of Andrásfalva materialized in the *rëkk*. The tool itself was never taken from America to the Bukovina or from the Bukovina to Hungary.

"We carved it according to our own ideas. But maybe if Buta and his lot had not seen the American there would have been no *rëkk*." This seems pretty likely; it is also very probable that if it had developed before our eyes it would never have become such a strange object with so many peculiarities, especially considering the time of its birth and evolution.

I mentioned earlier that the development of the *rëkk* falls into the period of the decay of traditional peasant culture. This implement, however, despite every adverse circumstance, has a role to play, it is used in ever new forms and shapes. This proves also that a people does not stop its creating, adjusting, and integrating activity and it can never stop. If there is no active, alive folk culture there is no people either.

SÁNDOR CZAKÓ



# PRESS REVIEW

## PUBLIC DEBATE ON EDUCATIONAL POLICY

In Hungary, the educational system has been subject of constant debate and frequent changes have been made over the past three decades. Perhaps never has so much been spoken and written about it as in the past few months. It is beyond any doubt that the debates have contributed to polishing and refining the system, but during the process even the topics themselves have undergone changes. Today the point at issue is not the number of lessons per week on mathematics or Hungarian grammar necessary for a third grader in the secondary schools (training the age bracket from 14 to 18 years). The central question is the analysis of the extent to which the school, and particularly the secondary schools, can contribute to bringing about a harmony of individual interests and the requirements of society. In other words and more simply: whether or not the schools are training young people to face life.

In 1948, the year that saw the nationalization of schools run by various religious denominations and of private schools, together with the introduction of standard textbooks nationwide, the educational experts were guided by the following major objectives: to organize compulsory primary education throughout the country in the eight-grade general school (covering the 6 to 14 year olds), to transform secondary education (including the curricula) and to set higher education on a footing appropriate to the

demands of the new society. The coordination of tradition and the new ideas was an awkward process. It soon became quite clear that the rapid increase in the number of educational institutions and students demanded regular qualitative changes and that it was essential to establish new types of schools capable of keeping abreast of the requirements of social and technological development. This is, for example, what led to the birth of vocational schools which, while not neglecting general education and culture, also offer training in one or more trades.

Major or minor modifications were made virtually every year. In 1961, Parliament passed an Act embodying reforms designed to alter the balance of academic and vocational instruction, together with fundamental changes in the curricula and a modernization programme. Controversial new ideas were implemented under this scheme: for instance, grammar school pupils were given basic training in home electrics and wiring, book-binding, car servicing or, in the provincial towns, in operating agricultural machines. The sponsors of the reform were guided by the goal of simply making things easier for those school leavers who could not or did not want to proceed to higher education, and were not really out to add a separate skilled-worker's qualification to the school-leaver's certificate. The results of this experiment were debateable,



but the experiences obtained were later put to use in further revision of the curricula in the vocational schools.

Fresh debate began in the late 1960's, centring on the need to revise the school-leaving examination (*baccalaureat*, *Abitur*). The debate was carried on over a fairly broad range; even pupils, the 14 or 15 year olds, who enrolled in secondary schools in these years, would discuss the philosophy behind examinations during the break between two periods. Besides controversies involving fundamental problems of this kind, the debate on, for example, whether or not mathematics teaching should be modernized, has continued to the present day; however, it is sufficient to cast a glance at the front cover of one of the October 1979 issues of the *Economist* to be reminded that the experts of other European countries are confronted with similar problems.

#### *Grammar School and Vocational School*

The debate that has developed most recently is centered around how to harmonize public education as an abstract ideal and the concrete interests of society. The parties involved in the debate include specialist journals with a limited readership, the high circulation national dailies, and a number of other forums such as Hungarian Television and Radio. *Népszabadság*, the central daily of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party, for instance, held a round table discussion on the subject "What should the secondary school prepare its students for?" (October 28, 1979) in which the question of whether or not the needs of the national economy are being usefully served is subjected to scrutiny. In summarizing the changes that have taken place in recent years János Gosztonyi, Undersecretary for Education, had this to say: "We have attempted to satisfy economic and social demands with these changes. A network of vocational schools offering both a skilled-worker's certificate and a matricula-

tion certificate has been established, while in the grammar schools (*gimnáziums*, schools mainly for those intending to apply to universities—Ed.) the objective has been to impart practical knowledge by introducing a range of optional subjects." Another participant in the discussion Lajos Farkasinszky, a senior member of the Budapest City Council, pointed out remarkable changes in respect of the role played by certain vocational schools in the task of recruiting for a branch of commerce or industry: "In Budapest, 60 per cent of young persons entering secondary education attend vocational schools, and 40 per cent choose the grammar schools. This ratio corresponds to the needs of society, the national economy and specific demands for manpower. Those attending grammar schools can choose vocationally-oriented subjects for up to seven periods per week, so that if they should fail to gain admission to a college or university they will find it that much easier to choose a trade." Undersecretary János Gosztonyi added: "Pupils attending grammar schools can thus acquire practical knowledge which will help them to fit in in later life. This will put an end to the situation which has been characteristic until now, whereby grammar school leavers have been forced to go on to additional courses, in order to find a job."

A programme broadcast by Hungarian Radio (May 1979, First Programme) concerned a similar question. Educational specialists were called upon to give their views on specific problems in the two sectors of secondary education. The overwhelming majority of grammar school leavers apply for admission to some institute of higher education; those who fail at the entrance examination will become highly insecure and, in seeking employment, they will invariably discover that the school-leaving exam today qualifies them for nothing better than clerical drudgery; at the age of 18 they have, therefore, either to begin to learn a trade or to make repeated attempts to gain



admission to a college or university. The key question, raised by *Köznevelés* (20 April 1979) (Public Education—a periodical dealing with theoretical questions in education) as well as by the radio programme cited, can be formulated as follows:

“What should the school be doing?”

Ferenc Gázsó suggested in *Köznevelés* that „One of the fundamental functions of public education is that it prepares young people for the division of labour which prevails in society. However, a whole system of social inequalities is based upon the conditions of this division of labour. When the school prepares young people to take up social positions which differ from each other in various ways and demand different forms of training, it takes part directly in the reproduction of social stratification.”

“This is intimately bound up with the selective function of the school. The mere fact that selection occurs expresses the fact that socialist society is not yet capable of providing identical training and qualifications for everyone, nor of rendering the path to higher education completely open to everyone. The schools have to select those pupils who can most easily be prepared to complete a higher degree successfully. They are recruited, in the majority of cases, from children belonging to social strata well able to assist their children to satisfy the selective demands, as these are the strata in possession of the necessary culture. The school is seen to perform the job of selection on the basis of ability, or more exactly, on the grounds of achievement and the results of the entrance examination, and in principle objective criteria are applied. This alleged equality of opportunity can be approved of in principle but since the development of abilities and school achievements are very strongly influenced by inherited conditions and unequal social and cultural circumstances the selection of the individual assumes the character of social selection.”

“One way of easing the situation would be to release the general school from having to train young people according to the hierarchical divisions and narrow professional orientation secondary education and hence from the task of defining the students’ future career. This would lead to the creation of much more favourable conditions for the development of discriminatory pedagogical activities adjusted to the facts of cultural inequality. The school is, therefore, faced with the task of reducing educational differences between different social classes and strata and thereby paving the way for greater uniformity of social groups with regard to culture and schooling. Experience indicates that in fact different cultural levels can be concealed by formally identical certificates; these differences can be explained primarily along the lines of social stratification.”

The radio programme mentioned earlier discussed in detail the future of young people attending vocational schools. This type of secondary school prepares its pupils not so much for subsequent academic training as for entry into a trade or an industry at a medium level. Such school-leavers, however, are quick to realize that the knowledge acquired is sufficient at this level only, especially when the rapid pace of changes in technology is taken into account; they can only go higher by obtaining a university degree, but at the entrance examination they are invariably at a disadvantage compared to grammar school pupils, since this type of school provides a more thorough academic training. Teachers in vocational schools may well aspire to achieve the best possible results for their pupils; however, compared with the grammar schools there is no adequate basis in the syllabus.

*The School-Leaving Examination and the Entrance Examination for Higher Education*

We have seen that a broad debate on the role and importance of the school-leaving



examination at the end of secondary education. Many advocated abolition of this examination, arguing that candidates for higher education must sit a difficult entrance examination anyway, while those not wishing to go to college or university sit the school-leaving exam for formal reasons only. Others expressed the idea that the prestige and authority of the grammar school would suffer if the matriculation exam was to be abolished. Eventually a compromise was reached, under which the exam was retained but history was deleted from the list of obligatory subjects. This led to fresh debates, as a result of which history was restored to its former position as from 1980. Hungarian language and literature, mathematics and a foreign language have always been obligatory; pupils have been allowed to choose one or two additional subjects in line with his or her specific interest or the studies to be continued in higher education.

To understand the importance of the school-leaving exam it is essential to point out that the Hungarian system of entry into higher education strongly favours those who have fared well here. The marks obtained in the third and fourth grades of the secondary school and a successful final exam are no more than the initial steps; on leaving the grammar school the pupil will have a certain aggregate of achievement points which may be improved at the entrance examination. Experiences over the past two decades or so have shown that only applicants scoring the maximum number of points have gained admission to faculties of the humanities, schools of medicine and universities of technology. The value of the points scored, however, remains a major question mark. Do they demonstrate actual knowledge, should we deduce identical knowledge when identical aggregates are awarded? The debate carried on in connection with the school-leaving examination was necessarily linked with the nationwide debate launched on the system of admission to higher education; it led inevitable to

modifications in the school-leaving examination as well as the curricula in secondary education.

The details of a study published by Mátyás Unger in *Pedagógiai Szemle* (1979/1, 5) (Pedagogical Review—an educational monthly journal) pointed out the problems of the admission system. Investigations were carried out at the Humanities Faculty of Loránd Eötvös University, Budapest, where there is heavy competition for admission, often in a ratio of ten or twelve candidates for every one place. "Some 60 to 70 per cent of applicants show up for the entrance examination with the maximum aggregate of points awarded by their secondary schools. The references attached promise excellent students who have already achieved outstanding results in the two subjects they wish to study; they simply duplicate the maximum points rating. In actual fact hopes are frustrated year after year. The entrance examinations give rise to a growing number of wellfounded concerns. The gap between the standards prevailing in secondary education and those of higher education is constantly widening. The consequence of this highly regrettable fact is that education and high-level training of experts at universities and colleges is increasingly unable to build directly on the results of secondary education. In addition, there are also alarming variations in quality between the secondary schools."

When analysing this observation we must remember the essence of the whole debate, the question of what the school is really supposed to be doing. Those not entering higher education after completing secondary school may complain that they have not been well prepared to face life; at the same time, the universities are dissatisfied with the candidates produced for higher education. The general culture of the secondary school leavers gives much cause for concern: knowledge of the Hungarian language and literature is vague and confined to a cliché type of knowledge based on encyclopaedic facts;



students with excellent marks in a foreign language are often incapable of sustaining a conversation in that language, their knowledge is too abstract, and they might find it extremely hard to give directions to a foreign tourist asking his way in Budapest. To be fair, this investigation also revealed a number of positive factors as well, but it was the negative phenomena that seemed to be on the increase. "There is a danger that an unfavourable cycle may come into being; colleges and universities will have to accept poor student material, they will end up having to turn out poorer graduates, hence the experts and teachers of the future will also be of a lower standard; and the same process will be repeated on lower levels as well."

*Felsőoktatási Szemle* (1979/4) (Review of Higher Education—a monthly journal and forum for discussion of educational policy) argued concerning plans to modify the matriculation examination and the system of entrance exams:

"The present system of requirements for matriculation and entry into higher education does not facilitate general cultural goals as it should. In the future, pupils will be given a larger measure of freedom at the matriculation examination; it will be possible for them to make consistent preparations for the career they have chosen, without neglecting wider cultural considerations. The planned modifications to the system of entrance examinations are designed to ensure that its expectations should exert a more favourable influence on the secondary schools and promote higher cultural standards amongst those applying for higher education; its standards should also be adjusted to the new curricula in the secondary schools, and in an effort to ease the double burden imposed by school-leaving and entrance examinations it is intended to hold only a single exam in an increased number of subjects. The admission points total will continue to be calculated from the aggregate awarded by the secondary school and the results achieved at the entrance examination."

The investigations carried out at the universities trace the problems back to the educational standards of the secondary schools, they call unambiguously for higher standards in order to produce young people with a sound general culture, balanced knowledge and the ability to turn in outstanding achievements in later life.

#### *Round-Table on the "Two Cultures"*

Emil Petrovics, a composer often engaged in issues of public life and political questions, Professor at the Ferenc Liszt Academy of Music and a Member of Parliament, published an article in *Köznevelés* (June 29, 1979) (Public Education) which gave a new twist to the debate on secondary education. "The balance has been upset in favour of mathematics and science", Emil Petrovics wrote in his article, "education in the arts has been down-graded."

He is not alone in this opinion. There are others too who believe there are potentially dangerous disproportions between the humanities and science, and between general cultural goals and job-oriented training, in both cases to the detriment of the former.

Shortly after this article appeared the editorial board of *Köznevelés* held a round table discussion attended by university professors, academicians and directors of research institutes at which a number of extreme views clashed. The structure and proportions of the culture of the up and coming generation was the matter at stake. Obviously the debate attracted wide public attention.

István Király, Professor of Hungarian Literature at Loránd Eötvös University, agreed by and large with the views outlined by Emil Petrovics, giving the following reasons: "The school has a major role to play in establishing the value orientation and system of norms in a society. I completely agree with the view that an overdose of the humanities has been an historic failing in Hungarian society. I also



agree with the opinion that in the twentieth century a prosperous country needs not only major poets but also great inventors. I do not dispute the point that we need good experts. What I object to is that in the course of resolving these problems a narrow range of pragmatic considerations frequently gains the upper hand. Let us take, for example, one serious social problem: the number of young persons in the country's major industrial plants is dwindling, the majority seem to prefer a desk, or to content themselves with acquiring a servicing trade; they are reluctant to be factory workers, and this is no longer merely a problem of economics, it is also one of mental awareness. It would seem that the change in their perceptions, which took place in the wake of social change, has failed to assume the appropriate dimensions. The manual worker may earn sometimes three times as much as the clerk sitting at his office desk, but quite often the social prestige commanded by the latter is higher."

"How can this state of affairs be changed? In my view, perceptions and ideological and moral factors also come into play, over and above the considerations of economics or social organization. Man is a many-sided creature. He does not simply want to live, he also needs a purpose in life. He has not only quantitative but also qualitative needs: he can be motivated by moral forces and his subjective awareness of reality. In this manner subjective factors such as a feeling of responsibility towards the community, can become social agents. This possibility should be taken more seriously in every walk of life. But what is the foundation on which discipline and respect for labour can be based? Only on an awareness of responsibility, and this is not to be sustained merely by giving people material incentives or by preaching abstract moral sermons. A realistic and reasonable objective must be set. Take this very country, a unique attempt to mould a fragment of mankind in a socialist pattern, the joint venture of each and every one

of us. This is one of the reasons why I consider teaching literature a question of importance: it can assist in reviving awareness of responsibility in the community. Hungarian literature has always performed this function successfully in the past, and its most valuable works continue to do so at present."

Ferenc Pataki, the Director of the Institute of Psychology of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, contributed to the discussion as follows: "I suspect that there are some problems with what we term general culture. First of all on the historical plane there is the fact that the eight grade general school, in particular its upper grades, bears the marks of a school for the broad masses in which the balance between theoretical and practical knowledge had to be maintained at all costs. There is an inherent paradox in our traditional attitude to schools: while literature, history and speaking generally, the social sciences, all appear as products of human creativity, the sciences do not; yet chemistry, physics, biology and mathematics could be made far more attractive if more effort and imagination were expended in presenting them to students as the achievements of individual human beings."

So much for the debate, a debate which has witnessed diverse approaches to the principal issues, and in which the details have also come in for exacting scrutiny. Let me conclude this summary with a quotation from Péter Veres (1897-1970) the outstanding self-educated writer and thinker of peasant origin:

"It is quite obvious that the role and the importance of specialist skills will increase as a consequence of scientific and technological development and the ensuing division of labour; nevertheless, the role of the humanities will not decline, for it is up to them to prevent technological development from bringing the curtain down on us all."

GYÖRGY ODZE



# BOOKS AND AUTHORS

## BUDAPEST—THE BIRTH OF A METROPOLIS

"*Budapest, Anno . . .*" 19th-century pictures taken inside and outside the Studio by György Klösz, Royal Photographer. Introduced by Lajos Mesterházi, Corvina Press, Budapest, 1979. 188 pp. Also in English and German.

I have been looking through György Klösz's album for the third time and I just cannot see enough of it. One moment I am scanning the splendid Danube landscapes with a magnifying glass and separating out the minute grains on the screen-plate; in the next my attention wanders to the Rózsadomb, a hill on the Buda side, still sparsely settled. I search for the house of my great-grandmother, which I have never seen in real life. It was swept away by the war, that boldest of town-planners, oblivious to conservation. It would be there on this 19th century photograph, at least its roof should be visible amongst the foliage sloping downwards to the old highroad. When this picture was taken, Rosina Anna (born in 1867, daughter of Thomas Gabriel *murarius*, stone mason) would have been a little girl. By the time she married, the registers had been Magyarized, the *vinícolas* became vine growers and Franz Ferenc. I think Rosa herself spoke Hungarian better than German.

The then 270 000 population of Budapest increased fourfold by the turn of the century. Fast growth coincided with the increase of Hungarian elements. The majority of people in Budapest understood German even after the Great War, even if then it was not their mother tongue; but the press was predominantly written in the Budapest vernacular—that much-reviled urban Hungarian, with additional graftings from German and who knows how many other

languages. This cosmopolitan mixture suits the town rather well; as a matter of fact it fits the town rather better than the town itself suits the country of which it became the capital. This was the historical moment when the town broke away from the country and surged ahead independently; this was the period which distorted the development of other Hungarian towns, and Budapest itself, our much-loved, crowded hydrocephalus, is one of the results of this distorted pattern. Despite this, Budapest still represented the country, it was a condensation of the entire Austro-Hungarian world. Skilled Austrian and Czech workers were employed in its factories, walls went up under the supervision of Italian foremen, the scaffolding was the work of Slovak carpenters, house foundations were laid by Hungarian navvies from the Great Plain, the coffee-vendors were Bosnians in breeches, and the corn traders were assimilated Greeks and Serbs who had fled before the Turks centuries before. This strange Central-Eastern European ethnic mixture forged a Hungarian identity for itself in the melting pot of Budapest. This series of photographs by György Klösz covers a period of approximately thirty years and captures this process of assimilation—the language and names of the sign-boards reveal this beautifully.

Budapest once again became Hungarian, as it had been before the great genocide,



before the terrible loss of blood in the Turkish period, when the populations and indeed the whole towns of Buda and Pest had been wiped out. One year before the Christian armies liberated the town from Turkish occupation in 1686 (and completely destroyed it in the process), the council of Buda was corresponding in Hungarian with the War Council at Vienna. We still know the name of a Protestant Hungarian minister from 1686. What happened to the population of Buda? One thing we know for sure and that is that among the people who erected new walls in the indestructible

printing establishment. Most of his pictures were made into postcards, others—shop fronts and interiors, etc.—probably served advertising purposes. The survival of about 300 glass plates was pure chance: they were discovered accidentally in a trunk forgotten in the attic of his old house.\* Regardless of the intentions of Klösz, his lifework has become the family album of Budapest in the decades during which it became a metropolis. This growth can be followed from the Austro-Hungarian Compromise of 1867 to the turn of the century. Like childhood photos on which a later observer can already



*Advertising cosmetics, about 1900*

medieval foundations there was not one who had been a citizen of Buda in the Turkish times. The residence of the Hungarian kings was reborn as a sleepy German provincial town built in a paltry baroque.

György Klösz opened his photographic studio in a house which still exists in the City of Pest. Klösz was not so much an artist but a craftsman, and a successful one at that. In the course of a few decades his studio grew into the country's largest colour offset-



*Advertising an internationally known lotion for horses, about 1900*

perceive traits of the mature man, these pictures also reveal the origin of the arteriosclerotic town of today. The main lines of the modern city were laid down during the 25 years that Klösz was an active photographer. It is not exaggerating unduly to say that almost everything in Budapest was built or rebuilt during those years: from the bridges to the Grand Boulevard, from

\* See Gyula Maar's article, NHQ 27.





*The arcade of the Reitter (later Drechsler) Café, Andrásy út,  
now Népköztársaság útja, Budapest, 1896*





*The hosiery section of the Párizsi department store, around 1900*



*Poster for an international-automobile show, 1905*



*Advertising bicycles, about 1900*



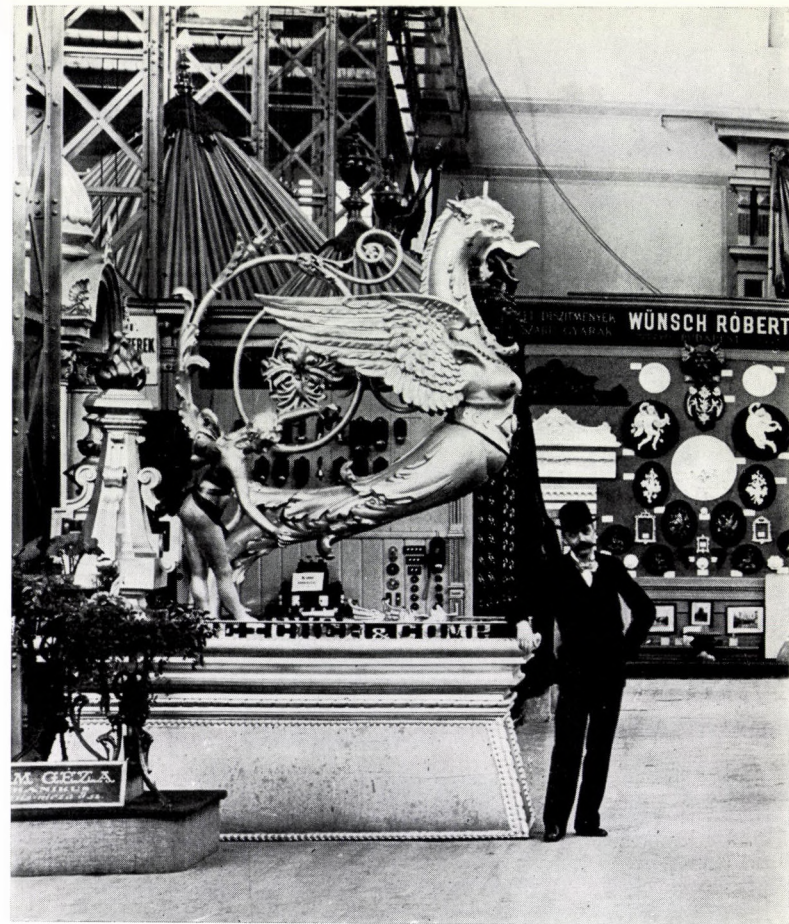


Nagykörút (Grand Boulevard), 1896

Haltér, 1895 (the Fishmarket)



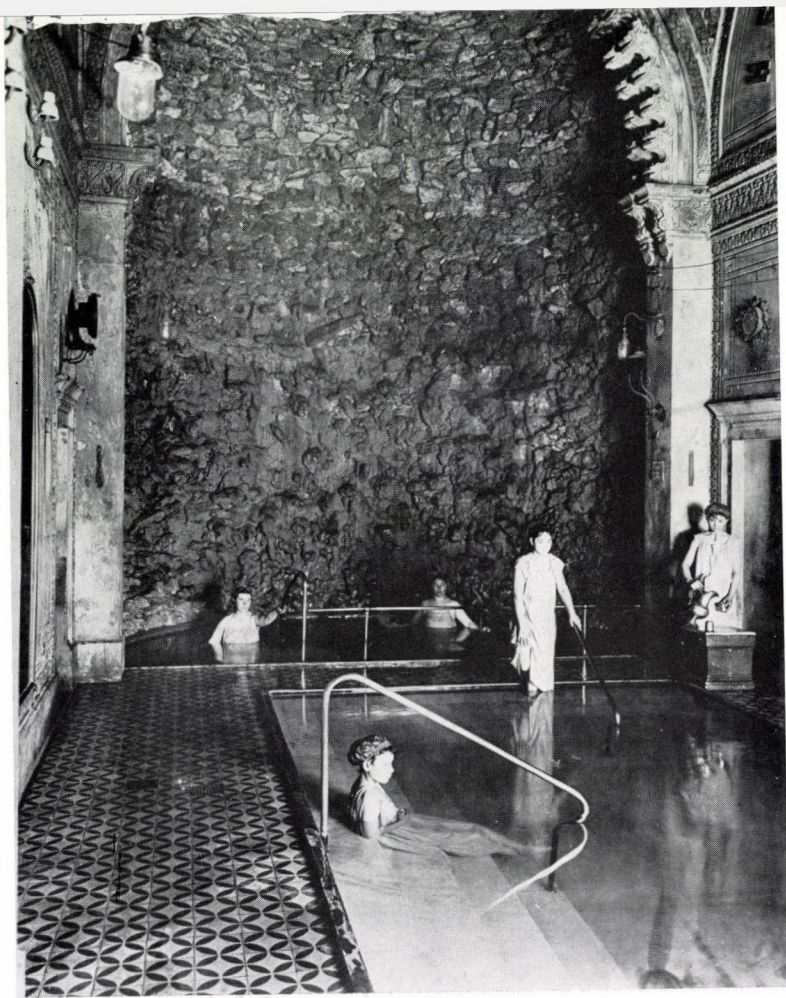




*The Millenary Exhibition, 1896*

*The festive inauguration of the new Parliament Building, in Budapest*





*A pool in the Rác Turkish Baths, 1900*



*Cog-wheel railway on the Buda hills, 1890*





Reproductions by Melitta Babi

The corner of Duna utca and  
Torony utca in Budapest, 1895

◀ The courtyard

The street front ▼





public sewers to Parliament, from the embankment to the theatres. A brand new town, conscious of its own importance, looks up at us from these pictures. This was the Hungarian Belle Epoque.

Its present inhabitants may find it hard to believe that this aged, war-crippled, pieced-together, patched-up, and now uniformly dirty-grey city was once uniformly new and reeked of fresh paint. The most astounding fact is that this was barely a hundred years ago. When György Lukács, who died only a few years ago, was taken for a walk as a little boy, the beautiful trees now choking in exhaust fumes along the Népköztársaság út were just saplings lining the Sugár út, a boulevard of Parisian elegance. Were it not for Klösz we would have no satisfactory image of this ambitious rival to Vienna, this "sinful city," where Endre Ady, coming from Nagyvárad, got off the train and was overwhelmed by the ambience of Western Europe. From Klösz's pictures we can see too the coffeehouses, which helped to sustain what has been to date the greatest age of Hungarian culture and to send out into the world a swarm of talented individuals who first learned to think in this ultra-cosmopolitan of cities. No doubt this bustling town, vigorously shaking off its provinciality and indifferent to the destruction of its own past in its unscrupulous haste to catch up with the world, left its mark on all these people; this is the town which comes to life on the glass-plates of Klösz.

The freshly Magyarized burghers of Pest were always in a hurry, and their appetites were ravenous. They caused the old small-townish Pest to disappear, and they did so with shameless eagerness. Their money stretched to finance the main arteries of communication, the major public buildings, and the ground-plan of the entire city. Looking back today we must consider it a marvellous achievement in its own right: it was certainly visionary city planning. A few decades ago we were inclined to

consider this age and its architecture with a certain irony; maybe we were ashamed, the shabbiness of eclectic art nouveau houses seemed only to add to the falsity of their splendour. We never noticed how well these hundred year old foundations had served us. The fact is that this is still the framework for almost every important activity that takes place in this city.

When the precursor of the present Elizabeth bridge was built shortly before the turn of the century, a broader road had to be forged between the 18th-19th century houses of the City, crammed together as they had been in the Middle Ages. This was essential if the bridge was to be the direct continuation of one of the main axles of the town, the highroad which led out of the city Eastwards. Thus a spacious clearing was created for the bridge-head, and then they began to erect large blocks of what, with a beautifully absurd compound, they termed literally "tenement palaces." György Klösz photographed the rows of houses to be demolished at the last minute. Perhaps he had the sense that history was being made, for these particular photos were certainly not made to order. He not only photographed the houses to be demolished but also the town's working poor, who were to lose their homes. They stand before the door clad in their aprons, tools in hands, just as the photographer found them in their workshops around the back. The children stand beside them, wearing big hats and plus-fours; there is a postman, a constable, and a mustachioed leather-capped joiner in the centre; the man beside him must be a stove-maker because on his back is a butt used for carrying sand and clay. There are also a few women with kerchiefs and "trouser men," i.e. people of a higher social class. These are Klösz's best photos, and their artlessness, immediacy and deliberate posing render them both intimate and naive at the same time: the photographer knows that he is working for posterity.

The evicted tenants most probably moved



to the new neighbourhoods; e.g. to a district which the townspeople, always inclined to slight exaggerations, would refer to colloquially as "Chicago" because of the regular grid-iron network of its streets and the breakneck speed at which its dwellings were erected. It was identified with America in the imagination of people who learned of the New World from the letters of hundreds of thousands of emigrants. Here, of course, the buildings were not "tenement palaces" but "tenement barracks." Those who saw them know how well this name fits them. "...sour misery lingered in the rooms opening on the yard, bent under the weight of worry, where the coughing child was threatened by the cursing janitor, and the only entertainment for the women was the daily gossip in the iron-barred corridor, and the men fled from these appalling homes to pubs and coffeehouses. These prisoners of poverty made careful note of what other people cooked, they listened to the clearly audible squabbles of neighbouring couples, they were fussy about girls' morals, and they watched other families going off on Sundays to the gloomy town-park." These lines were written by Gyula Krúdy, one of the finest Hungarian prose writers of the early part of the century, who had himself just come as a young man from the provinces to this fascinating metropolis.

The finest trait of Klösz's pictures is that they are modestly and precisely down-to-earth and that he had no other ambition than that everything on his photos should be recognizable. To the end he seemed constantly fascinated by the technical possibility of intercepting light reflected from objects on a layer of gelatine. He has no pretence at all to be creating a work of art, to be in search of any aesthetic values.

A glass plate by Klösz is quite simply "a mirror which does not forget." His pictures demonstrate the original virtues of photography, the purpose for which it was invented. On a photo everything is (or can be) reproduced exactly as it is in real life.

This obvious, natural and quite unplanned documentary aspect, which emerges straightforwardly as the product of technical perfectionism, has assured these pictures of the acquisition of a secondary aesthetic quality in the course of the past hundred years. Their enforced rigidity and toneless sharp contours have structured themselves into a style, they have become a hallmark of the age, just as certain old objects of everyday use exemplify a period in which nothing more practical has yet been conceived. Seen outside the banal context in which they were taken, the pictures are able to evoke that contemporary context with an artistic force that is almost magical.

Furthermore this context is strangely contradictory to the image which radiates from the conscious products of the age. Its infallible encyclopaedias with their still untarnished gilt, the endless serials of books, the impressive public buildings—all suggest even to us, success, permanence, a career achieved. Klösz has also recorded for us the fleeting moment, whether or not this was what he set out to do. Whenever he set up his tripod, crowds gathered around him: gentlemen with stovepipe hats, workers with leather caps, provincials in felt hats with upturned brims, street-porters with their uniform caps, children, apprentices and errand boys; only women and girls figure rarely, and then they always have their kerchiefs as the emblems of their inferior social status. All these people would stand in a semi-circle, gape at the maestro, and the picture of the high stone building behind them would capture unfinished movements, unseemly postures and half-smiles; accidentally and unconsciously their transience has been permanently caught on the photo. Perhaps this is the essence of photography. There is no pose, no studied posture, these faces betray only a sincere curiosity and sometimes awe at being the subjects of a photograph; and the camera which focused on the building in the background, indifferently and automatically recorded the



obvious and easily-forgotten fact that real people have built this city, not abstract theories or social formations, and that it was inhabited not by statistical figures but by the people whom we see on Klösz's photos in the "unwitting creation" of history.

A pigeon flutters in front of a house in the City like a blurred white veil—the date

is about the end of the 1880s, it is a fine autumn day, or perhaps an unusually warm and sunny day in spring. Judging by the position of the shadows the time is around eleven in the morning. György Klösz is taking photographs.

ISTVÁN BART

## CHANGES IN POETIC VEGETATION

Zoltán Jékely: *Évtizedek hatalma* (The Power of Decades). Magvető–Szépirodalmi, 1979, 370 pp.; László Kálnoky: *A szemtanú* (The Eyewitness). Békéscsaba, 1979, not paginated; Ottó Orbán: *A visszacsavart láng* (The Flame Turned Down). Magvető, 1979, 79 pp.; Imre Oravec: *Egy földterület növénytakarójának változása* (The Change of a Territory's Vegetation). Magvető, 1979, 123 pp.

The Hungarian literary revival of the beginning of the twentieth century was centred around the review *Nyugat* (West) founded in 1908. *Nyugat* stood out in the decades which followed as the representative of constant renewal and continuity. Poets who began their careers as late as the 1940s were still classified by critics as members of the third *Nyugat* generation.

Zoltán Jékely is one member of this generation, one who has been writing mature poetry since adolescence. He was born in 1913, the son of the well-known poet and translator Lajos Áprily. Jékely studied Hungarian, French, and history of art at the Eötvös College in Budapest, where he was considered something of a prodigy. Legends were woven around his person, he even became the hero of a novel; the legends were motivated by his high sensitivity to reality and passionately consistent refusal to acquiesce in it.

Jékely achieves a rare degree of intimacy in his poetry. Although he writes excellent prose and is a very sophisticated poet who

knows all the ins and outs of his trade, his best poems (perhaps for this very reason) make us forget that poetry is also a craft and a special language within the language. Whenever his violently emotional verses, mostly iambic, rhyming, written in stanzas, sometimes verge on the borders of banality there is always an unexpected rhyme, a surprising image, a sudden change of tone, or an obliquely ironical sentence to elevate them. The ability to express surprise and rapt attention is one of his most characteristic traits; as he puts it in his melancholy "Homo faber": "... I never once gazed into pipe-smoke, and boredom has not eaten away at my mind." (Prose translation).

Jékely was the translator of *Vita Nuova*, and almost all of his many love poems, from adolescence to old age, could bear as their motto the famous line of Dante: *incipit vita nuova*. A new life begins when the poet describes a current experience, but equally when he evokes the memory of an embrace of twenty-six years ago. A new life begins on the Via Appia when he sees a beautiful



woman „because there is nothing more beautiful than singing about beauty,” and a new life begins when he praises the eternal beauty of the subject of a 600-year-old statue in Prague. Love is a lifestyle, it generates value and loyalty, it is the promise of a more worthy life for man. “And today, when there are no feasts and cities crumble to ashes, safeguard, defend our love”—lines written during the war, reality apprehended with every nerve and denied equally emphatically, both instinctively and morally. He is not a naive lover, he values friendship even more; but he loves love together with all its torments. In 1934, at the age of 21, he translated a poem of Ronsard from the second book of the sonnets to Helena (“Je plante en ta faveur cet arbre de Cybèle”). Many years later he wrote his *Ellen-szonett Helénának* (Counter-sonnet to Helena). And yet he plants no pine-tree in her honour because at a “nocturnal hour” he realizes that the timeless charm of the adored lady in question is not meant for him, and his faith evaporates such “that I could only weep in sorrow.”

Flaubert wrote somewhere that he could not look at a cradle without seeing a coffin. The remark might well have been made by Jékely. Death had been an intense experience since his youth and the war only heightened its intensity. In a poem evoking childhood years on the banks of the river Szamos in Transylvania, he wrote: “Decay and the humbug of reality deceived and hurt horribly! He evoked a pristine childhood in his life, for he was an impoverished poet and a fisherman.”

From his early years, and especially after the war, the dead would haunt his dreams and poems; he interrogated them on the subject, and in their name he demanded life. The „pristine childhood” is a quite special province in his poetry. Even as a mature man worrying for the future of his son, he still remained a child. A few years after the death of his own father, when he was nearing 60, he described a childhood

experience: “. . . like God, so strong is his father”. Both father the poet (Lajos Áprily) and mother appear time and time over in his poems, first as living persons and later as the most vivid of the poet’s memories.

The angler on the riverside who in this certain moment of his life may even have valued fishing above love and poetry, has a deep experience of history, of great and small events in Hungary and throughout the world. To the destruction, dehumanization, and mechanization of life he opposes the dream, the myth, the „new life” which starts afresh with each love, each work of art, any tremor in the life of the family. *Incipit vita nuova* could even stand above all his works and not only the lyrical love poems: in his *Zsoltár özönvíz után* (Psalm after the Flood), following the catastrophic inundation a man “tills the soil once more in the primitive frenzy of recommencement.”

László Kálnoky, another poet of the third *Nyugat* generation, started to write verse rather late. His first volume was published in 1939. Among the poets of this generation none could be more different than Jékely and Kálnoky. Jékely created myths; he is a magician who peoples his world with family, friends, women, works of art, rivers, and mountains. Kálnoky in contrast speaks almost exclusively of himself: his characters are his ego and his personal loneliness.

“You thought it was a ghost from afar, your double is coming, in deep mourning, walks past you dreamily, as if he didn’t see you at all”—this is the message he addressed to himself in the poem *Sötétedés* (Dusk) written in 1974. Perhaps even the prose translation conveys his horror of solitude. This poet has no characteristic background, and if, very seldom, he mentions his family forbears or concepts such as love, this is only to stress his loneliness through contrast. What is missing in the background is more than compensated by his moral integrity. His life gives his poetry the seal of authenticity, and *vice versa*.



Kálnoky started his career under the influence of Baudelaire; the outstanding translator of *Faust II*, the *Love Songs of Alfred Prufrock*, *Morgenstern*, and numerous poems in Greek, French, German, and English, remained loyal all along to his early master. Baudelaire wrote:

. . . *la douleur est la noblesse unique*  
*Où ne mordront jamais la terre et les enfers*

he also, in addressing the *hypocrite lecteur*, articulated his *ennui*. Baudelairian spleen has given Kálnoky's poetry one of its recurring themes. As a poet, he is tremendously ambitious but successively frustrated by dire financial circumstances, grave illness, and undeserved neglect to boot.

A Catholic? He is a believer inasmuch as he creates no alternative interior mythology, but an unbeliever insofar as he does not seek solace in the other world, and no succour from religious relief in this one. He has some secret knowledge of the issues concerning belief and doubt: "faith determined by religion is an obscure abyss"—he once wrote.

*A szemtanú* (The Eyewitness) is a slim volume of selected poems, in a limited edition, illustrated by Lenke Diskay. Its size was obviously determined by the format of the series in which it has appeared at Békéscsaba. Some very good poems have been left out, including everything which is not a self-portrait or personality description in some form or another. The book discusses the shaping of self-knowledge over time (I find the term "development" inappropriate in this case): "sclerosis tightens the heart, the veins, the brain, but self-knowledge goes on expanding"—he writes in *Születésnapomra* (For My Birthday).

The title poem, "The Eyewitness" first appeared in the poet's fifth collection (*Farsang utóján* [In the Last Days of Carnival], 1977). As a title for this selection, it is well-chosen; it truly sums up Kálnoky's experience and world outlook. The eyewitness speaks for

himself and is responsible for himself only. He is tense, strong by powerful passions, and weighs every word carefully. Kálnoky leaves nothing to chance if this is at all possible in poetry. He is a volitional poet, classical in the sense of Valéry.

"Always to be looking at the same"—he wrote aphoristically in "The Eyewitness." Dozens of poems are variants of a single mood, feeling, idea, or experience. It is not always "the same" because it is modified by every concrete verse. Perhaps this is only the reaction of a reader who does not find variations on a theme necessarily monotonous. Kálnoky is a virtuoso. He wrote a sonnet in 1958 in which each line begins with the words "only one." His contemporary, István Vas, observed that their meaning was slightly different in each of the fourteen lines.

"He who throughout the years has revolved around an imaginary centre protected only by the absence of weapons," says the eyewitness; and he adds: "he has seen floods which invalidate maps."

The images of destruction recur in his poems all the time. Kálnoky is a cruel poet but he is most cruel to himself. The first poem in "The Eyewitness" is *Férfikor* (Adulthood) written in 1943. "I had been a happy poet once"—says the first line, comparing his poems to the brook running down "gentle hills." But when adulthood is reached "foul ague and pestilence surround me," and the poet continues: "before me the jungle with its bizarre, murderous inhabitants." The conclusion of the poem is both poignant and precise: "and yet I continue on my way." Into the thicket where the weak and irresolute are devoured by the shrubs—the journey is told with splendid and captivating musicality, with rare reliance on rhyme.

The last poem of the volume is *Mi vagyok én?* (What Am I?). In thirty-three lines he defines himself by means of grotesque images and expressions as if he finds deliberate pleasure in telling the most offensive, cruel, and absurd things about himself; he



sees himself as "pointless ticket for a cancelled performance," or a "vegetarian cannibal," or in the last line as a clown in a cortège. If the mourning is mere affectation, the clown is there to instigate rebellion; if it is real, he helps to bear the pain.

Ottó Orbán wryly remarked in connection with his new book of poems: "Collections by poets over forty scarcely count. It is neither here nor there whether the volume in question is No. seven or No. eleven. Over forty the poet, if he really is one, is a poet in much the same way as he is a human being, inconspicuously and incurably. Something or somebody, perhaps the poet himself, has turned down the previously exuberant flame of lightly squabbling youth. Not that his poems should shine with less light, but it should be a different light, with deeper fire and less lamp-black." The title-giving piece, *A visszacsavart láng* (The Flame Turned Down), is part of the cycle *A folytatás* (The Continuation). The cycle consists of a series of prose poems and essays in verse. Their conciseness and imagery qualify them as verses, but they retain original essay-like qualities in virtue of the thoughts which they provoke, particularly concerning Budapest at the beginning of the century or his digressions on the Muse itself. The first of the cycle is *Az arcom a tévében* (My Face on Television). Its last sentence goes: "The survivor of a shipwreck jabbbers here, and his septal deviation is clearly visible now in colour transmission above his firemen-luring shirt." This sentence hints at the essence of Orbán's poetry. "The Flame Turned Down" varies and continues the message: "In ages when the lamp burns with a reduced flame, poetry is not verse, a vision dipped in music. On the corridor where time drags you there is no Apollo to make the shaken poet blurt out: 'Change your life!' And even if there were a youth with lightning, lyre, and marble locks, it is not up to God to explain how. Survival is the art of the earth. . . And poetry: an inward-growing palm, a screen in the draught

over the agonizing flame because sometime, somewhere, in something, who knows. . . it flares up. . . it must flare up. . ."

Orbán distances himself both from Rilke's and Pound's concepts of poetry. The poem which discusses this in Poundian form was printed in NHQ 67, in a translation by László T. András and William Jay Smith. Here are a few lines which characterize the poet's life and world of thought:

I had wanted for years to translate Pound  
not that I felt close to him far from it  
I was intrigued by the puzzle of person-  
ality

.....  
My disappointment in the text then grew  
deeper and deeper  
nowhere they key a reference an ex-  
planation  
unless to swooning snobbery of the  
nouveau riche is taken for that  
The verse overflowed with Florence the  
chronicles and Messrs So-and-So  
and any number of Chinese sages  
Tradition as art relic leaves me cold  
.....  
I have survived a siege what else could  
I believe in Under  
the barbed wire of years a tin can and  
a jack-knife are poetry itself.

Ottó Orbán was born in 1936. He survived the war and the persecution of the Jews—his father was one of the victims. In various places he confesses that it was war and persecutions which made a poet of him. His first book, *Fekete ünnep* (Black Feast), appeared in 1960. He is a versatile poet and literary translator, and he wrote an excellent book about India. In 1976 he toured the USA in the framework of the International Writing Program (University of Iowa). Some of his poems in "The Flame Turned Down" record his American impressions. He describes Stephen Spender's lecture at Mount Vernon, Boston under snow,



the New York of Lorca, and his realization in America of his own Europeaness.

The second volume to be published by Imre Oravecz (born in 1944) is called *Egy földterület növénytakarójának változása* (The Change of a Territory's Vegetation). I think it marks an important event in Hungarian lyrical poetry. Certainly it is one of the strangest volumes of poetry I have ever read. As far as I know this is the first book written in Hungarian by a Hungarian and printed in Budapest which contains verses in English. Hungarian Haiku verses are likewise rare. Oravecz has written three: on hope, on illness, and on the slip-road to Highway 80 in Salk Lake City.

The book is prefaced by three quotations: from San Juan de la Cruz, Minka Czóbel (an almost forgotten Hungarian poetess of the turn of the century), and from Thoreau's *Walden*. There are two poems about Thoreau in the volume and it seems that this American philosopher is gaining ground in Hungarian poetry; he has also inspired Dezső Tandori.

The book is divided into four cycles. The first, *Trakl Budapest* (Trakl in Budapest), contains four variations on its subject. This Austrian poet has played a significant role in Hungarian poetry over the last 10—15 years. The two Haikus, on hope and on illness, also belong to this cycle. The second cycle is titled: *Jelentés az Erie-csatornáról* (Report on the Erie Canal). The title poem is based on an American travel book written by Sándor Bölöni Farkas, a Hungarian traveller of the nineteenth century. The poem is a mixture of texts by Bölöni Farkas and Oravecz. Two other poems are devoted to the Viennese writer Artmann, whose writings have recently appeared in Hungarian in a selection edited by Oravecz, who also wrote a postscript and translated one or two of them. Part of that postscript might stand as a personal confession on the part of Oravecz: "...like a sort of modern mannerist he was constantly changing the scenes of his life, a commuter between Gibraltar and Franz

Josef Land. He also never ceased to change the style of his works, with never-flagging zeal between Homer and Nestor... he could put everything to some use, for him everything in literature, the old and the new, were equally full of life and value. He was extravagant and restless. No sooner did he take up one thing than something else captured his imagination. This accounts for the fragmentary character of his works; their strength is to be found precisely in this piecemeal approach."

As far as I know Oravecz was the first to cite Carlos Castaneda in a Hungarian text. In this cycle he figures only as the author of a quotation placed above the prose poem „A chicagói magasvasút Montrose-i állomásának rövid leírása” (Short Description of Montrose Station of the Chicago EL-train). In the cycle “The Change of a Territory's Vegetation,” Castaneda and Thoreau are the protagonists. “This book is both ethnography and allegory”—wrote Walter Goldschmidt in the introduction of Carlos Castaneda's *The Teaching of Don Juan. A Yaqui Way of Knowledge*. The harmonizing of ethnography and allegory also characterize Oravecz's Castaneda-inspired poems, and especially those in the fourth cycle of the volume, *Palatkvapi iskola* (Palatkvapi School). The appendix informs the reader that *Palatkvapi* means Red House, the mysterious red city of Hopi legends built by Katshinas somewhere in Mexico or South America. The Hopis are “Shoshone Indians who regard themselves as the chosen people” and *Katsbina* is “the spirit of life's invisible forces.”

Thus the heroes of these four cycles are Trakl, Artmann, Hungarian nineteenth-century explorers in America, Thoreau, Castaneda, and the Hopi Indians, or rather their explanations of the world. As to genre, the poems are Haikus, long prose-poems, short poems in free verse, and mundane textual commentaries. Fleeting allusion alternates throughout with meticulously detailed descriptions. A good example of the



latter is provided by the poem "Emlékezés az ülőkalauzrendszerre" (In Memory of the Seated-Conductor System), translated by Daniel Hoffmann in NHQ 74. Here is the first stanza:

"Under the 'Seated-Conductor System', as its name implies, the conductor sat at right angles to the direction in which the bus was moving, on a backed seat bolted above one of the rear wheel humps, beside the rear door reserved for boarding only, his back to the window, facing inside."

Oravec has a degree from the University of Debrecen in English and German, and from the University of Illinois in linguistics. His first volume of poetry, *Héj* (Rind), appeared in 1972 and created something of a stir, mainly with its forceful one-line poems. His verses have been translated and printed in *Micromégas*, *The Greenfield Review*, *Modern Poetry in Translation*, and *The New Hungarian Quarterly*.

LÁSZLÓ FERENCZI

## DEGREES OF FICTION

Gyula Illyés: *Beatrice apródjai* (Beatrice's Pages), Szépirodalmi, Budapest, 1979. 575 pp.; Endre Vészi: *A tranzitutas* (The Transit Passenger), Magvető, Budapest, 1979. 249 pp.; Szilveszter Ördögh: *Bizony nem haltok meg* (Verily you will not Die), Magvető, Budapest, 1979. 290 pp.; Péter Nádas: *Leírás* (Description), Szépirodalmi, Budapest, 1979. 290 pp.

Autobiography in a literary form is presently very much in vogue in Hungary. Politicians and peasants, artists and sportsmen alike have been busy committing to paper, or dictating their life-stories, not to mention, of course, the writers. The last named are frequently ready to take their own lines for their main subject. Alongside literary documentation of historical or everyday events, self-documentation is also gaining ground. "Beatrice's Pages," the latest work to be published by the grand old man of Hungarian letters, Gyula Illyés, is also a work of autobiography.

Non-fiction writing has never been alien to Gyula Illyés, now in his seventy-eighth year. Indeed, whenever Illyés, famous primarily as a poet, has embarked on prose writing, the outcome has been either an out-and-out personal essay or chapters from his own life, closely intertwined with the cur-

rents of his age. His most renowned prose work, *People of the Puszta*, has been translated into a number of languages; it was born in the wake of the populist movement and the village research of the 'thirties, and drew an authentic picture, which was at the same time a personal confession, of the world from which Illyés himself sprung: that of the agricultural labourers and farm-hands attached to and resident on large estates. His *Petőfi* also blends the techniques of the essay with a personal confession. It is devoted to the life of Illyés's great ideal, the revolutionary poet of 1848. "Huns in Paris" was genuinely autobiographical, inasmuch as it dealt with the Hungarian exiles of the 'twenties; Illyés himself was one of them, and in Paris he absorbed for a lifetime the spirit of contemporary avantgarde, and French culture in general.

We have had to wait more than thirty



years after the publication of "Huns in Paris" for an earlier chapter of his autobiography, giving the history of the revolutionary times which drove him and many others into foreign exile in the first place. "Beatrice's Pages" is about the year 1919, a year that has assumed great significance in Hungarian history, though it does branch out in time here and there.

Gyula Illyés, a surrealist poet in his youth, is now acknowledged as the grand old man of Hungarian letters. As a prose writer, "Beatrice's Pages" shows him once again to be astonishingly original. Not primarily with regard to its style for his prose, overburdened with metaphors, gives his critics plenty of scope, simply because nowadays we are averse to this kind of studiedly clever phraseology. Yet there can be no doubt that there is no greater virtuoso writing in the Hungarian language today than Gyula Illyés. He seems to have manifold layers of the folk vernacular and of old Hungarian in his bones, and his work is an inexhaustible source of novel turns of phrase that are attractively different from contemporary idiom, which is becoming more and more drab. With every sentence he writes, Illyés leads us back to the origins aspect of the language. However, when puristic aspirations take over and develop into a *tour de force*, as they sometimes do, they interfere with the reader's enjoyment of the work. It is not that the author wishes to boast of his own strength, only that of the Hungarian language, but still this honourable aim sometimes detracts from his purposeful portrayal of the period.

The structure of "Beatrice's Pages" is all the more original. The novel, for this is what Illyés terms it, is actually the story of a single year. As a time span for a novel that is quite adequate, but for a volume of memoirs it is a very short period indeed. Of course, the year was an eventful one. In the autumn of 1918 the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy disintegrated, the successor states were formed and in Hungary, after

a bloodless revolution, a bourgeois democratic government took power. The prime minister was Mihály Károlyi, an immensely rich aristocrat coming from a family with a great past, who distributed his own lands among the peasants. Károlyi inherited from the Monarchy a country that had been defeated in the war, and, faced with internal upheavals, the hostile attitude of the Entente and the successor states, and the loss of great parts of the country inhabited by Hungarians, he could not properly stabilize his position. In March 1919 he handed over power to the communists, who had been gaining ground. The dictatorship of the proletariat was proclaimed in Hungary. This, however, only intensified the weight of external pressure on the country, and after a rule of hundred and thirty-three days, it was international intervention which overthrew proletarian power. After the withdrawal of the Rumanian and French troops, officers of the former Austro-Hungarian armed forces captured Budapest. Headed by Miklós Horthy, a K. und K. rear-admiral, they began a campaign of repression. They imprisoned and executed left-wing sympathisers by the hundred, and those able to get out of the country did not hesitate to leave. Gyula Illyés was forced to follow suit a little later.

Illyés relates what he himself lived through, and since at the time of the Republic of Councils he was but a seventeen-year-old grammar-school boy, we learn no more of historical events than an unusually perceptive boy, a recent arrival in a proletarian quarter of Pest, could observe for himself. It is more than enough, especially when we come to the boy's role after the overthrow of the Republic of Councils; by then he was already active in the conspiratorial resistance, and helping those in trouble in any way he could. Nevertheless, the reminiscences are often overwhelmed by Illyés the essayist, anxious to explain and analyse the broader historical contexts of his suburban exploits with the light of hindsight.



All this gives rise to a quite peculiar work, not least as far as its own construction is concerned. One has the impression that Illyés was sitting opposite and churning out the details of it all as the reader's partner, or a host playing on his curiosity. There are other acceptable methods of writing autobiography, but Illyés's method is guaranteed to help the reader rediscover and enjoy the basic communicative functions of literature.

"Beatrice's Pages" has no kind of definite structure. The recollections do not proceed in any chronological or thematic order. It is the person of the narrator who creates the unity of the work, and a lively awareness that it is one and the same person who is speaking to us throughout. In a certain sense, time stands still in Illyés's book, just as it does in recollecting the past. If one searches more closely for some backbone to the book, one might find this in the account rendered of the campaigns launched to aid those in detention and their families; and linked to this are the descriptions of various homes, relatives, trips back to the country, friends, first literary efforts, and turbulent events, quite apart from the historical commentaries. It is as if Illyés were always talking about just what is most important to him, and if he fails to carry a story through on one occasion, he will take it up again later and continue exactly where he left off. The most private family imbroglions and intrigues thus merge entirely naturally with the enthralling intellectual trends of the years immediately preceding the Great War, and questions of Hungarian history.

Illyés comes from a peasant family, but his shepherd and farmhand ancestors represented a special section of the peasantry. His father was a skilled mechanic on the manor and one of his uncles was a municipal official in a small town. Illyés himself was marked for life by his childhood contacts with the "people of the puszta," but at the age of fifteen he was already in Pest, an example of the urbanization and embourgeoisement which have been the main ten-

dencies of social development in Hungary in the twentieth century. He lived in Újpest, a typical outlying district of Budapest, a citadel of the organized working class, in a proletarian flat consisting of one room and kitchen; and from this base he sought access to working class educational facilities, and then made contact with the working class movement. He was sixteen when the proletarian dictatorship was declared, and by that time already had a comprehensive grasp of Hungarian social reality. The year 1919 then shook his previously diverse and scattered experiences into order. "Beatrice's Pages" tells how Illyés spent the year of 1919, but in a manner which adds important details to what we know of the significance of this year for the nation.

One such important detail is the consideration of what the Hungarian Left lost through gradual and "meek" acquiescence in the exclusion of several million Hungarians from the newly-defined borders of the country, and how the Hungarian national cause in general suffered. According to Illyés, in accepting this, the Left indirectly played into the hands of counter-revolutionary reaction, which was able to monopolize the just demands for a border revision, affecting millions of people and exploit them for its own purposes. He also blames Benes, the Czechoslovak foreign minister, for not having understood Károlyi's visionary conceptions for the settlement of the Danube basin, distrusting him merely because of aristocratic origin, and inciting the Entente to intervene in Hungary. Károlyi tragically lost his hold in consequence, and so the way was opened for a premature dictatorship of the proletariat, with chances of survival virtually zero against heavy international odds. Had this come about only one year later, then Soviet power, having fought off the forces of foreign intervention, might have perhaps been able to offer more effective help to the socialist experiment in Hungary.



Endre Vészi was born in an outlying district of Budapest in 1916—that is, very close both in time and space to “Beatrice’s Pages.” His father worked in a soap factory, and Vészi himself learned the trade of a steel-graver. He joined the young workers’ movement, worked for the social-democratic daily, *Népszava*, and started on his career as a distinctively working class writer. His life story ran parallel with the reawakening of the Hungarian working class movement, paralyzed by the overthrow of the Republic of Councils. For decades he wrote mainly poems, but more recently prose writing has gradually become the most important dimension of his work. Today he is reckoned to be one of the most interesting of short-story writers in Hungary. Amongst other works, he is the author of the story *Vera Angi*, the screen version of which scored international success recently, under the title *Vera’s Training*. His latest volume of short-stories bears the title “The Transit Passenger.”

The title story sets the keynote for the volume. The protagonist is a 44-year-old washed out film scenarist, an underling to successful directors what no one takes very seriously. Next door to his flat in the loft lives a sweet-scented, snobbish courtesan, who one night breaks in on him with an urgent request for help; her guest, a Hungarian who had left the country and returned in his old age for a visit, had suddenly died in her flat. She asks the scenarist to accept responsibility for the visitor, i.e. for his corpse, because should she be left saddled with him, she would get into trouble with the police for prostitution.

The scenarist sees the big chance of his life in the transit passenger. He resolves this time not to let the great theme slip from his hands, and subsequently in an insolent tone he refuses an offer by Avar Náthás, one of the junior executives of the powers that be, to join a geological expedition to Africa to collect material for a planned Hungarian-American coproduction. Naturally the hero

is finally unable to write up the story independently, he only succeeds in becoming intimate with his neighbour, developing a fever, having visions, spending his last cent, and being forced to flog the story for a small consideration to Náthás, who has been lying in wait for him as soon as he ferreted out the story.

Vészi intended to write just the kind of bravura story to which his maladroit protagonist aspired. He did write the story, he stole it away just like Avar Náthás did, but it did not turn out exactly to be a bravura piece. The story begins with attractive flippancy, but it, peters out in tenuous reveries and sentimentality. This kind of story, purporting to sparkle, to be snappy and full of surprise turns, does not really seem to be Vészi’s line. He is more a man for an imperceptible blending of reality with fantasy. As with so many Hungarian prose writers, with Vészi too it is the virtues of the lyricist that stand pre-eminent.

Vészi has arrived at his present broad palate via stories of working class subjects, drab in tone, with naturalistic predecessors. It is a mixed bag indeed. The *Transit Passengers* offers an assortment of endeavours, some of them not well worked through. One of the stories is about a little boy who, feeling out of place on the modern housing estate, discovers harmony amongst the paraphernalia of an old-style working-class flat (spared demolition, preserved in its original state and turned into a museum), which stimulate his imagination. Another piece depicts the plight of an office worker who feels the world collapsing around him when, as times and people change, there is no more need of the soldierly officiousness which had been his trademark all along. Yet another story features an old woman who is mortally ill; God appears to her in the form of a young man at her hospital bed, but the old woman arrogantly turns him away. The best writing in the volume recalls Vészi’s old world: the worker’s life of the ‘thirties. In it he writes about the vicissitudes of his



father the soap-boiler, and with images of bubbling cauldrons, alkaline fumes and volatile oils he succeeds in taking the reader with him to slightly artificial domain of memories.

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Szilveszter Ördögh is a writer of a younger generation. The main value of his new volume, "Verily You Will Not Die", lies in its unity. The book is an array of twelve stories, but these stories share much a close stylistic, thematic and atmospheric unity that an extra quality is added to each one of them. In a rhapsodical dedication, opening the volume like a confession, Ördögh suggests the common roots of his inspiration: "To narrate with feeling and with wisdom, as so many brilliant talents have in the past! To tell a hundred tales in ten days like Giovanni Boccaccio did! . . . To tell stories with such artful modesty as Giovanni Boccaccio!" Today, of course, it cannot be done. Boccaccio "perhaps was still able to believe—but even this is doubtful—that the ten days, the one hundred tales, the seven fairy girls and the three fairy youths on earth would make people forget the ghastly impact of the plague in Florence!" This option is not open to us, the writers of today. Now the writer "offers scraps of glass in his naked palm. Shattered tales, no more heroes any more."

Szilveszter Ördögh's cycle of stories invoke crippled, shattered life-stories of recent decades. Their protagonists are children, old women and peasants, all of them victims of their own selves and of their environments. A solitary woman ponders over the ruins of her life as she lies awake at night; her fiancé died in the war, her husband resigned from the party in 1956, turned to drink and abandoned her, her daughter, to whom she had clung, tenaciously, also took off one fine day and quit the country. Canvassers call on a peasant farmer and try to persuade him to join the co-operative farm. The peasant, who has only recently obtained some land of his own, stubbornly resists.

"But you will sign eventually. If not today, tomorrow. Because we'll keep coming until you do." "You're welcome, the farmyard is big enough, there's plenty of room here." Boys are playing war games in the village; they grab gold of a little girl in the evening, and tie her up, labelling her as a traitor, the girl seeks to emulate Zoya, the famous Soviet partisan girl she knows from her reader, and so she suffers in silence.

An old peasant, who has lost touch with everything, creeps out of his shack early one morning and erects a scarecrow on the meadow with his own shabby clothes. "Because they, too, are just running, but they do not read the papers about the peril to come! Well, I grab it in the middle, so that they should fear it from afar!" The story radiates a veritable Faulknerian air.

The climax of the volume is a story in which a peasant couple of today decide to get a divorce after thirty years of marriage. They have endured all the tribulations you can imagine, and materially they have reached the level of respectability. Now they finish it quietly, by mutual agreement. They arrange everything, they throw the usual big name-day party with all the family together for the last time, in the knowledge that next day they will build a wall through the centre of the house. Both want peace at last in their old age, but the hopelessness of seeking peace through loneliness is exposed by the other stories of the volume. Even the mere fact that a divorce is taking place has a shocking impact in the story. In Hungary divorce has not been customary among people of peasant origin, especially amongst the elderly, with unwritten communal laws still running deep in their blood. A divorce in such circumstances, with such apathetic resignation, such boundless grief, reflects the desperate nature of their predicament.

Szilveszter Ördögh's stories deal with the inner history of our recent past, with the devastations caused in the soul by cares, exertions and disappointments, the price to be paid for relative prosperity in a material



sense. He draws up a psychological constat about the state of allegedly simple people, about whom in the past we knew the surface details alone: their financial privations, the soul-killing drudgery of their work and their moral courage. Ördög diagnoses symptoms which once seemed to be the privilege of the middle class intelligentsia. But "hastily forgotten, cares secretly buried" show mercy to none. "We can never wash them away. All we can do is conceal them somehow on our face. This daily burial—our perpetual cleansing motions—is demanding greater and greater priority, and our countenance is slowly fading."

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Péter Nádas, a collection of whose stories has come out under the title "Description," is also a representative of the younger generation. He attracted attention with some highly individual stories at the end of the 1960s, and then reappeared on the scene after a lengthy silence with a novel entitled "The End of a Family Novel" (1977), which has been highly acclaimed, and was recently published in West Germany by Suhrkamp. It can be seen in the table of contents here that, besides "The End of a Family Novel", Nádas also wrote a number of these short-stories during the period of almost ten years in which he was artpublishing. In the case of a relatively young author it is rather unusual for a new volume to include works written before his last published book; more than one of these works, now appearing for the first time, was written upwards of a decade earlier.

Péter Nádas differs sharply from all prose writers to emerge in Hungary during the last ten to fifteen years, the writings of whom have broadly similar contours. One of these differences lies in the fact that he arrived on the scene in full armour from some kind of biblical mist, later clarified somewhat in his novel, and has hardly changed at all ever since. He sticks almost obsessively to certain thematic and stylistic models. His chief subject is the functioning of ego conscious-

ness, its mechanism rather than its substantive content. The narrator reared on the *nouveau roman* is out to set down the fumbings of a distracted consciousness in interior monologues. In the exterior world, everything has become uncertain for this consciousness, and finally the reality and certainty of his own self also become questionable.

A longer story, "Love" is—as far as can be judged from the self-contradicting turns of this monologue—about a guy smoking grass with his girl-friend in a Budapest apartment (which lends a certain peculiarity to the case, since this is not routinely done in Hungary); he smokes, more than is good for him, which gives rise to grave disturbances in his consciousness, renders him unable to separate reality from delusion. In this state he lives through the fundamental problem of his life so far in an intensified manner: "Now I still know it: I have entered a circle which had an entrance but no exit. With that, however, only my own strivings have become finalized. I haven't got outside myself, I've fallen back inwards. What has become finalized is the past, I have lost my contact with the outside world, because I was afraid, I have always been afraid of it. . . I thought if I simplified it to myself, I might understand it. I might understand the world through myself. It was a lie. . . I lied to myself that anything I don't understand, doesn't exist. Now it has really vanished." He has escaped inwards to avoid uncertainties, and it seems now that he gets closed in there for good.

The other stories in the volume are also variations of this solipsistic experience of the world. Elements of the outside world intrude arbitrarily and at random. Situations, stories and relations do not become more coherent as they advance. Only the descriptive consciousness functions. It reacts almost like an electroencephalograph or a telex machine, and these reactions convey the constantly growing feeling of prevailing uncertainty.



Nádas certainly knows all there is to know of the possibilities of the interior monologue. Yet, in the light of his novel, these stories seem rather experimental, test runs in the formulation of a specific experience of the world and the absorbing of various literary influences; only the epic flow of the "family novel" could supply this method with an

appropriate subject. So Nádas too has developed, but the level attained by the stories in *Description* also represents a respectable achievement in Hungarian prose writing, which has not often set out on genuine voyages of intellectual exploration.

MIKLÓS GYÖRFFY

## REMEMBERED HISTORY

Frigyes Puja: *A felszabadult Battonya*  
(Liberated Battonya) Gondolat, Budapest, 1979, 448 pp.

Battonya stands for something in recent Hungarian history: it was the first place to be liberated. I hesitate to call it a village, a population of 13,000, not to mention the author's training—and occupation at the time—he was a local printer, hardly conform to an English reader's notion of a Central European peasant community. That of course is one of the hazards of writing briefly about a regionally distinctive part of Hungary: one is caught between the devil of a maze of parentheses and footnotes, and the deep blue sea of leaving much unexplained.

Reading this fascinating book I became truly aware how atypical Battonya is, and I do not now mean as a type of settlement, or because of some feature in its distant past or social structure. Those are all what one would expect in that part of the Trans-Tisza region. What makes it atypical is the reason why its name was inscribed in the history books. Thanks to being liberated already in September 1944, Battonya escaped the darkest and most humiliating chapter of recent Hungarian history, rule by Major Szálasi and his fascist Arrow Cross scum. Every Hungarian aware of the dates should know that, but I am sure even most natives of the country will only have discovered from Frigyes Puja's vivid account that Bat-

tonya was most fortunate in another respect as well: it escaped the ravages of war. There was no cruel siege, no tank battle or artillery barrage, Battonya did not change hands several times, like most of rural Hungary, there was no house to house fighting even. True, a number of Red Army tanks were destroyed in the fields, but as far as the villagers were aware, this first bit of Hungary was abandoned by Hitler's and Horthy's forces without firing a shot. Unlike the rest of Hungary Battonya escaped war damage.

Frigyes Puja, the author, is of course the Foreign Minister, well-known to readers of this journal for his important articles on foreign policy. It was, therefore, journalistically tempting to start this review with the author's person. This, however, would have been misleading for two reasons: the book is more than able to stand on its own feet; the wine we are offered here has no need of the bush of the author's prominence in another field. Besides, the events related are remote from what is discussed in the chancelleries of Europe or the corridors of international power. What we get is domestic politics of the most basic sort, at the grass roots or precinct level. The foundation of local party organizations, first Socialist, then Communist, is described in detail, we



are told much about the persons involved, their background and character, alas, one might say, all in Hungarian, for no sociologist of political parties can really afford to neglect such material. There is plenty, of course, not only in the archives, but also in the libraries, about veteran politicians resurfacing—and often regrouping—after the Nazi nightmare, but not much to match Frigyes Puja's account of the way simple village folk assembled to form a party, not really knowing what kind of party.

When it was decided to form a Communist Party organization, a few men, Puja included, travelled to Rumania to the nearest city, Arad, for advice on how to go about it. "At the time we still naively believed that national frontiers will be unimportant in the future." It ought to be added that Battonya is less than a mile from the present frontier and that, at the time, no major Hungarian town had, as yet, been liberated.

The structure of the book, that is the combination of documents, personal reminiscence told straight, and long passages worked up into a fictionalised narrative, does not really concern readers who have no access to the text. I am not competent to judge whether the present balance is the fruit of considered artistic judgement, or merely a report of a state of affairs. In other words a decision to publish material of considerable interest right now, in an as it were unfinished state, in the awareness that affairs of state are unlikely, for some time to come, to permit the author to devote much time to a subject so far removed from his present duties. Reservations one might feel about the manner of composition do not, however, affect recognition of the authenticity and credibility of the style. We are not left in doubt for a moment regarding the commitment of the author, he freely uses adjectives and expressions of approval and disapproval, but the story nevertheless emerges with the force of objective truth. The rhetoric is there, but it is straight and honest rhetoric, no sly distor-

tion. Opponents might not like the way Frigyes Puja tells his story, but they cannot object that their side is not given.

The telling of the Kevermes case illustrates the author's objective methods. A conflict situation arose in Kevermes between the local village headman, a member of the Communist Party, and the parish priest who was backed by his bishop. A sad tale, which exemplified in a tea cup the storms which had to sweep the country before the present constructive relationship between Church and State could come true, degenerated into farce when a self-appointed and heretical "bishop" decided to exploit the opportunity to fish in troubled waters. A fine figure of a man with a silver tongue that he placed in the service of the new democracy, fond of food and drink, and women. When it came to paying the bill he said that those above would settle it. Mine host was taken aback, but the pseudo-bishop did not mean the heavenly powers: the local Communist Party organization had their headquarters on the top floor. The story is told by quoting articles from the local press in full, from papers that were far from sympathetic to Puja and the cause he stood for.

Another example is a letter dated February 17th 1947, written by a writer from Budapest who visited Battonya. It tells a tale of local terror and anarchy, the facts, and the way they are presented, remind one of the sort of articles that appear in liberal papers reporting distant revolutions. A general sympathy is expressed, but hands are thrown up in horror at particular local events. Puja quotes the letter, then explains that the victims were not the sweet little innocents described in the letter but that, nevertheless, those responsible were all expelled from the Communist Party. The Budapest writer had predicted that the state of affairs would have dire electoral consequences for the Communist Party, but, to quote Puja: "When it came to the election results, he proved a poor prophet. Battonya was one of the few villages in County Csanád where the



Communists increased their vote by roughly 40 per cent."

Much of the book is taken up by problems of Party organization. The major problem all along was to combine the need to recruit members with ensuring that the right sort of people were recruited. Even some of the founding members proved unworthy. It is a pleasant touch to name those who stood the test of time and events, while only the initials of those who failed are given.

In time the young printer was moved on to greater things, becoming district (*járás*) secretary of the Communist Party. As such what had been problems concerning individuals whom one knew personally acquired a more general character, though that was of course present from the start. At one time a central directive put an end to further recruiting, setting an upper limit to Communist Party membership. Puja observes: "Those who prescribed an upper limit to membership clearly hoped that in this way they would defend the party against careerists and similar elements whose place was not there. What we achieved was the exact opposite; a significant proportion of the careerists caught on quickly, they moved into the party, on the other hand we frightened off many respectable and honest peasants." I have quoted that since it seems to me to be an important observation of theoretical interest to sociologists of political parties.

Frigyes Puja closes his book with the local results of the August 1947 parliamentary elections. As the multiplicity of parties listed indicates, the country was still governed by a broadly based coalition. An opposition, Puja calls them the clerical parties, was also represented in the legislative assembly. To quote the author's preface: "I believe that a more thorough knowledge of the 1945-1948 period is desirable for every Hungarian citizen. One still comes across people whose judgement of the whole period from the liberation to the autumn of 1956 is

equally unfavourable. And yet the strategy and tactics of our party, its methods and operating style, were generally sound up to the year of the turn of events 1949 is so-called in Hungary." What is said here about Hungarian citizens goes doubly for this Australian citizen, and I am sure I can here speak for all non-Hungarians who take an interest in the affairs of this country. Though I was a student at the time, taking a lively interest in the affairs of East Central Europe, the fact that the Rákosi era did not start in 1945 really only sank in when I came to this country. The more's the pity that this book is not accessible to those who do not read Hungarian.

*A felszabadult Battonya* is then a lively and absorbing account of the immediate post-war years as seen from one particular neck of the woods, typical socially and historically of a large part of Hungary but atypical, in terms of the period described, because of early liberation. What, however, makes it most memorable for me is the way the liberation itself is described and discussed.

The point is that the priority of Battonya as regards liberation is not an article of faith, it was only established as late as 1960 by a survey carried out by the daily *Népszabadság*, and it has been disputed since. Frigyes Puja convincingly argues in its favour, at least he convinces this reader though, it is fair to say, not all historians specialising in the period. It is abundantly clear however that, although Frigyes Puja was present in Battonya throughout, had access to the memories of others, and to Soviet documents, the precise sequence of events is by no means certain. The chapter titled "The liberation of Battonya" starts:

"In the early afternoon of the 22nd or 23rd of September the Hungarian regiment dug in on the outskirts picked themselves up and passed along the streets, moving westwards." Well, which is it to be, the 22nd or 23rd? It does Puja credit that he admits to not knowing, and is indeed indicative of the way people who expected to



be caught in cross-fire must have felt. There were more important things than the date, survival for one. There is also some uncertainty regarding the movements of Red Army reconnaissance units, and their backing up by properly organized occupation forces. The case for Battonya priority is clinched by the certainty that the village was not reoccupied by German or Hungarian forces—as often happened elsewhere—after Red Army reconnaissance passed through and before Red Army units arrived in force. What seems to have happened was that the fortunes of war and the thinking of military commanders ignored the frontier. The border had neither symbolic nor strategic value and was far too close to the

scene of defeat to permit regrouping. Hence Battonya, to the great good fortune of the inhabitants, was abandoned without a fight.

It should be mentioned that Frigyes Puja has stayed in constant touch with his native grounds, and the scene of his early successes as a Party official, indeed this highly readable and informative book in itself offers ample evidence for the truth of this assertion. He is the member for Battonya in the Hungarian parliament. As readers of the Preface to NHQ 74 will remember, some of the questions put to him when he appeared in the 'Ask the minister'\* programme on television, concerned his constituency work.

RUDOLF FISCHER

## READING AMERICAN PROSE IN BUDAPEST

### *Updike's The Coup*

When a writer's narrative art succeeds in entrancing the reader, he is not likely to pay much attention to whether the work qualifies as a novel, a satire or even an anti-utopia. Such considerations usually arise in retrospect, when they may, however, present themselves all the more disquietingly. John Updike's new novel (*The Coup*) contains numerous elements of these three genres but the author is unable finally to plump for any one of them. Overlappings and transitions both in tone and approach, are particularly important in this book. They contribute greatly to its attractiveness and give this work its specifically and unmistakably Updikeian character.

Colonel Hakim Felix Ellellou seizes power from King Edumu IV in a military coup, puts the ex-king in prison and wields full personal power over Kush, a country on the southern border of the Sahara, a one-

time French colony with no access to the sea and permanently threatened by drought. A fanatical Moslem and an Islamic-Socialist (whatever the real meaning of this funny-sounding amalgam) Ellellou wants to preserve the purity of his country and of the revolution, primarily against the United States, but also against the influence of other Western countries.

The novel amounts to the memoirs of the Colonel, written partly in the first person, partly in the third. It is revealed in the last pages of the book that he has been overthrown during his second great peregrination in the desert, that power has been seized by his prime minister Ezana (whom Ellellou had arrested just before his departure) and an up-and-coming young state security officer. Ellellou is in turn arrested, pensioned off, and expelled from the country. He writes his book on coffee-

\* Parts of the transcript appeared in NHQ 74.



house terraces in Nice, keeping body and soul together with the pension sent from Kush.

The novel is a satire—or rather a satirical natural history—of dictatorship. Acting partly from sincerely held convictions, partly because he is impelled to follow the course of his earlier actions, Ellellou is driven to the increasingly desperate acts which ultimately bring about his downfall. One of these is to burn American food-relief supplies, an act which results inevitably in human sacrifice, with the well-intentioned American relief official responsible dying on the stake. A similar act is the *manu proprio* beheading of the ex-king, set in the midst of some gruesome state festivities.

A satire of dictatorship: yes, but equally a satire of American penetration into the Third World. Ellellou, who has studied in the United States and even imported one of his four wives from that country, wants at all costs to prevent American penetration and the insinuation of the American way of life into Kush. Twists of fate, and of Ezana, his prime minister, caught by the spell of technical progress and personal enrichment, lead to failure; the human sacrifice at the desert border designed to obstruct the inflow of relief supplies proves to be a most efficient means of facilitating multifold American penetration; bazaar imitations of American small-towns replace the former "hallowed, ideal" network of Negro villages.

Updike is a forceful and courageous writer. His characters are depicted with admirable irony, his dialogues are excellent—these virtues are well known from his earlier novels. The situations he creates also emanate much force and vigour. All of these long recognised skills are complemented here by a new one: his landscapes are magnificent. He paints marvellous, unforgettable pictures of the African desert—poetic and artistic, but also horrible and frightening. The whole book has something of dreamlike quality: it reveals here and there his visionary imagination in the ap-

proach to both landscape and situation and this is an entirely new feature of Updike's narrative art.

The irony so typical of this author continues to pervade the dreamlike sequences and to lend them fresh colour. There could be no more devastating criticism of Ellellou's attitude, ideology and methods of leadership, than the detail, masterfully described, where Ellellou accompanied by one of his wives spends weeks on end as a member of a caravan of smugglers, crossing a mountain range in the desert. He does so, and puts his own life at risk, in order to see for himself a "miracle" that is rumoured far and wide. When they finally arrive, on the point of death from hunger and thirst, they see a long row of glittering, luxurious buses on a well-constructed, firstclass motorway: tourist groups from the neighbouring country are using this route as a short-cut to visit and contemplate the "miracle". The miracle itself, incidentally, is the head of Edumu the ex-king; Ellellou carries out the beheading and the roving Touareg steal the head, which is apparently able to talk—with the help of an electronic contraption, as Ellellou soon discovers.

Even if one feels sometimes that this picture of Africa is superficial, apt to concentrate on striking features on the surface instead of trying to penetrate the depth of situations and underlying causes, it still is chock-full of information about Africa's position, possibilities and perils. The book is equally revealing about the US. Probably the best, certainly the most authentic and convincing parts of the novel, are more in which Ellellou recollects his years of study in America, his conversations and personal relationships there. In this light his occasional meetings, in the course of the story, with his American-born wife obtain a particular depth, intensity and colour.

How finally to sum up this novel? It is a graceful yet bitter play of fantasy; according to Updike's thesis the world is beyond redemption. The manner in which con-



traditions and possibilities are formulated in the novel points to Updike's thoroughly anti-revolutionary stand. This is also expressed in the backcloth, which is present throughout as a sort of *leitmotiv*: not a single drop of rain falls in Kush during the five years of Ellellou's rule. Everything withers, as if under a death sentence. As soon as the dictator falls it starts raining and the climate becomes suddenly agreeable. Ezana, it would seem, has Allah on his side.

*Kazin's New York Jew*

Alfred Kazin seems to me to be a writer whose importance is primarily national: his first book, *On Native Grounds*, which laid the foundations of his nationwide fame and literary reputation, is considered to be a work that had a profound impact on judgments and notions formed in the USA about modern American prose. *New York Jew*, which I've just put down, seems to be a self-contained autobiographical work, but in fact it is a continuation of the author's two earlier volumes of reminiscences and retrospection.

Kazin writes splendidly. He is clear, often witty, sometimes sharp, but seldom hurting anybody; he characterizes—or portrays—situations extremely well; and his greatest value as a writer lies in his ability to capture the mood and atmosphere of a period. From the early thirties right up to the present day he has punctually and tangibly reproduced the changing atmosphere, the flavour and dynamics of almost each decade; and when historians in the future come to seek a plastic picture of this age it is likely that Kazin's book will serve as a useful and reliable source.

The life of the *New York Jew*—Kazin's life—is characteristically the life of the New York intellectual. By choosing this combative and even provocative title, Kazin has, whether intentionally or not, pointed to a fundamental problem, to a basic

self-contradiction in the entire "New York Jewish School". It is true that in relating his career, his love affairs, his social life, Kazin pays most attention towards Jewry, towards fellow Jews. It is with a mixture of pride and sympathy that he recalls his parents—the poor little tailor and his wife who had come from Russia to the US—and also the environment in which he spent his early childhood. Yet this is not his real world, not his way of life nor his field of interest; and the extent to which it is *not* can be felt most acutely in his description of his trip to Israel.

Kazin had travelled a good deal before he visited Israel, right after the Six Days' War. Even if he doesn't say it outright, it can be sensed from his writing that he is putting himself to test on the issue of whether he's really going "home"? He doesn't answer this question in so many words, but his description waxes eloquent. This is a world alien to him, one in which perhaps he sympathizes with the Israelis but cannot shut his eyes to the disagreeable phenomena of nationalism, to the excesses of religious fanaticism and prejudice, and to militarist elements. An alien world, and certainly less attractive than France which he revisits regularly with a lover's passion, or Italy, about which he writes with delight and humour when recollecting a longer visit immediately after the Second World War. Wherever he goes his reactions are those of the American humanist intellectual, in his youth in the 1930s a radical (though he doesn't talk too much about this today) and, even in later disillusionment, still fascinated by quite a few of his youthful ideals.

Why, then, the rigid adherence to Jewish identity? Why such an aggressive title for a none too aggressive, indeed contemplative and humorously nostalgic work of autobiography? Surely an element of fashion has crept in here: it is fashionable to be a Jewish writer in the United States today. However, this fashion, besides proving that the *Endlösung*, the Final Solution has utterly



traumatized all civilized mankind for a generation at least, also implies that a piece of history has been wiped out, namely the centuries-old, traditional way of life of Chassidic Jews. This is what Kazin's parents—and the parents of all the other Kazins and their whole environment—transplanted to New York, to the East End. One of the most interesting lessons to be drawn from Kazin's memoirs is how this way of life and this traditional community come to an end and are dissolved into the wider and more spacious American community, how the profile and the socio-ethnic composition of the formerly characteristic Eastern Jewish section of town are transformed. For Kazin, Israel is "an alien country," a disappointment. This is partly because its population is quite different, with habits quite different from those he had been led to expect; and partly it is because, when he meets extreme Chassidim at the Wailing Wall of Jerusalem, he immediately feels it to be an anachronism today.

He is simultaneously full of nostalgia for a certain world and certain patterns of behaviour and yet aware, both emotionally and intellectually, that they have become anachronistic and are in rapid process of extinction. It is this aspect of the book, the light it throws upon numerous other phenomena apart from Jewry, which brings it much closer to us; the phenomena so acutely described are not at all specific to Jewry; the nostalgia and the reactions are, in their essentials, hauntingly close to the nostalgia and reactions characteristic of Hungarians, emotions likewise not invariably constructive in this context either.

Perhaps I have lingered too long on thoughts provoked by the title of the book. Yet there is this considerable discrepancy between title and contents and to my mind Kazin's life as he himself relates it does not differ so very greatly from that of any American intellectual of his generation. It is perhaps no exaggeration to say that this

is where the real interest of the volume lies, namely, in all that Kazin has to say about pre-war and wartime New York, its writers' and artists' focal point in Greenwich Village and its inhabitants, about his years in the editorial offices of *New Republic* and *Fortune* and about the personalities, both the famous and—at least on this side of the Ocean—the not so famous—with whom his life and work brought him into contact.

Kazin brings the personalities of Edmund Wilson and T.S. Eliot to life; he repeats the feat with Luce (founder of *Time-Life-Fortune*), with the photographer Cartier-Bresson, a colleague of his, with his friend Saul Bellow, his pupil Sylvia Plath, art historians Berenson and Leo Stein, Norman Mailer, Robert Frost and John Kennedy; Kazin creates memorable pictures of them all.

To all of this, one further skill is expertly deployed: Kazin has a gift for rendering the spirit, the atmosphere, the mood of moments in time and place. In wartime Britain he detects the peculiar prejudice verging almost on antipathy, which every Yankee seemed to nurture against Britain and the British; he visits Paris before the war and right after it, and notes the substantial changes which took place in-between; after the war he is in inflation-stricken Italy, then back in New York for the McCarthy era and later, for J.F.K.; he breathes the spirit of 1968 in Europe and America; he gets across the atmosphere and tensions of Israel, and in all that he writes he is consistently sensitive to the spirit of the age. Reading him is both an aesthetic pleasure and an object lesson in history.

Kazin is not an historian, but a writer concerned to articulate his own memories. Women—wives and mistresses or sweethearts—take pride of place in his own history. Strangely enough it is about those closest to his heart that he has most trouble in communicating. For instance Natasha, his first wife, originated from the same environment as himself. He does not say it in so many words but he implies that their



separation was due to their having drifted poles apart in outlook. Kazin drifted along, ideologically speaking, with the general currents of his intellectual milieu, while Natasha remained faithful to the left-wing views she had embraced when they met years before. Kazin is equally unable to paint an affectionate portrait of his last wife, Beth. Beth—the author, an easy-going, cheerful sort of woman behind whose outward mirth is hidden the full horror of the Jewish fate, a horror which erupts unexpectedly from time to time. The pictures drawn of the women in between are much more satisfactory: Mary Ellen, the dancer with her insatiable appetite for knowledge, and her passion for its practitioners, Louise, the rich heiress, estranged from Kazin by her money and her emptiness. One could go on enumerating the shorter and lighter encounters, affairs, and flirtations, colourfully and happily told. Through sharing the variegated history of his own life, the author has woven a saga of our era.

*Malamud's Dubin's Lives*

In all the years that I have been reading fiction I have very rarely come across an unknown work written by a contemporary and been immediately possessed by the vague yet irresistible and pure feeling that I held a masterpiece in my hands. I scarcely know the novel properly at this stage, its plot or its characters; but the cadence of the sentences, the precision and richness of the images, the inherent tension of the writing is enough to grip me and carry me along, with the conviction that I have been privileged to read a work of genius.

Reading the first pages of Bernard Malamud's new novel, I was overcome by just this uncommon and blissful feeling. It stayed with me throughout the book, in fact the sensation became stronger. The spell of this novel is difficult to define for the work makes use of no particular devices,

unusual techniques or tricks of the trade. It speaks for itself, and that's saying a lot nowadays, when almost every author attributes greater importance to his trademarked tricks than to his message. Malamud's artlessness and the apparent absence of a message overwhelm and fascinate the reader, at least a reader of my kind who is always childishly seeking new vistas, new knowledge, new people and, in the last resort, a deeper self-knowledge, an enquiry inwards into his own soul. It is perhaps precisely this that Malamud gives us with greater intensity and purity in this novel—greater than other novelists achieve, greater than he himself has achieved hitherto.

The book is heartrending chamber-music, and it is by no means accidental that Dubin's neighbours and friends are members of a chamber orchestra. It is a sonata of solitude, of gregarious loneliness, of partner-finding and partner-rejecting, for any number of reasons; it is a sonata in which every instrument—characters, setting, history—plays its solo, but finally melts into the single sad melody of the intellectual's fate at the end of the twentieth century.

The novel is primarily an anatomy of married life, of how it may turn sour, of how the emotional ties binding the partners can loosen. It is also, and with equal intensity, the anatomy of the birth of a new relationship and the fulfilment which flows from it. This aspect of the novel recalls, in some places, a two-hundred year-old introspective novel, Rétif de la Bretonne's *La dernière aventure d'un homme de quarante-cinq ans*, where the psychological and biological process observed by Dubin in himself and epitomized by Malamud in Dubin appears more openly as a thorough confession, and in a more romantic manner.

The intervening two centuries have changed both external and personal relations such that the old patterns have become unrecognizable, particularly as regards consciousness, psychological processes and their motivations. It is one of Malamud's great



achievements to demonstrate step-by-step that, however well up Dubin and his wife may be in the psychological and psychiatric literature they are powerless to deal with their own processes, their own "case", because most of the forces impelling them are hidden so deep in their unconscious that they defy rational controls.

The objective realism of the novel is a match for its intimate and deep-seated psychological realism. People, both in time and space, in their way of thinking and in their behaviour, exude the last years of the Nixon era, and the reader is well prepared for the information that the protagonists are reading about the Watergate investigation in bed. So this chamber-music, without strictly overstepping, the limits of the genre, becomes something of a symphony of its time.

Children play no small part in this. I'm afraid that although the generation gap has never been smaller than it is today, children nowadays generally become materially and morally independent of their parents at an earlier age, and more completely detached from them. The process of detachment, estrangement, opposition and reconciliation is traced with great precision through Dubin's two children.

The setting plays a quite special role in the plot. Dubin is a nature-lover, an avid walker. The natural phenomena of the seasons appear around him as secondary motives, soft, pervasive and evocative. On three occasions landscape and nature are promoted to a more active role; once, for instance, in the shape of a snowstorm, a kind of projection of Dubin's inner crisis, when Kitty appears with a car to save him from a sorry end; secondly, when he makes it up with Fanny after a separation, in nature's bosom; and thirdly, when he stumbles out at night in the course of a further emotional crisis and, as in the first episode but in a quite different manner, now it is Fanny who

rescues him in her car. In these sequences the setting, nature, is a symbol and also a projection, as it were, the active presence of internal psychological processes; through them the other quieter and more discreet nature scenes also obtain a deeper relief and a heightened importance.

I have referred to the apparent simplicity of the narrative. Indeed, Malamud relates the story with seemingly classical "impassibilité". Although he seldom steps outside Dubin's ego he succeeds in perceiving and making the reader perceive the feelings and the psychological crises of other protagonists, not least those of the women. However, this objectivity and lack of emotion is only the outward appearance. A thorough-going analysis of style would penetrate the secret paths along which the author transmits his own committed heart-throb to the reader, between the lines of so dispassionate a text. One of his means is the masterful build-up to climaxes, which can be noticed at first sight; the chapter-endings and also the closing sentences of parts within the chapters are almost invariably gems of construction; they close and they open up simultaneously giving a perspective—symbolic or dream-like—on what has gone before and directing the reader's attention forwards to what is to follow.

A writer's tour de force—but what is its real goal? Well, I would say that it is a masterpiece on the basis of content as well. It has many messages, and the generations to come will probably discover even more. It says not only "this is life" and "this is what love is like", but also—and perhaps this has priority—"this is how intellectuals are", unsure and audacious, hesitating and resolute, cowardly and courageous, searching blindly for salvation in the confusion engendered by their own conceptual prejudices.

PÉTER NAGY



## IMMORTAL PONYVA

Péter Pogány: *A magyar ponyva tüköre* (Hungarian Popular Literature Through the Ages) Magyar Helikon, 1978. 410 pp.

*Ponyva* in Hungarian commonly denotes the popular literature formerly sold at fairgrounds; it originally referred to the coarse cloth on which the pedlars of old displayed their wares, which included books and almanacs of dubious quality. In time, the word was used to indicate these publications themselves, and eventually covered every conceivable literary form. In modern Hungarian *ponyva* is a pejorative expression used not only in connection with certain types of book, but also plays, films and television performances.

According to *The Historical and Etymological Lexicon of the Hungarian Language* the poet János Arany (1817–1882), who was intimate with the ways of country people, was the first to use the word in the sense of “trashy” literature. Many threads connect Arany’s own poetry to the *ponyva* literature of the previous century. In the summer of 1851, less than two years after the suppression of the 1848–49 Hungarian fight for independence, he began writing his comic-satirical epic *The Nagyida Gypsies*, in which he degraded the heroic national struggle to the level of a gypsy anecdote. Lajos Kossuth, the revolutionary leader who wished to depose the Habsburgs, was depicted as a gypsy chief encouraging his tattered company thus: “The *ponyva* proclaims our heroic deeds, written in chronicles and almanacs. Someone may even devote books to us, and the world will be amazed at how valiant we were.” Arany directed this piece of bitter irony not only at the leaders of the freedom fight but also at himself, for in 1848 he too had written stirring, revolutionary poems, and these too had been printed in the *ponyva* books sold at fairs. It is interesting to note that only a few years before Arany, the poet Gyula Sárosy did not yet utilize the word *ponyva* in this figurative sense. In 1849

Sárosy published his long poem *Golden Trumpet on Ponyva*, a relentless attack on the Habsburgs, which included the following philosophical stanza: “Life, you see, is like a *ponyva*, covered with yarns and fables. You may derive wise words from it, until it is swept from under you.”

In their series “Hungarian Typography” the bibliophile publishers Magyar Helikon have so far published books dealing with outstanding figures of Hungarian typography, as well as the great printing works. The latest volume in the series, Péter Pogány’s *A Survey of Hungarian Trash*, undeniably comes within the category of typography in that the wares of those selling cheap literature to the public at fairs consisted of printed works. However, only a meagre fifteen pages cover matters strictly in the field of typography, such as printing and illustrating, whilst a further thirty deal with printing houses and various *ponyva* series. The rest of the book has little or nothing to do with typography, which makes it more readable and of interest to the wider public. The wise teacher who gathered round himself a group of listeners—like grandfather and grandchildren or priest and congregation—and imparted to them all manner of wise and instructive advice was a characteristic figure of the age of enlightenment. Péter Pogány, a Benedictine monk, is a descendant of those teachers with access to a storehouse of inexhaustible knowledge. His chosen subject is this *ponyva* literature and he utters discourses on it to an imaginary group of listeners seated beneath the branches of an old, imaginary walnut-tree. But indeed, is there anything under the sun which cannot in some way be connected to the main theme? As soon as one starts to talk about one old *ponyva* volume, one starts to uncover additional related material in the



realms of, for instance, history, literature, ethnography and medical history. The author has attempted to organize the wealth of additional information into chapters and sub-headings, and he has, on the whole, been successful in doing so. Furthermore, by way of ingenious and humorous chapter headings he has managed to conceal his cleverly contrived system, which must have involved considerable time and effort. For example, who would guess that a chapter on drama headed *One is Necessary* was about variations on the parable of the prodigal son? With an impressive knowledge of cultural history, Péter Pogány lines up all the protean modifications of the basic story, including renaissance short stories, school plays, beggars' lamentations, performances at fairs, and finally paintings and wood engravings in which the artist was able to depict enticing female figures and lewd scenes under pretext of a biblical theme. There were antecedents to this associanist-germinal method in the writing of Hungarian cultural history. At the beginning of the century Sándor Takáts (also a monastic scholar) wrote about the Hungarians' way of life in the 16th and 17th centuries on the basis of old manuscripts which he researched thoroughly. Similarly, István Ráth Végh collected many old curiosities between the two world wars. But is it possible to write about cultural history in any other way?

The *Survey of Hungarian Trash* is divided into two parts, which are entitled *What Is Public Belongs to Everyone* and *Common Prey*. These titles do not give much idea on how the two parts differ from each other, although on further reading the difference soon becomes apparent. Part one concerns contents, *ponyva* as a genre and its most significant subcategories, such as epics, lyric verse, anecdotes, divination and the dissemination of knowledge. Part two, subtitled "The Sociology and Nature of Trashy Literature", is far more miscellaneous, and it is not really possible to give a brief description of its themes. A particularly fine

chapter analyzes Hungarian poets' connections with *ponyva*. The author also deals with printers, patterns of reading, singularities of printing and title-pages, as well as booksellers' tricks, collections of printed works and the characteristics of cheap books worldwide.

From time to time, the author himself adopts the method booth-keepers at fairs use to attract customers; for instance, he has given one of his chapters the pseudo-title of "Literary History Hung on a String and Pinned Behind a Mirror". What he wanted to prove here was that over the centuries there was no strict boundary line between these trashy variants and more highbrow literature in Hungary. Some writers tried in vain to disguise their works in *ponyva*-form and even when they personally went to sell them at fairs the public were still not interested. Mihály Táncsics (1799-1884), self-educated representative of the common people, was freed from prison by the inhabitants of Pest on 15th March, 1848, the day of the revolution. He lived through many an adventure befitting inclusion in a novel. For nearly twenty years he lived in hiding from the police, and he has a particularly moving account of how, as a sick and aged man, he wheeled his daring political pamphlets to the small-town market-place, only to wheel them all back home again unsold.

In this well-documented book Péter Pogány describes how poets attempted to distinguish themselves from the perpetrators of the lowest forms of literature from as early as the second half of the 18th century. One way in which they did so was by writing parodies. The figure of Mihály Csokonai Vitéz (1773-1805) stands out among the Hungarian poets of the French Revolution era. His brand of Weltschmerz bohemianism was akin to that of Robert Burns. At the age of twenty Csokonai wrote his first play, which he subtitled: *He Who is a Poet in Hungary Must Also Be Mad*. In this the character Csikorgó



(Grater) is heaped with the praises, friendship and money of aristocrats for his dreadful rhymes, while the genuine poet Tempefői (a self-portrait) lives under threat of imprisonment for not being able to pay his bill at the printers. This is the realistic and explicit utterance of an ambitious young man who, aware of his own talent, wants to become a great poet. Csokonai, however, was shortly flung out of college and he drifted along without means or a job, fighting a battle against consumption. A few years later Csokonai wrote a farce featuring a character similar to Csikorgó, Kurusz (meaning "quack"), but without attempting to set him off against a genuine poet this time, because by now he himself has sunk to the degraded level of versemonger. Not only fate but the literary world proved unkind to Csokonai, for his poetry was mistakenly labelled *ponyva*, especially by his contemporary Ferenc Kazinczy, who wanted to play the role of a Hungarian Goethe. It was not until several years after his death that Csokonai's value was recognized by other poets.

Where, then, does the dividing line between trash and genuine literature lie? And what treatment do both deserve? This has been a continuous dispute (sometimes a battle) over the past five centuries, in which the field and weapons have often changed in a surprising way. The history of *ponyva* in Europe began with the printing of books; this seems obvious enough, for in the age of codex-copying the poor certainly could not afford to buy books. There is no guarantee, however, that those who could afford the codices were also endowed with sound literary taste. The libraries of Lorenzo de Medici and the 15th century Hungarian King Matthias contained not only classical works but worthless hocus-pocus books as well. High-brow *ponyva*, for example the Romance cult, spread like wild-fire once printed books were widely available. The first great modern novel, Cervantes' *Don Quixote*, was intended to be a parody of *ponyva*. But the basic

works of the genre Heliodoros' *Aithiopica*, Apuleius' *Golden Ass* and Petronius' *Satyricon* were written in ancient times.

That most irresistible of literary genres, the novel, had a double face from the start. Straining for effect and playing on readers' emotions are techniques which may be detected in even the very best, and often one cannot but admire the technical skills of some of the successful inferior novels. Dostoyevsky's whodunnit *Crime and Punishment* is undoubtedly in a higher literary class than those of Georges Simenon or Graham Greene, but who would dare raise a barrier here and suppress the works of Simenon and Greene, or, if you like, those of Chandler and Agatha Christie? Virginia Woolf in *Orlando* and James Joyce in *Ulysses* freely admitted their links to *ponyva*, the most despised branch of literature. Péter Pogány's book does not attempt to theorize but merely takes a look at the history of Hungarian *ponyva*. However, he does come to the conclusion that *ponyva* is here to stay; and although its face is ever-changing, its identity is constant.

The *ponyva* books of old are valued as museum pieces. In the Hungarian National Library where copies of every single Hungarian publication may, in theory, be found, the *ponyva* collection is the most incomplete. For a long time the librarians shunned the cheap publications, and by the time they realized that perhaps they ought to be collected after all, copies had become scarce.

The value of *ponyva* literature for students of cultural history was realized equally slowly. The international development of the motifs, and the ways in which changes occurred, can be traced from those *ponyva* publications which have survived. The literary and *ponyva* traditions of neighbouring countries in East Europe, where languages were often mutually intelligible offer a particularly satisfying field for investigation. Hungarian *ponyva* literature adopted many motifs from Germans, Slovaks, Southern Slavs, Roumanians und Ukrainians. The



researcher can go back several centuries guided by the songs contained in the *ponyva* song-books. Collecting folk songs and tunes first began in a conscious way two hundred years ago at the instigation of Johann Gottfried Herder. The publishers of the *ponyva* books got in first, however, with their editions of folk song lyrics, which were a mixed bag when it came to quality and authenticity.

Superstition, magic and belief in witches offer no less an important source to the researcher and there is also plenty of opportunity for comparison, because in Hungary and the rest of the Habsburg Empire witchcraft trials were regular occurrences until the middle of the 18th century. Many people were burnt at the stake and the trial records that have been preserved testify to the extent to which superstitious beliefs prevailed.

A peculiar variety of *ponyva* publication was a sheet of paper covered with a series of tiny pictures of The Virgin Mary, which were believed to have a curative value. Since the author of *A Survey of Hungarian Trash* is a Benedictine monk, as I have already mentioned, it is surprising that he makes comparatively little mention of the religious literature which appeared in *ponyva* form, although it would be very interesting to collate the printed texts with what has been handed down to us by way of oral tradition. A marvellous collection of folk prayers and incantations, *I Ascend the Mountain, Descend the Slope* by Zsuzsanna Erdélyi, was published recently. It transpired that just as much wealth and variety is contained in the prayers uttered before bedtime by aged villagers as there is in folk songs and tales. A compilation and analysis of the motifs, both Hungarian and those of other countries, might yield results as exciting as the ones obtained in the field of folk ballad texts and music.

Research into *ponyva* is an interdisciplinary affair, but then this is true of any branch of study nowadays. Péter Pogány has

done a very fine, incredibly thorough job. In addition to literature and ethnography, he also has an extensive knowledge of medical history, criminology, the history of printing and the book trade, typography and fine art.

The author had a vast job in ploughing through all these subjects, as well as the *ponyva* books themselves. Anyone who has ever attempted research no matter how small the subject, will appreciate the work that went into producing this 400-page volume. However, one interesting tit-bit did escape the author's notice. During the course of my own research into Csokonai I came across several *ponyva* volumes with the title *The Infallible Predictions of Mihály Csokonai Vitéz*, each of which contains predictions for a number of years, beginning with the following dates:

1811. There will be great monetary changes.

1814. The French will be defeated.

In later years the predictions deviated from each other, foretelling all manner of things from war, earthquakes, to a good harvest, hail and pestilence. The prophecies concerning the close of the century, on the other hand, were pretty unanimous in that they predicted the end of the world and the day of judgement, not to mention the emergence of the New Jerusalem.

The oldest in this series of predictions, dating back to the 1840s, is hand-written and as yet makes no mention of Csokonai. The poet received the dubious honour of having his name adopted as a trade-mark by charlatans in the 1850s. Whoever thought up the idea was a clever man, indeed he must have been familiar with literature and history. Csokonai died in 1850. Thus, if his "infallible predictions concerning the devaluation in the Habsburg territories in 1811 and the defeat of Napoleon in 1814" came true, then obviously the predictions in the book bearing his name also had a good chance of being fulfilled. In subsequent publications it was not difficult to adjust



the predictions *post facto*, for example the inclusion of the 1848-9 freedom fight in the 1860 publication, and the Hungarian agreement with the Habsburgs after 1867. Even the First World War gets a mention, for there was a 1920 edition of Csokonai's infallible predictions. Before Péter Pogány no one had written so extensively and profoundly about the history of cheap literature in Hungary. He concludes that *ponyva* is immortal and will no doubt survive all kinds of social changes. However, the author has not dealt with the way in which this immortality can be evidenced today, neither has he speculated on the future successes of *ponyva*.

Authorities on cultural policy are proud of the fact that literary classics have been published in Hungary over the last thirty years in altogether more than a hundred million copies, in the guise of paperback *ponyva*. Before the war one of the large Budapest publishing houses had introduced a series of classics in paperback form, publishing one a week. These were known as "yellow novels" on account of their yellow covers. At the beginning of the 1950s the *Olesó Könyvtár* (Inexpensive Library) did much the same in an attempt to encourage those who read only trash to read better books. Since then, *Olesó Könyvtár* has come to publish its books on better paper with tastefully designed covers, and to offer a wide selection of the best of Hungarian and world literature.

But alongside these admirable series outright trash, such as adventure stories and whodunits, is also published. Its existence is in some measure legitimized by the fact that these works cost six times as much and the publishers pay "trash tax" which helps to pay for the publication of better quality books. Even so, the literature subject to this tax belongs to a better grade of trash, and authors include Agatha Christie, Georges Simenon and Chandler, the creators of classic detective stories. The balance between cheap and expensive mass literature has been steadily maintained, over the years, although debates do crop up occasionally.

Some people have argued that books subject to trash tax should not be loaned by public libraries (a free service) because in this way the devotees of trash evade the tax. The opposite opinion has also been voiced. Not long ago sociologist Elemér Hankiss declared that *ponyva* fulfilled a democratic function because it made up the reading matter of the majority of people; given this fact, the minority favouring highbrow literature was at fault in seeking to influence or dictate public taste. Food for thought lies in the fact that the volumes of at least twenty Hungarian poets are published not in a few thousand copies, which is average in the west, but in 10,000-50,000 copies.

BALÁZS VARGHA



# ARTS

## THE MANUAL GROUP

*Works by Mariann Bán, Márton Horváth, Zsuzsa Pérelí,  
Vladimir Péter, Júlia Szilágyi and Anna Szilasi*

In place of the usual opening speech, these young artists invited the Solymár brass band to play at the opening of their exhibition. The band played in the majestic aula of the Műcsarnok, built at the end of last century, and the acoustics of the big marble-floored hall further enhanced the strident brass-band sound. It should be pointed out that this is an amateur ensemble from a village near Budapest which has a German population. Most of its members are elderly people, farmers and tradesmen. They played German folksongs and pieces dating from the time of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy and their wind instruments are a comparative rarity in present-day Hungary.

I felt their performance to be an organic part of the exhibition. The Manual Group is made up of a variety of craftsmen: Mariann Bán, a potter, Márton Horváth, who designs and makes glass jewellery, Zsuzsa Pérelí, a weaver, Vladimir Péter, a goldsmith, and Júlia Szilágyi and Anna Szilasi, who work with fabrics. The art historian Ibolya Herczeg arranged their exhibition in three rooms of the Hungarian capital's most distinguished exhibition hall. She did so in a bazar-like manner which retained the spirit of fairground music, though faithful to the elegant norms of the museum.

The Manual Group was formed in 1975, and first exhibited at the *Huidevettershuis* in

Bruges. In 1978 they followed this up in the *Sin'Paora* gallery in Paris with an exhibition entitled *Nostalgia*. In Hungary, however, they had to wait until 1979 for their first representative show. In their catalogue "In Place of a Manifesto" they issued precisely that—a manifesto. They wrote: "...we have drifted together because of the similarity of our aims. All of us are working with traditional materials, with traditional craft tools as our instruments. We make objects without bothering with any market research, and it turns out that there is a demand for them. The choice of materials and methods of production is not primarily determined by feasibility, pragmatic considerations, profitability, etc., but by requirements imposed by the materials themselves, latent in a sphere which is hard to verbalise, that of the sense of touch... We wish to dissociate ourselves explicitly from those who produce fancy trinkets disguised as articles of daily use, who exploit customer's hesitancy and ignorance..."

The Manuals appeared on the scene at the best possible moment. The applied arts in Hungary had been waiting so long for the breakthrough of the achievements of the *Bauhaus*, the victory of function, geometrical abstraction and good design, that when this finally did come about this long awaited modernity had been so diluted, that it seemed that one more avantgarde had been overcome by its fate, had become academic.

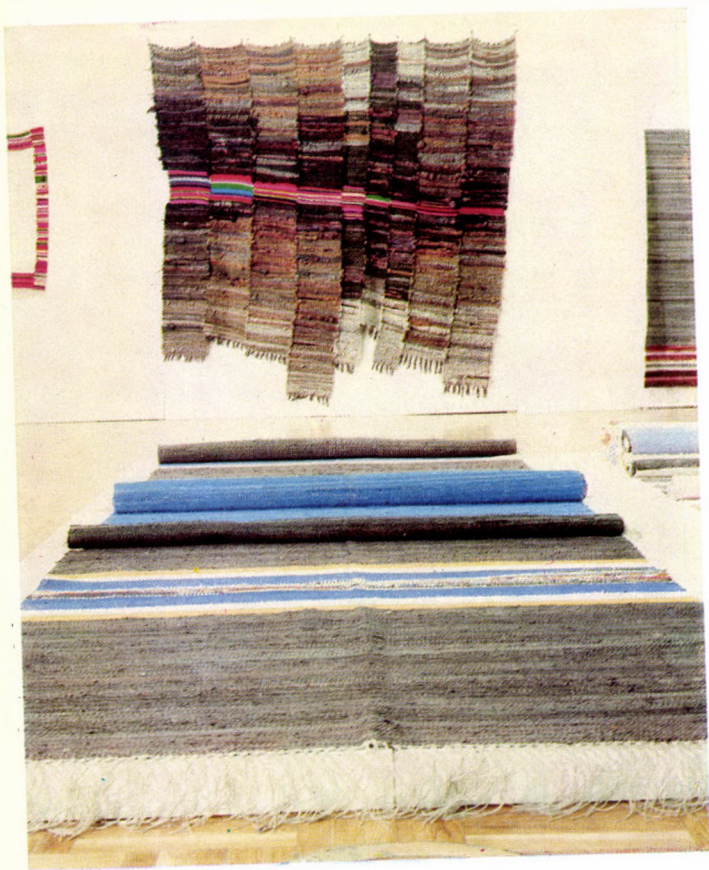




*Mibály Szabó*

ZSUZSA PÉRELI: ASTA NIELSEN (TAPESTRY WITH APPLIED  
PHEASANT FEATHERS, 70 X 80 CM, 1979)

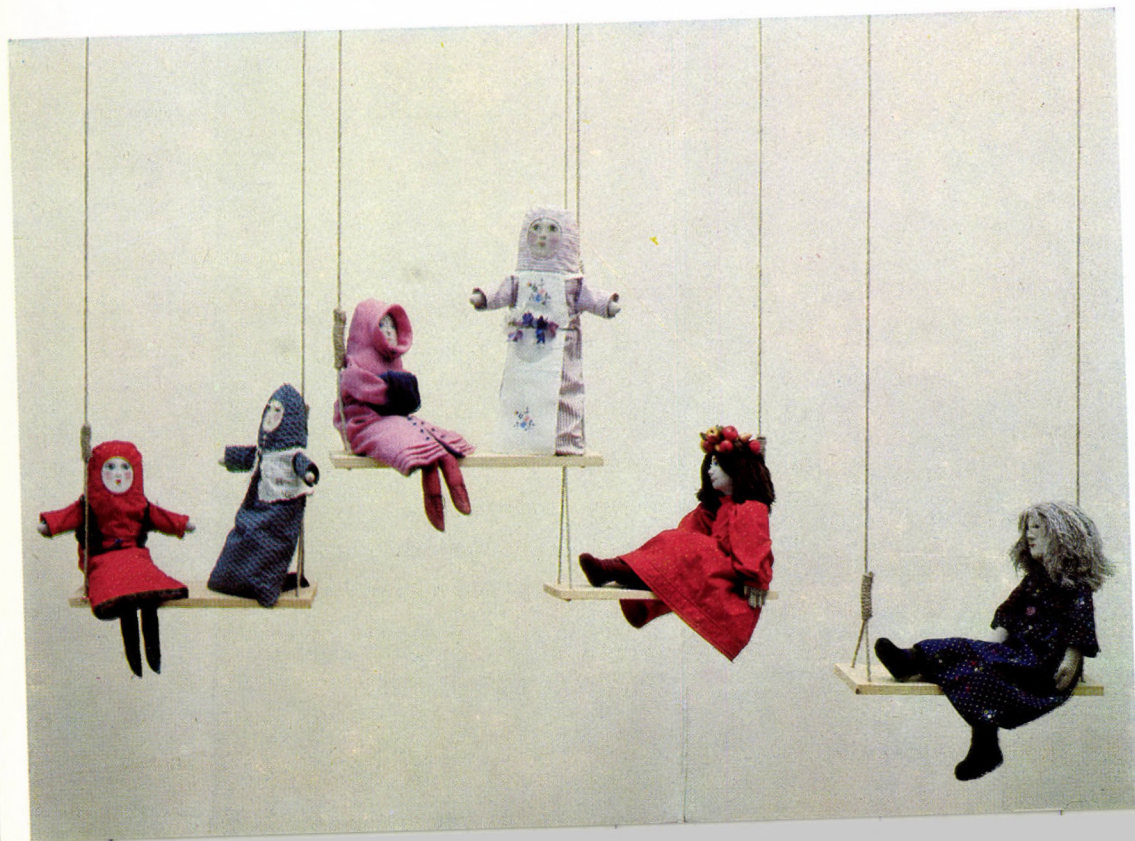




ANNA SZILASI:  
LARGE BROWN TAPESTRY  
(HANDWOVEN WOOL AND  
RAG CARPETS, 1979)

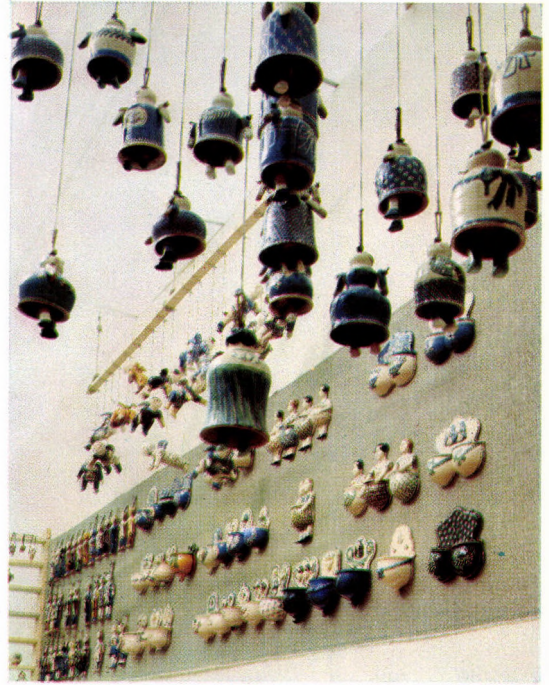
Mihály Szébbé

JÚLIA SZILÁGYI:  
RAG DOLLS (1979)





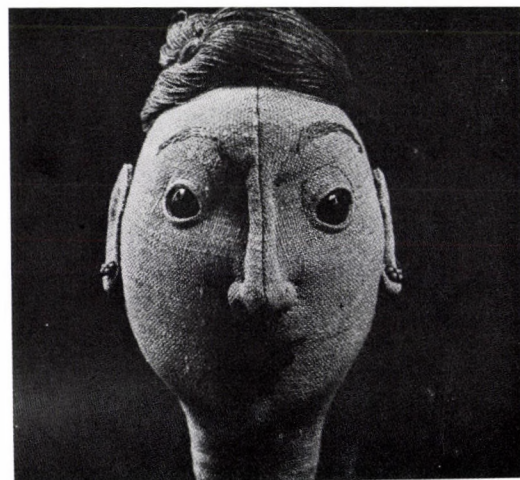
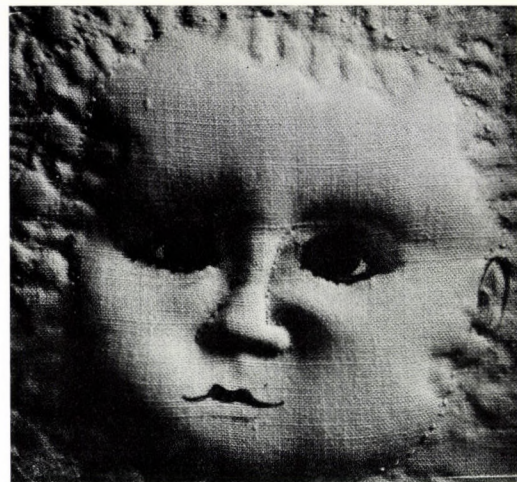
MARIANN BÁN: BELLS,  
HOLYWATER STOOPS (CERAMICS),  
1979



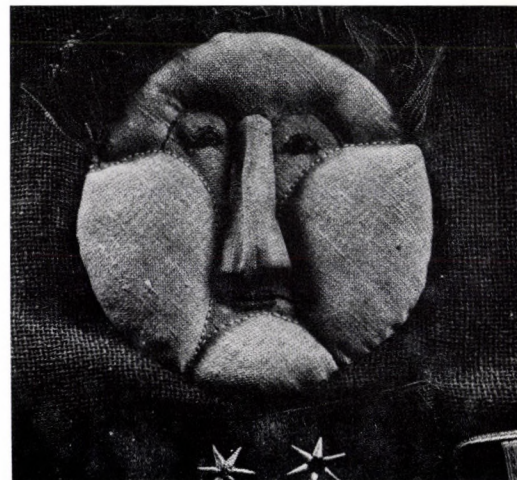
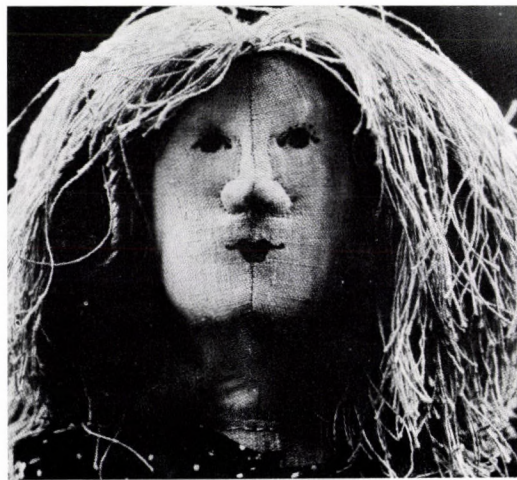
MARIANN BÁN: DOLLS,







*László Lelkes*

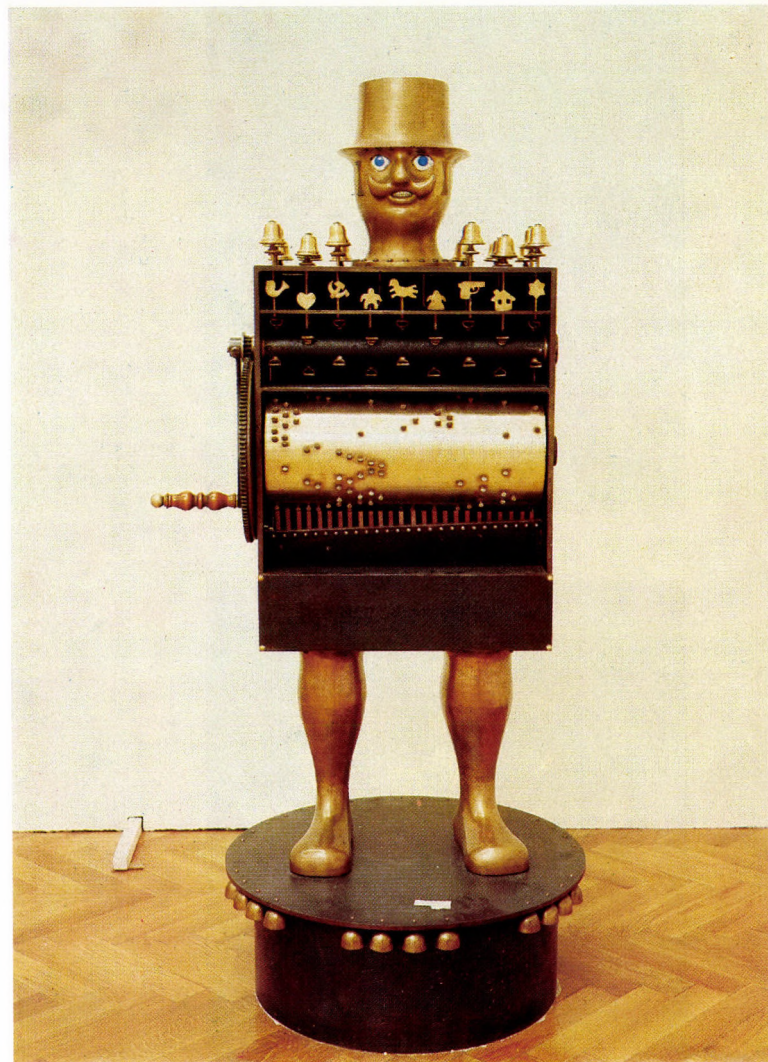


JÚLIA SZILÁGYI: DOLLS' HEADS (TEXTILE)





MÁRTON HORVÁTH: GLASS BEADS (1979)



Mihály Szabó

VLADIMIR PÉTER: ORGAN GRINDER  
(COPPER, IRON, 160 CM HIGH, 1979)





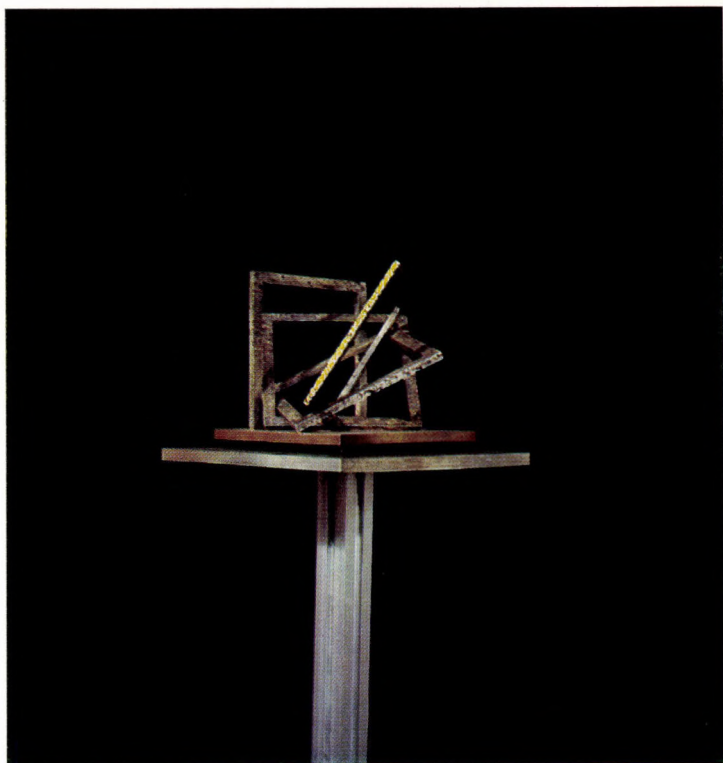
VLADIMIR PÉTER: COSTUME JEWELRY (COPPER, LEATHER, STONE)

József Rák



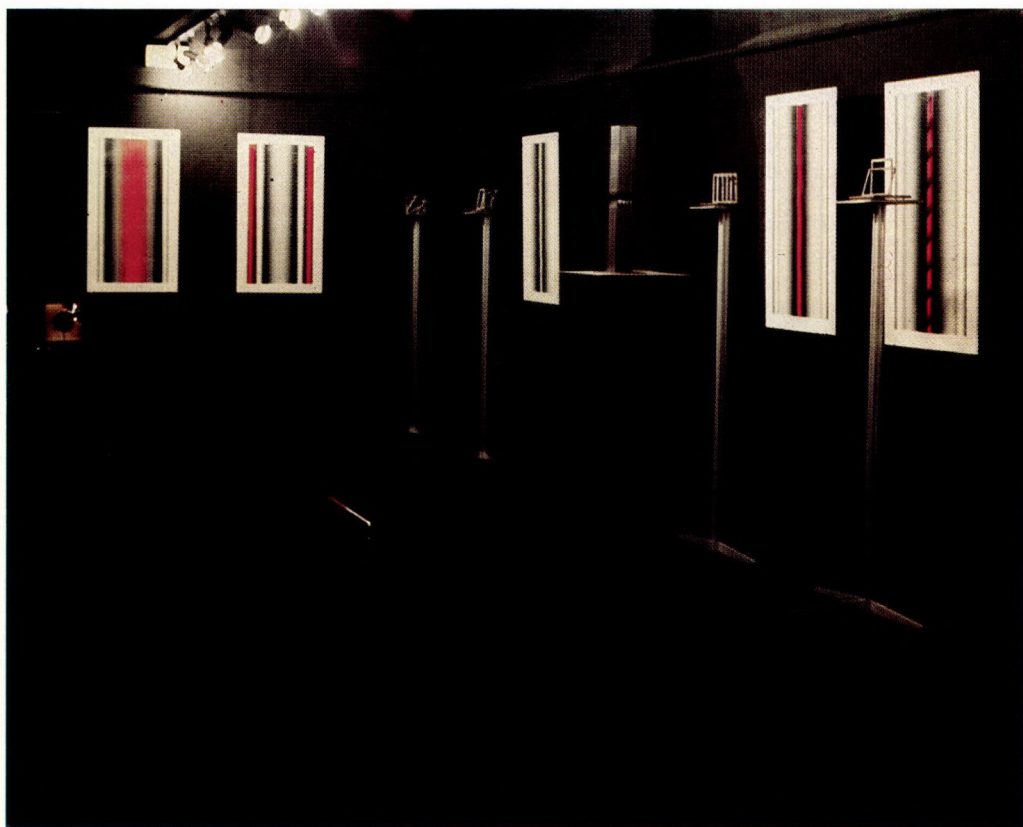


GYULA GULYÁS:  
CONNECTED SQUARES  
(BRONZE, SILVER,  
20 X 20 CM, 1979)

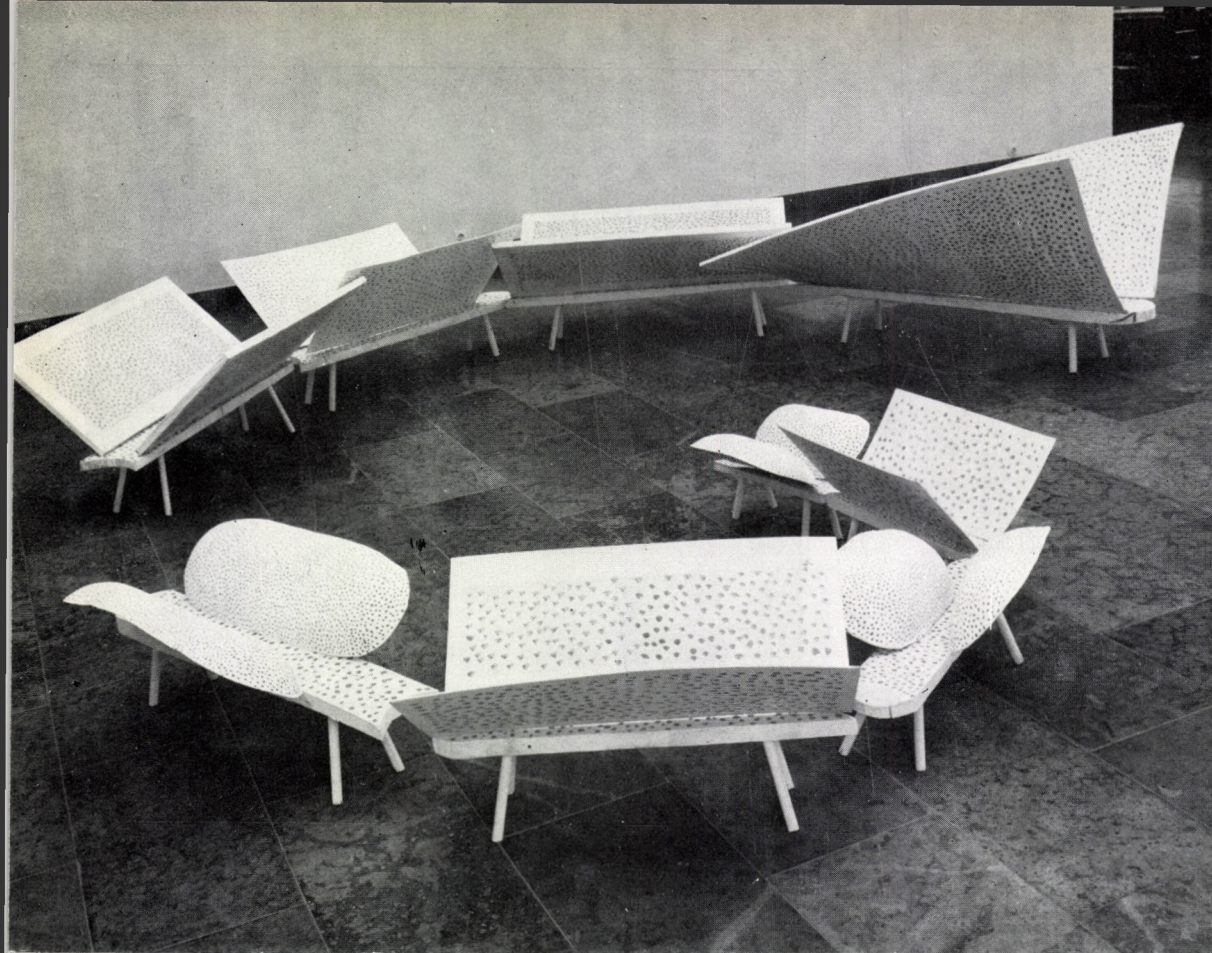


Margit Babos

INTERIOR OF THE EXHIBITION OF GYULA GULYÁS AND TAMÁS HENCZE  
IN THE FRENCH INSTITUTE IN BUDAPEST (1979)



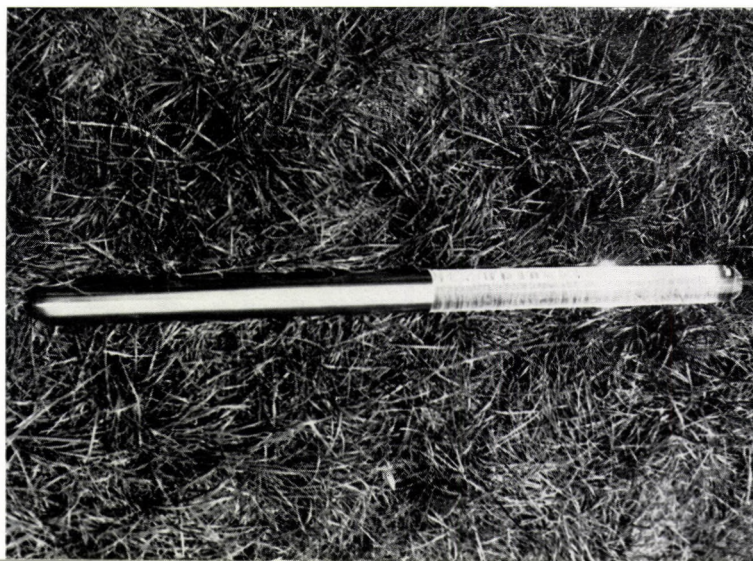




*Levente Szepsy Szűcs*

GÉZA SAMU: THE LARGE PAPER KITE (WOOD, PAINTED CARDBOARD  
13 M LENGTH, 0.40-1.20 CM HIGH 1979)

GYULA GULYÁS: THE STANDARD OF SCULPTURE  
(CHROMIUM, PLEXI GLASS, 3 X 75 CM 1979)



*Margit Bakos*



The more backward section of the general public accepted this pale imitation of modernity, this cheap corruption, when "modernity" itself needed to be revamped. The artists of the Manual Group recognised this, not because they are strait-laced conservatives sitting in a lavender-scented room and sighing for the past, but precisely because they are true rebels. They have rebelled against rigid walls, bleak planes, military angles, cubes and strip lights. They are seeking order through their own excesses, a lost order. They do not form an artistic school, since they are all quite different from each other, and not only in the genres in which they work. Yet they are linked by their interest in the traditional, by nostalgia, and at the same time by their critical approach to this nostalgia. Most of them share a developed self-irony, apart from a general playfulness and sense of humour. The Manuals are also associated by their talents. A spontaneous collective of good artists does not tolerate honorary members with lesser gifts. Flexible tuition at the Budapest Applied Arts School has obviously played its part in their achievements, as can be seen in the fact that each artist has become the diametrical opposite of his or her former teacher. Such a grouping is in itself a novelty, artistic collectives being unusual in Hungary, and this in itself is as indicative of what the Manuals are trying to do as is the conception of their works.

Apart from the manifesto, each member also contributed his own short *ars poetica*, providing further indications of his aspirations. Each of them is so lucid and carefully phrased that it is perhaps best to quote from them in turn.

\*

"I always wanted to do something," writes Mariann Bán, "which could only be done by me, by which people could identify me, and through which I could find my own identity... I do not like the terms 'ce-

ramics' and 'ceramist'... I love folk art, but I do not believe in its artificial sustenance." Bán starts out from folk art, or she takes the goods of olden-day fairs, as her models, but this is only the launching pad for a long and fruitful journey. The greater part of her pottery is made up of figures, bodies like potato-sacks or cello-waisted women, some of them designed to form money-boxes; there are boy gymnasts on the rings, others dressed in the striped vests of the nineteenth century; there are little angels and bells, and the body of the bell is none other than the long, wide skirt of the doll. The artist is obviously at home in tuning as well, because the figures can be moved to produce delightful chimes. All of them are stiff, vain puppets with a military look and carriage. The ruthless and critical artist—this exciting and attractive young woman—even has the courage to mould certain elements of a self-caricature into these dolls. In addition to the bells there are various pipes and pear-shaped instruments amongst the exhibits; in actual fact, these are genuine primitive instruments. The collection is rounded off by little bowls reminiscent of holy-water stoups in the homes of peasant families.

The décor of the figures deserves special mention. Some types crop up more than once, but the details are unique to each doll. Most of them are shiny, glazed ceramic embellishments featuring the characteristic blue dye of folk art ornaments or stylized flower garlands. A splendid assemblage effect is achieved by the kilned Rococo roses and pastorelle scenes from transfer pictures: natural ornaments appropriate to delicate porcelain are reproduced here on stocky, clumsy, rustic earthenware.

As I say, each piece is unique, it is almost as though Mariann Bán had calculated all the possible variations and mutations of design on a computer; according to the museum's stock-book, 2600 Bán pieces were on display in this section. The arranger had placed some of them up on shelves, like jam-jars in



the pantry, and others—the angels, gymnasts and bells—were ingeniously suspended.

Márton Horváth is the first craftsman, at least in Hungary, to try his hand at making glass jewels, working at home in an ordinary flat. His technique, the "turning on the core," practised in ancient Egypt, means that the hot glass beads are impregnated by a slender stick, much the way that pork en brochette is prepared by the chef. His beads, which might form part of a ring or a leather armband, have very simple basic forms: cylinder, ball, discus or oval. They are white or stained with metallic oxides into different colours, opalesque, translucent or mottled. One of his own inventions is a squat vase-shaped bead, with its basic colour of cobalt-blue ornamented with white rickrack or white balls, and drawing its inspiration from the medium make of calico; the contrast of blue and glaring white lends special attraction to these pieces. After threading the beads in the usual way the artist goes in for more and more adventurous forms in pendants, for example with a plethora of crosses or an arrangement resembling Gothic finials. Horváth manages all this not in an instinctive or improvising manner but according to a scenario of specific designs. He himself says that "the main function of a jewel is to express in its own specific manner the personality of its wearer". No mere display could provide this effect, the jewels can live only on the necks and wrists of beautiful women; but the visitors to the exhibition could appreciate the works when the female artists, artists' wives and women critics present acted as spontaneous mannequins.

"What makes the gobelins woven in olden times so fascinating," writes Zsuzsa Péreli, "is that each of their colours, has lived through hundreds of years and somehow retained its freshness... I love weaving gobelins from wool. I would hope that the colours of my own gobelines will endure in a similar way."

There has been a debate going on recently

as to whether the art form of the goblin is still possible today, or whether it has died a death. In my opinion there are good poets and versifiers, good paintings and cheap fakes, and in the same manner there are good gobelins and bad ones. It is bad art in any form that is anachronistic, and not goblin weaving. Zsuzsa Péreli is a goblin-maker, highly self-aware, the master and passionate lover of a most traditional process. Péreli the goblin artist is actually a descriptive artist—since one can also write with metatheses—she is a painter who uses a weaving loom instead of brushes. Péreli's originality in this traditional, almost reverential form of expression is to transpose into it the wildest, one might say most scathing, ironical tendency of her spirit.

She is not only playful and cynical at times, she has the courage to be light-minded, though never in her choice of subject, in her impulses and her execution of them. Péreli is a nostalgic artist, she archaizes, but she does not take the great artistic trends—eclecticism, Art Nouveau—as her model. Instead she looks to their secondary or tertiary precipitations or indeed, to outright trash. Some of her earlier pieces have already been reviewed here\*, but if anything these latest ones are even more exciting.

On her portrait, *Asta Nielsen* she used real pheasant feathers and preserved the realism of a photograph. *Kitten with a Ball*, now in my own collection, incidentally might stand as the blazon of Zsuzsa Péreli's anti-trash trash, and the "Lovely Little Hall-Pictures" (as she calls them) present Rococo-inspired landscapes, but drawn with a sewing-machine on cheap fabric and then put into the appropriate Blondel frames. She herself has sewn these frames in silk and stuffed them with oakum. The duet of cherubs woven on a cobalt blue background and flanked with a garland, quite apart from its technical skill, speaks for itself, or, to be more precise, it wilfully argues.

"Why have I become a textile artist?"

\* NHQ 70, p. 202



because I couldn't stay a kindergarten teacher for ever! . . . The custom of giving presents has proliferated so widely nowadays, it has become virtually a compulsion. To satisfy it, objects have to be turned out *en masse*, and the quicker people buy them, the quicker they part with them. I would like to produce objects which are difficult to part with," she says.

"Whenever I'm asked about my trade, I always feel embarrassed and hesitant when I say that I'm a goldsmith," Vladimir Péter confesses. Later he concludes: "Therefore, when it really comes down to it, I am still a goldsmith." He need not ponder this so deeply. During the Renaissance no one racked his brain to concoct dualities like "goldsmith-sculptor" or even "goldsmith-cum-painter". Nor did the great names of *Art Nouveau* or the *Baubaus*, and contemporary art is obviously becoming more and more of an interdisciplinary activity anyway. Péter is both goldsmith and sculptor, he turns out masterworks in both genres and he loves them both: could anything more be asked for?

Péter is actually the key figure of the Manual Group, one of its most outstanding artists; I shall be brief only because I have already reviewed most of the pieces he exhibited here.\* I wrote then about his strikingly heavy steel, glass, plastic and amber jewels, forms akin to digging instruments, bottle-openers, tea pots. He has not run out of ideas: the pendant of his latest string of beads is a little horse with a rubber wheel attached to its abdomen just like the ones used at airports to transfer luggage. I also mentioned last time how he managed to conjure up the spirit of the Pest fun-fair at the beginning of the century (the scene of Ferenc Molnár's *Liliom*). He has plastic statues almost five feet high of women acrobats, fortune-tellers, merry-go-round horses and of death itself. The nostalgia expressed in them questions the very enterprise of grand art and simulta-

neously provides an answer to his own genre dilemmas.

Péter did come up with plenty of new jewels and metal etuis for this occasion. Particularly effective were his two huge columns decorated with spiralling red lines where the artist seems to have chosen a verbal interpretation for the column-caps: one is the head of an old man with a thick moustache and a bowler hat, the other that of an old woman with her hair tied up in a bun. His best work is perhaps his merry-go-round figure. This piece in brass is a sculpture executed with the precision of the goldsmith, depicting some cross-bred between a man and his hurdy-gurdy. The man wears a top hat and twiddles his moustache according to the fashion of his age, the early years of the century. His legs are also made of brass, but his body is an angular hurdy-gurdy, with a punch-card in real brass; and when the brass handle is turned the music rings out. I do not know quite how to categorise this subtle work with its many layers of meaning, either as to genre or to style. It is autochthonous, and that is why it is so good.

Júlia Szilágyi exhibited batik wall pictures and hangings, the successors to the panel pictures of an earlier age. She ornamented the appliqué bases with old leftover materials, and in the centre fashioned with a most original, textile embossed face relief, from stiff snow-white linen. The influence of folk art, or rather of ethnographical collections is also felt, especially in the deliberate use of original materials. Her favourite forms include the flat relief pull-hussar (by pulling a string his arms and legs are made to move) and a twenty-inch soft, stuffed textile doll.

Szilágyi displays her textile sculptures on tiny pieces of furniture. In the cradle there is a flat pillow doll assembled from pieces of genuine, festooned village bedding; the setting, the sculptor's plinth, for her various other dolls is a swing. One of them has a fruit-garland on her head. This Flora

\* NHQ 69, p. 179



character, like the others, wears a multi-coloured dress: together they make up a complete set. The bridedoll also sits on the swing, all dressed in white, with a myrtle garland.

The parade of dolls leads us through all the mysteries of life. There is another section which shows a group of old women, all in black, with plain black kerchiefs on their head according to peasant custom; only the dark clothes of the younger women are allowed to have some pattern embroidered. Their faces share the same round format. The furniture effects are not lacking here either; the old women are sitting side by side on a bench, alluding perhaps to a widely known, not particularly edifying pseudo-folksong, the work of some long-forgotten musician: "The old women sat outdoors on the bench. . .")

Most of Júlia Szilágyi's work are toys, for children and adults alike. They are full of humour, irony, and above all, of sarcasm. The Szilágyi dolls are veristic. She is a designer who loathes the syrupy, she models and sews without superfluous sentimentality.

Anna Szilasi:\* "I have specialized in hand weaving, I work in my own workshop, my basic materials are not artificial. . . I experiment with extremes of proportion and rhythm, I use few colours, but they tend to be intensive ones. I would say that my working method is close both to that of jazz and that of the fine arts."

Looking at Szilasi's tapestries and carpets

\* NHQ 70, p. 202

I was thinking that in painting we recognise the concept of deliberate economy in the use of colours, and we acknowledge the opposite, that of avowed abundance of colours. Some textile designers swear by the chaste, greyish-yellowish elegance of unpainted materials, and others by abundance. Anna Szilasi is pale, monochrome and restrained; but then suddenly in the middle of a piece she unexpectedly lets go and, with scant respect for all the Rubicons of colour science, introduces the most daring, loud colours. The greater part of her textile creations are filled with tintless, white or mellow colours; the multicoloured section occupies much less space, usually appearing in paired images, in mirror-like reflections. This is obviously paraphrase of the pillows of Hungarian peasant art, where traditionally only the borders of the pillows stacked high on the bed were embroidered. These were the only parts visible, they decorated the room, and the rest could remain plain white. Szilasi is fond of setting off her more strident colours against each other. She puts illmatched colours side by side, achieving the same effect as a second in music, for example a brilliant rose-pink next to a red claret, or green, white, and black in juxtaposition. Such arrangements would have been quite inconceivable in the past in academic painting, and for well-dressed ladies too.

These speculative extremes are thoroughly abstract and profoundly meaningful.

JÁNOS FRANK



## THE SQUARE AND THE DRAGON-SERPENT

*Works by Tamás Hencze, Gyula Gulyás and Géza Samu*

Tamás Hencze (b. 1938), showing his works in the exhibition hall of the French Institute in Budapest, is one of those artists who made his appearance in the second half of the 'sixties, emerging from isolation, with a simultaneous orientation towards the possibilities inherent in abstraction, surrealism, Tachism, hard edge, pop and op art. Together with his fellow artists, he presented his work in temporary exhibition halls, colleges and cultural centres. They chose their models among the Hungarian artists who, decades before, themselves took the road towards new European art, and, to the end of their lives adhered to *avante garde*, a trend which had been condemned at various time periods for different reasons. One of their masters was Lajos Kassák (1887–1967)<sup>1</sup> and another Dezső Korniss (b. 1908)<sup>2</sup> decades younger than Kassák, who started in the 'thirties from Lajos Vajda's surrealist inspired art, and developed his abstraction of an individual tone after 1945. He helped the younger generation, including Hencze, with severe criticism and an understanding appreciation.

In the late 'sixties Hencze's critics were pleased to establish the encouraging start of an artist at the beginning of his career, but the recognition of his definite, individual tone was mingled with overtones of anxiety. Due to the backwardness of the others, they considered his position almost hopeless, seeing no further perspective for a progress lacking all precedent and followers in Hungary. The ten years that have elapsed since do not allow for a final stock-taking, one thing however can already be stated; Hencze's spirit has not been broken by this artistic delay, but has consistently continued expanding the formal problems he was engaged with at that time.

The decisive characteristic of his work

<sup>1</sup> Most recently NHQ 67.

<sup>2</sup> NHQ 39 and 70.

lies in a peculiar illusionistic element that relates him to Op Art. Although the artist acknowledges his relationship to Vasarely, at the same time he also underlines his distinctiveness. While Vasarely uses colour combination and pictorial form to elicit optical effect, Hencze paints illusion itself, and through its material fixation even multiplies its effect. He does not stay satisfied with the colour gleam brought about by the neighbourhood of paint patches, on a canvas as well he wants to establish a reciprocal effect, let's say, the grey province that originates between black and white.

His manner of realization is also individual. He works with a roller, like house-painters or photographers, and his pictures are built on the continuity following from its movement. The trace left by the roller becomes lighter evenly as the paint becomes thinner, and the composition built of homogeneous patches is given extremely delicate transitions. The colour transitions give rise to a feeling of movement and space, in short, of illusion, while at the same time also fixing it as reality.

Another constant element of Hencze's artistic method is repetition. "With every variation one collides with the material in a different manner," he says. "I want to continue with my repetitions because every repeat means something else." The works now on display also exemplify this principle. The forms are constituted of a few colours, red, silver-grey, black and white. The paint traces becoming lighter and darker have the appearance of concave and convex conformations, of tubes and metal spans. Their arrangement according to a set rhythm forms the graphic sheet, and then the series are brought forth out of the transformation, and the shift of the components in relation to one another.



Hencze sometimes applies the potential formal arrangements as thin, quotation-like stripes, inserting them into the centre line of a different composition, thus making the original rhythm more complex. The shift between the quotations and the basic pattern has an interesting contrast effect, but its function is often something else. It calls into question the mapping that arises from the delicate transitions, destroying the illusionistic effect engendered by the undulation of form. This role is assigned to the harshly vital, decorative red colour which represents a static standstill, a definite plain effect against the delicate movement of the silver-greys.

\*

Like Hencze, Gyula Gulyás also traversed the more rugged path to becoming an accepted artist without art college training. First he made his sculptures besides being a tapestry weaving craftsman displaying his work at exhibitions of amateur. In 1971, however, he already exhibited a transparent plexi cube at the third biennale of small sculptures in the southern Hungarian city of Pécs. The Cube carried within it, like an embryo, a tiny mirror-polished bronze sculpture. His works on display at Pécs brought him an invitation, in 1972, to join the artist's colony on an abandoned quarry in Villány. In 1974 he presented his paving stone designs in the Petőfi Literary Museum, together with the statues of Tibor Vilt.<sup>3</sup> Later he was the guest of the Dunaújváros Iron Works<sup>4</sup> where he looked for material among the factory's waste products. In addition to metal, his imagination was inspired also by concrete, by the idea of spacial plastic art. He introduced his ideas under the title *Space Forms*, together with Tibor Vilt and János Kass<sup>5</sup> in 1975, in the Budapest exhibition rooms of the Institute for

<sup>3</sup> NHQ 62 and 69.

<sup>4</sup> NHQ 62.

<sup>5</sup> NHQ 62.

Cultural Relations. He wanted to set up the large size constructions along a motorway, but the idea was not given an enthusiastic reception and has remained unrealized.

A geometrical element, the cube form, runs through Gulyás's plastic realm like a guiding thread. The plexi cube of 1972 was followed by the basalt paving blocks, wrapped up, tied up, or screwed together, but besides them, and after them, other works have also emerged—cubes with their covers split like peel, and forms provided with organic twists—which, despite their seemingly more unrestricted sections, were incorporated into the same strict frame. The work he carved in the Villány quarry broke up the closed nature of the regular spacial form with elements providing a contrasting effect, opposing minor sections of rounded off edges with the rigid, closed unit of the strict prismatic form.

In his latest show Gulyás broke away from this tradition, with the role of the cube taken over by the square. The core of the composition is provided by a stable form erected like a frame, and offering a point of comparison for the shifted twin-formations. The square variations follow two concepts: on the one hand they preserve the regularity of the basic element and its clear outline, even underlining it with repetitions, and on the other, they exploit the intersections arising from the rotation, that is the effect of the more zigzagged, fragmented contours. Gulyás traverses every possibility, trying to take possession of this artistic problem worn to sterility, and seeking his own solution.

\*

Géza Samu, who exhibits his playground object within the *Workshop series* of the Hungarian National Gallery, can look back at a life full of surprise turns. He was born in 1947 in the small village of Kocsola. From 1962 to 1966 he attended the goldsmith's department of the Specialized Sec-



ondary School of Fine and Industrial Arts, and after leaving tried his hand at a whole range of occupations: he was a goldsmith, did his national service, and then, in succession, was a theological student, an organizer of exhibitions in museums and a newsboy. His health deteriorated and he has been an invalid pensioner since 1969, devoting all his time to his art. First he retired to his native village, and later bought an 18th century water-mill at Bükkösd, near Pécs, and moved there.

His grandfather on his mother's side was a jack-of-all-trades. Samu learnt to carve as a boy, becoming familiar with working with timber, and acquiring growing respect for the material remains of folk carving and handicraft, of which he is an enthusiastic collector. His compositions are mountings of such things, but besides these assemblies he also makes objects in which he employs, instead of ready made products, the ancient techniques of carving and dovetailing.

Toys are a new element in Samu's art. In May 1978, for example, he showed sculptures in the Múcsarnok gallery constructed like enlarged toys. The several metre

high dotted dragonfly-dinosaur, with flapping wings and on red wheels, featured among the large pieces in the open-air section of the display. *The Great Dragon-Serpent*, now crammed into a hall of the Gallery, is also intended for out-of-door display as part of a playground. The head of the monster twisted in the shape of an S, consists of two tubs placed on each other, and propped up with a lath, with, putting it in the vulgar tongue, spotted winged, flying crickets as segments. Samu made a toy, and his work does not wish to pretend to be more than that. But while he invokes the transubstantiating force of the child's imagination with the usual means of his earlier sculptures, he imperceptibly leaves behind that archaizing spiritual-formal scope of problems of an ethnographic type which has kept him imprisoned so far. He creates fairy tale real with artistic reticence. He knows that things do not need to be told right through, or to be burdened with descriptive, projective details. It is enough to provide the impulses.

ZOLTÁN NAGY

## ARS SACRA IN THE BUDAPEST MUSEUM OF APPLIED ARTS

For the first time in Hungary a selection of liturgic art objects of six Hungarian religious denominations was on display for four months in the Budapest Museum of Applied Arts. The Roman Catholic, Calvinist, Lutheran, the Hungarian and the Serbian Orthodox Churches, as well as the Jewish community between them lent over 400 art objects, most of which were unknown even to experts. This in itself lent scholarly importance to the exhibition.

Extensive research for almost a decade was done to explore hitherto unknown ob-

jects of sacral art. Furthermore Budapest University arranged art history courses which will help those permanently in care of these objects to look after them competently. Hitherto hidden treasures came to light as members of the public were able to judge for themselves.

Every Church and the Jewish community contributed in the past to Hungarian art, each adding specific features. Roman Catholic objects, as was only to be expected, represent the great periods of art history most fully. From the founding of the Hungarian



Kingdom to our own days the Church added to and preserved outstanding works of every major style or its treasures: the Romanesque, Gothic, Renaissance, and Baroque, the different schools of the nineteenth century, Art Nouveau, and various modern styles are all represented and permit a comprehensive survey of the past of Hungarian culture and art. As is the case with other Hungarian works of art, the material was depleted by the great traumas of history. Tartars, Turks and other wars have wrought destruction; nevertheless, the diversity of what is available proves the wealth of the past, and helps to evoke bygone beauty.

Catholic Church objects include goldsmith's work, weaving and embroidery, sculpture, painting, etc. from many of the great workshops and masters of Europe. It should not be forgotten that the Catholic Church had been a patron of art, influencing developments with its commissions.

The study of specific stylistic features is an important aspect of scholarship. It is particularly important in Hungary. What motifs, formal and iconographic features did Hungary contribute to the European mainstream? From this viewpoint Calvinist art is especially important, in the first place for a study of the evolution of the Hungarian Renaissance. In Hungary the Renaissance was at its height in the sixteenth and seventeenth century, the period of the Turkish occupation, with the result that a so far unknown treasury of Eastern motifs enriched what was basically a European style, forming a specific trend within the Renaissance. This is visible in the ornamental elements of architecture, in goldsmith's work, and in weaving. The finest examples are Calvinist cloths for the Lord's Table. The formal wealth and variety of these works are a good example of this special local feature of the Renaissance.

The Lutherans transmitted the sacral art of the German Late Renaissance and the Baroque. Luther's teaching spread fast in

Hungary, the fact that Luther's last will and testament is in this country is one result. Lutheran liturgical objects were either made by Germans or by Hungarians who had learnt their craft in Germany. Many are close to Hungarian folk art, and use its motifs. The Lutheran Church in Hungary started to patronize art early and encouraged local workshops which then evolved a special Hungarian style.

One condition for survival of the scattered Jewish communities was their respect for traditions. This is manifest in liturgic art, in the preservation of liturgic objects. As these show, they were not only able to safeguard their several-thousand-year-old traditions, but they also enriched their art with local characteristics. There were periods, especially in the nineteenth century, when many goldsmiths relied largely on Jewish commissions.

The Hungarian and Serbian Orthodox Churches exhibited mostly items from the seventeenth to nineteenth century. Iconographically these observed the strict rules of the Eastern Churches but their world of form was strongly influenced by the dominant style of the age—especially the Baroque.

The spiritual focus of the exhibition is a table on which each participating community is represented by one object. The Eastern Churches exhibited an icon of Saint George the Martyr, made in Northern Russia at the end of the sixteenth or the beginning of the seventeenth century. The four principal colours follow the rules of icon painting as laid down by Saint Dionysos the Areopagite. The red colour of the dragon expresses mental aggression. The horse is white. This colour resembling the divine light is the symbol of the force which annihilates all earthly evil. The blue of the sky the secret of being, symbolizing the transcendental nature of the sensible world. Brown, the colour of the earth, acts as a counter-point to blue, as the sky is the antithesis of the earth, and substance the antithesis of the insubstantial.



ARS SACRA IN THE BUDAPEST MUSEUM OF APPLIED ARTS



*Endre Domonkos*

THE BODY IN THE HOLY SEPULCHRE (17TH CENTURY, WOOD, 120 CM,  
TERESKE, PARISH CHURCH)

PACIFICALE, EARLY 16TH CENTURY,  
(49 CM HIGH, IN PARTS GILDED  
SILVER, GYÖNGYÖS)



*Endre Domonkos*

CHALICE FROM THE  
CALVINIST MUSEUM, DEBRECEN 1708  
(GILDED SILVER, 24 CM HIGH)



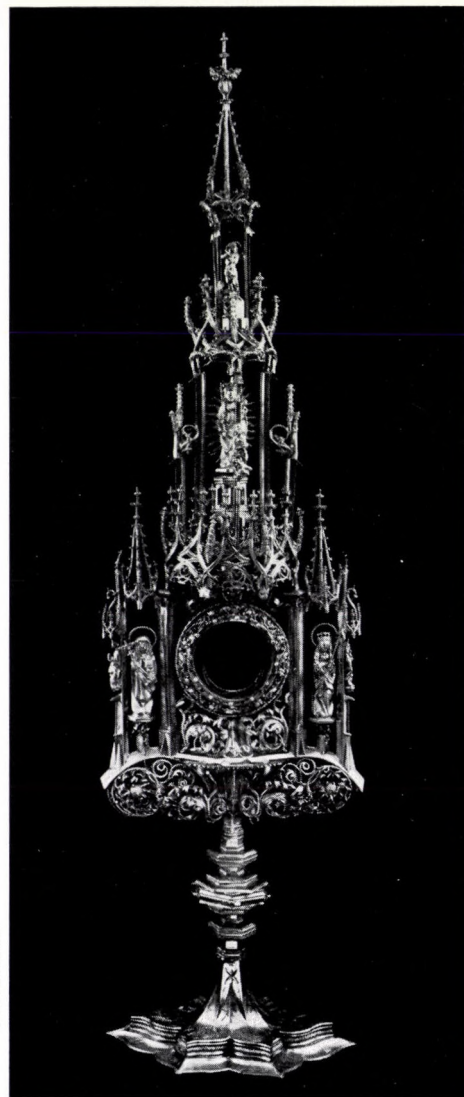
*Endre Domonkos*





LEVITE TANKARD, 1797,  
THE WORK OF JOSEF PRANDTNER  
(SILVER, 40 CM HIGH)

MONSTRANCE FROM NÉMETJÁRFALVA,  
ABOUT 1500 (GILDED SILVER  
99 CM HIGH, GYŐR CATHEDRAL)



*Endre Demónkos*





PIETÀ, CCA 1600 (WOOD, 100 CM HIGH, ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH, NAGYBAJCS)



*Endre Domonkos*

CHRIST WEARING THE CROWN OF THORNS, 15TH CENTURY (PAINTED WOOD, 98 CM HIGH, VESZPRÉM,) DIOCESAN MUSEUM,





László Szegényi,

CHALICE, 15TH CENTURY (GILDED SILVER, TWISTED WIRED  
ENAMEL AND FILIGRANE WORK, GYŐR CATHEDRAL)



Corvina Press

CHALICE, 1703, VIENNESE WORK (ENAMEL AND FILIGRANE  
GILDED SILVER, GYŐR CATHEDRAL)





MONSTRANCE, 18TH CENTURY (WORK OF JÁNOS SZILASSY FROM LŐCSE, GILDED SILVER WITH ENAMEL, ROMAN CATHOLIC PARISH CHURCH, GÖDÖLLŐ)



PAIR OF RIMMON, 1701 (PARTIALLY GILDED SILVER, ITALIAN CRAFTSMANSHIP, 70 CM HIGH, JEWISH HISTORICAL COLLECTIONS)





László Harris

*The early gothic Church of the Holy Trinity, Velemér, seen from the south-east.*



*A pocket mirror placed on the level of a southern window throws light on a certain point of the fresco cycle opposite; the exact spot changes from one moment to the next throughout the year, and can therefore be used to identify points in time which are important in the culture of the community*



*The ray of light flowing down the centre of the church in the early morning of midsummer marks out the limits of the sacral space, the distance between the ledge of the window of the sanctum and the threshold of the entrance*



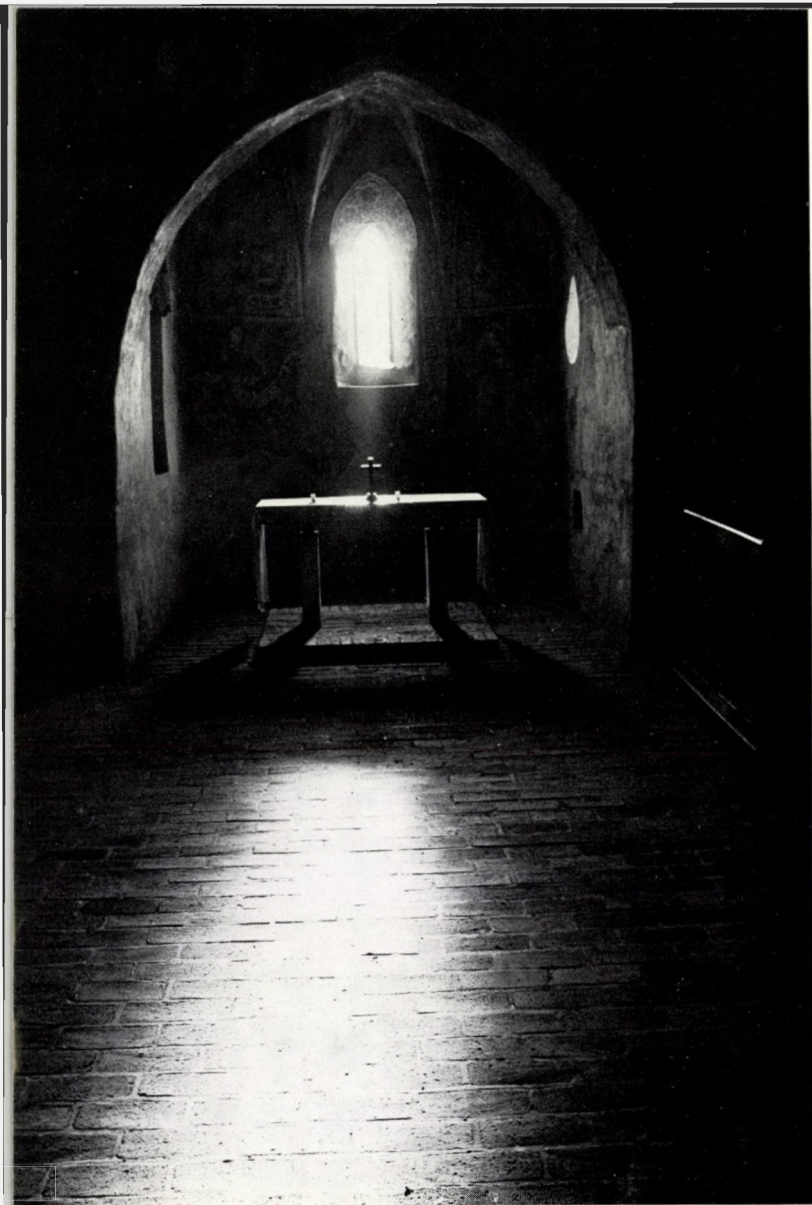
László Horis

*The cycle of frescos on the northern side: a series of scenes from the Epiphany*



Erőnc Tulok





László Harris

Károly Falvay



*Saint Ladislas and Saint Nicholas—continuation of the northern cycle of frescoes*

*The ray of light entering through the eastern window passes along pictures of the opposite western wall during mid-summer*



The Catholic Church is represented by a monstrance from the middle of the eighteenth century. The beautiful modelling also has iconographic importance. On the upper part the figure of the Virgin Mary reaches out from the sky and hands a rosary to Saint Dominic. His counterpart is the Doctor Angelicus, Saint Thomas Aquinas, with the radiant star, the symbol of light-bringing science, on his breast. The lower part of the monstrance shows Saint Martin of Tours in a well-known scene. A young soldier, he tears his cloak in two, giving one half to a beggar.

The Lutheran Church is represented by a chalice made in one of the best European goldsmith's workshops in Augsburg. The silver angel heads which adorn the gilded chalice convey the plastic beauty of late Renaissance goldsmith's work.

The symbol of Jewry is an eight-branched menorah made in seventeenth century Poland. The original, seven-branched, was in the temple in Jerusalem, and as copying was prohibited, it could be remodelled for synagogue or home use only with certain modifications. The ancient form thus became eight-branched. Other Jewish devotional articles prove the same rule, such as the rimmon used to decorate the Torah. Rimmon means pomegranate. The motif served to adorn the garb of the high priest of the temple in Jerusalem, and the tower-shaped rimmon, this goldsmith's masterpiece of torah-ornament, was adorned with pomegranates.

The table on which these objects are exhibited is covered with a cloth for the Lord's table representing the Calvinist Church. These wonderful compositions embroidered on linen, cambric, muslin, with golden and silver metallized or coloured silk yarn, are the unique treasures of the Hungarian Renaissance and early Baroque.

This arrangement in the centre of the exhibition conveys the message that these objects are not only related as works of art but also in their spiritual message.

The earliest objects were found in Kaloča during the excavation of the tomb of a twelfth-century bishop. A silver chalice was found with a paten in the centre of which the "digitus paternae dexteræ" is engraved as the symbol of divine presence. The other finds were a golden bishop's ring with a yellow topaze, a golden pectoral cross and a bishop's crook ending in a dragon head. These relics are very important also for general cultural history.

A fine Jewish manuscript showing the figures of Adam and Eve made up of minuscules, i.e. as part of the text, as well as the Tree of Paradise with the snake coiling on its trunk are Romanesque work.

Gothic art is richly represented. Two goldsmith's techniques were developed into Hungarian national styles: cloisonné and filigree ornament using a leather needle. One of the finest specimens of this period is the monstrance of Némethjárdfalva: its architectural structure and sculptural wealth make it a masterpiece. Some of the pieces of sculpture are unique in mood and style, such as the Pietà of the village church of Nagybjacs from the beginning of the seventeenth century, and the fifteenth-century statue of Christ in the Diocesan Museum at Veszprém. They show characteristics of Hungarian Gothic.

The late Renaissance is represented mostly by Lutheran and Calvinist chalices and cups, as well as splendid cloths.

Hungarian Baroque, as well as fine work from other countries is plentifully represented. These include vestments from Lyon, Vienna, and Venice, and goldsmith's work from Augsburg, Nuremberg, and other European towns.

Baroque sculpture merits special study. The most popular saints of Hungary are represented almost without exception: Saint Roch protects against the plague, and Saint Florian, the former Roman legionary, against fire. Above them all stands the figure of the eternally virgin, God-bearing Mary, the Blessed Virgin of Hungarians.



The Madonna treading on the crescent of the Franciscan church of Szeged, the Mary of the Visitation from Somogy County, the monumental queen of the Diocesan Museum in Veszprém. Each of them bears witness to Hungarian eighteenth-century Mariolatry. Saint Stephen, the founder of the Hungarian State, is there of course, and Saint Ladislav, the Hungarian chivalrous king. The Baroque artist represented the founder of the state with sceptre and orb, King Ladislav is in armour, with a shield and sword.

Among the statues of Christ, the Holy

Grave body in Tereske merits special mention. The body cramped in the agony of death is represented with the dramatic passion of the Baroque. Not only great masters, folk artists as well have left their mark on the statues of Christ. Ecce Homo or Christ bound to the column and whipped are outstanding examples of Hungarian folk art.

All in all, the exhibition made a serious contribution to scholarship, the history of religion, as well as that of Hungarian and universal art.

KATALIN DÁVID

## SPACE-TIME COORDINATES OF A GOTHIC CHURCH

About five years ago a small working party consisting of artists, architects, art historians and engineers began to entertain the idea of examining fundamental definitions of space and time in certain cults and religions; the idea was to approach them as entities in an indivisible continuity of space and time, and to describe them with the aid of space-time graphs. We were aware of earlier experiments by—to mention only the best-known names—A. Leroi-Gournaï in France, Norman Lockyer, A. Thom, and Fred Hoyle in Britain, Rolf Müller and Marius Schneider in Germany, Gerald Hawkins in America, and L. F. Zhegin, G. K. Wagner and B. A. Rybakov in the Soviet Union. It soon became clear to us that our examinations would not go down well with the representatives of established disciplines, but this was no deterrent.

It was approximately five years ago that we received the news that a somewhat unusual renovation programme had been designed for the early Gothic church at Velemér (Vas county, South-Western Transdanubia) by the scholarly priest of the parish, József Kovács.

In the spring of 1976 we carried out test measurements in this church to discover whether space-time coordinates could be related directly, and if so, in what way. By then it had become clear to us that the time-dimension should not figure in this train of thoughts as an *an und für sich* explanation; rather, it should be restored to its original purpose (at the time of the birth or active functioning of the system of interconnections under examination); it should be considered as one of the possible dimensions of the behaviour of the "celestials" or, narrowing the question down for experimental purposes, as a medium through which brilliant celestial bodies move. If we examine it in this way, then the time-dimension can be translated at any time without any difficulty—and very spectacularly!—into all three dimensions of space. The only condition to be ensured is that at the scene of the "translation", darkness should always be separated clearly from light. The process should be studied in all its essential elements by a relatively small number of observers, from a relatively small area, with minimal moving of position. This is suf-



ficient to define in a basic way the space of all elementary cults and rituals.

In the interior of the church the movements of the celestials are oriented towards the most sacred parts. If this church is conceptually imagined to resemble a dark-room, it is generally the internal surface of the northern wall that offers itself as the "scale" of the interconnected series of celestial events, their visible confirmation; it is through the southern system of openings facing it that light enters the interior of the church, theoretically on every day of the year, and if this is projected through an adequately narrow window which is filled with some translucent medium which focuses light, this then passes along the interconnected series of pictures on the northern wall, the exact distance depending on the time of the year, bringing new pictures to life and revealing those already observed in new shades.

This all sounds fine in principle, but there is a small hitch in this beautifully elaborated train of thought. The hitch is that the Sun, apparently traversing its divinely ordered path from horizon to horizon, when it reaches the south side is already at a height from which light projected through the southern window cannot reach the facing wall; instead, it shines directly at the floor. How does the ray of light nevertheless come to strike a spot on the northern wall painting? Of course, "through a glass, darkly"—to quote Ingmar Bergman, and through him the Apostle Paul.

#### *Experiments with a mirror*

On one of sunny day of the end of March we experimented with a mirror, in all the likely points of the Velemér church, without finding any reassuring answer to our question. And then, as so often happens in the course of such research, good luck came to our assistance. Disheartened by failure, we began to take traditional photo-

graphs of art objects, and since the mirror was only getting in the way, I put it out of the way on the bevel of one of the southern windows. At that moment the long awaited beam of light focused on one of the most exposed points of the northern wall facing us. Something we had least suspected, the bevel, was the mirror surface we had been seeking. After the pictures had been developed it became obvious that light would have dawned even without the mirror, but in a way which could not have been sensed by our eyes. During recent renovations of the church—designed precisely to improve the lighting—yellow reinforced glass was put into the window, causing the light entering the church to be dispersed; hence only a photographic emulsion, more sensitive than the human perceptive apparatus, could demonstrate the difference in tones between the lighted and unlighted parts of the fresco. Thinking the matter over after the event, the solution seemed to be quite obvious. A bevel channels away rain when it is situated on the external side; this does not justify a bevel on the internal side. We had found out earlier that the culture in question had no use for architectural elements that were purely decorative.

Hardly a few seconds after we had noticed the first light on the wall—by chance it fell on the star of Bethlehem—we could photograph it in a new position; and then it passed on, along its ordained path, throwing light on one picture after another, and reminding us that we belonged to a moving universe, and had to find our place and role in it from one moment to the next.

#### *The light stopped at the church entrance*

Having worked out the principles of operation it seemed worthwhile to try and find out what happened in the "dark-room" at specific moments of the year, for example at mid-summer. Is the four-dimensional continuity of the time axis projected in some



special way into three-dimensional space in the Velemér church?

The experiments revealed unequivocally how, on the longest day of the year, a light spot clearly distinguishable from its environment appears shortly after sunrise in the southern corner of the western wall facing the window of the sanctum; it first throws light on sinners seeking protection under Mary's mantle, then it passes step by step in a northerly direction and downwards as the sun rises higher and higher. At this point we suddenly realized that we had to remove the benches from the axis of the church. The light spot descended and continued to grow, until it reached the floor, where it eventually stopped at the entrance. The light then flowed down the centre of the church, marking out the axis of the building and the length of that axis. The light can penetrate no further, since this is the longest day of the year; it cannot cross the threshold, it cannot escape from the dark-room. In this manner a maximum was formed in the dimension of space, incontestable evidence that ritual space was part of a single, indivisible space-time continuity; the movements of this continuum are transposed to a human measure, and thus man's longing for some form of spatical and temporal orientation, and his need to experience this personally, is satisfied.

#### *Investigations in a new dimension*

In the course of the analysis of the first pictures taken in the Spring of 1976 it already occurred to us that there might be other non-linear connections between the various scenes on the northern wall.

First of all we began to seek correspondences between parts of the picture surface which a conventional approach would not suppose to be organically linked. For instance, the horseman on the left and the Bishop Saint Nicholas on the right had the same face, in young and old

versions respectively! And when we took a closer look at the figures, we soon discovered a third edition of this face too, above the shoulders of the bearded figure standing left of the star and holding a fur cap in his hands. Although in this case the similarity was almost completely lost during restoration, it can be observed clearly on the close-up photograph that the broad, slightly sunken face, crowned by a high bulbous forehead, corresponds perfectly to the faces of the two figures in the wings, and also that the new eyes inserted in the course of restoration do not fill their original sockets, but are unjustifiably small and too close to each other. The endeavour of the restorer is clear: through these small adjustments he was trying to bring the figure closer in stature to the two servants on his left, and thereby to exclude him from the ranks of the somewhat more imposing and important principal figures of the three kings as well as Mary, Ladislav and Nicholas. Yet we may conclude from the original shape of his head that the size, position and role of this figure all indicate that he has no place among the servants, even if he does hold in his left hand the bridle of the horse of the oldest king (a kneeling figure) but belongs rather to the "celestials"; he is their worthy companion, the modest host in the background, the necessary complement to the Mary-Infant ensemble in this scene: Saint Joseph himself.

If we move inwards one figure from the wings, we again recognize conspicuous kinship between the figures of the second horseman and the standing figure of Saint Ladislav. In addition to the essential identity of physiognomic characteristics and the shape of beard and hair, the impression is also confirmed by elements of attire and by the phenomenon—also to be observed in the earlier example—that these kindred faces are consistently staring in the same direction. This is so even when—as in the case of the second king—this is the opposite direction from that in which the figure is proceeding in this setting.



*The three holy Kings*

This second affinity which we are postulating (between Saint Ladislas and the figure of the second Magus) may draw attention to a further very interesting connection. The figures of the three biblical kings coming to visit the Infant Jesus are matched by another trio of famous kings, the so-called "Three Holy Kings of Hungary" a group commonly depicted by mediaeval Hungarian artists. There is no reason for surprise. The frescoes of Velemér were painted in the last decade of the reign of Louis the Great (c. 1380). This was when esteem for the holy Hungarian kings, especially Saint Ladislas, was at its highest. It was about the same time that statues of the three kings (standing figures of Imre, István and László)—about which Janus Pannonius wrote a poem at a later date—were erected at Nagyvárad; a separate statue of Saint Ladislas on horseback was also the work of two sculptor brothers from Kolozsvár. Here too there was a deliberate association which the three biblical kings, according to no less a personality than the scholarly reformer and hymn translator of European fame, Albert Szenczi Molnár. He saw the statues with his own eyes in the seventeenth century and heard the "silly stories" of the people of Nagyvárad in which—according to communications obtained from the Kolozsvár writer and cultural historian István Szócs—the well-known figures from Hungarian history doubled as the three biblical kings. Whatever opinion we form, it is impossible not to notice that the three kings of Velemér bear a much more conspicuous resemblance to Saints Emeric, Ladislas and Stephen than to the biblical Kings from the Orient, who were later given the names of Melchior, Balthasar and Caspar.

If we now take another look at the entire northern fresco, the existence and specificity of these interconnections, established on a basis merely of external similarity, suddenly obtain confirmation in an entirely new di-

mension, on the level of moral values. What is it that links the youngest king to Saint Joseph standing behind the throne of the Madonna, and to the Bishop Saint Nicholas as well, over and above the similar shape of the cranium? Why is there this similarity at all? We only have to think through what characteristic virtue Prince Emeric of the House of Árpád, who died when still a youth, was canonised. It was because of one single virtue, his chastity. And Saint Joseph? This time through a double *chastity*: on the one hand, as a reward for abstinence and on the other, because he accepted the fact of her virginity and did not reject her even though she was with child. And Saint Nicholas? Quite apart from the fact that he is a Bishop (the fact is emphasized by his vestments) and therefore above earthly pleasures, including first of all male desires, his exemplary character is illustrated in this case by his pious donation to three virgins; poor and almost compelled to sell their bodies, his gift keeps them on the strait and narrow.

And the "two Saint Ladislas?" Here the mutual correspondence of the roles is even more obvious. In both cases we are dealing with an ideal type of the mature man of *knighly virtues*. Finally, the figure of the third king can be identified with Caspar, through his kneeling, the inscription on the band over his head, his greybeard, his deportment, and especially his relationship to the Madonna. A closer scrutiny reveals an almost comical verbatim resemblance to the most popular image of Saint Stephen, King of Hungary, in the scene in which the old man with the grey-beard, on his knees, offers up the Holy Crown to the Patron Saint of the country may wonder what has happened to the crown, but here again it is the restorer who must be held responsible for its disappearance. On a blowup its traces can still be seen, but the crown itself was removed from the painting in the course of some earlier restoration and it is now almost unrecognizable.

GÁBOR PAP



# THEATRE AND FILM

## PLAYS AND GENERATIONS

Plays by *Sándor Petőfi*, *Milán Füst*, *István Csurka*,  
*Gyula Hernádi*, *György Spiró*

*György Spiró: Hajrá, Samu!*  
(Come on, Sam!)

There were no all-star programmes, gala receptions or publicity campaigns surrounding last year's international conference of children's theatres in Kaposvár, Western Hungary. A series of performances were given, professional debates were held, an opportunity was given for those concerned to exchange opinions. All in all a delightful spectacle and experience to delight 15,000 local children. It is not possible within the space allotted to me to relate the plots of the plays performed by the participating Italian, Soviet, GDR, and Hungarian companies in Budapest, Pécs and Békéscsaba. Still, let me now exceptionally expand the usual muster of the Hungarian plays of the season in this direction.

The playwright whose prize-winning children's play I saw at Kaposvár is the extraordinarily gifted novelist, poet and literary translator, György Spiró (I reviewed his *Hares on the Island* in a previous number.) *Come on, Sam!* is built on a simple idea: what happens if an everyday little boy discovers that he is able to fly? How do the adults, his parents and teachers react to the manifestation of his specific gift? And indeed, what does a schoolboy do today if it turns out that, contrary to his class mates and fellow beings, he is easily capable of disregarding the laws of gravitation? It is

here that this out-of-the-ordinary gift and bent clashes with the incredulity and bureaucracy of the adult world, and the outcome is not exactly reassuring, either from an educational or a psychological point of view. From an aerodynamical aspect it is still passable, because by the time they squash Sam's irregular gift, it turns out that there is another boy in the class who takes over the wings from him.

It is a real pity that this not entirely new, but very good idea did not produce a real play. Spiró, belying his proved theatrical sense, did not provide a plot that is indispensable for unfolding the basic situation; he has merely offered a sketchy outline of the characters, and it was this sketch the Csíki Gergely Theatre of Kaposvár finally staged, in a likewise slipshod manner. But since children's plays of an original tone and contemporary subject are in short supply the world over, in this age of naive literary adaptations of comics and conventional cautionary tales, one should still mention the possibilities left unexploited by Spiró's play.

*Sándor Petőfi: Tigris és Hiéna*  
(Tiger and Hyena)

Nowadays, even in Hungary, it is only students of literature who read Sándor Petőfi's youthful historical blood-and-thunder, *Tiger and Hyena*. Confused, romantic,



bewildering—the judgements were made, echoing those of the contemporaries, for a theatrical denial of which we have been waiting for a long time. Ten years ago Károly Kazimir took up the gauntlet in the Theatre in the Round in Budapest, giving an idea of the values inherent in the play. In the Soviet Union it was performed by several theatres during a festival of Hungarian plays. But even the most daring Petőfi addict would not have thought that the 23-year-old Petőfi's historical thriller would turn into a major success on a modern university stage in 1979.

The play has the following antecedents: the poet, who already during his student years showed a keen interest in the theatre, became a member of the company of the Pest Hungarian Theatre in 1839, and travelled in Transdanubia with a small touring company for three months in the summer of 1841. Later he acted at Székesfehérvár under the stage name of Sándor Borostyán. The benefit performance of his short stage career was the Fool in *King Lear*. Contemporary opinions differed on Petőfi's histrionic talent, and it is a fact that he only maintained a sympathy for the theatre and nostalgia for the theatrical world once engaged in his meteoric literary career. His dramatic criticism is evidence for the first, *Tiger and Hyena* for the latter.

The plot is an aftereffect of a power struggle of nearly a thousand years ago between the Hungarian King Béla II and the Slav Princes Borics and Predslava: a bloody and fatal, but not too logical political story of a succession. The poet was more interested in the power of excessive passions than in the logic of the characters. Frigyes Riedl, one of Petőfi's 19th century critics, called attention to the fact that drama, as the most objective genre, had not suited Petőfi, since "his hot emotions melt, as it were, the form of the play, overflowing into its contents, filling the speech of the characters, and scorching their souls... In *Tiger and Hyena* we are faced not with old historical characters, but with the young Petőfi..."

Imre Katona, the manager of the *Universitas* group in Budapest, proved last summer at Gyula Castle how far he could leap from the text of the Petőfi play. Now, seeing the Petőfi-fantasia performed in a series at the University Stage one may once again ponder that maximum infidelity sometimes means the truest fidelity. Petőfi would certainly be amazed to see his historical play staged with a curtain of soap-bubbles, with electric lamp ballets, huge nylon foils and strange masks, and to discover that his swordsman protagonists finally maintain their cause with revolvers. This list in itself seems to be an attack on the performance. And yet, the modern adaptation of *Tiger and Hyena*, hallmarked by Imre Katona, has preserved and exploited the play's catharsis. The performance, idealizing the poet's enthusiasm, and exposing senseless bloodshed and tragicomical, phrasemongering nationalism, is compelling. Katona's ideas almost without exception underline the present validity of the play. I do not think that Petőfi's work can be tackled only in this manner, but it is also quite something that the director has proved that it can be tackled in this way as well.

#### István Csúrka: Deficit

*Deficit* is the drama of four people: four not very young contemporaries of intellectual outlook or stature. It takes place here and now, that is in the 'sixties, during a single night, in the home of in a flat equipped with all mod.cons. on a housing estate in a new Hungarian town. By the beginning of the play the experience of yesterday's happiness of setting up a home has already worn off: the X's are already tired of their home, just as they are of their friends, of television, and of the whole way of life that has grown rigid around them. Y, X's wife, has become disappointed above all in the young citizens of the new town. According to X: "No one wants anything. Nor do we."



Then it turns out from a dialogue between the X's and the visiting Z-W couple—a fair piece of mental gymnastics in itself—that this is not really true either. X, the most gifted of the four, and also the strongest personality, definitely wants something. At least he wants to cut through the cobweb of *ennui*, so that something should happen at last, if nothing else, then at least the four of them should break the norms of conventional morality by swapping wives, and thus, *faute de mieux* they should fight their own bed-time revolution. When X proposes this for the first time, his friend, Z, is not even shocked. He does not take it seriously. But X is not joking, he holds that if life, the fog, the mire, history, and the rat race have deprived him of the possibility of acting freely in a manner worthy of himself, of doing something useful, of real value, he at least will accept what is wrong according to the existing moral norms. Ersatz action instead of real action. What attracts X is not fulfilment, not even sexual lust, but the shock that awaits them all. He imposes his will relatively quickly on his wife, the actually insignificant, silly Y, every inch a woman, and on Z, the friend, who easily yields both to passivity and enticement, and is infirm of purpose. Thus X's plan is finally implemented between those two, this however, merely means half of the revolution of the bed. Y accepts Z willingly, perhaps even gladly, between her sheets, but at the same time X, the initiator, despite all his efforts and agitation, and in the knowledge of his spiritual and male superiority, fails to obtain the consent of the honest W, who has a sovereign personality, worthy of him. The ambiguous outcome of the revolution of the bed signifies the failure of Ersatz action, and at the same time offers a criticism of the protagonists and of the age that impels them to look for such substitutes. The latter two—and this is the very essence of the play—are inseparable.

According to the author of *Deficit* the

play takes place when the generation which after the country's liberation was on its way, young and singing, and whose members had earlier seen the gates opened wide before them, discover with bitterness and amazement that the same gates are shut. This is their ordeal and tragedy. Despite this, Csurka makes an attempt to acquit his protagonists. Z, in a self-critical manner, even confesses: "Now here I stand facing the bed of my friend's wife, I would like to get into it, I am afraid of getting into it, and just because of this, I would like to blame the system, society, the international situation, the nuclear age and technological civilization that I now propose to get into bed with my friend's wife. . . . And the system, socialism, capitalism, peaceful coexistence, general anxiety, exclusion, alienation, the horrible doubts, the lack of great possibilities, hapless Hungarian history, '48, '49, '19, '56, are all lined up there, accepting responsibility. Here come Dózsa, Kossuth, Petöfi, Rákóczi, Truman, Khrushchev, Stalin, and Churchill, together they take hold of me and put me into my friend's wife's bed, saying with one voice: You are not to blame, we have made you into that what you are, we have pushed you into that bed. . . ."

This self-critical severity of judgement, free of compromise, the dialectic differentiation between inseparable social and individual responsibility from the cover, and at the same time the main worth of the play's authenticity and realism. And yet, it is here that I feel the vulnerability of the 1979 première of *Deficit* written in 1967. In Csurka's play the period in which it was born is suggested not by topical reflections or minor references and concrete events, but in the way of posing the question itself, and by the answers the protagonists give to the questions of social existence, also by the revolutionary attitudes of the relevant generation, of which Csurka is also a member, which after 1956 became embittered, but which still felt a choking need for historical action. However, with the passing



of a decade social reality has undergone a great change. The acute period of lost illusions and self-doubt has come to an end, and the generation of the revolutions that once was on its way singing, now around their fifties, has become polarized. Some have found, or thought they have found, new, more settled possibilities for action, others have embarked on professional careers, others again have drifted to the opposite pole, committed suicide, left the country illegally, or turned alcoholics. Instead of proclaiming a revolution of the bed, they divorced those wives who had been with them, on their way singing, in order to marry their twenty years younger secretaries. The fever of substitute action has also subsided; you need calm and composure to drive a car in the traffic of the 'seventies, and to build a weekend cottage in an economy of things in short supply.

In the late 'sixties Csurka's *X* still opened with reverential anxiety the violin case in which he had once hidden his automatic weapon and with it the Communist Manifesto, and which he guarded in the play like the Ark of the Covenant. If then and there the weapon had come into his hands it is easily possible that he would have fired it. But, as Csurka reveals with a sense of prophecy and good dramatical sense, the case proved to be empty. Its contents must have got lost long ago, when moving house. This is why the symbolic and metaphoric great scene of the play, destined to express its hidden meaning, the carefully prepared dramatic punch line of the stage version, goes off half cock at the 1979 performance.

In judging the play, both the critics, and supposedly the reader too, willy-nilly come up against a certain relationship between *Deficit* and *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf*. There were those who—for reasons of tactics, or to prove the rank of Csurka's work—side-stepped or belittled this unavoidable question. In a television interview the author referred to the fact that when he wrote *Deficit* he had not yet known

Albee's play which was only performed in Hungary some time afterwards. This, however, does not alter the fact that in the great arena of the world theatre Albee got in first. Still, the forceful historical and social charge in *Deficit* is a card which, at least for a Hungarian public, trumps even this handicap.

In recent years critics have often challenged Csurka for taking so long to come up with a successor to his so far most important play, *Fall Guy for Tonight*.<sup>\*</sup> Why does he rest content with exposing surface abuses on stage, why does he so often exploit his talent for petty ends? How is it possible that in his full length plays he only dares to face up to the real questions of our existence for a matter of minutes? *Deficit* is the drama of a basic problem of our age, of the content of our lives, of the basic crisis of values of our generation. And as such it is an unequivocal answer, and evidence as well. It bears out that Csurka does possess the stature necessary for writing a play; and, since the death of István Örkény, that perhaps no one in Hungary rivals him in the psychological and theatrical knowledge needed for the intensification of character portrayal and the shaping of parts.

#### *Milán Füst: King Henry IV*

Milán Füst was a child of the 19th century. He was a member of the circle around the periodical *Nyugat* as an essayist, and only started to write verse later. He carried the plan, the nucleus of his tragedy *King Henry IV* within himself from the age of 17, and was 43 when, in 1931, he worked it up in three weeks. Preparations for the play's world première were taking place in Berlin in the early 'thirties, but foundered when Hitler came to power. The first performance took place 33 years later, in 1964, in the Budapest Madách Theatre. The performance, a great success, was

<sup>\*</sup> See NHQ 39.



directed by Géza Pártos, with Miklós Gábor—one of the most successful Hungarian Hamlets—in the title role. He now looked back to his earlier success as an actor in the role of director.

From the start Shakespeare was Milán Füst's lodestar. He translated *King Lear*. In a manner of speaking Füst competed with Shakespeare when, going beyond Hungarian history, he composed a chronicle play. *King Henry IV*, though it tackles many psychological and philosophical problems is nevertheless a chronicle play.

Even those who have forgotten everything they ever knew about the 11th century German emperor, will still remember his struggle with the Pope, and his notorious trip to Canossa. The eponymous hero of Milán Füst's play is 24 years old at the start of the action, an unbridled and passionate hobbledehoy. When he learns that the German lords and princes once again accept him as their liege lord, he hardens into a king at the call and enticement of power. Only later does he wake up to the truth that the long desired role deprives him of what is most important—his own self, his personal freedom and the unrestricted possibility of materializing his bents and wishes. His life bristles with party struggles, religious and personal controversies, victories, humiliating defeats. He drains the cup of glory to the dregs, and as an outcast, thirsts for human understanding in vain. At his side there is Bertha, a queen equally strong as an ally and opponent, but in his insatiable male desire Henry humiliates her, a hundred times over. Later he lives to see that of all his enemies he first and foremost has to dread his own sons.

Milán Füst's work has a Shakespearean range and Shakespearean passions, in addition to a Baroque stage apparatus, but all this serves the expression of the doubts, failures and achievements of 20th century man. Critics of the play usually consider it their duty to point out that *King Henry IV* is not a historical but a philosophical play, the

main issue being the contradiction between existence and the world, the hopelessness of totality as an aim of life, and its agonizing failure. The public is concerned not so much with the plot as the character, the unexpected transformation of the strange and unbridled young king, not ready for power, and the contradictory human and political appearance of the ruler going to Canossa, in the thrall of power.

Miklós Gábor as director was probably attracted not so much by an analysis of the effects of power, but rather by the drama of a man unable to believe but yearning for faith. In his words the work "is the drama of the desire for action. It is the drama of the great deficiency of the world." The need to realize one's personality, and the failure to do so, as life's great and deadly experiment, is one of the basic subjects of our century. Shakespearean dimensions in themselves do not mean a Shakespearean work, but in Milán Füst's play the glow of the great scenes, the explosion of passions straining against each other, and the poesy typical of the whole span of the work, are fascinating. So much so that one is almost absorbed even when the dramatic engine ticks over idle, during episodes that are mere appendages. The versatile and radiating Péter Andorai in the title role, bears the burden of the performance. The others have their moments that is all, and thus the huge tableau, lacking a close-knit ensemble suitable for performing a difficult play, has remained rather drab.

Gyula Hernádi: *Lélekvándorlás*  
(Transmigration of souls)

I do not propose to tell the story of Gyula Hernádi's political thriller. True, under the circumstances, a notice in NHQ is hardly likely to diminish the thrills of the Hungarian public, but the four stories subordinated to the common denominator of a title and dramatic formula are beyond



relating. One could at most reveal the formula of these mini crime stories to an identical pattern, their reproducible technological procedures and the rules of the game invented by Hernádi. The common aim of the four stage hypotheses, prying into the secret of political attacks, is to throw light on various historical if's. How would history have shaped if what did not happen, had happened, if it had happened as it could have happened, or as it did in the author's imagination. If you are interested in the imaginary moving force behind the overthrow of a given power, you just conjure up a possibly hefty, daring woman, together with two males, moving along different lines—a lover or an adversary, you place a few weapons, knives, revolvers, hypodermic needles, at given points on the stage, say the pockets of the characters, and you do not rest satisfied with the fact that these, according to dramatic rules, are going to be used, but if possible, turn the whole situation inside out, ensuring at least one breath-taking surprise for the viewer. As a spice for plots of this kind morbid humour and irony seem to be the most suitable.

When the first words are heard (I cannot write when the performance begins, because the playwright-cum-director, had the bizarre idea to entrust the introduction of the various scenes, preparing the emotional atmosphere, to a couple of dancers), the date is 1898. The plot concerns Elisabeth, Empress of Austria, and Queen of Hungary, or more exactly the plot against her. The leading roles are those of the Emperor Francis Joseph and Katherina Schrott.

Hernádi never gives excess care to character depiction. As the author of scripts for Jancsó's films he has become accustomed to Jancsó's reducing character portrayal to the role played by his protagonist within a structure, or to selecting the right type of actor. Hernádi's strong point has always been—and this is true for *Metempsychosis* as well—the creation of situations. He usually derives the story from the situation,

constructing it in a logical way, disregarding reality. The often astounding plot, rich in surprise turns, carries the idea and creates tension, up to the point where a logical short circuit ensues on the stage. Only, this construction does not tolerate exposure, or systematic repetition, and this is precisely what Hernádi aims at here, with the metempsychosis of roles and ideas. In *Metempsychosis* he further reduces the usual models of his plays by substituting for reality or a segment of reality. We are offered sketches, formulae, now set in a historical framework, now without any. Already in the second scene, the protagonist, a girl languishing in prison under sentence of death, has precious little to do with her own age. We have to take the playwright's word that the scene takes place in 1914. It could as easily be 1912, 1919, 1932, 1944, or 1956: this would not alter the absurd and imaginary plot. This time, however, even the story itself causes no surprise: Hernádi has used its original when writing the script for Jancsó's *Allegro Barbaro*.

This again is followed by some dancing. The author turns the pages of his historical calendar so quickly that he soon gets to the present. In Budapest in the Hotel Gellért, a German fascist disguised as a Latin American tropical fruit merchant, meets his one time love, Mrs Béla Hollai, who turns out to be, yes you have guessed it, a veteran Communist and Marxist historian. The subject of the confrontation here is the outcome of a plot against Hitler, and its consequences. It is at that point of the polemics that the most striking idea of the evening emerges: how the Second World War would have developed and what the future of the various people and of Hungary would have been, had the attempt against the Führer been successful.

Perhaps the key-words of this synopsis in themselves indicate that Hernádi whirls along the puppets of his imagination into more and more bizarre situations. This time the structure shows a greater stock of ideas



than logic, and the public although enjoying themselves throughout, sooner or later realizes that such a quantity of literary arbitrariness does not really have a conceptual cover. Yet it is still not given the time to feel annoyed, by the end of the following dance duet, the wheel-chair of President Peron is rolled on to the stage, followed by the beautiful, much admired Izabel Peron, who, of course, has her own secret, and thus her own weapon, too, like the rest of them.

Whatever Hernádi, the King Midas of the Hungarian theatre touches, turns into ideas. His riches can justly be envied by the film people and the manufacturers of plays who do not care if meanwhile the poet meets his death, the soul wastes away, and the thought addressed to our age only appears in its own purity in the writer's commentary. In this, added to *Metempsychosis*, Hernádi precisely expounds the double message of his play. First he warns us against "accepting without thought the facts of history and of everyday life that overwhelm us; we should want to acquire information that stands closer to truth, and should sift the often manipulated jumble of facts with a sceptical mind." This thought

is, of course, much less astounding than the plots of the various sketches, but at least it is in harmony with the happenings on stage. Something which cannot be said with an absolute certainty about his second message. According to Hernádi these scenes suggest that "although history leaves a rather restricted field of play to the personality, one can act even within most exasperating situations, as an autonomous, active person."

Nowadays it would seem as if Hernádi, luxuriating in the arsenal of his ideas and devices, overlooks the fact that jugglers merely entertain, perhaps, dumbfound those who watch, but that it is up to plays to elicit deep feelings.

There was greater interest in this performance due to Hernádi being his own director. One of his old wishes has come true: to assert his author-centric ideas in the age of the visual theatre. The intention once again is more concrete and more characteristic than the outcome. The truth is that the play is simple and the actors are old hands at the game so that the performance does not really allow us to judge Hernádi's abilities as a director.

ANNA FÖLDES

## A WELCOME FIRST AND OTHER FILMS

Péter Gothár: *Ajándék ez a nap* (A Priceless Day), Márta Mészáros: *Útközben* (On the Move), István Szabó: *Bizalom* (Confidence), Ágoston Kollányi: *Az állatok válaszolnak* (Animals Responding)

In recent months a number of wellknown directors have presented new works, including Márta Mészáros, the director of *Örökbefogadás* (Adoption), *Kilenc hónap* (Nine Months), *Ők ketten* (The Two of Them), and István Szabó, the maker of *Álmodozások kora* (The Age of Daydreaming), *Apa* (Father),

*Szerelmesfilm* (Love Film) and *Tűzoltó utca 25* (25, Fireman Street). However, the biggest sensation was created by the young director of *Ajándék ez a nap* (A Priceless Day). "First feature" is a special category in film-making everywhere, but nowhere is its role so important as in the Hungarian cinema; the



first films of István Szabó, István Gaál, Ferenc Kósa, and Sándor Sára not only signalled the emergence of a new talent but also new departures in theme and style. Péter Gothár's film is apparently destined to continue this tradition. He represents a generation born into socialism, he himself is completely at home in the Hungary of today. He knows its problems inside out, but is also sensitive for its style, attitudes to life and more subtle phenomena. For him the country is not only a new social-political formation (with deformations, social and moral, readily acknowledged) but also a daily grind, which constrains, determines, burdens, and in some cases even ruins the lives of human beings, with few exceptions. Hungarian feature films (the documentaries are another category) used to approach aspects of private lives rather bashfully. Their heroes tended to struggle more with the great questions and historical problems of the age than with everyday concerns; yet these, however "ordinary," affect the lives of the masses and without them the Hungarian cinema would be supplying an incomplete picture of reality. It is to Gothár's credit that he deals openly and sincerely in the medium of film with problems which officialdom is also concerned to recognise and to bring to the notice of the public.

The end of their film, when we bid farewell to the heroine, the kindergarten teacher Irén Zémann (Cecília Esztergályos), is complete confusion and absolute uncertainty. We have no idea how she will manage to raise the money needed to ensure that she can take possession of her new apartment (acquired with so many difficulties) in spite of the increase in prices. We don't know if she really breaks with the lover for whose sake she has embarked on this risky apartment adventure, or if she is only toying with the idea. And as to her future in general? All we know is that after many nerve-racking weeks she spent one agreeable, comforting day—the one alluded to in the title—having a heart-to-heart talk with an

understanding soul, the soul belonging, with a grotesque irony, to the wife of her lover. There is no great tragedy to resolve everything, nor is there any satisfactory happy ending. Instead there is a long, lightly floating conversation interspersed with drinking, reaching far into the night, in the course of which the two women, apparently deadly rivals, exchange their worries and unhappiness.

The openness of the conclusion is the secret of the film's new and quintessentially modern catharsis-experience. The film ends but life continues, and with it continue the worries and problems of everlasting conflicts and unsolved dilemmas, this is what the ending suggests. The touching struggle of the 30-year old kindergarten teacher to find some order in her private life and create a home for her future marriage ends in a spectacular failure. The man she loves will probably opt for the calm of family life though we know this to be false and petrified; his wife has already resigned herself to the disintegration of their marriage. Irén will remain alone (or prolong the humiliating mistress relation) and try to cope with acute financial burdens far beyond her possibilities, and the hassle of a fictitious marriage (in Hungary couples committing themselves to procreate have easier access to flats and to state credit) with her namebestowing husband liable to demand real husband's rights from time to time. But life must go on and Hungarian law condemns noone to the streets. She too must continue the exhausting struggle, to keep an apartment which has already lost its entire purpose.

Gothár adapted the script himself from a short story by Péter Zimre. In the film he accomplished with striking force something which had been missing for a long time in Hungarian films; while others have lingered unduly in the past, he has apprehended and condensed what is typical of our own age, and done so not in an abstract or didactic manner but faithful to all the complexity of the real world. Despite the unexpected



and interesting turns of the plot everything in this film is familiar. Primarily, there is the tense aimlessness of the heroine, and the compromises struck in love inside and outside marriage, enforced by social responsibility and social hypocrisy. Then comes the desperate struggle for a flat, everyone's daily struggle in Hungary, stretching the limits of the law, proceeding from a support and maintenance contract as a means of acquiring an apartment, after the owner's death, then its sale to a "fictitious" purchaser, then the marriage of convenience. Gothár shows how the ephemeral love of aging men often originates in good faith, and he sympathises with the equally bona fide gullibility and pushiness of lonely women. Finally he approaches an eternal problem in modern form: we may not be blessed with the propensity for a lifetime of monogamy (unlike some birds), but still we tie ourselves hypocritically to monogamous morals and ideals with all the social and psychological conflicts they entail; the reason is that until now we have been unable to invent something better.

All this is familiar to us and offers insights into the problematic aspects and difficulties of the life we know. There is no feeling of *déjà vu*, the recording of experiences known inside out, but—and this is the unique magic of art—a realization which leads us to discover the familiar in new and never previously seen images. In art, after all, the typical is always concrete and individualized in contrast to the typicality of a sociological fact. One of the strong points of Gothár's film is that he individualizes well-known situations and characters are bold and sharp, sometimes even verging on the grotesque or the absurd. "This is madness"—says Irén Zémann on that fantastic Christmas night which she spends not with her lover but with the family of her "husband" who have come to greet her as their prospective daughter-in-law and force her into the "marriage bed" by the weight of their expectations.

Péter Gothár worked with excellent actors and drew from them spirited acting which remained true to life. The names of Cecilia Esztergályos, Judit Pogány, Lajos Szabó should be singled out for special praise. The cutting is dynamic and gripping; the photography of Lajos Koltai is accurate, characteristic and suggestive. The whole film has humour and a revelatory irony, and the story adapted from Zimre is vivid and authentic. One or two minor negative aspects should be mentioned: sometimes there is an excess of detail, too much is crowded into the story, Gothár leaves too little to his audience's imagination, and he has not stepped out boldly enough from the dimensional limits of television (where he used to work) and is not yet secure in the more specious world of the cinema. It is likely enough that this weakness is disturbing only under the refined magnifying-glass of the professional critic and when all is said and done this will be seen as the first film of a most promising director.

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Márta Mészáros, a fighter for women's rights, deserves the international respect she enjoys. In *Útközben* (On the Move) written together with the Polish actor Jan Nowicki, the permanent leading man in her later films, she abandoned her usual themes and tried to present a psychological drama; but neither the psychology nor the drama is genuine. The heroine of the film (played by Delphine Seyrig) is the daughter of a Polish mother and Hungarian father, and she lives in Hungary. Sorely shocked by the sudden death of a Polish friend, she unexpectedly decides to travel to Poland to resolve her nervous crisis, and leaves without even notifying her family of her intentions. In Poland she meets her old family, makes the acquaintance of a distant relative (Jan Nowicki) and falls in love with him. She attends a family wedding and witnesses the unhappiness of a girl forced into marriage, runs into all sorts of people,



actors, peasants, ordinary and less ordinary representatives of Polish society; and in due course she leaves her lover to his aim, contented family life, and returns home to her own, happy family life in Hungary. The critics were unable to discover the why and wherefore of all this. The film is protracted snooping on a private liaison, in spite of its heavy sighs and emotions. Mészáros must have seen something in the story which she was unable to formulate; she is too good a director to waste her time with a touristic illustration of traditional Polish-Hungarian friendship, precious though this friendship is to Hungarians.

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István Szabó's *Bizalom* (Confidence) is a more interesting and ambitious enterprise. Inspired probably by the climate of mistrust and suspicion which embittered the lives of so many people in the 1950s, the film explores the anamnesis suffered by so many. It is actually set in 1944, in the months of fascist terror. One day an unknown man accosts the heroine, a young woman, in the street, and tells her that her home has been raided; her husband has managed to escape, but she must not go home; as she has nowhere to go, the resistance movement will take charge of her too; false papers identify her as a refugee from Transylvania, she has to share a flat with a stranger and act as if she were his wife.

It is probably not surprising that this cohabitation turns into a love affair but Szabó is not aiming at yet another wartime love story. The enforced togetherness of strangers is his platform for analysing conflicting impulses of trust and mistrust. The woman is guilelessness incarnate. Unaware even of her husband's political activity, she is open and trusting, whereas the man, veteran of the movement, is the embodiment of mistrust, paranoid suspicion, and senseless conspiratory obsessions. Even when his love is fulfilled this man cannot get rid of the

feeling that perhaps the woman in his arms is a Gestapo agent.

I believe, however, that this anamnesis is not just a case history of one human being's but rather the anticipation of something which later became a general phenomenon, with different roots. Pathological suspicion, manipulated from above, in the period we call that of the "personality cult" was the outward symptom of a theory which György Lukács called "nightmarish," namely that the class struggle necessarily intensifies under the conditions of socialism. However, there is no denying that the terror reign of the Hungarian Nazis was the period of sharpest oppression, of life and death political struggle; it established quite different coordinates for the complex issues of trust and mistrust, such that it is a mistake to associate this sort of mistrust with that which followed later. To put it in simpler terms, the hero is a thesis walking on two legs, his mistrust in its pathological form is not the result of his actual situation (which requires rather caution and prudence), neither is it inherent in his character: it has been fed into him by the film director. Those who lived through it know that illegality in the fascist period required ceaseless vigilance but it also supposed complete confidence, solidarity and mutual aid within the resistance. This aspect, however, is quite absent from the character of the hero. The characterization of the woman is much better and her position in society adds to her authenticity. She experiences the drama of a doctor's wife who suddenly falls out of the doll's house and exchanges the security of middle-class life for the grim laws of illegality; completely cut off from her family, she turns for help and support to her "husband". He has had more training and experience in concealment and political life, furthermore he loves her. But her efforts are largely in vain, not, I think, through the fault of the "husband", but because of the deliberate didacticism of the director.

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This report would be incomplete if I did not record a sad loss, the death of István Homoki Nagy, the pioneer of popular scientific films. In the fifties he was probably the best known of all Hungarian directors. His works—*A Kisbalaton nádrengetege* (The Reeds of Little Balaton), *Egy kereszénylány története* (The Story of a Lanner), *Vadvízország* (A Kingdom on the Water), *Cimborák* (Pals), *Hegyen-völgyön* (Over Mounts and Dales) were successes all over the world. He was a passionate filmmaker, and the exploration and popularization of Hungarian landscapes, flora and fauna was his obsession. It is difficult to say whether he was better as a director or as a cameraman for he did both jobs superlatively, in addition to writing his own scripts, if script be the right word in the case of nature films demanding infinite patience and sophisticated sensitivity to the beauties of nature and the mysteries of science. He has left us, and year by year the numbers of his beloved birds are dwindling and the soils of his cherished flowers are contracting, whilst pollution rears its ugly head everywhere. It is obvious that Homoki Nagy was not only a contemporary master of the nature film but also a witness to landscapes and creatures, our companions and our biological environment, here in Central Europe over the centuries; our grandchildren will be indebted to his camera.

It is a coincidence, yet not entirely accidental, that a new nature film, *Az állatok válasznak* (Animals Responding) opened in Budapest at the time of his death. It is the work of Ágoston Kollányi, another pioneer in the same genre, who continued and improved on the work of Homoki Nagy. Kollányi himself is well known in the international film world. His *Bölcsők* (Cradles) was a prizewinner at Cannes in 1956 and *Örök megújulás* (Eternal Renaissance) has toured the world. Homoki Nagy, a filmmaker of an earlier age, believed that his task was basically to describe the lives of animals; Kollányi penetrates more deeply,

with the help of ethology; he conducts a dialogue with animals, he asks them questions. With the aid of a professional ethologist, Professor Vilmos Csányi, he has filmed rare species in the nature reserves of Hungary, in the savannahs of Tanzania and among the coral reefs of the Indian Ocean; he repeated classical experiments of Lorenz, Timberger and, of course, Csányi, which are still unknown to the broad public. Now we have to opportunity to observe things we are familiar with from tales and proverbs (e.g., how the blind, featherless young cuckoo pushes the eggs of its foster parents out of the nest) as well as many other things of which we have no inkling. Sometimes the camera is just an impassive witness to unbelievable events, such as the African vulture taking a stone in its beak and hurling it at the ostrich egg until its hard shell breaks open, or tiny marine crabs disguising themselves with pieces of plants, or the dung-beetle, the holy scarab, rolling dung to form a cradle for its young. Sometimes the director does not content himself with simple observation; but when he puts an obstacle in the dung and thrusts a little stick into it, the scarab copes with the problem admirably by lifting the dung from the trap like a diminutive acrobat, and even if it disintegrates, the beetle obeys its interior command and, with the obsession of a Sisyphus continues to roll what must be rolled.

This is only one of many interesting experiments conducted by Kollányi. They are not to be disdained for their value as curiosities, but their real purpose is to answer questions raised by science, and to inform the public of these answers. How much in the behaviour of animals is inherited, regulated by a fixed genetic code, and what is picked up in the course of life, through what Lorenz called "imprinting?" For example, the behaviour of some fowl who consider the first object they perceive after birth to be their mothers. What are the limits of animal adaptation? Culls and



crows quickly learned that soil turned over by the rumbling tractor was a happy hunting ground for them; but the May-fly, whose dazed love-dance over the river inspired so many poets, is doomed by the transformation and industrialization of its environment; its rigid genetical program, the inheritance of millions of years, does not give it the scope to adjust. Or there are the thrilling mirror-experiments, with animals from fishes to apes; the creatures nearest to man not only give spontaneous answers but seem at times to ask questions themselves,

and to use objects near at hand as tools to help them.

Kollányi's film is an experiment in popularizing a relatively new branch of science. One thing is certain: though certain animals are already quite well-known through film, Kollányi's colourful epic—literally and metaphorically—is also an outstanding and comprehensive attempt to illuminate the achievements and methodology of the whole discipline of ethology.

ERVIN GYERTYÁN



# MUSICAL LIFE

## TWO TEMPLES OF MUSIC

*A Liszt Ferenc Zeneművészeti Főiskola száz éve* ("100 Years of the Ferenc Liszt Academy of Music") Edited by József Újfalussy. Editio Musica, Budapest, 1977. 292 pp. + 150 photographs. In Hungarian. István Gábor: *A Vigadó története*. ("The History of the Vigadó.") Editio Musica, Budapest, 1978. 160 pp., illustrations. In Hungarian.

"100 Years of the Ferenc Liszt Academy of Music" is a collection of studies that has probably made its way to the bookshelves of many music lovers, or at least to those of the past, present, or future graduates of this Academy. This may be simply because of the affection and nostalgia which those emotionally involved with the history or present life of this great institution feel towards it.

The need to lay Hungarian musical education on a more highly organized basis and simultaneously to raise its standard was first recognized in the eighteen-sixties. The planned institution was expected to tie Ferenc Liszt, who had spent most of his life abroad, to his native Hungary. The expectations were fulfilled in fact when Liszt, though he never settled permanently in Hungary, came to play a prominent part in the efforts to establish the Academy; he accepted the president's post and also taught there right up to his death in 1886. A cherished relic of the Academy today is the copper plate with his consulting hours that used to hang on the door of his room.

The Academy has not always been at its present site; at first, No. 4 Hal Square was rented for the purpose and Liszt was given an apartment here; then, after five years of teaching, the Academy building at Sugár Street was completed. The present and third home of the Academy is in Ferenc Liszt Square. A gorgeous example of Hungarian Art Nouveau, the building was constructed

between 1904 and 1907 to the design of Flóris Korb and Kálmán Giergl. On its façade, there is a bronze statue of Ferenc Liszt by Alajos Stróbl right above the main entrance, flanked by bronze reliefs depicting Ferenc Erkel and Robert Volkmann.

In 1875, the Academy of Music had 38 students. At that time even the boldest imagination would not have foreseen an institution teaching several hundred students and enjoying a truly international reputation. Interest abroad is revealed by the continual flow of individual and group visitors, as well as in the high number of students who apply to continue or complete their studies here.

However, not only has the number of pupils increased over the last one hundred years; the standards and methods of the teaching have also changed considerably. The chief educational merit of the Academy of Music was initially its high level of organization. Teaching later grew more differentiated; subsections included preparatory, teachers' training and artists' training departments, and further improvements in general standards caused the institution to be raised to the status of an institute of higher education; since 1925 its official name has been the Ferenc Liszt Academy of Music. In 1971 it was awarded the status of a high school of university rank by the Presidential Council.

The Academy of Music is first and foremost a school, but over and above this it also



plays an important role in the musical life of the capital. Budapest's only real concert hall, with an audience capacity of 1,200 persons, is still housed here.

In this book the past one hundred years of the Academy of Music are recalled in pictures compiled by János Kárpáti, the director of the Academy's library. For us, but perhaps for the generations to come as well, the most interesting illustrations are those of the staff who taught at the Academy in its jubilee year (1975-76). The photographs group the teaching staff according to their departments. It is a pity only that they are too small in size; it would have been preferable to give each group photograph a whole page, in other words, double the space actually allowed.

Although the history of Hungarian music at the turn of the century and in the twentieth century has not yet been the subject of a comprehensive analysis, the chapter entitled "Teachers of the Ferenc Liszt Academy of Music" is in fact a significant step forward and a most useful chart of the data. The editors of this chapter merit having their names mentioned.

Our feelings about the written text, the substance of the book itself, depend to a great extent upon the exact point (before or after reading the main text) at which we read the postscript by the editor of the volume, the musicologist József Újfalussy. What he writes is impressive in its modesty, yet true: "No one had any doubts that writing the centennial history of the Academy was a becoming way of observing in a written form the one hundredth anniversary of the establishment of the Ferenc Liszt Academy of Music. But as the date of the anniversary approached, it became increasingly clear that because of its belated growth towards full maturity, Hungarian musicology is not yet ready to cope with the solution of such a task." [...] "It would have been easier, but unbecoming if we had given up the idea of bringing out a jubilee album for such reasons. That is why we decided consciously

and deliberately to violate the usually compulsory requirements governing unity of form, and have included recollections of a more personal nature arranged in a rough chronological order over and above contributions which could be described as genuine studies and documents. Such recollections evoke the activities and personalities of the most outstanding directors and teachers of the Academy."

I feel it will be of more interest to list the musicians who are the subjects of studies and articles in this volume rather than offering a table of contents. *Ferenc Liszt* (1811-1886), founder of the Academy, president (piano); *Ferenc Erkel* (1810-1893), head (composition, piano, instrumentation, harmonics, aesthetics, Hungarian style, counterpoint, music history, church music); *Ödön Mihalovics* (1842-1929), director, life chairman (chamber music, string quartet); *Béla Bartók* (1881-1945), (piano); *Zoltán Kodály* (1882-1967), vice-director, honorary president, chairman of the Board of Directors in 1945/46 (composition, instrumentation, Hungarian folk music, score reading, solfeggio, musicology); *Ernő Dohnányi* (1887-1960), head, honorary chairman (piano, composition); *Jenő Hubay* (1858-1937), head, life president (violin, viola, chamber music, orchestral practice, orchestral performances); *Ede Zathureczky* (1903-1959), head (violin); *Ferenc Szabó* (1902-1969), director, honorary president (composition, instrumentation, score reading, musicology), and *Leó Weiner* (1885-1960), member of the Board of Directors, 1945-46 (composition, chamber music, musicology, wind ensemble).

The mere list of the names is enough to suggest that this anniversary publication includes a whole range of interesting writings, however diverse in nature. Yet this is no substitute for a history of the Academy of Music as called for by the occasion. This is not in fact such a special task, one which would require the collaboration of whole generations of music historians. As things stand, the Academy of Music remains of



secondary importance in the book, and we are left with no comprehensive view, not even after we have read all the writings in the volume, of the life of the Academy itself. It is like a history book which tries to outline world history by presenting only the heroic deeds of outstanding military leaders.

Viewed from a musicological aspect, a publication like this should include all the noteworthy figures of Hungarian musical history. The volume fails to include anything by György Kroó, one of the most significant of contemporary music historians. There is another, perhaps even more striking, shortcoming: the musicological activity of the late Professor Bence Szabolcsi certainly deserves a study. This is not to say that more space should be allocated to theory at the expense of composers and performing artists. Yet I feel such a study would have been much more justified than the inclusion of a report about the department of musicology.

In contrast to many other countries, in Hungary, musicologists too are trained at the Academy of Music and not at the various universities. This allows for a deeper relationship between regular concert performers and students of theory and paves the way to better understanding on the part of the listener. The first musicology department was launched in 1951; since then new classes consisting of 5-7 people have been started up every other year. The carefully worded article by Ilona Ferenczi, "Musicological Training at the Academy of Music," reveals that, despite all the author's good intentions, for the time being, she does not find too much to praise in this young department. The author of the article is not to be blamed for this shortcoming; she supplies just what her title promises but, since she is well aware that a detailed analysis is unlikely to arouse wide interest, she remains at such a high level of generalization that the reader is given no insight at all into this profession.

Unfortunately it cannot be said of all the

writings included in the volume that their contents live up to their titles. Melinda Berlász, for instance, struggles with a definition of the sphere of musicology instead of discussing the teaching of the subject in her article "Teaching Music History at the Academy of Music (1875-1945)." Apart from a list of the teachers of historical subjects and a bibliography of printed textbooks, we learn nothing of real importance from this article. It is not clear why a special chapter had to be devoted to a study of this particular field. There is nothing to justify a sharp periodization in discussing a subject that is still a part of the curriculum to this day.

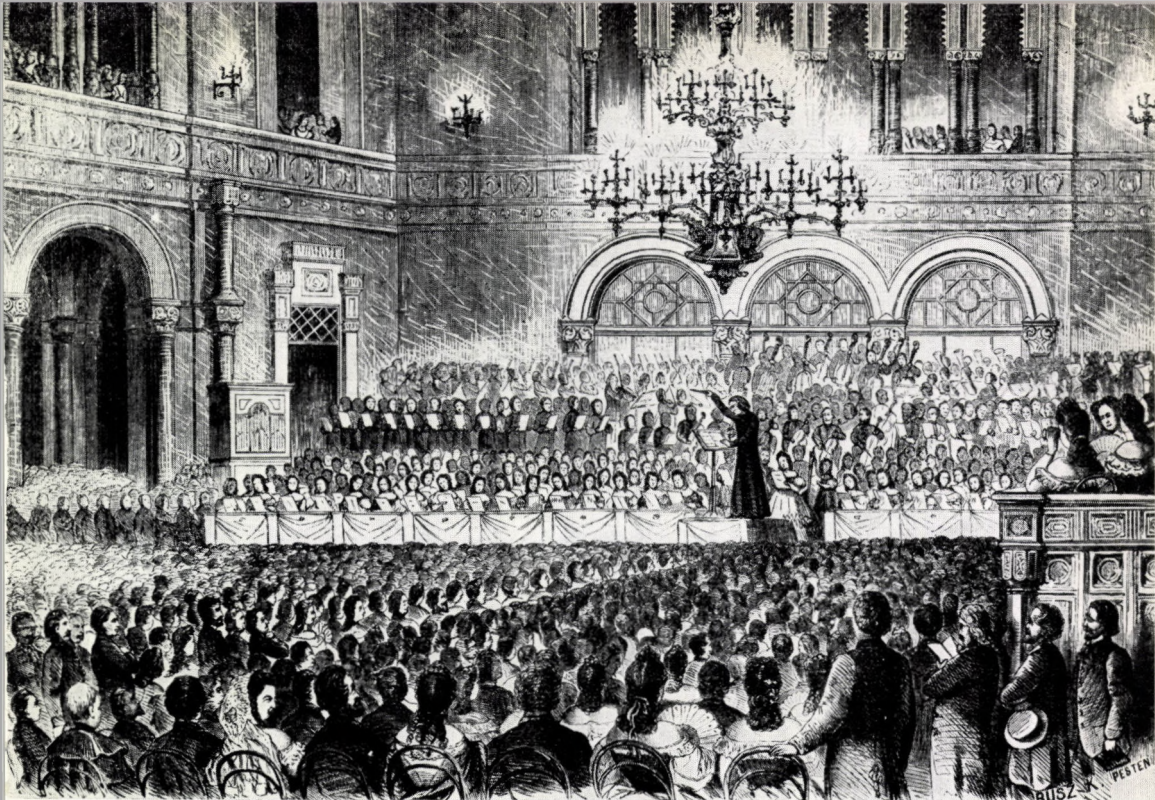
Enthusiasm of little value in itself and a failure to appreciate the size of the task provide the only possible explanation why one and the same person has written two studies devoid of any real personal message and hence of any interesting or useful ideas.

It is difficult to set up any order of value. The studies are so different in genre that they are difficult to compare. I am guided only by my personal experiences when I select a few of the numerous praiseworthy contributions which I feel deserve special mention.

Several monographs have been written about Ferenc Szabó, but none so much to the point as András Pernye's short piece about the characteristics of his composer's oeuvre. We also see the composer through the eyes of two Szabó pupils: András Borgulya and István Láng (both significant figures on the current Hungarian music scene) and the publications secretary, Mrs. László Takács.

The study "Ernő Dohnányi. His Art and Pedagogical Views" by Sándor Kovács is one of the highlights of the volume. Most of the present piano teachers at the Academy of Music were once Dohnányi's pupils; one merely has to be described as a "Dohnányi pupil" to be held in high esteem today by world-famous musicians. Kovács is not only a musicologist well acquainted with the life and art of Dohnányi. He is also at home in the





*Ferenc Liszt conducting the Legend of Saint Elizabeth oratorio in the Vigadó, 1865 (woodcut by Hermann Paar, after a drawing by Franz Kollarz)*

*Courtesy Zeneműkiadó*

*Coronation Banquet in the Vigadó in 1867 (woodcut by Károly Rusz, after a drawing by Bertalan Székely)*







György Klösz

*The Vigadó at the end of the 19th century and today*

Ferenc Borács





tangle of reviews, views, and opinions which surrounded him, and he also acquaints us with the most typical features of his performing style.

"Ödön Mihalovich Directing the Academy of Music 1887-1919" by Katalin Szerző is an account of the most highly trained musician of his age. He had one and the same objective as head of the Academy of Music over three decades and as a composer, namely, to raise Hungarian music to a European standard. As a composer, Mihalovich somewhat lost his way but he has left us a lasting heritage through the force of his impact on the musical public.

"A Pupil of Zoltán Kodály"—this is the title of a conversation János Breuer had with Pál Kadosa. A pianist and a composer (now head of the piano department of the Academy), Pál Kadosa was a pupil of Kodály in composition from 1921 to 1927. The interviewer has all the sources at his fingertips and relies on a regiment of facts and figures when posing his questions; the replies by Professor Pál Kadosa reveal several new aspects of Kodály's ways and methods of teaching. The conversation is also significant inasmuch as it outlines two portraits: that of Kodály, the teacher, and that of Kadosa, his pupil. This piece is a most fortunate interplay of the objective and subjective, of facts and personal experiences.

This is not a book to be read at one sitting. Most of the studies are interesting reading matter in themselves and they are quite independent of each other. From this point of view it is even advantageous to have a rich variety of forms, for this widens the choice for the reader.

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The Vigadó is a piece of Hungarian cultural history. It is also a much-suffered architectural monument of the Hungarian capital, and its latest reconstruction is about to be finished these days.

In the last quarter of the eighteenth

century, more and more people were calling for the construction of a building to house a theatre hall and ballroom, a centre for culture and entertainment. In 1789, János Schilson submitted such a proposal to Emperor Joseph II. But the emperor died and his successor, Leopold II, did not approve of the idea. Numerous suggestions and plans were prepared and discarded until in the spring of 1808, the foundation stones of both the Pest German Theatre and the building which became the Vigadó were laid. The German Theatre was completed in 1812, but the construction of the Vigadó took longer. Designed by Mihály Pollack, this impressive building, situated on the Pest side at the busiest point of the Inner City, was inaugurated on January 13, 1833. Known as "Redoute," it functioned for sixteen years until, during the Hungarian War of Independence in May 1849, it was destroyed by the cannons of general Hentzi, the Austrian commander of Buda Castle.

Another fifteen years passed before the rebuilt palace was reopened. Although the desire to construct a new Redoute was there in the early 1850s, no resolution to implement the desire was taken until 1860. The opening of the Redoute was the highlight of the 1865 carnival season. Protracted arguments about the name of the building resulted in the acceptance of the Hungarian term *Vigadó*, in place of the foreign *Redoute*.

Inaugurated in 1865, the palace was designed by the architect Frigyes Feszli; its romantic murals were painted by Károly Lotz and Mór Than. It met with a lack of understanding both in the general public and amongst contemporary architects, but the building has since become a symbol of Romantic architecture in Hungary. Its main façade is richly decorated with a series of portrait-reliefs along the main cornice. The more simple side façades also feature some Hungarian motifs. Although Feszli's work has been subjected to recurrent architectural criticism, today we feel there is little to justify the unflattering opinion



then held by many about a somewhat eclectic building which in their view did not come up to the requirements of modern architecture. What *was* justified was the criticism concerning the acoustics of the hall. Almost all the reliable critics of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century complained about this after every concert at the Vigadó. This was all the more unfortunate, since the most noted performers of Europe had to give concerts in a hall which failed to satisfy one of the basic preconditions for real enjoyment of any musical event. "If you only heard an orchestra play in the Vigadó, you couldn't know what it was really like. Those of us who knew only this one blinked in astonishment when we first heard music performed in good concert halls abroad," wrote Zoltán Kodály in 1946.

The new building outlived its predecessor, the Redoute, as a centre of culture. It was seriously damaged by bombing raids during the Second World War, and it took quite some time before its reconstruction was begun.

The new form of the Vigadó is currently taking shape. Its designer, the architect György Tiry, has tried to keep to the original style as much as possible and to pay special regard to the parts preserved as architectural monuments.

As for the present and future role of the Vigadó, István Gábor, the author of the book, is ready with a concise reply: "In keeping with the most up-to-date technical and musical requirements, special facilities have been incorporated for radio and television transmissions and gramophone recordings. Built with the financial backing of the institutions involved, namely the Hungarian Radio, Hungarian Television, and the Hungarian Record Company, these studios have been constructed in such a way that multiple transmissions, sound or video recordings, can be made simultaneously. This might well be a practical need. In addition to the big concert hall with a seating capacity for 600 people, there will be a chamber hall for

smaller ensembles with an audience capacity of 200."

István Gábor's book meets a long-felt need. As one generation grows up after another, less and less is known about this building. Its name is encountered only by those who happen to read about old cultural events. A division of the history of the building into three parts was the most natural course, since when reconstruction is completed, the Vigadó will be in its third reincarnation.

The Old Redoute, The Reconstruction and Inauguration of the Vigadó, and The Second Reconstruction of the Vigadó—these are the three chapters devoted to questions of architecture and the history of architecture. The chapters in between relate the highlights of the second reincarnation of the palace, the period from the last third of the nineteenth century up to the end of the Second World War. This book, which is thus primarily a discussion of musical events, approaches the following themes specifically: Ferenc Liszt and the Vigadó, the Philharmonic Society at the Vigadó, Famous Artists and Orchestras from abroad at the Vigadó. This last chapter pays special attention to guest performances in Budapest by musicians of world renown such as D'Albert, Emil Sauer, Hubermann, Jan Kubelik, Hubay, Dohnányi, Debussy, and Casals. Two chapters are about less well-known aspects of the past of the Vigadó: Dance Parties, Balls, Lectures, and Exhibitions at the Vigadó; and The Vigadó's Role in the Working-class Movement.

The thematic grouping is logical and the proportions are well-chosen. Gábor's descriptive cross-section of the events related to various personalities or orchestras from the history of the Vigadó is embellished by a great number of minute details, and excerpts and quotations from reviews (some more penetrating than others). Despite the author's very readable style, the inclusion of so much data infuses a certain amount of dryness into the book. A more frequent use



of charts would have made it all much easier to understand; the author's insistence on forming round sentences when the point really is to put across the facts makes his otherwise enjoyable writing somewhat ponderous.

The book is richly illustrated and the pictures are excellent. Their arrangement, however, is extremely clumsy: sometimes a sentence (here and there even a word) is broken up by a string of pictures which disturbs the flow of the prose.

The main aim of the publication is to popularize, which explains and justifies the author in not aiming at completeness in any of the lists he supplies. As he writes in his Preface: "From the middle of the nineteenth century up to the end of the Second World War, there was no important musician, conductor, or singer who did not at some time give at least a guest performance at the Vigadó. It would be hopeless to try and present them all and merely to list

their names would be futile. Therefore I decided to give pride of place to those concerts that have gone down as events of true importance in the history of music and the performing arts and have at the same time left lasting impressions on the minds of music-lovers. Yet I am sure that many great names and events will be found missing." His selection is indeed arbitrary.

The lines quoted reveal that the author has counted on the reader's desire to look up names in the book. It is therefore hard to understand why no index is supplied to help the reader find the names in which he is interested.

The book is most pleasing in its appearance and may deservedly attract the interest of musicians and music-lovers alike. But it is not to be welcomed as the first full history of the Vigadó, as a detailed analysis complete with all the minutiae. Such a comprehensive work has yet to be written.

KATALIN FITTLER

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## NEW RECORDS

MUSIC TO ENTERTAIN THE KINGS OF HUNGARY 1490-1526. Camerata Hungarica, Ars Renata. Directed by László Czidra. HUNGAROTON. SLPX 11983-84.

I have often discussed various Camerata Hungarica recordings, especially those of early Renaissance music, or that of the late Middle Ages, related in one way or another to Hungary. I also reviewed their three records of 17th-century music as well as solo recordings (recorder concertos by Vivaldi) by László Czidra, the head of the ensemble. Their latest release is further evidence that László Czidra is the leading Hungarian performer of works written before 1750 and that his group is the best of the ensembles specializing in the music of that age.

László Czidra started as an oboe player in a symphony orchestra, a fact that in my view, has had a decisive influence on the quality of sound he produces. The sound of his recorder, pommer or krummhorn is of a sensual beauty, with life, flexibility and an almost breathing quality lent to it by Czidra's wide range of diaphragm vibration. This assumes special significance when he plays the recorder, as the dynamic possibilities offered by this particular instrument are rather limited. (The pitch goes up if the performer plays it forte and drops for softer sounds.) Czidra overcomes this difficulty by using an extremely intensive column of air, in other words, by using an oboe players' technique. Most of his flourishes are improvised and as such, are organically built into the chain of fixed sounds. Czidra has a



music historian's knowledge of Renaissance music and has gained international distinction with several of his publications. He teaches the practice of performing Renaissance music at the Ferenc Liszt Academy of Music.

The most attractive feature of these records is the conviction that there is nothing archaic about the dance music of bygone ages, on the contrary, that music composed with the aim of entertaining people is very much alive today. The same goes for vocal music, primarily works of a secular nature. The latter basically fall into two emotional worlds (without a sharp line of distinction between the two): gay, witty and playful songs on the one hand, and sentimental songs about love on the other. Both come through in a sincere and uninhibited way, thanks to the group's approach that human feelings have only assumed new shades but have not changed in five hundred years.

The two records in question introduce us to the last golden age of music in Hungary's royal courts. A few decades later Hungary was decisively defeated by the Turks at Mohács, the independent Hungarian kingdom came to an end, and one hundred and fifty years of Turkish rule in the largest, central part of the country followed. The composers of the record all had direct ties with the courts of Wladislas II. and Louis II, the king killed in the battle of Mohács. Works one can be certain were there performed include those by Heinrich Finck (1444/45-1527) and Paul Hofhaimer (1459-1537). King Matthias had wished to engage Heinrich Finck as court musician in the last decade of his reign (1458-1490) and it was Finck who was made a knight by King Wladislaw II. (1515). It is in Finck's extremely lively instrumental pieces that one can most admire László Czidra's flair for flourish and the clean, rhythmic sound of the ensemble. The choir (*Ars Renata*) sometimes sounds off key amidst the sighs of *Ich stund an einem Morgen*, that is the only thing I found wrong.

The second and third of the four sides open with dances from the Organ Tablature of Jan Lublin. The person who transcribed the tune most have had close links with Hungary and her music (the first score of a Hungarian dance features in this tablature). At the same time, this material is of wider implications and interest: in addition to various forms of variation used throughout Europe, it also includes intavolations by several noted composers of the most different nationalities, including choruses by Thomas Stoltzer (1480/85-1526), a court musician of the King Louis II. of Hungary. The chorus *Ich klag den Tag* and its instrumental versions are especially well performed by Stoltzer.

Gergely Sárközy plays no fewer than ten instruments, being responsible for all the keyboard and lute solos on the record as well as being a virtuoso master and improviser on a great variety of string instruments. He performs Adrian Willaert's (1480/90-1562) *Ricercare* on a Spanish string instrument plucked with a plectrum (*Vibuela del mano*) in the same freely swinging and therefore lively rhythm as he does Finck's or Hofhaimer's clavichord intavolations. He and László Czidra are the two pillars of the ensemble.

I happily recommend the two records to lovers of old music. Their material is certainly not provincial. The masters listed, and those left unmentioned here, are all amongst the outstanding musicians of their times, members of the musical elite of Europe. Listeners will probably most delight in the free performance and flourish of the various instrumental pieces.

ANTONIO VIVALDI: LUTE CONCERTOS AND TRIOS 1. Concerto for lute, strings and harpsichord in D major (F. XII. No. 15.); 2. Concerto for viola d'amore, lute strings and harpsichord in D minor (F. XII. No. 38.); 3. Trio for violin, lute and continuo in C major (F. XVI. No. 3.) Dániel Benkő — lute, János



Rolla — violin, László Bársony — viola d'amore, Zsuzsa Pertis — harpsichord — Ferenc Liszt Chamber Orchestra. Leader: János Rolla. HUNGAROTON SLPX 11978.

Dániel Benkő, the lutenist, has gained international recognition, primarily as a musicologist, being responsible for the publication of the scores of the complete works of Valentin Bakfark; as well as for their recording. (Two of the three volumes of scores and four of the five records have come out so far.)

The records under discussion present yet another aspect of Dániel Benkő's performing art. As a performer of Vivaldi's little known works for lute, he emerges as a musician completely at home in the world of the baroque. Going far beyond merely playing the notes on paper, he makes ample use of the chance to improvise. (Naturally, especially in the slow movements.) Let me call your attention first of all to the first number where the lute is the sole solo instrument. This is a piece of beautiful construction where it is easy to place the required emphasis on the concerto part by a correct arrangement of microphones. The slow movement is one of Vivaldi's most beautiful *Largos*. The roughly symmetrical two parts return and the custom of the age requires them to appear in a more highly flourished form for the second time. Benkő

proves to be a real poet here. His flourishes never cover, on the contrary, they stress the beautiful line of the melody, giving stress, body and resonance to each sound and the listener is happy to find himself enveloped in Vivaldi's poetic world that is as simple and obvious as any natural phenomenon.

In the second piece, the idea of using the viola d'amore as the lute's partner at first strikes one as dangerous because of the differences in volume between the two instruments. However, Vivaldi overcomes the problem in an easy and virtuoso way by having the two instruments reply and respond to each other.

The two pieces on the B side of the record (marked above by numbers 3. and 4.) are quite unusual compared to the general construction of baroque trio sonatas. Except for the slow movements of the two works, the two instruments which carry the time are side by side as a general rule, necessarily resulting in the lute being whisked to the background. The problem is overcome once again by the use of flourishes which restore the lute part to a life of its own.

The soloists of the recording prove to be sensitive and fine partners to Dániel Benkő. The outcome is freely flowing, rich and affluent baroque music.

ANDRÁS PERNYE



## OUR CONTRIBUTORS

ACZÉL, György (b. 1917). Deputy Prime Minister. Member of the Political Committee of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party. See "The Socialist State and the Churches," NHQ 66, "Workdays and Prospects," 71, "Historical Contemporaries of the Present," 73, "Intellectuals in Socialist Society," 75, and "A New System of Values," 77.

BART, István (b. 1944). Translator, journalist, editor at Európa Publishing House in Budapest. A frequent contributor to this journal.

BODNÁR, György (b. 1927). Literary critic, head of a section at the Institute of Literature of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. Studied Hungarian and English at the University of Budapest and at Eötvös College, worked at the Ministry of Culture in the early fifties, edited a literary magazine 1955-56, was editor in chief of a publishing house in 1957. Has published books and studies on various 20th-century Hungarian authors.

CZAKÓ, Sándor (b. 1938). Journalist, trained as an adult education librarian. Has worked on a number of ethnographic research projects.

DÁVID, Katalin (b. 1923). Art historian, specializing in religious art. A graduate of the University of Szeged in art history, medieval archeology and aesthetics, she has worked in the Museum of Fine Arts, Budapest, headed the Art History Documentation Centre, and is now in charge of the Collection of Religious Art in the Budapest Museum of Applied Arts. Has written books on Masaccio, medieval Hungarian art, and the one-thousand years of Polish-Hungarian connections.

FERENCZI, László (b. 1937). Our regular poetry reviewer. See his essays on Endre Ady, NHQ 66, on Gyula Illyés, 68, and on Ferenc Juhász, 74.

FISCHER, Rudolf (b. 1923). Journalist, on the staff of NHQ. A graduate in history from the University of Sydney, going on to do post-graduate work on modern Hungarian history at the London School of Slavonic and East European Studies.

FITTLER, Katalin (b. 1952). Music critic, a graduate of the Liszt Academy of Music. She works on music education programmes for Hungarian Radio. See "The Language of Music," NHQ 73.

FÖLDES, Anna (b. 1931). Journalist, critic, on the staff of *Nők Lapja*, a weekly for women. Our regular theatre reviewer.

FRANK, János (b. 1925). Art critic, one of our regular art reviewers.

GYERTYÁN, Ervin (b. 1925). Essayist, novelist and film critic. Studied at the Sorbonne after the war, worked in journalism and publishing, was on the staff of a Budapest film magazine and of the Hungarian Film Institute. At present heads the film section of Hungarian Television. Publications include a book on the poet Attila József, another on the relationship between the various arts, a collection of essays on György Lukács and his circle, another on films. Has written three novels.

GYÓRFFY, Miklós (b. 1942). Translator, film critic, assistant professor of comparative literature at the University of Budapest. Has translated numerous classical and modern German authors. Worked in films, publishing and as a secondary school



teacher. Has written the scripts for several films and published books on Bergman and Antonioni.

HANN, C. M. (b. 1953). Sociologist. Read Philosophy, Politics and Economics at Oxford, obtained his Ph. D. at Cambridge in 1979 with a dissertation entitled "The socio-economic structure of a community on the Great Hungarian Plain." His book about the same community is published by Cambridge University Press. He is presently a language editor on the staff of NHQ.

KEMENES, Egon (b. 1924). Economist, author of numerous essays and articles on economic policy and development. Member of the Council on World Economy, senior staff member of the Institute of World Economy of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. See "Hungary's Fourth Five Year Plan," NHQ 45, "Past and Future of Development Efforts," 54, a review of a book by Mátyás Timár in 56, and "The Role of Education in Economic Development," 62.

KEPES, András (b. 1947). Journalist. Graduated in literature and aesthetics at the University of Budapest, worked for years at Hungarian Radio, at present heads a section at Hungarian Television. Has published and broadcast on culture and the arts.

MÉSZÖLY, Miklós (b. 1921). Novelist. Studied law, worked in odd jobs before devoting himself to writing. Published his first story in 1943, but his first collection appeared only in 1957. Has published a dozen volumes of fiction, collections of essays and two plays. His *Az atléta baldla* (Death of the Athlete, 1966), has Czech, Danish, French, German, Polish editions, *Saulus* (1968) appeared in Finnish, French, German, Polish, and Spanish. There is also a collection of stories in German. István Gaál's film "The Falcons" (1970) was based on the story of the same title by Mészöly, published in NHQ 40. See also "Report on Five Mice," a story, in NHQ 31.

NAGY, Péter (b. 1920). Literary historian and critic, Professor of Comparative Literature at the University of Budapest, a former guest professor at the Sorbonne in Paris. Editor of *Irodalomtörténet*, a scholarly quarterly, and author of numerous books and monographs on Hungarian literature. See "Lukács and Hungarian Literature," NHQ 60, "Four English Novels," 61, "The Quiddity of Hungarian Drama," 64, "The Literary Revolution in Hungary around 1900," 67, and "How Modern was Zsigmond Móricz?" 77.

NAGY, Zoltán (b. 1944). Art historian, one of our regular art reviewers.

ODZE, György (b. 1949). Novelist and critic. Graduated in 1970 from the School of Trade and Catering. Started publishing in 1973. His first volume of short stories *Ténymásolatok* ("Fact-copies") appeared in 1978. He is on the staff of the Institute for Cultural Relations. See his short story in NHQ 72.

ÓVÁRI, Miklós (b. 1925). Member of the Political Committee, Secretary of the Central Committee of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party, responsible for cultural policy. A graduate of Budapest University, he held various teaching posts between 1948 and 1958, was head of the department of science, education and culture of the Central Committee.

PAP, Gábor (b. 1939). Art historian, a graduate of the University of Budapest, formerly head of the arts section at Hungarian Television. Has published a book on the painter István Nagy (1965), and a great number of essays and reviews on modern and contemporary Hungarian art.

PARANCS, János (b. 1937). Poet, translator. Studied mechanical engineering at the Budapest University of Technology and literature at the Sorbonne. Lived in



Paris 1956-1964, publishing his first volume of poems there while working on the staff of *Magyar Műhely*, a Hungarian literary magazine published in France. Returned to Hungary in 1964, has worked at the Petőfi Museum of Literature, at present reader at Magvető publishing house. Has published six volumes of poems and many translations from French. Original titles of his poems in this issue: *Tizenhárom sor a csalódról; Apokaliptikus délután; Patt-belyzet; Minden olyan*. This cycle of poems, first published in the January 1979 issue of *Vigilia*, a Catholic monthly, was awarded the Hungarian Writers' Association's Robert Graves Prize for Best Poem of the Year, 1979.

PERNYE, András (1928-1980). Was professor of Musicology at the Ferenc Liszt Academy of Music, member of the editorial board of this review, as well as its regular music reviewer.

RÉNYI, Péter (b. 1920). Journalist, Deputy Editor of *Népszabadság*, the central daily of the HSWP. See among recent contributions to NHQ: "Thirty Years to Change a Society," 58; "The Art of Politics," (on a book by János Kádár) 62; "Let's Make it Together," 66, and "János Kádár in Vienna, Rome and Bonn," 68.

SIMAI, Mihály (b. 1930). Economist, professor at Karl Marx University of Economics. President, World Federation of UN Associations. Worked for the UN in New York 1964-1968. Heads the Hungarian Commission for UNICEF. Major publication: *Az Amerikai Egyesült Államok a világgazdaságban* ("The United States of America in the World Economy," 1965.) See "The Brain Drain and the Developing Countries," NHQ 35.

SOMLYÓ, György (b. 1920). Poet. Has published numerous volumes of poems as well as books on poetry. Author of a novel, as well as a book on the poet Milán Füst. Has translated many French, English, Latin- and North American poets. Editor of *Arion*, a yearbook of poetry, fiction and criticism in several languages, published by Corvina Press, Budapest. See his poems in NHQ 23, 32, 57, the obituary "In Memoriam Pablo Neruda," 53, and an excerpt of his novel "Shadow Play," 72.

SZÁDECZKY-KARDOSS, Elemér (b. 1903). Geologist and geochemist, Professor of Geology at the University of Budapest, a member of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. Has published numerous studies on various highly specialized aspects of geology and geochemistry.

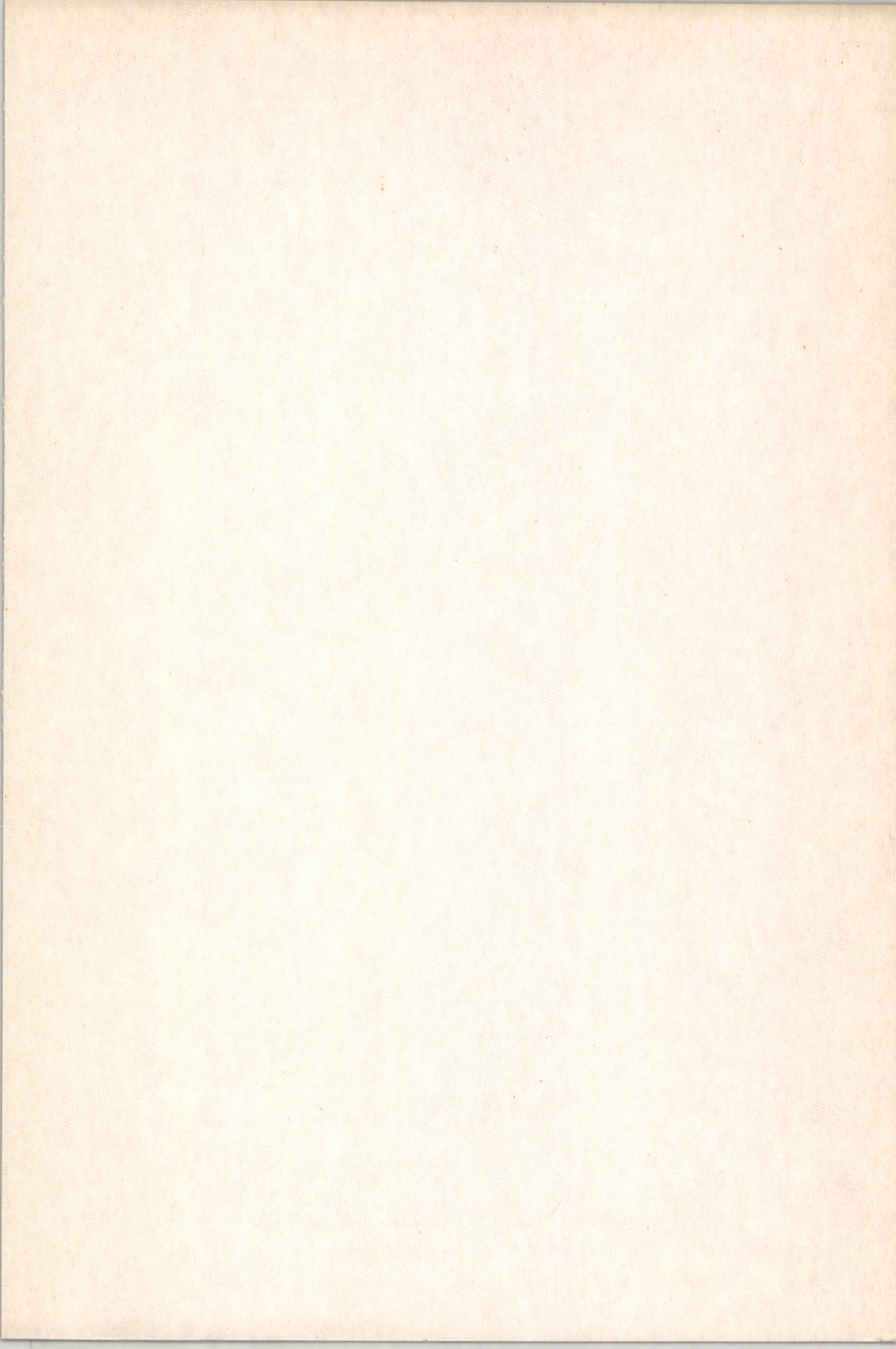
VAJDA, Miklós (b. 1931). Essayist, critic, translator, Literary Editor of NHQ.

VARGA, Gyula (b. 1938). Economist, head of a section in the Research Institute for Agrarian Economics in Budapest. Main fields of research are economic factors in the development of agriculture and methodology of enterprise planning. Has co-authored books on the economy of market gardening, enterprise-level planning, econometric methods in planning. Previous papers appeared in NHQ 19, 20, 21, 23, 71.

VARGHA, Balázs (b. 1921). Literary critic and broadcaster, Editor of *Budapest*, an illustrated monthly. Has written extensively on 18th and 19th century Hungarian poetry and published a number of volumes of language games for the young. Writes and conducts an educational television programme of games for children. See "Arts Education of the Young," NHQ 40, "The Psalm Translator" (Antal Szenci Molnár), 57.

*Articles appearing in this journal are indexed in HISTORICAL ABSTRACTS; AMERICA, HISTORY AND LIFE; ARTS & HUMANITIES CITATIONS INDEX*







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